

## 5.1 Heather Moorland – Dry heath, wet heath, blanket bog and degraded heather

**Definition:** There are four types of heather moorland - dry heath, wet heath, blanket bog and degraded heath. All heather moorland types have at least 25% cover of heather and heath indicator species including western gorse, with the exception of degraded heath, which has between 5-25% cover.

**Dry heath** occurs on well-drained shallow peat less than 0.5 metres (m) deep. The vegetation comprises of heather, bell heather, bilberry, western gorse with tormentil and grasses.

**Wet Heath** occurs on lower slopes too dry or steep for deep peat deposits normally under 200m. Peat depth is up to 0.5m. The vegetation comprises of heather, cross-leaved heath, bilberry, deer grass, and purple moor grass with *Sphagnum* mosses.

**Blanket Bog** occurs on deep peat deposits over 0.5m deep. The average depth of peat is 2m to 3m. It is formed on areas normally over 200m. Blanket bogs develop topography with numerous pools and raised hummocks, which are formed by *Sphagnum* mosses. Vegetation comprises heather, cross-leaved heath, cotton-grasses, deer-grass, crowberry, bog asphodel and sedges such as white-beaked sedge. Bog pools and margins support bog bean, sundews and bladderworts. *Sphagnum* mosses are very frequent. Black bog rush and purple moor grass are found on western blanket bogs at lower altitudes.

**Degraded heath** is principally formed as a result of overgrazing and/or peat extraction on moorland and can be classified as either degraded dry heath or wet heath. Heather plants will exhibit characteristic signs of overgrazing such as topiary, drumstick and distorted growth forms. Areas of bare or sparsely covered ground may be present. The vegetation will reflect the original category and will include heather, bell heather, cross-leaved heath, bilberry, cotton grasses and deer grass. Unpalatable grasses such as mat grass and purple moor-grass and rushes may dominate a high proportion of the sward.

**Aim:** to maintain and increase the extent of heather moorland in Northern Ireland through the implementation of appropriate grazing and agricultural practices.

**Biodiversity objectives:** heather moorland contributes to the Biodiversity Action Plan targets for the Irish hare, Curlew, Hen harrier, Small cow wheat, Blanket Bog, Upland Heathland, and Montane Heath. Some NI Priority species such as Red Grouse, Golden plover, Few-flowered sedge and Cloudberry will also benefit.

### Management requirements

- No grazing from 1 November to 28/29 February on all heather moorland types. However, within the grazing period, the stocking density and length of grazing will vary depending on the heather moorland type and whether sheep or cattle are used (see Table below).

Heather moorland type	No Grazing period	Stocking density and grazing animal	Grazing period
Dry heath	1 November-28/29 February	0.30LU/ha sheep and/or cattle	1 March-31 October
Wet Heath	1 November-28/29 February	0.25LU/ha sheep or 0.20LU/ha cattle	1 March-31 October 1 June-31 August
Blanket Bog	1 November-28/29 February	0.075LU/ha sheep only	1 March-31 October
Degraded heath (dry)	1 November-28/29 February	0.30LU/ha sheep and/or cattle	1 March-31 October
Degraded heath (wet)	1 November-28/29 February	0.25LU/ha sheep or 0.20LU/ha cattle	1 March-31 October 1 June –31 August

- No cultivation, fertilisation, liming, reclamation, mineral extraction, dumping, drainage, construction of new lanes or application of slurry, farmyard manure, herbicides, pesticides, insecticides, sheep dip, fungicides, basic slag, sewage sludge, poultry litter or any other material is permitted.
- Existing drainage systems can be maintained but not widened, deepened or extended.
- Supplementary feeding sites, temporary silage clamps and storage areas for big bale silage or hay are not permitted on heather moorland.
- Peat cutting is limited to 0.1ha for domestic use. Mechanised peat cutting is not permitted.
- The spread of scrub/trees must be controlled.
- The removal of western gorse on *dry heath* is not permitted.
- New fencing is not permitted without the permission of DARD.
- Trees must not be planted on heather moorland.
- No poaching.
- Burning requires the written permission from DARD and cannot be carried out from 15 April – 31 August.

## Further advice

Where a mix of heather types occur within the same grazing unit, an average stocking density based on the ratio of different types will apply to the whole unit, where there is at least 20% of each type. Areas of common grazing will be eligible provided **ALL** graziers/shareholders agree to follow the relevant management requirements. The control of bracken and heather regeneration, by burning or flailing, may be funded through Specific Conservation Measures. Existing drains may require infilling where DARD deems this necessary. Noxious weeds such as thistles and ragwort may be controlled with herbicides, applied using a weed wiper or spot sprayer. The annual payment includes an element for routine positive management such as scrub control (see Appendix IV).

Management plans are provided for participants in the Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Countryside Management Schemes

