

DUNLOSSIT ESTATE

TABLE 1: COMPARISON OF THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO MOORLAND BRACKEN CONTROL

| CRITERIA | Herbicide | Mechanical methods | Pigs |
|---|---|---|--|
| Delivery | Usually a one-off exercise with follow-up spraying the following year. Spray can be delivered from the air; from ATVs, or from man-mounted spraypacks | Rollers, cutters or bruisers towed behind ATVs. More unusually, a team of brushcutters or trimmers operated by manpower | Pigs turned loose on a moorland area and left to determine their own work programme. Regular management checks are required for welfare reasons |
| Ability to target problem areas | If delivered by vehicle, access is limited by terrain; if delivered by air, it is hard to deal with a mosaic of bracken patches | Dependent upon terrain – vehicular tools need relatively level land; strimming by hand is very manpower intensive | Pigs are All Terrain Animals and their natural instincts lead them to the areas needing attention |
| Short term effect | Instant gratification – vast swathes of dead bracken | Instant gratification – smaller swathes of dead bracken | Slow to show progress, but fascinating watching it unfold – and getting to know pig habits |
| Long term effect | Slaughter of bracken by chemical is for a finite period only – nothing has changed, and if bracken invaded before spraying, it will invade again. Spraying does not achieve eradication without assistance through some form of change in land use | The bracken colony will be weakened, but only where machinery can come into contact with it | The presence of pigs as part of the eco-system means that patches of bracken are continually being put under pressure on a rotational basis |
| Positive and negative ecological impacts | Use of a spray means that chemicals are being introduced to what is likely to be a totally organic area | With any vehicle or machine, there is a minor risk of oil or fuel pollution | Using pigs is really a reintroduction of the 'wild pig' which would once have been part of the fauna of the land. There is no evidence of undue erosion; over-enriched soil (pigs with space don't operate a latrine system), and there is no evidence of pigs pursuing any one species to extinction (not even bracken) |
| Enhancement of species mix | Spraying will increase the mat of dead bracken material, which will further inhibit other species | Cutting or bruising will increase the mat of dead bracken material, which will further inhibit other species | The rooting of pigs exposes the soil to create a seedbed; it also unearths seed which may be already lying dormant in the soil |
| Cost of management | Spraying is not cheap: if by helicopter, it is a large sum of money leaching out of the system; if by manpower, the albeit lesser cost of spray – and a colour marker – is leaching out of the system, and large blocks of manpower are taken away from other tasks | This is again very manpower intensive (not to mention leading to threatened strike action – strimming the moorland is tedious work!). If vehicles are used, the ever-increasing cost of oil is a major factor | Pigs themselves are relatively cheap; pig food is not – and is money leaching out of the system. There is a manpower requirement – a daily visit. But unlike the other methods, there is also an income stream once the pig reaches mature age – and the premium value of pork produced this way cannot be over-stated |