

Unit 74 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Wet heath is recorded as an interest feature within this unit in both the monitoring specification and within Natural England 'Designated Sites View', all other interest features surveyed and that fall within this unit are not included.

Unit 74 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath is found to be in this condition with a lack of positive indicator species and graminoids at too high levels. For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, due to the low number of stops made, the assessment is not solely made on the 'upland' assessment but also takes into account surveyor comments.

A few stops were also taken in acid grassland and blanket bog habitat, but these are not interest features within Unit 74. The small number of stops suggests that they occur as mosaic /transitional habitat and adding these additional interest features to the unit is not required. Surveyors comments support this as they refer to extensive areas of acid grassland, with wet heath and blanket bog present, but note that no areas of subalpine dwarf shrub were observed. The stop records and surveyor comments within wet heath and acid grassland suggest that the acid grassland is overgrazed and it is probable that the acid grassland is actually degraded wet heath. **Land management – Over grazing should be added as a pressure for Unit 74.**

Wet Heath

Two samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment, Unit 74 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as ascertaining change in the trajectory of condition by comparing data with past surveys is not possible with two sample points.

Surveyors observed that wet heath occurs towards the northern end unit 74 and on some of the lower slopes in a mosaic with slightly deeper peat soil blanket bog. Vegetation noted included positive indicator species *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Carex* sedge spp, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Sphagnum* spp, non-crustose lichens and pleurocarpous mosses. The cover of positive indicator species was found to be just above the target level but the ericoid component less than 20% of vegetation cover. *Juncus squarrosus* Heath rush and *Nardus stricta* Mat grass at low cover levels they combine to form a significant component of the vegetation. Browsing on dwarf shrubs was observed to be too high and it was also noted that extensive areas of acid grassland occur and this may have developed from degraded over grazed wet heath, a review of grazing management is recommended and **Land management – Over grazing should be recorded as a pressure.**

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 74 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- *Erica tetralix* Cross leaved heath should be present within a 20m radius of the centre of the quadrat (50% failed the target)
- No more than 75% of cover should consist of graminoids, mean value found 77.5% graminoid cover.
- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. (only 6.5% recorded) and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather (only 3.5% recorded).

Unit 75 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 75 is found to be **unfavourable no change** condition as wet heath, subalpine dwarf shrub heath, blanket and valley bog and acid grassland were all found to be in unfavourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% of both acid grassland and wet heath sample stops, 83% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath and 50% of blanket bog failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

Both wet and dry heath habitat appear to lack the required positive indicators and heather in all growth phases to meet favourable condition targets and for acid grassland the sward is short which would suggest overgrazing. **Land management – Over grazing should be added as a pressure to achieving favourable condition.**

Surveyors commented that Unit 75 consists of upland acid grassland, typically on steep slopes with a short sward and only modest species diversity. On higher ground a mosaic of sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath, wet heath and blanket bog can be found. These habitats typically have a good diversity of positive indicator species, however, surveyors observed that cover levels of positive indicators were often below target levels. Surveyors observed mixed stock grazing with sheep, cattle and ponies.

Wet Heath

Three samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyors comments and the whole feature assessment, Unit 75 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as the 2013 monitoring survey gave a condition of unfavourable recovering because an agri-environment scheme was in place to restore favourable condition. However, there appears to have been very little change in condition with many of the same attributes failing the assessment. Unfortunately, it is not possible to ascertain whether there is a downward trajectory in condition by comparing the 2024 survey with the 2013 results due to the lack of samples provided in the 2024 survey.

Surveyors commented that a modest diversity of positive indicator species were observed in Unit 75 including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Carex* sedge spp., *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Sphagnum* spp. and pleurocarpous mosses. However, in places the total cover of positive indicator species, as well as ericoid cover, were below the target levels.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 75 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather fails the assessment with a mean of 26% (100% stops failing) and 18% (33% stops failing) respectively.

However, the monitoring attribute no more than 75% of cover should consist of graminoids, was close to failing with a mean value of 72%. In addition, one of the three stops failed this attribute. Therefore, it is recommended that the graminoid cover is monitored and changes made to management as appropriate.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Six samples were taken within subalpine dwarf shrub heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment, Unit 75 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as the 2013 monitoring survey gave a condition of unfavourable recovering, because an agri-environment scheme was in place to restore favourable condition. There appears to have been very little change in condition with many of the same attributes failing the assessment, although some slight improvement (but still failing) in monitoring attributes such as positive indicator species, therefore unfavourable no change is appropriate as a decline in condition cannot be found.

Surveyors commented that the majority of subalpine dwarf shrub heath habitat occurs on the north western half of Unit 75, to the west of the River Tavy, and includes a regularly used MoD rifle range. The heath featured *Calluna vulgaris* Heather occurring extensively in the habitat, along with some areas where *Ulex gallii* Western gorse assumed dominance as the most abundant dwarf shrub, in some locations overwhelmingly so. Other dwarf shrubs present included *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath and *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry typically as minor cover level associates. Other positive indicators included *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss and non-crustose lichens. However, at a number of the sample locations the cover levels of these species were below target levels, as was the diversity of positive indicators.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 83% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 75 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica spp.* *Vaccinium spp.* *Ulex gallii* Western gorse, *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent, fails the assessment despite having a mean value of 51.5% as three out of the six stops failed to meet the target.
- All growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area, fails as three out of six stops failed to contain heather in all its growth phases. The majority of heather cover 98% was in the building / late mature stage with only 1.33% in pioneer and 0.5% in degenerate.

It is recommended that the current management is reviewed and changes identified and actioned that will both help improve the cover of ericoids and help encourage a diversity in age structure.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Four samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 75 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be **unfavourable no change condition**. Unfavourable no change condition is given as ascertaining change in the trajectory of condition by comparing data with past surveys is not possible with four sample points.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 50% of blanket and valley bog attributes failed the assessment. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that the blanket bog habitat in Unit 75 typically contained a good diversity of positive indicator species, with all sample locations having at least six species. These included *Sphagnum spp.*, *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common Cotingrass, *Eriophorum vaginatum* Hare's-tail cottongrass, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly fringe moss and pleurocarpous mosses. However, the combined cover of these positive indicators was below target levels at a number of locations. The cover of *Molinia caerulea* was variable across the feature but abundant in places and in some of these locations the

cover of positive indicators was low. Cattle were grazing in this area at the time of the survey which will be beneficial and contribute towards the recovery of condition.

Acid Grassland

Five samples were taken within acid grassland habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 75 acid grassland interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified, the 2013 survey did not include all of the monitoring specification attributes.

The surveyors commented that the majority of the areas observed featured bent – fescue grassland comprised of varying cover levels of *Agrostis capillaris* Common bent and *Festuca ovina* Sheep's fescue, along with other grasses such as *Nardus stricta* Mat grass and *Anthoxanthum odoratum* Sweet vernal grass. Cover of forbs such as *Galium saxatile* Heath bedstraw and *Potentilla erecta* Tormentil, exceeded the 10% minimum target for forbs in some locations but not all. Sedges, including *Carex pilulifera* Pill sedge, were locally prominent in the sward. It was also observed that some areas appeared to be experiencing some bracken encroachment. **Land management – Weeds / Inappropriate species should be included as a pressure to achieving favourable condition.** Bracken would appear to be increasing in extent as no bracken was recorded in the 2013 survey.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of acid grassland sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 75 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- Cover of negative indicator species observed from the visual extent of the sample point should be less than 1%, fails this attribute as the mean 2% cover was observed with all stops failing. However, this attribute was passed at a quadrat scale.
- Less than 10% of vegetation cover should be made up of bracken and/or scattered native trees and scrub, fails the assessment with a mean value of 11% and two stops out of six (40%) failing to meet the target.
- At least 25% of the live leaves and/or flowering shoots of vascular plants should be more than 5 cm above the ground surface, and at least 25% should be less than 5 cm above the ground surface, fails to meet the attribute as only 10% of the vegetation was found to be over 5cm (100% stops failing), with 73% being less than 5cm.

It is recommended that grazing levels and management should be investigated and adjusted as appropriate, to encourage taller vegetation and / or reduce bracken and scrub cover if after further study this is found to be a factor in causing unfavourable condition.

Unit 76 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 76 is found to be **unfavourable no change condition** as wet heath, subalpine dwarf shrub heath and acid grassland were all found to be in unfavourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of Unit 76 sample stops in all three habitats failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The heathland interest feature habitats are lacking the required cover of ericoids and age diversity to achieve favourable condition. Consideration should be given to current management and the changes required to achieve favourable condition identified. The acid grassland lacks diversity of forbs and the vegetation height is too low to meet favourable condition targets, this suggest that grazing levels are too high and need to be adjusted.

The surveyors recommended that the proportions of sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath and acid grassland that occur as a mosaic, needs to be reviewed against baseline data as it was observed that there is a trend towards increasing areas of acid grassland with fragmented heath remnant. The diversity of positive indicator species was generally found to be good across the habitats, but cover levels frequently were below target levels. It was also noted that *Molinia caerulea* is a local issue in some of the wetter habitats. The observations and survey results suggest that **Land Management – Over grazing should be recorded as a pressure** in Unit 76.

Wet Heath

Three samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 76 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified.

The surveyors commented that the wet heath habitat featured relatively diverse vegetation with a number of positive indicator species present including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Carex* sedge spp., *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Drosera rotundifolia* Round-leaved sundew, *Sphagnum* spp., pleurocarpous mosses, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly fringe moss and non-crustose lichens. While the cover total of positive indicator species was typically achieving the target levels, the cover of ericoids was below the 20% threshold. *Molinia caerulea* levels were locally abundant but within surveyed areas acceptable.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 76 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. (only 29% recorded) and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather (only 10% recorded). All stops failed both attribute targets.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Eight samples were taken within subalpine dwarf shrub heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 76 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified.

The surveyors recommended that the mapping of subalpine dwarf shrub heath is reviewed in relation to changes in habitat extent. The middle plateau area is mapped as subalpine dwarf shrub heath, but when walked the area was observed to be primarily acid grassland with fragments of relict heath as well as patches of subalpine dwarf shrub heath. The feature included a good diversity of dwarf shrubs and other positive indicators, however, overall cover levels and diversity at actual locations was found to be below target levels. Species present included *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Ulex gallii* Western Gorse, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly fringe moss and non-crustose lichens.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 76 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica spp.* *Vaccinium spp.* *Ulex gallii* Western gorse, *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent, fails the assessment despite having a mean value of 45% as six out of the eight stops failed to meet the target.
- All growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area. At least 10% of the heather should be in the late mature growth phase, fails this attribute as 7 out of 8 of stops (88%) failed to contain heather in all its growth phases. The majority of heather cover 96% was in the building / late mature stage with only 0.63% in pioneer and 3.38% in degenerate.

It is recommended that current management is investigated and changes are made that will both help to improve the cover of ericoids and help encourage a diversity in age structure.

Acid Grassland

Three samples were taken within acid grassland habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 76 acid grassland interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified.

Surveyors commented that the acid grassland habitats included bent – fescue swards with abundant *Agrostis capillaris* Common Bent and frequent *Festuca ovina* Sheep's fescue, and these areas included species such as *Galium saxatile* Heath bedstraw and *Potentilla erecta* Tormentil, which allowed the forb cover to exceed the 10% minimum target. Other acid grassland areas, however, featured abundant *Nardus stricta* Mat grass and in these areas the forb cover was below the target levels.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of acid grassland sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 76 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- The cover of negative indicator species observed from the visual extent of the sample point should be less than 1% (mean was found to be 1.3%), although this attribute was passed at a quadrat scale.
- More than 10% of the vegetation cover should consist of forbs, a mean of 9% was recorded.
- At least 25% of the live leaves and/or flowering shoots of vascular plants should be more than 5 cm above the ground surface, and at least 25% should be less than 5 cm above the ground surface, fails to

meet the attribute as only 17% of the vegetation was found to be over 5cm, with 83% being less than 5cm.

It is recommended that grazing levels should be investigated and adjusted as appropriate to encourage taller vegetation and opportunities for desirable forbs to establish.

Unit 77 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 77 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as subalpine dwarf shrub heath, wet heath and acid grassland were all found to be in unfavourable condition. Blanket bog was found to be favourable.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of samples within subalpine dwarf shrub heath, wet heath and acid grassland habitat failed the assessment. For blanket and valley bogs 43% of stops failed the assessment but passed all individual monitoring attributes if only the mean value of all stops is considered. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The subalpine dwarf shrub heath is failing to meet the required ericoid cover and age diversity, whereas wet heath cover of graminoids is too high. Consideration should be given to current management and the changes required to achieve favourable condition identified. The acid grassland lacks diversity of forbs and the vegetation height is too low to meet favourable condition targets, this suggest that grazing levels are too high and need to be adjusted. **Land management – Over grazing should be added as a pressure** to achieving favourable condition.

Surveyors commented that whilst there were areas of good quality habitat, overall the condition of the habitat interest features were typically unfavourable. Positive indicator species were present in all of the habitats, but the frequency and cover of these were not consistently meeting the target levels. Negative species such as bracken occur within the acid grassland and sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath and the cover of *Molinia caerulea* Purple-moor grass is likely to be impacting on the wet heath and blanket and valley bog interest features.

Wet Heath

Four samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 77 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with four samples.

Surveyors commented that the wet heath habitat featured relatively diverse vegetation with a number of positive indicator species present including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Carex* sedge spp., *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Sphagnum* spp., pleurocarpous mosses and non-crustose lichens. However, a number of these species were uncommon and the cover of ericoids was generally too low. *Molinia caerulea* levels were variable but included areas where it was dominant resulting in very low cover levels of positive indicator species. Overall graminoid cover also exceeded threshold levels in places. It is recommended that management and grazing levels should be investigated and adjusted as appropriate to reduce graminoid dominance and encourage positive ericoid indicator species.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 77 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- No more than 75% of cover should consist of graminoids, fails the assessment with a mean value of 75% and two out of four stops (50%) failing to meet the targets.
- At least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, fails the assessment with a mean cover of 5.5% and all four stops failing to meet the monitoring attribute target.
- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp., fails the assessment with a mean cover of 36% and all three out of four stops (75%) failing to meet the monitoring attribute target.

All other monitoring attributes were passed.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Six samples were taken in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 77 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with six samples.

The surveyors commented that the sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath included a good range of positive indicator species, however diversity and cover at different locations often failed the target levels. *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry heath and *Ulex gallii* Western gorse heath stands occurred. Other positive indicators such as *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica cinerea* Bell heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, non-crustose lichens and *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss, typically occurred at low cover levels. Negative attributes include areas where the cover of bracken is likely to be impacting habitat condition, and in some areas the level of browsing exceeded the 33% maximum for non-pioneer material. It is recommended that current management is investigated and changes are made to grazing levels that will both help to improve the cover of ericoids and help encourage a diversity in age structure.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 67% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 77 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- At least two indicator species should be present from *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica* spp., *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss, *Vaccinium* spp., *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent, fails this attribute with a mean value of 1.83, four out of the six stops (33%) failed to meet the target.
- All growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area. At least 10% of the heather should be in the late mature growth phase, fails this attribute as four out of six of stops (67%) failed to contain heather in all its growth phases. The majority of heather cover 87% was in the building / late mature stage with only 9% in pioneer and 3% in degenerate.

Blanket and Valley Bogs (NOT LISTED IN ANNEX 2 OF MONITORING SPECIFICATION)

Seven samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 77 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be in **favourable** condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 43% of blanket and valley bogs sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. Because of the limited number of sample points the assessment also gives greater weight to surveyor comments that across the areas of blanket and valley bog

assessed a good diversity of positive indicator species were found. The cover of positive indicator species was also good, regularly exceeding 50% cover. Positive indicators observed included *Sphagnum* spp., *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Eriophorum vaginatum* Hare's-tail cottongrass, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss, non-crustose lichens and pleurocarpous mosses. Peat depths were taken ranging from 37cm to 150cm depth. Therefore, it is reasonable to find this interest feature in favourable condition.

Acid Grassland

Nine samples were taken in acid grassland habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 77 acid grassland interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified.

Surveyors commented that the majority of the acid grassland areas walked featured combinations of *Agrostis capillaris* Common bent and *Festuca ovina* Sheep's fescue, with elevated levels of *Nardus stricta* Mat grass locally. The forb component of the sward was observed to be below the 10% target level, but this margin was close and over 10% cover of forbs may be achieved if the survey was carried out in summer months. Locally the cover of *Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus* Woolly-fringe moss reached 10% but this wasn't widespread. Bracken cover over acid grassland was also noted.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of acid grassland sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 77 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- Cover of negative indicator species observed from the visual extent of the sample point should be less than 1%, fails this attribute as the mean 1.6% cover was observed, with no stop passing this attribute.
- More than 10% of the vegetation cover should consist of forbs, fails the assessment with a mean value of forbs of 6.2% and 89% of stops failing the attribute.
- At least 25% of the live leaves and/or flowering shoots of vascular plants should be more than 5 cm above the ground surface, and at least 25% should be less than 5 cm above the ground surface, fails to meet the monitoring attribute with only 8.33% of the vegetation found to be over 5cm and 88% being less than 5cm. Eight out of the nine stops (89%) failed to meet the target.

All other monitoring attributes were passed. It is recommended that grazing levels should be investigated and adjusted as appropriate to encourage taller vegetation and opportunities for desirable forbs to establish.

Unit 78 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 78 is found to be **unfavourable no change** condition as subalpine dwarf shrub heath and wet heath were both found to be in unfavourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% of wet heath and 90% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The heath interest features positive indicators are either failing or close to failure and within the subalpine dwarf shrub heath heather lacks age diversity. Surveyors comment that there is very little heath within this unit and it is predominantly acid grassland dominated by *Molinia* that is heavily grazed. The baseline NVC needs to be assessed to ascertain whether wet and dry heath has been replaced by acid grassland as a result of high grazing pressure. **Land management – Over grazing should be added as a pressure** and current levels reviewed and changes agreed to restore heath to this unit. Surveyors commented that some of the footpaths within this unit were also eroded and that **Disturbance & Recreational Impacts – Erosion should be added as a pressure.**

Wet Heath

One sample was taken in wet heath interest feature in Unit 78. Based on this record and surveyor comments, Unit 78 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change condition**. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with only one sample.

Surveyors commented that there is very little heath in Unit 78 and that the unit is predominantly acid grassland which is highly grazed and dominated by *Molinia*. Baseline NVC habitat maps should be reviewed to ascertain whether acid grassland has developed from degraded over grazed wet heath. A review of grazing management is recommended and **Land management – Over grazing should be recorded as a pressure.**

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 77 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. (only 22% recorded) and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather (only 2% recorded).

All other monitoring attributes were passed. However, it should be noted that no pioneer heath was found at the sample stop so the monitoring attribute that measures browsing of pioneer heath was not assessed.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Ten samples were taken in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 78 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Comparison with the 2013 survey that found subalpine dwarf shrub heath in unfavourable recovering condition, finds that in 2024 there is less browsing of the dwarf shrubs and pioneer heath but the cover of dwarf shrubs has reduced. The reduction of heath and replacement by acid grassland was observed by surveyors which indicates unfavourable condition.

Surveyors commented that there is very little heath in Unit 78 and that the unit is predominantly acid grassland which is highly grazed and dominated by *Molinia*. Baseline NVC habitat maps should be reviewed to ascertain whether acid grassland has developed from degraded over grazed heath. A review of grazing management is recommended and **Land management – Over grazing should be recorded as a pressure.**

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 90% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 78 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- All growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area. At least 10% of the heather should be in the late mature growth phase, fails this attribute as eight out of ten of stops (80%) failed to contain heather in all its growth phases. The majority of heather cover 99% was in the building / late mature stage with less than 1% in pioneer and 1% in degenerate.

However, the monitoring attribute at least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica spp.* *Vaccinium spp.* *Ulex gallii* Western gorse, *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent, passed at 59%, but it should be noted that five out of ten (50%) stops failed to meet the attribute target.

Unit 79 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 79 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as subalpine dwarf shrub heath and acid grassland were both found to be in unfavourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% of acid grassland and 67% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is failing due to the cover of bracken, but the lack of diversity in growth phases is also of concern. The acid grassland vegetation height is too low to meet favourable condition targets and the cover of negative indicators such as bracken and soft rush too high. The current management in particular grazing levels, should be reviewed and adjusted to a level where the interest features can recover and the attribute monitoring targets can be met. **Land management – Over grazing should be recorded as a pressure on this unit.**

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath (NOT LISTED IN ANNEX 2 OF MONITORING SPECIFICATION)

Three samples were taken in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 79 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with three samples.

Surveyors commented that either *Ulex gallii* Western gorse or *Calluna vulgaris* Heather is the most abundant dwarf shrub along with a subordinate cover of *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, with dwarf shrub cover at least 30%. Dwarf shrub growth stages was observed to be primarily building / mature with limited pioneer, degenerate or dead material. Heavy browsing above the 33% threshold was recorded at one location and bracken encroachment was observed as a threat to condition in another location.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 67% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 79 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- Cover of bracken should be less than 10%, a mean value of 17% was found.

Acid Grassland

Four samples were taken in acid grassland habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 79 acid grassland interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with four samples.

Surveyors observed that the short grazed acid grassland sward consisted of either abundant *Agrostis capillaris* Common bent with subordinate cover of *Anthoxanthum odoratum* Sweet vernal grass and *Festuca ovina* Sheep's fescue, or *Nardus stricta* Mat grass. Within the acid grassland, dwarf shrub relict heath was a rare

encounter and this was principally *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, as well as *Potentilla erecta* Tormenitl and *Galium saxatile* Heath bedstraw. Some areas of grassland had a high cover of bracken, while other areas soft rush was locally abundant. It is recommended that grazing levels and management should be investigated and adjusted as appropriate, to encourage taller vegetation and reduce the coverage of negative indicators and less desirable species such as bracken and soft rush, which will then allow opportunities for desirable forbs to establish.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of acid grassland sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 79 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- Negative indicator species observed from the visual extent of the sample point should be less than 1%, fails this attribute as the mean 14% cover was observed.
- Less than 10% cover should be *Juncus effusus* soft rush, fails the assessment at a visible scale with a mean of 14% but passes at a 1m² scale with a mean of 3%.
- Less than 10% of vegetation cover should be made up of bracken and/or scattered native trees and scrub, fails the assessment with a mean value of 28% combined target. The bracken cover mean was found to be 25% mean cover.
- At least 25% of the live leaves and/or flowering shoots of vascular plants should be more than 5 cm above the ground surface, and at least 25% should be less than 5 cm above the ground surface, fails to meet the monitoring attribute with only 15% of the vegetation found to be over 5cm and 62% being less than 5cm. Three out of the four stops (75%) failed to meet the target.

Unit 80 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 80 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath, subalpine dwarf shrub heath, blanket and valley bog and short sedge acidic fen were both found to be in unfavourable.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% of both short sedge acidic fen and wet heath, 88% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath and 20% of blanket bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale. Hence, blanket bog is found to be favourable despite having 20% of samples failing the condition assessment.

The wet heath is failing to meet the required ericoid and positive indicator cover and surveyors commented that some areas of wet heath were dominated with Molina and gorse.

The surveyors commented that Unit 80 features extensive sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath with a number of areas of wet heath, blanket and valley bog and acid grassland. A reasonably good diversity of positive indicators occurs within the habitats, but the frequency and cover levels did not meet the target levels across the unit. Grazing levels across the unit should be reviewed as browsing levels of dwarf shrubs exceeded target levels in places, but not across the whole unit. **Land management – over grazing should be recorded as a pressure** for Unit 80. Surveyors also noted that **Fire – Managed burn** should also be included as a **pressure** for Unit 80 but no further details were provided.

Wet Heath

Two samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 80 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified.

Surveyors commented that the wet heath habitat featured relatively diverse vegetation with a number of positive indicator species present including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Ulex gallii* Western gorse, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Carex* sedge spp., *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer sedge, *Sphagnum* spp. and pleurocarpous mosses. The cover of positive indicators was reasonably good, however, the cover level of ericoids did not always achieve the 20% minimum, but in some other places the cover of dwarf shrubs was locally too high.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 80 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, fails the assessment with a mean of 30% and 32% respectively.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Five stops were made in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 80 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition.

Surveyors commented that sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath is extensive across the unit and included areas of *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry heath and areas of *Ulex gallii* Western gorse heath. Other positive indicator species present included *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica cinerea* Bell heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, non-crustose lichens and *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss. Cover levels for desirable species were frequently below target levels. It was observed that browsing levels on some areas of dwarf shrub heath was in excess of 33% for non-pioneer material. It is recommended that grazing levels should be reviewed and adjusted to reduce the impact on the vegetation. Also recommended that bracken encroachment is investigated as this poses a local threat to the heath. Both **Land management – over grazing and Land management – Weeds / Inappropriate species should be recorded as pressures for this unit.**

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 88% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis found the mean value of all monitoring attributes passing the assessment, but both grazing and bracken cover was flagged by surveyors as a concern. Unfavourable no change condition is therefore given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified

Short Sedge Acidic Fen

One stop was made in short sedge acidic fen in Unit 80. Based on this record Unit 80 short sedge acidic fen interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of short sedge acidic fen sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 80 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of live leaves and flowering shoots of vascular plants should be more than 15 cm above the ground surface, fails the assessment as no vegetation over 15cm was recorded.
- At least two positive indicators from: small to medium *Carex* sedge sized spp. *Hydrocotyle vulgaris* Marsh pennywort, *Sphagnum* spp, *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Juncus acutiflorus* Sharp flowered rush, *Menyanthes trifoliata* Bogbean, *Potentilla erecta* Tormentil, *Ranunculus flammula* Lesser spearwort, *Succisa pratensis* Devil's bit scabious, *Viola palustris* Marsh violet, fails the assessment as only small to medium sized *Carex* sedge was recorded.
- At least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of positive indicator species (25% from each of groups i and ii), fails the assessment with 40% recorded in group 1 and no records in group 2.
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Blanket and Valley Bogs (NOT LISTED IN ANNEX 2 OF MONITORING SPECIFICATION)

Five samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 80 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 20% of blanket bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that the frequency of positive indicators was typically below the target levels and locally the browsing pressure on dwarf shrubs

exceeded target levels. For this reason a condition of unfavourable no change is appropriate as there are also no comparative surveys from which movement in trajectory of condition can be identified.

Surveyors commented that blanket bog habitat areas had peat depths ranging from 37cm to 91cm and that sphagnum bog-moss cover across the habitat tended to be reasonably high. **Land management – Over grazing should be recorded as a pressure for this interest feature.**

Unit 81 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 81 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath is found to be in unfavourable condition. Subalpine dwarf shrub heath was found to be favourable.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 50% wet heath and 60% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale. Hence, subalpine dwarf shrub heath is found to be favourable despite having 60% of samples failing the condition assessment.

It is encouraging that some of the upland habitats have been found to be in favourable condition. However, it is recommended that the current management is reviewed and adjustments made to enable the wet heath interest feature to establish the required ericoid and positive indicator cover to allow favourable condition. Surveyors commented that grazing within some habitats appeared too high and this is indicated by the low sward within the acid grassland habitat. Therefore, **Land management – Over grazing should be included as a pressure for this unit.**

Wet Heath

Two samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 81 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with two samples.

The surveyors observed a modest diversity of positive indicator species including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Ulex gallii* Western gorse and pleurocarpous mosses. However, the cover of positive indicator species, as well as ericoids, did not meet the target levels in some locations and purple-moor grass is frequent. Browsing levels of dwarf shrubs were found to be relatively high but below monitoring threshold levels. It was also observed that some areas of gorse were managed by burning.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 50% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 81 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, fails the assessment with a mean of 17% and 11% respectively.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Five stops were made in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 81 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **favourable** condition.

Surveyors commented that positive indicator species recorded included *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica cinerea* Bell heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Ulex gallii* Western gorse and *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry. The cover of dwarf shrubs recorded was between 35 – 65%, however, at some locations the contribution to the total indicator cover by *Ulex gallii* Western gorse is too high. *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent was also recorded frequently across the feature type. The dwarf shrub structure in this unit showed a reasonable amount of diversity across the different age classes, with building/mature the most common, but also pioneer, degenerate and dead material.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 61% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, as this is based on just five sample points an assessment should also consider surveyor comments and also an analysis of the individual mean value of the monitoring attributes which were all passed. It should also be noted that a comparison with the 2013 survey finds less heather and dwarf shrubs recorded as browsed and heather in all age classes has improved as heather was only found in the building phase in 2013. However, although the monitoring attribute all growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area, was passed 87% of heather cover recorded was found in building and mature phase with just 3% in pioneer and 3% in degenerate. It would be desirable to increase the amount of heather in pioneer growth stage to ensure this attribute remains favourable.

Unit 82 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 82 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath and subalpine dwarf shrub interest feature were both found to be in unfavourable condition. It should be noted that short sedge acidic fen is an interest feature on this unit but no survey points were made in this habitat type.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% wet heath and 88% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The wet heath interest feature is failing to meet the required ericoid and positive indicator target. The subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature does not quite meet the target for ericoid positive indicators. It is recommended that management is reviewed and adjusted to increase positive indicator occurrence in these habitats.

Surveyors commented that Unit 82 is mapped as featuring extensive areas of sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath, as well as areas of wet heath. In areas where soil wetness increases blanket and valley bog habitat occurs. While these habitats contain a good number of different positive indicator species, these did not occur either frequently enough or at high enough cover levels. The cover levels of purple-moor grass are high in places and targeted management may be required to achieve favourable conservation condition. Management to address cover of *Molinia* should be identified and actioned therefore **Lanf Management – Weeds / Inappropriate species should be added as a pressure for this unit.**

Wet Heath

Three samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 82 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified

Surveyors commented that the wet heath habitat featured a reasonably diverse vegetation with a number of positive indicator species present including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Carex* sedge spp., *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Sphagnum* spp., pleurocarpous mosses and non-crustose lichens. However, the cover of positive indicator species was below the target levels in some areas, as was the specific ericoid cover level. Purple-moor grass levels were variable but included areas where *Molinia* dominated resulting in very low cover levels of positive indicator species.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 82 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, fails the assessment with both attributes having a mean of 15%.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Eight stops were made in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 82 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified

Surveyors commented that sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath within Unit 82 contained a reasonable diversity of positive indicator species. *Ulex gallii* Western gorse was widespread within the feature and locally very abundant. Other indicators observed included *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica cinerea* Bell heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, non-crustose lichens and *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss. Target cover levels of positive indicator species were met in some areas but not across enough of the feature within the unit. Overall browsing on dwarf shrubs was acceptable, however localized areas of heavy grazing were detected. The majority of the dwarf shrubs were building / mature, with only limited amounts of pioneer, degenerate and dead material.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 88% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 82 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica spp.* *Vaccinium spp.* *Ulex gallii* Western gorse, *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent, fails the assessment with a mean value of just under 50% vegetation cover and 50% of stops failing to meet this target.

The monitoring attribute all growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area, was passed. However, 87% of heather cover recorded in building and mature phase with just 3% in pioneer and 3% in degenerate. It would be desirable to increase the amount of heather in pioneer growth stage to ensure this attribute remains favourable.

Unit 83 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 83 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath, blanket and valley bog and subalpine dwarf shrub heath were found to be in this condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% wet heath and subalpine dwarf shrub heath and 67% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

Both wet and dry heath habitat appear to lack the required positive indicators and heather in all growth phases to meet favourable condition targets. The heath and bog habitat appear to be now limited in extent and it is recommended that the NVC baseline map is investigated to ascertain whether the extent of acid grassland has increased at the expense of heath and bog habitat. If this is found to be the case then management actions should be identified to reverse this trend.

The surveyors observed that *Molinia* had encroached throughout most of the units habitats, management needs to be reviewed to identify changes that will reverse *Molinia* dominance. **Therefore Land management – Weeds / Inappropriate species should be included as a pressure.** Surveyors also noted erosion as a pressure particularly on MOD tracks which is resulting in exposure and erosion of peat. **Disturbance & Recreational Impacts – Erosion should therefore be recorded as a pressure.** A single Sitka spruce was also noted as a pressure by surveyors, this will be noted as a pressure and it is recommended that this is felled, but the threat to condition from this pressure is low.

Wet Heath

Three samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 83 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with three samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 83 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- *Erica tetralix* Cross leaved heath should be present within a 20m radius of the centre of the quadrat fails the assessment with 66% (two out of three) of stops not meeting this target.

Observations made by surveyors indicate that wet heath is limited in extent and that *Molinia* is dominating the heath. It is recommended that current management is investigated and changes are made that will help to improve the cover of ericoids .

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Three samples were taken within subalpine dwarf shrub heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 83 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with three samples.

Observations made by surveyors indicate that subalpine dwarf shrub heath is very limited in extent, lacks the expected crustose lichens and that *Molinia* is encroaching throughout. It is recommended that current management is investigated and changes are made that will both help to improve the cover of ericoids and help encourage a diversity in age structure.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 83 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica* spp. *Vaccinium* spp. *Ulex gallii* Western gorse, *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent, fails the assessment with a mean value of 46% cover.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Six samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 83 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with six samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 67% of blanket bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that the blanket bog was heavily dominated by *Molinia* and that *Calluna vulgaris* is the dominant heather and showed some minor signs of grazing pressure. As six samples were taken it is not possible to accurately compare the survey to the 2014 survey, however, a general observation is that the cover of positive indicator species has increased from mean of 68% cover in 2024 compared to 46% cover in 2014. However, it is uncertain whether the records taken in 2014 are actually on blanket bog habitat given the very shallow (mean value 10cm) nature of the peat soils.

Unit 84 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 84 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath and blanket and valley bog were both found to be in unfavourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% wet heath and 67% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

Surveyors commented that Unit 84 was heavily grazed, which resulted in less established heather than would be expected in wet heath. The surveyors noted that all habitats lacked the required number of positive indicators and that *Molinia* dominated the sward out competing more desirable species. **Land management – over grazing should be included as a pressure for this unit.** The surveyors also noted areas of exposed and eroded peat and also an area which had been fly tipped. Therefore, **Disturbance & Recreational Impacts – Erosion and Dumping / Fly topping should be recorded as a pressure.** It is recommended that the current management of Unit 84 is reviewed and adjusted to reduce the cover of negative indicators and favour the establishment of positive botanical indicators.

Wet Heath

Three samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 84 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with three samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 84 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- *Erica tetralix* Cross leaved heath should be present within a 20m radius of the centre of the quadrat fails the assessment with 33% (one out of three) of stops not meeting this target.
- No more than 75% of cover should consist of graminoids fails the assessment with a mean value of 87% and all stops failing to meet the attribute target.
- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica spp.* *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium spp.* *Sphagnum spp.* and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica spp* and *Calluna vulgaris* fails the assessment with a mean of 5% and 1% respectively. 100% stops failed both targets suggesting the composition of positive indicator species is poor.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Six samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 84 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with six samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 67% of blanket bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 84 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of at least 3 of the listed positive indicator species, fails the assessment with mean value of 32% and 50% of stops failing to meet the attribute target.

Unit 85 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 85 is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition as this is the condition of the wet heath interest feature. The failing habitat interest features lack the required positive indicators. Blanket and valley bogs are found to be in favourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% wet heath and 43% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

Surveyors commented that the majority of the high ground and plateau feature widespread bog habitat along with wet heath. These habitats tended to have areas of high *Molinia* cover and the habitats typically lacked the target numbers and/or cover of positive indicator species. Small areas of short sedge acidic fen also occur scattered through the unit, typically near watercourses. On lower ground near the southern and eastern sides of the unit areas of acid grassland occurred with some sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath. As with the wetter habitats these feature types typically lacked adequate cover of positive indicator species. It is recommended that the management is reviewed and changes made to address the *Molinia* cover. **Land management – Weeds / Inappropriate species should be included as a pressure** for Unit 85.

Wet Heath

Four samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 85 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with four samples.

The surveyors commented that the wet heath habitat featured relatively diverse vegetation with a number of positive indicator species present including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Carex* sedge spp., *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Narthecium ossifragum* Bog asphodel, *Sphagnum* spp., pleurocarpous mosses, *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss and non-crustose lichens. However, the cover of positive indicator species was typically below the target levels as was the specific ericoid cover level. Purple-moor grass levels were variable but included areas where *Molinia* was dominant resulting in very low cover levels of positive indicator species.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 85 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attributes target:-

- *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath should be present within a 20m radius of the centre of the quadrat fails the assessment with 25% (one out of four) of stops not meeting this target.
- No more than 75% of cover should consist of graminoids fails the assessment with a mean value of 83%, with only one of the four stops passing the attribute target.
- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather fails the assessment with a mean of 14% and 4% respectively. All stops failed both attribute targets suggesting the composition of positive indicator species is poor.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Seven samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 85 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be in **favourable** condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 43% of blanket bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that *Molinia* was frequent and abundant within the unit but a good diversity of other species were present throughout including a good diversity of *Sphagnum* spp., *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Eriophorum vaginatum* Hare's-tail cottongrass, *Drosera rotundifolia* Round leaved sundew and pleurocarpous mosses. Surveyors commented that a wide variety of peat depths were recorded ranging from 44cm up to 183cm.

As seven samples were taken it is not possible to accurately compare the survey to the 2012 survey, however, a general observation is that the cover of positive indicator species has slightly increased from mean of 54% cover in 2024 compared to 57% cover in 2014 and the levels of grazing appears to have reduced.

Unit 86 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 86 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as acid grassland and blanket and valley bog are found to be in unfavourable condition. Acid grassland fails the assessment due to a lack of positive indicator species. For both habitat interest features vegetation height was low and for areas where wet heath habitat occur it was observed that grazing levels are reducing the occurrence of dwarf shrubs in favour of graminoid species. The cover of *Molinia* and soft rush are also causing unfavourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% acid grassland and 45% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

Surveyors commented that the majority of Unit 86 comprised of blanket bog and wet heath habitat, with areas of acid grassland (including areas on steeper slopes) and numerous small areas of short sedge acidic fen. The habitats generally retain a good diversity of positive indicator species, however, in places these do not occur together in high enough number or not combining to achieve high enough cover levels to achieve condition targets. Reasonably heavy grazing pressure on dwarf shrub was observed in several places, therefore livestock numbers, type and timing of grazing should be reviewed to reduce the pressure. *Molinia* cover is high in a number of different feature types and this could be associated with the high grazing levels. The current management of Unit 86 needs to be reviewed and adjusted to provide conditions to encourage positive indicator species and reduce the extent of soft rush, *Molinia* and other graminoids. **Land management – over grazing should be recorded as a pressure** on achieving favourable condition.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Eleven samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 86 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 45% of blanket bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that the blanket bog habitat had a wide variety of peat depths recorded, ranging from 37cm up to 209cm. *Molinia* was observed to be abundant throughout the feature. Despite this a wide diversity of positive indicator species were noted including *Sphagnum* spp., *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass, *Eriophorum vaginatum* Hare's-tail cottongrass, *Racomitrium lanuginosum*, pleurocarpous mosses and non-crustose lichens. This is also reflected in the data analysis with a mean of eight positive indicator species found which more than meets the required number of four.

A comparison with the 2012 survey is not possible as not all of the monitoring specification attributes were used in the previous survey. However, a general observation is that the cover of positive indicator species has decreased from mean of 76% cover in 2024 (with 24% of stops failing to meet the 50% cover target) compared to 85% cover in 2014 (with no stops failing to meet the 50% cover target). However, the level of browsing appears to have declined.

Surveyors commented that browsing was too high in some areas and **Land management – over grazing should be recorded as a pressure** to maintaining favourable condition.

Acid Grassland

Three samples were taken within the acid grassland habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 86 acid grassland interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with three samples.

Surveyors commented that the acid grassland in the areas observed were bent-fescue grasslands with *Agrostis capillaris* Common bent and *Festuca ovina* Sheep's fescue. Even though the survey was undertaken relatively early in the season, the cover of forbs was very low, and well below the 10% target. Forbs present included *Galium saxatile* Heath bedstraw and *Potentilla erecta* Tormentil.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of acid grassland sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 86 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- Cover of negative indicator species observed from the visual extent of the sample point should be less than 1%, fails this attribute as mean 1% cover was observed, with no negative 'weedy species' recorded at a quadrat scale.
- More than 10% of the vegetation cover should consist of forbs, fails the assessment with a mean value of forbs of 2% and all stops failing the attribute.
- At least 25% of the live leaves and/or flowering shoots of vascular plants should be more than 5 cm above the ground surface, and at least 25% should be less than 5 cm above the ground surface, fails to meet the attribute as only 4% of the vegetation was found to be over 5cm, with 91% being less than 5cm and all stops failing to meet this monitoring attribute.

Unit 87 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 87 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as blanket and valley bogs is found to be in this condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 59% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment.

It is recommended that the baseline NVC habitat map is assessed alongside the findings of this survey to ensure that the correct habitat interest features are associated with this unit. Given the surveyors comments regarding the failing habitat, a review of the current management is recommended to ensure that positive interest features establish and that the level of soft rush and *Molinia* is controlled. Surveyors also noted that **Disturbance and recreation - vehicles in the form of a man made track should be noted as a pressure** to the condition of the unit.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Thirty seven samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 87 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 59% of blanket bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. Because of the high number of sample stops taken it is reasonable to base the condition on purely this analysis. It should be noted though that when just the mean value of all stops are taken all monitoring attributes are passed, however, the upland rule applies to this analysis and therefore the interest feature is found to be unfavourable.

The surveyors observed that *Molinia* was frequent and dominating in places but positive indicator species still occurred at favourable levels. Grazing was observed at very light levels. **Land management – Weeds / Inappropriate species should be included as a pressure** to further explore the extent of *Molinia* and identify positive management to reduce extent.

A comparison with the 2013 survey found that many of the monitoring targets are at similar values. Differences occur in the cover of positive indicator species which has decreased from mean of 56% cover in 2024 (with 54% of stops failing to meet the 50% cover target) compared to 64% cover in 2013 (with 40% stops failing to meet the 50% cover target).

Unit 88 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 88 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath and subalpine dwarf shrub heath, were both found to be in unfavourable condition. Blanket and valley bog interest feature was found to be in favourable condition with a good number of positive interest features.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% of both wet heath and subalpine dwarf shrub heath and 22% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The failing habitat lack the required positive indicator species to reach favourable condition. The current management of Unit 88 needs to be reviewed and adjusted to help failing habitat interest features reach favourable condition. Management should therefore be included as a **pressure** to achieving favourable condition.

Wet Heath

Three samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 88 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with four samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 88 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- *Erica tetralix* Cross leaved heath should be present within a 20m radius of the centre of the quadrat fails the assessment as one of the three stops (33%) did not meet this attribute.
- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica spp.* *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium spp.*, *Sphagnum spp.* and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica spp* and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather fails the assessment with a mean of 38% and 4% respectively. All stops failed both monitoring attributes.

Surveyors observed that bilberry was common but heather species were not well represented.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

One sample was taken in subalpine dwarf shrub heath in Unit 88. Based on this record Unit 88 subalpine dwarf shrub heath is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with one sample.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 88 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute target:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should be made up of *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica spp.* *Vaccinium spp.* *Ulex gallii* Western gorse, *Agrostis curtisii* Bristle bent, fails the assessment with 21% vegetation cover recorded.
- At least 25% of dwarf-shrub cover should be made up of: *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Erica spp.* *Racomitrium lanuginosum* Woolly-fringe moss, *Vaccinium spp.*, fails the assessment with a cover of 21%.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Nine samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 88 blanket and valley bog interest feature is found to be in **favourable** condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 22% of blanket and valley bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all individual monitoring attributes were passed. Plant diversity appears to be good with a mean of eight positive indicator species found which more than meets the required number of four.

An accurate comparison with the 2012 survey is not possible as not all of the monitoring specification attributes were tested in the 2012 survey. However, a general observation is that the cover of positive indicator species has increased from mean of 55% cover in 2012 to 75% cover in 2024. In addition, the level of browsing on dwarf shrubs appears to have declined but remains at around the same level on pioneer heath.

Unit 89 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 89 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as wet heath, subalpine dwarf shrub heath and blanket and valley bog were found to be in this condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% of both wet heath and subalpine dwarf shrub heath and 62% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The dominance of *Molinia* throughout the interest feature is resulting in a low cover and diversity of positive interest features. This combined with the observed high level of sheep grazing and drainage of blanket bog is of concern. Management of this unit needs to be reviewed and adjusted to reduce *Molinia* cover and encourage positive indicators occurrence in these habitats. Surveyors commented that the unit is also impacted by the MOD road network and drainage ditches. **Land management – over grazing and Weeds / Inappropriate species, Freshwater Impacts- Drainage and Disturbance & Recreational Impacts - Vehicles** should all be included as **pressures** for this unit.

Wet Heath

Six samples were taken within wet heath habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 89 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with six samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 89 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica spp.* *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium spp.*, *Sphagnum spp.* and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica spp.* and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather. 24% cover of *Erica spp.* and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather was found, however only 33% from *Erica spp.* *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium spp.*, *Sphagnum spp.* therefore fails the assessment.

The surveyor commented that wet heath was sparse within the unit and where it occurred it was dominated with *Molinia*. **Land management – Weeds / Inappropriate species should be included as a pressure**

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Three stops were made in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 89 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with three samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that the *Molinia* was encroaching into the habitat interest feature and that heavy grazing occurred in some areas. For these combined reasons a condition of unfavourable no change is appropriate.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Thirteen samples were taken in blanket and valley bog habitat. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 89 acid grassland interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as there are no comparative past surveys from which the trajectory of condition movement can be identified, the 2012 survey did not include all of the monitoring specification attributes.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 62% of blanket and valley bog sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all individual monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that that *Molinia* was dominant within all bog habitat, that sheep grazing is high and that drainage also threatens the blanket bog condition. **Land management – over grazing and Freshwater Impacts- Drainage should be added as pressures** for this interest feature.

A comparison with the 2012 survey is not possible as not all of the monitoring specification attributes were used in the previous survey. However, a general observation is that the cover of positive indicator species has increased from mean of 47% cover in 2012 compared to 74% cover in 2024. In addition, the level of browsing of shrub and pioneer heath appears to have reduced.

Unit 90 Condition Assessment North Dartmoor SSSI November 2024

Overall Unit Condition

The overall condition of a unit is determined by the 'lowest' interest feature condition found in the monitoring assessment. Therefore, Unit 90 is found to be **unfavourable no change** as blanket and valley bog, wet heath and subalpine dwarf shrub heath are both found to be in this condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass. For this survey 100% of both wet heath and subalpine dwarf shrub heath and 50% of blanket and valley bog sample points failed the assessment. However, for the unit assessment of monitored features condition is determined by considering surveyor comments as well as data analysis as it is not possible to provide a condition based on data alone given small number of samples taken at unit scale.

The wet heath is failing to meet the required ericoid and positive indicator cover. Subalpine dwarf shrub heath is failing due to the majority of heather present being in building/late mature growth phase.

Surveyors commented that Unit 90 contains a complex mosaic of habitats in the valley bottom and extending up the adjacent slopes. The majority of the feature types were in unfavourable condition, most frequently related to the frequency and/or cover of positive indicator species not meeting target levels. Allowing for the fact assessment was undertaken outside of the recommended survey period, there were lengths of soakway forming reasonably good habitat. It is recommended that the management in this unit is reviewed and adjusted, particularly grazing levels which are frequently noted as high by surveyors. **Land management – over grazing should be added as a pressure** to achieving favourable condition.

Wet Heath

Three samples were taken within Unit 90 of wet heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 90 wet heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with three samples.

The surveyor commented that the wet heath habitat featured a moderate diversity of positive indicator species including *Erica tetralix* Cross-leaved heath, *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Sphagnum* spp., pleurocarpous mosses and non-crustose lichens. The combined ericoid cover was typically below target level as was the total cover levels for all positive indicator species. Grazing levels were found to be too high as was the graminoid cover, the latter being a result of the grazing pressure. It is recommended that the current management is reviewed and adjusted to reduce grazing pressure and allow ericoid species to establish throughout the wet heath. **Land management – over grazing should be recorded as a pressure** to achieving favourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of wet heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 90 found the following attributes mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- *Erica tetralix* Cross leaved heath should be present within a 20m radius of the centre of the quadrat, fails the assessment with one out of the three stops not meeting this target.
- At least 50% of vegetation cover should consist of species from *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp. and at least 20% of the vegetation cover should consist of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather. 9% cover of *Erica* spp and *Calluna vulgaris* Heather was found and 11% cover of *Erica* spp. *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium* spp, *Sphagnum* spp, therefore fails the assessment. All

stops failed to meet the monitoring target, suggesting the composition of positive indicator species is poor within Unit 90.

- In addition the graminoid attribute - no more than 75% of cover should consist of graminoids, is deemed as passed but only just with a mean value of 73%. Two out of the three stops had a graminoid cover of 85%. Therefore, the graminoid cover should also be considered a factor in achieving favourable condition.

Subalpine Dwarf Shrub Heath

Five stops were made in subalpine dwarf shrub heath. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 90 subalpine dwarf shrub heath interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with five samples.

The surveyors commented that the sub-alpine dwarf shrub heath in this unit typically featured vegetation with only limited dwarf shrub diversity. Areas of heath exist where *Ulex gallii* Western gorse is the main dwarf shrub and in places this is dominant. Other heath stands primarily contain either *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry or *Calluna vulgaris* Heather as the dwarf shrub. Other dwarf shrubs present include *Erica cinerea* Cross-leaved heath. Grazing pressure in places exceeds 33% on non-pioneer material and the stocking of the area needs to be reviewed. The habitat was relatively even aged with the majority classed as building/mature. Pioneer material was rarely detected, while the extent of degenerative material was limited. Grazing pressure was noted as particularly high on bilberry plants. **Land management – over grazing should be recorded as a pressure** to achieving favourable condition.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 100% of subalpine dwarf shrub heath sample stops failed the assessment as at least one monitoring attribute failed at the sample point. An analysis of the whole feature assessment data located within Unit 90 found the following attribute mean failing to meet the monitoring attribute targets:-

- All growth phases of heather should occur throughout the area. At least 10% of the heather should be in the late mature growth phase. Unit 90 fails this attribute as a mean of 97% was found in building / mature stage, 3% in degenerate and less than 1% in pioneer. Although all growth phases are present nearly all heather present is in building / mature condition and therefore it is reasonable to fail this attribute.

Blanket and Valley Bogs

Two samples of blanket and valley bog were taken in Unit 90. One of these samples was located in mapped wet heath but on inspection some blanket bog indicator species were found and so the condition assessment for this interest feature was made despite this not being a good representation of blanket and valley bogs. Based on these records, surveyor comments and the whole feature assessment results, Unit 90 blanket and valley bogs interest feature is found to be in **unfavourable no change** condition. Unfavourable no change condition is given as it is not possible to compare results with past surveys and accurately conclude a change in the trajectory of condition with two samples.

For an upland interest feature all attributes must pass the stated monitoring target at the sample points, if one attribute fails then the feature fails at that sample point. To be favourable 90% of stops (sample points) must pass, for this survey 50% of blanket and valley bog attributes failed the assessment. However, an analysis of the mean value of all monitoring attributes found all monitoring attributes were passed. This assessment also considers surveyor comments that grazing levels were quite high. That a moderate diversity of positive indicator species were observed including *Sphagnum* spp., *Calluna vulgaris* Heather, *Vaccinium myrtillus* Bilberry, *Trichophorum germanicum* Deer grass, *Eriophorum angustifolium* Common cottongrass and pleurocarpous mosses. *Molinia* was found to be quite abundant and it is recommended that the cover of purple-moor grass is monitored to ensure it's extent does not threaten favourable condition. For these combined reasons a

condition of unfavourable no change is appropriate. **Land management – over grazing should be included as a pressure.**