

Appendix E

Draft Weed-cutting Protocol

Weed-cutting criteria, combined with the Environment Agency's weed-cutting maps and a cutting vs flow diagram, form the foundation of a draft consenting protocol between English Nature and the Environment Agency. The protocol enables the organisations to discharge their respective legal duties, and compliance is compulsory. The draft protocol has been developed in the light of experience and will be reviewed at the end of each weed-cutting season. The protocol will be distributed at the start of every year to ensure the information reaches all those who need it to plan their management of the river and land.

The decision-making framework for weed cutting is shown in Figure E1. The DEFRA ESA project officer will primarily be involved in reviewing the process rather than in individual consents.

Draft weed-cutting criteria

The 'criteria for cutting' describe the circumstances under which the Environment Agency will carry out a cut, as the environmental impacts in the cSAC are outweighed by the overall environmental benefit to the area that cutting will affect (SPA, ESA and SAC).

Criteria that will be used are:

- Saturated topsoil
- Rate of rise of river leading to saturated topsoils in two weeks
- Severe poaching due to high groundwater levels even where stocking rates are appropriate to the ESA and Avon Valley SSSI management agreements
- To allow compliance with ESA and SSSI management agreements (for example, stocking rates and haymaking) at appropriate times.

Consideration of impact on the Avon Valley ESA and SSSI will guide Environment Agency decisions with respect to impact on any reach where those areas exist. The guiding requirements for wetness in the ESA and SSSI are:

- Before end of April; 10%, surface water by area
- Before end of May; 5%, surface water by area
- Before end of June; wet ditches with water levels not greater than 0.3 m from ground level.

Criteria not to be used for cutting (reasons that do not justify a cut) are as follows:

- Cultivation
- Silage machinery access
- Maintenance of access
- To allow owners to breach ESA agreements
- Temporary high river levels due to storm water

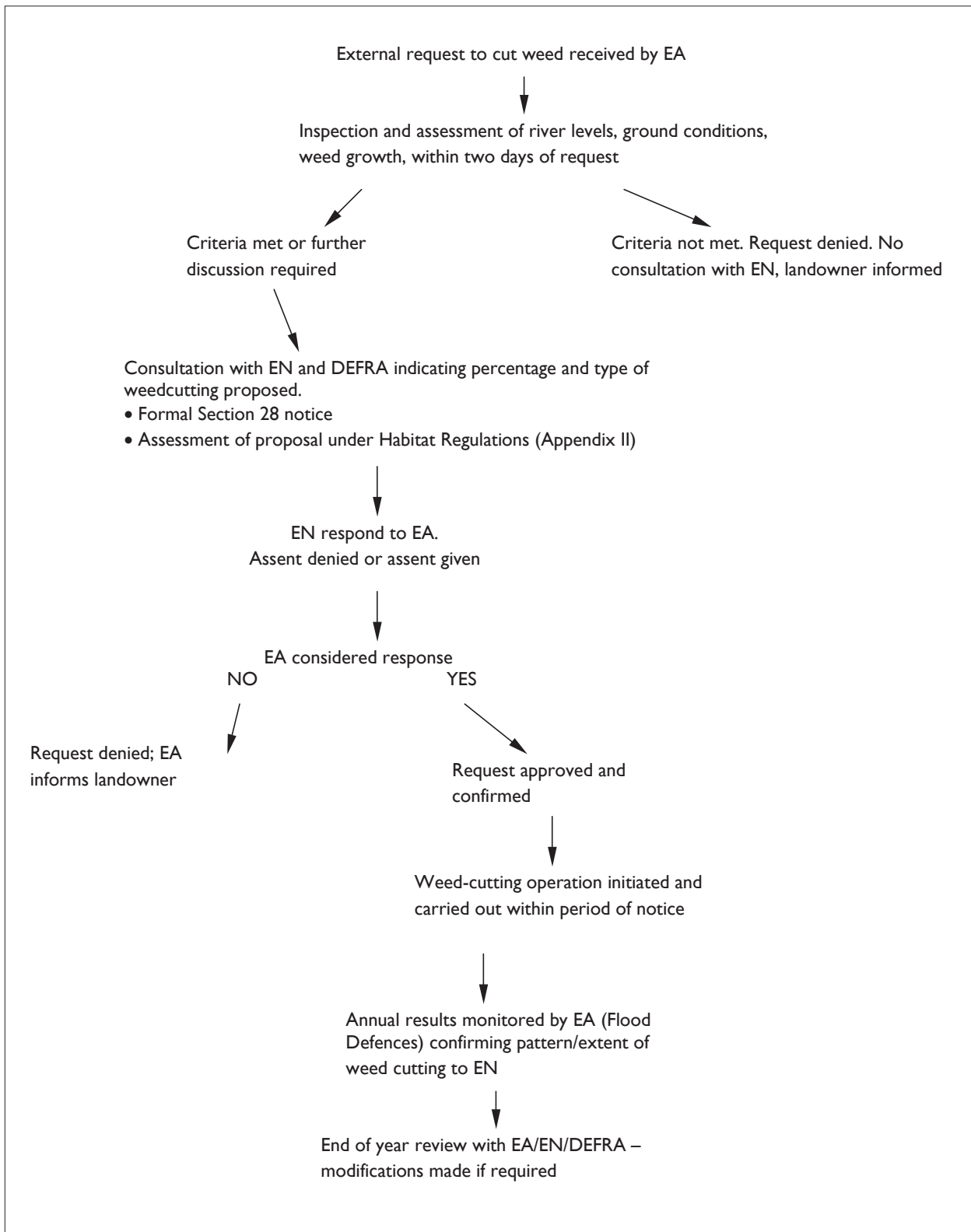


Figure E1. Draft decision-making flow chart for weed cutting.