



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



An Roinn
Cultúir, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta
Department of
Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht



'The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development: Europe
investing in rural areas'.

Best Practice Checklist No.2

Removal of Encroaching Scrub

Why the Burren Programme (BP) co-funds this work:

The species-rich grasslands of the Burren host a huge diversity of plants and animals. These habitats are quite rare, and their integrity is threatened both through overgrazing and undergrazing. The latter situation contributes to scrub encroachment; which can greatly alter local biodiversity, impact on archaeological and geological features, and restrict animal and human movement. However, a well-planned and properly carried out programme of scrub control, with good follow-up, can greatly improve this situation.

Burren Programme funding:

All suitable scrub removal work is co-funded by the BP to the tune of 75% of the actual cost of the task. In addition, 50% of the cost of items such as protective clothing, boots, eye- and ear-wear is also available.

To be assured of receiving your allocated payment for the planned scrub work, the work must be carried out and completed to at least the baseline standard as outlined in this checklist. Failure to do so may result in a delay, reduction or loss of payment. Persistent poor performance or failure to correct poor work may result in no further funding for scrub work for the remainder of your contract (see BP Terms & Conditions). In contrast however, by doing a job well, you will receive the full allocated payment, reap the benefits of the job itself and make it easier to get permission and funding for future work. You will also be helping to ensure the long-term positive impact and success of the Burren Programme.

If you do not have time yourself to complete planned works, please consider hiring-in outside help to do the work on your behalf. A list of willing and experienced local contractors is available from the BP office: most of those listed are farmers like yourself. Any 'I-2 work money' that is not drawn down by you is theoretically lost to the locality, whereas it could be used to provide employment to relatives or local people in the area, while importantly also helping to address scrub encroachment issues on your farm and potentially increasing your I-1 field scores and payments.

The following checklist contains some of the common issues and shortcomings encountered when assessing scrub work. Being aware of these will help ensure you do the job properly and get paid for it promptly.

Remember, always read your individual I-2 work plan carefully before starting any job, and speak to your advisor and/or the BP team if in any doubt.

- For more details on scrub control techniques, please see the *BurrenLIFE Best Practice Guide No. 5 - A Guide to Controlling Scrub on Burren Winterages and other areas*.

Prior consultation check:

You, or your advisor, will need to consult with the BP team to get approval for certain scrub removal jobs.

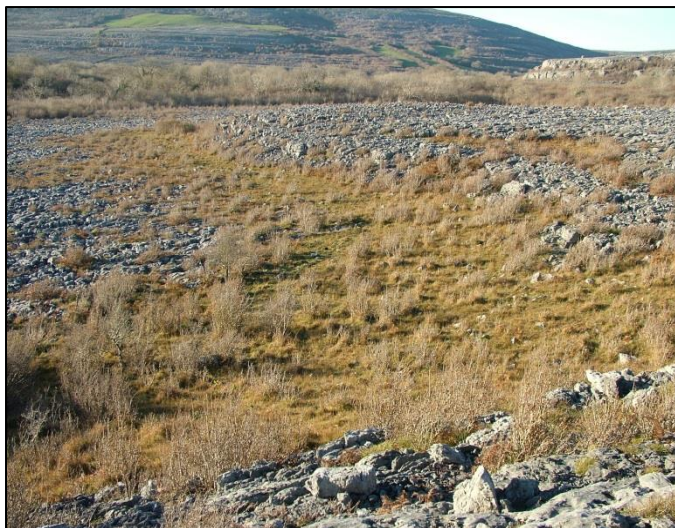
The BP in turn may need to consult with the relevant bodies, namely NPWS, NMS and in some cases the County Council. Situations where additional consultation is required may include:

- Scrub work in an archaeological complex or on a recorded monument, and in some cases for work adjacent to an archaeological complex/recorded monument.
- Scrub removal by machine in a SAC or on non-SAC Annex I habitat.

Cutting the encroaching scrub:

1. Do not cut scrub during the bird nesting season (March 1st - August 31st): this is illegal.
2. Ensure all scrub marked for removal, is cut, up to and including the taped bushes on the edges of the marked area, unless specified otherwise in your plan.
3. Stick to the plan - do not cut further or more than is intended, and be aware of any areas that may be specifically marked as 'Do Not Cut' on your work maps.
4. **Do not cut mature stands of hazel scrub (with woodland flora underneath) or any isolated mature trees** (over 2m/6ft tall, or for smaller types like whitethorn, any with trunks over 5cm/2in wide) unless previously agreed with the BP team. Side branches may be trimmed but the cut surface must not be treated.
5. Scrub should be cut as low as possible, i.e. less than 30cm/1ft above the ground when using a chainsaw/ bladed strimmer. Consider the ability of your livestock to safely graze areas after scrub clearance works.
6. If a machine-mounted brushcutter/flail is being used, it must not cross limestone pavement or old walls without using protective tyres rafts or rubber mats, and may only cross these at the indicated locations along suitable routes: otherwise it will result in damage to the heritage, and a loss of payment.
7. Do not use a machine-mounted brushcutter/flail to cut scrub which has been costed for chainsaw/ bladed strimmer (as you may not have permission for this): use only the method as approved in your plan.

Tip: *Be safe! Never work alone, always bring a mobile phone with you in case you need help. Always use protective clothing, boots, eye- and ear-wear: co-funding is available for these.*



Scattered hazel scrub encroaching onto species-rich grassland areas, suitable for removal.



Hazel scrub taking over an area of species-rich grassland, at a stage where it is worth removing.



Mature trees (e.g. whitethorn, ash, holly, rowan) and mature scrub should be left intact.



Targeted scrub removed from a species-rich area, enabling wall repair and a restoration of grazing.



Protective clothing is a must for scrub work, while working in teams is also highly recommended.



Rubber mats or tyre rafts must be used if crossing any old mound walls with a machine.



Large old tyres, roped together, provide an effective cushion to protect pavement and old walls.

Gathering and piling the scrub brash:

- 1.** All cut scrub must be gathered up properly, including small bushes. This is particularly true of blackthorn, which if left scattered, will prevent effective grazing and pose a serious hazard to your livestock.
- 2.** Hazel piles rot down quite quickly over time, but blackthorn rots far slower, so may be best burnt (where suitable), chipped (if accessible) or piled in carefully selected spots where it will have the least impact.
- 3.** Fewer, larger, consolidated brash piles are preferable than lots of small scattered piles; and remember, do not pile on grazeable areas or directly on good limestone pavement.
- 4.** If considering burning brashings later (pending consent), only stack them in open areas with deep soil, and at least 16m (50ft) from any public road.
- 5.** If allowing the brash to rot down naturally (preferable in the majority of cases), do not stack it where brambles are present as the brash piles will just foster their expansion.
- 6.** Scrub piles must not impede livestock access so don't build piles in the middle of an access path that you've just cleared!
- 7.** When cutting paths or areas close to mature scrub, the cut brash can be dragged off under the adjacent mature bushes and left to rot down.
- 8.** Never stack scrub piles close to, or on, walls or any other built structures.

Tip: *The task of properly gathering up and suitably piling the cut brash should not be overlooked - otherwise you might not be fully tackling the scrub issue in a field and it's impacts on the grazing levels.*



Scattered cut scrub remaining: job incomplete and not eligible for payment until it is gathered up.



Neatly piled hazel brush can form a very useful habitat for various wildlife as it rots down.

Burning the scrub brush (only if & where suitable, and in accordance with legal protocols):

- 1.** Though generally unadvised, the burning of brush piles (mainly if blackthorn) may be an option in certain cases, depending on there being suitably deep soil underneath and on the relative location of the area.
- 2.** To obtain consent, you must notify in advance, your local authority (either Clare or Galway County Council) and the fire brigade (phone 999) - where and when you intend to burn the brush piles. You will also require prior permission from the NPWS if you intend to burn brush piles in an SAC.
- 3.** Do not burn any living vegetation during the bird nesting season (March 1st - August 31st): this is illegal.
- 4.** Do not burn piles on rocky or thin-soil surfaces as this will cause the limestone to fracture and blacken.
- 5.** Do not burn piles within 16m (50ft) of public roads (illegal), or close to walls or archaeological sites.
- 6.** Do not burn when conditions are very dry or windy, as fire can spread very rapidly. Never take any risks!



Well placed brush piles, especially hazel, will generally rot down rather quickly.



Do not burn brush piles on exposed rock or thin soils; this will cause significant damage.

Treating the cut stumps:

1. Treat all stumps within 1 hour of cutting (preferably within 15 minutes) – any later and the stump will already be ‘scabbing over’ and won’t allow the chemical to enter the system.
2. Do not treat stumps in wet weather – the chemical will just wastefully and unsafely wash off.
3. Do not use a high-pressure sprayer/nozzle to treat stumps – the more targeted you can be, the better.
4. Do not treat small stumps <1" in diameter (unless they form part of a stand with other larger stumps), as these are often difficult to target effectively, so instead the subsequent regrowth should be treated.
5. Do not treat stumps in late winter - early spring (late Jan - Feb) as this is when the sap is already rising so the chemical will just be flushed out of the system.
6. Only use a suitable herbicide (consult an approved pesticide advisor e.g. at point of sale).

Wiping scrub regrowth:

1. Wipe scrub regrowth and small bushes in summer when in full leaf (typically late May to mid-August).
2. Use a hand-help weed wiper or a low-pressure hand-held sprayer to target herbicide application: **untargeted spraying of regrowth is not permitted, and where identified, will result in a reduced field score.**
3. Do not wipe/spot treat in hot, sunny weather or when it’s raining as the treatment will not be as effective. A day with some light misty rain is okay; but pay attention to the weather forecast.
4. Only use a suitable herbicide (consult an approved pesticide advisor e.g. at point of sale).

Anytime when using herbicides on your farm; always ensure that you record their use in a log, that you follow the instructions on the product label, and that you wear the appropriate safety gear for the job.



Untargeted regrowth spraying is not allowed, and will result in a reduction in the field score.



All rubbish and containers must be collected and removed safely once work has been completed.