



Ecological Considerations

Various ecological factors need consideration when planning the management of *Rhododendron ponticum* on an infested site. These ecological constraints or considerations can be identified in a desktop study, as alluded to in Section 3. In terms of ecological considerations, a desktop study should identify:

- Any statutory designations afforded to the site under domestic and/or international law, for example, Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).
- The potential impact of the work on individual species, for example, UK species protected by law, such as European Protected Species (EPS) and all nesting birds.
- Potential impacts on watercourses which may run through, or near to, the site.
- The potential impact the various control methods could have on the native habitat and its regeneration once the work is complete.

After identifying ecological considerations in a desktop study, site specific measures to mitigate any potential effects of the work can be put in place. These may include:

- Applying to the relevant regulatory body (in Wales, this is Natural Resources Wales) for consent to carry out the work if the treatment area, or part of the treatment area, is located within a SSSI. For Natura 2000 sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, RAMSAR Sites), a habitats risk assessment (HRA) should be undertaken to assess the likely impact of the work on the features of the site.
- Conducting surveys for protected species and ensuring that any work involving cutting or chipping *R. ponticum* is carried out outside the UK bird nesting season (March-August).
- Notifying the relevant regulatory body where herbicide must be applied near watercourses, only using herbicides approved for use in or near water, and avoiding the use of adjuvants such as mixture B NF. You must also ensure all operators are competent and have relevant qualifications for applying herbicide near watercourses (see Section 6 for more details). Where possible, use stem treatment to minimise the potential for herbicide drift.



- Choosing an appropriate method of control that will cause minimal damage to the native habitat. All methods have their advantages and disadvantages, with no method suitable for the whole range of different habitats and sites invaded by *R. ponticum*. The control method should therefore be chosen on a site-by-site basis, based on various considerations (see Section 6 for more detail). Examples of such considerations include avoiding foliar spraying within designated sites or in habitats with sensitive communities to avoid drift damage, avoiding the use of chippers where possible within woodland communities as thick layers of woodchip can hinder native vegetation regeneration, and not burning cut material unless it is essential due to its impact on air quality, especially near more densely populated areas.

Biosecurity is another important ecological consideration in order to prevent the further spread of *R. ponticum*, and/or other damaging species from the treatment area. For example, *R. ponticum* is known to be a vector of the pathogen *Phytophthora ramorum*, which causes a disease in various UK tree species. Therefore, a biosecurity risk assessment should be carried out beforehand to identify potential pathways for the spreading of Invasive Alien Species (IAS) or pathogens from a site, with appropriate mitigation measures taken to minimise the risk. Mitigation measures may include:

- Ensuring all equipment and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are clean on arrival and are cleaned and disinfected before leaving the site at the end of the day.
- Ensure the wheels and wheel arches of any vehicles or machinery are free of soil and plant debris when entering and/or leaving the site.
- Avoiding removal of plant material from sites known to harbour IAS, including pathogens such as *P. ramorum*, ensuring any plants are treated and disposed of *in situ*.

