



## **POLICY AND PROCEDURE No: 19**

### **PEAT CUTTING/EXTRACTION**

#### **Introduction**

The Trust aims to work to a high standard of environmental stewardship across all areas of activity. On the Galson Estate, this is manifested in a holistic approach to long-term sustainable development across a range of different land uses, including peat extraction.

#### **Who can cut peats?**

Crofters in Scotland have the right to cut peat for their own use if they meet certain conditions. The right was introduced in 1886 by the Crofter's Act. According to the Act, crofters (and their spouses) retain the right to cut peat on common grazings if they:

- acquire the site of their croft dwelling-house.
- are granted a conveyance under the Crofters (Scotland) Act 1955.

Crofters should ask their grazings clerk to advise on their croft's allocated peat bank(s) location.

Access tracks are a shared responsibility of township shareholders; crofters should work with neighbours to maintain access.

#### **Permitted methods of peat-cutting**

##### **Hand Cut - Preferred**

For those permitted to cut peat, it should be carried out in a traditional, sustainable manner by:

- Selecting the darker, deeper layers of peat.
- Cutting this peat into slices using a "tairsgeir".
- Stacking the cut peat in a formation that allows them to dry out on the heather.
- Reinstating the turf in the traditional method.
- Crofters and contractors should avoid undue damage to shared access tracks.

##### **Machine Cut – Individual Banks**

- Cutting as close to the hand-cut method as possible.
- Removing peat from individual banks to a width of approximately 36 inches/90cm, maximum.
- Stacking the cut peat in a formation that allows them to dry out on the heather.
- Reinstating the turf, as close as possible to the traditional method.
- Crofters and contractors should avoid undue damage to shared access tracks.

##### **Machine Cut – Extruder (Sausage Machine)**

- Only in areas agreed by the grazing committees and away from other peat banks.
- Crofters and contractors should avoid undue damage to shared access tracks.

## **Prohibited methods of peat cutting**

The extraction of peat **cannot** be done by:

- Use of an excavator and hopper – for example peat cannot be dug and moved to another site to be laid down
- The wide-scale removal of peat through inappropriate machine-based practices which undermines the peat bogs and waterways.

## **Impact from vehicles**

Heavy vehicles will not be allowed to initiate damage or promote further degradation to the wider peatland. Damage to the fragile peatland can be caused by using vehicles and machinery with incorrect wheels, weight, or tracks that support the vehicle on the peatland surface.

## **Commercial Peat Cutting**

UOG will work with all grazing committees to prevent the practice of commercial peat cutting. UOG aims to prevent peat cutting from becoming a commercialised industry. The following is not permitted:

- The unregulated sale of peat, on which tax is not paid.
- Unused plots being exploited, without grazing committee permission, with peat being sold to customers.

## **Peatland Restoration**

- The Trust will continue working with NatureScot, Peatland ACTION, and other parties to identify areas of peatland on Galson Estate that could benefit from activities such as peatland restoration and help groups as required to advise and facilitate applications for the available funding.
- The Trust will seek to encourage and advise crofters on the schemes and funding options available currently and in the future to achieve protection and restoration targets.
- UOG will explore options for restoration and conservation of peatland, seeking to work with common grazings and all relevant stakeholders to help limit, reduce, and reverse degradation and erosion of peatland on the Estate.

Work with Peatland ACTION to provide education sessions through talks, social media, newsletters, etc. Identify areas that may qualify to be entered into the peatland regeneration scheme. Work with grazings committees to identify banks that can be allocated to new residents.

**There is a danger that if peat cutting is not managed locally, in a sustainable manner, the right to all peat cutting could be stopped at a national level.**

## **Summary**

Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn has no intention of ending the traditional right to cut peat for a person's domestic use. However, inappropriate extraction methods should not be used as they cause environmental damage and risk the future of traditional peat cutting. Commercial cutting should not operate under the guise of domestic cutting.

## **Review of Policy**

This Peat Cutting Policy was adopted by the Board of Directors of Galson Estate Trust at its meeting on 4 March 2025 and will be reviewed annually.