



RHODODENDRON REMOVAL WITHIN THE AVON DAM CATCHMENT

South West Lakes Trust (SWLT) in association with the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)' programme, Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) are jointly funding an initiative to eradicate *Rhododendron ponticum* in several areas just north of Shipley Bridge within the Avon Dam catchment on Brent Moor.

The proposal will take the form of a total of 4 trial plot areas covering 3 hectares, identified as appropriate through close consultation with key stakeholders. These include landowners, South Brent Commoners Association and other key agencies such as the Environment Agency, Devon Wildlife Trust, Natural England, Dartmoor National Park and their Historic Environment Department.

The aims of the proposal include utilising a novel method called the Lever/Mulch technique to remove and control the invasive *Rhododendron* from a range of habitat types and plant densities. These include riparian (riverside) habitat, open moor habitat and areas of historic significance such as the remnants of Brentmoor house. The technique is supported by SWLT and environmental bodies, as it removes the need to treat the regrowth of this vigorous plant species with chemical herbicides. By cutting the above ground biomass and retaining the stem, this enables the stem to be used as a lever to break the plant off at the root crown. This root crown is then covered with the cut arisings (mulched) restricting light from promoting regrowth of the plant.

WHY DO WE WANT TO DO THIS?

Rhododendron ponticum is an introduced plant species originating from the Iberian Peninsula and the Himalayan region. Introduced to the UK in around 1763 it was prized by rural estates for its value both ornamentally and as cover for game species. Unfortunately, the plant's survival strategies and ecology are one of its downfalls to our native flora and fauna.

Thriving in our damp, oceanic climate it spreads rapidly reproducing both vegetatively through layering and by seed dispersal onto open moorland. Once established, it creates a dense impenetrable thicket with its light-excluding canopy completely restricting the ability of any understorey vegetation to establish. The result, where dense *Rhododendron* stands occur, is land that is ecologically barren to both our native flora and fauna that rely on vegetative diversity to thrive and succeed.

Couple this with the fact that *Rhododendron* is a sporulating host for tree pathogens within the *Phytophthora* genus and it becomes clear why control of this Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) is critical to ensuring our native habitats are protected.



WHEN DO WE WANT TO START?

Works on site are planned to start on Monday 24th June 2024. Overall project management will be overseen by environmental management consultants Land and Heritage for the client SWLT. A local tree specialist contractor will be used to cut vegetation within the trial plots with an army of volunteers present to help with the stacking of arisings from Moor Trees and other local community groups. It is expected that the works will be complete within a 4-week period and all health, safety and environmental protection measures will be in place, together with ecological protection to nesting birds and other priority species afforded by an ecological watching brief.

At this stage we wish to extend a huge thank you to the cooperation of the relevant landowners and the South Brent Commoners Association for supporting the ambitions of this trial work and they, along with the local community, that love and respect this beautiful part of the UK, can rest assured that every effort will be made to ensure that the landscape, together with its native flora and fauna will ultimately benefit from these works.

Any further comments or concerns can be directed to South West Lakes Trust. We thank you for your understanding whilst we carry out these works.

Morwenna Thelier (Dartmoor Biodiversity Officer BSc (Hons) MSc for SWLT can be contacted on **07904 849926** for any questions relating to the works.