

ACRES Peatland SCORECARD TIP SHEET

TIPS

Determine the best path to assess the field. This will often be a 'W' path but make sure to cover all vegetation types present i.e. bog, wet/dry heath and slopes, hummocks, hollows where possible.

Do not just follow access tracks or paths as this gives a biased view of the field's condition.

Observe the wider area during the 'W' walk to estimate the overall grazing level and cover of bracken, scrub and invasive species. Aerial photographs may also be helpful for estimating cover of scrub and bracken.

Stop regularly to part the vegetation to estimate the moss cover, assess the vegetation structure and check for weed species or scrub seedlings.

Note any comments or management actions which may be useful to the CP team in the section provided in the app.

Not all positive indicators will be in flower at the same time, look for leaves as well as flowers.

Positive indicators may occur throughout, in clumps or sparsely (e.g. sundews).

Do not spend excessive amounts of time in one area or nice hummocks/corners as this isn't representative and is not the protocol that will be followed during an inspection.

A2 Cover of mosses, lichens & liverworts

Cover of mosses and lichens can vary significantly. Pick several small representative areas to estimate cover and apply the average of these to the entire field where appropriate.

Low: <10% cover across the field. Mosses, liverworts and lichens are present in very small numbers in the field.

Moderate: 10-30% cover of mosses, lichens and liverworts across the field.

High: 30%+ cover of mosses, lichens and liverworts across the field.

B1 Hydrological Integrity (Carbon Capture)

Good hydrological integrity (with the water table at, or close to, the surface) is essential for supporting a healthy functioning peatland with continued peat formation.

Drainage can lead to erosion of peat and the release of carbon.

Significantly altered: Widespread free-flowing drains impacting >20% of field. Evidence of subsidence, collapse, cracking of adjacent peat, increased rate of run-off and reduced water table.

Moderately altered: Free-flowing, unvegetated drains present and impacting <20% of field. Abundance of peatland species which favour drier conditions i.e. Ling heather, Tussock grasses and Gorse.

Slightly altered: Some drains present but these are well vegetated and partially impeded i.e. neither free-flowing or abundant. Limited effect on field. Some sphagnum species present.

Moderately intact: Surface largely intact/stable. Some evidence of historic disturbance. Well vegetated drains with impeded flows. Vegetation/hydrology is largely stabilised/recovered.

Intact Bog/Heath: No evidence of past drainage/disturbance across fields. Site exhibits a high water table with active peat formation.

A3 Vegetation Structure


A peatland with good vegetation structure will have a well-developed shrub, sedge / herb and moss layer. The shrub layer should not be uniform in structure and should have shrubs at various growth stages.


Over-grazed: 


Uniformly low vegetation height with poor structure. Little / no heather present on bog / wet heaths. Often lacking moss, sedge / herb or shrub layers.

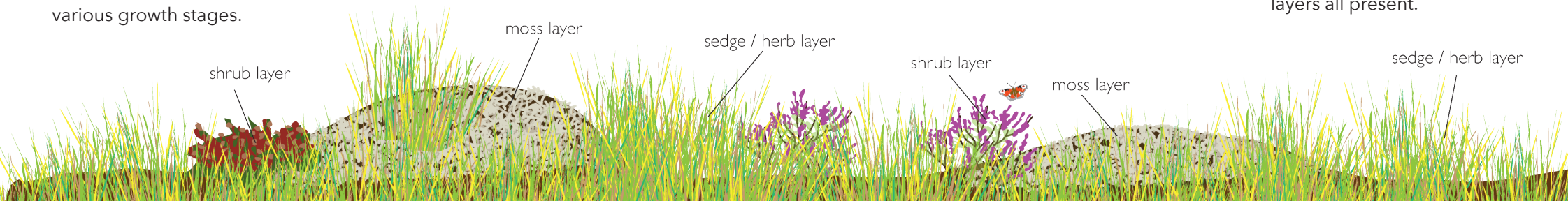
Under-grazed: 

Rank sward. Purple moor grass / mat grass / senescent heather dominant. High litter cover. Thatch forming.

Moderate (Over-grazed):  >25% of field has low, uniform vegetation height (although not throughout).

Moderate (Under-grazed):  >25% rank vegetation although not throughout. Degenerate heather or dense purple moor-grass present.

Good:  Abundant grass and sedges. Hummocks / hollows / pools present on bogs. All stages of heather growth present on heaths. Mix of bog / heath vegetation throughout. Moss, sedge / herb and shrub layers all present.



Good peatland / heathland structure with all three vegetation layers present

C5 Turbary

Turbary is the extraction of turf or peat from a peatland as a source of fuel. This negatively impacts the hydrology and vegetation structure and creates large areas of bare, eroding soil.

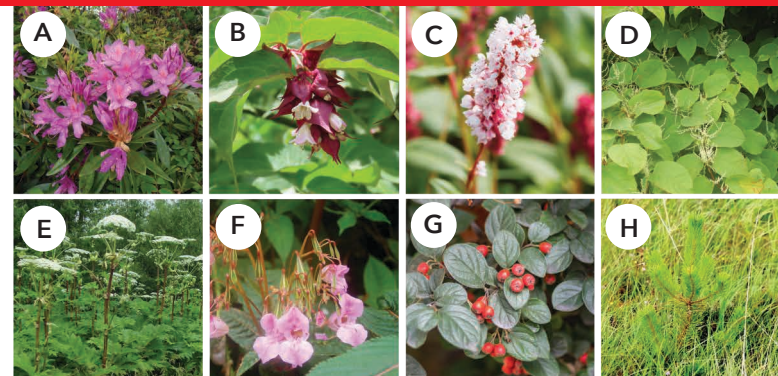
High: Active peat cutting/associated works. >10% of field affected. High levels of bare peat present due to extraction. Sausage machine cutting taking place in any part of the field.

Moderate: Active peat cutting and associated works (mechanical cutting from face-bank, hand-cutting, milling etc.) across <10% of the field.

Low: No evidence of peat cutting during the most recent season.

Negative Indicator species

- A. Rhododendron
- B. Himalayan Honeysuckle
- C. Himalayan Knotweed
- D. Japanese Knotweed
- E. Giant Hogweed
- F. Himalayan Balsam
- G. Cotoneaster
- H. Self-sown conifers



Positive Indicator species

The pictures below display the flowering forms of different plant species which are positive indicators of well managed peatland habitats.

During the "W" walk, of the field, identify and tick off each positive indicator species/group present, excluding the field margins.

Higher cover of positive indicator species/group is associated with better quality semi-natural grasslands, unless one or a few species dominate, which can indicate sub-optimal quality.

Cover of a plant is based on the visible above ground parts, i.e., leaves, flowers, and stems.

SHRUB layer



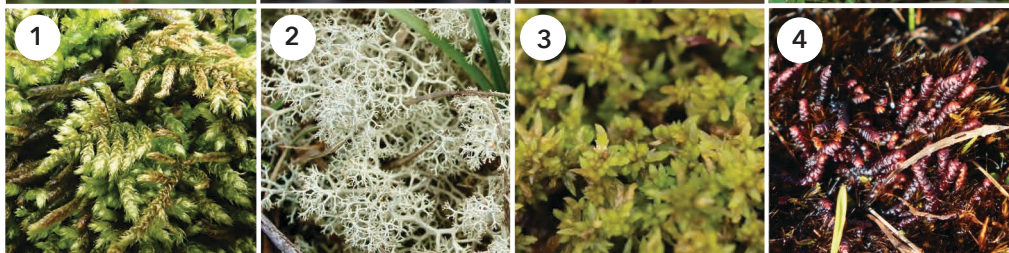
- 12. Bell heather
- 13. Cross-leaved heath
- 14. Ling heather
- 15. Bilberry
- 16. Bog myrtle
- 17. Western Gorse

SEDGE / HERB layer



- 5. Bog asphodel
- 6. Bog bean
- 7. Bog cotton
- 8. Lousewort
- 9. Sundews
- 10. White-beaked sedge
- 11. Black bog rush

MOSS layer



- 1. Branched mosses
- 2. Non-crustose bushy lichens
- 3. Sphagnum mosses
- 4. Liverworts