

Introduction

This document explains our approach to woodland conservation and how we manage our own estate.

Background

We believe conservation should maintain and enhance biodiversity by enabling the widest range of habitats and species to survive and evolve. Action should focus on tackling the sources of change and on habitat conservation.

We have identified that the most important features of sites for woodland biodiversity are: ancient woodland; old growth (stands with more than 200 years' growth with a continuity of old trees); size; core area (area of habitat not significantly affected by negative edge effects from adjacent land use); woodland edge adjacent to other semi-natural habitats; density of semi-natural habitats within the surrounding landscape; and linkage of semi-natural open-ground habitats.

We believe that the UK's fragmented landscapes and likely rates of climate change threaten the survival of our natural world. There is a need to create sympathetically managed landscapes that allow as many species as possible to adapt and move in response to change. This means looking out from woods as well as in on them and considering interactions with other woods, wildlife habitats and more intensive land uses. We are as interested in what is happening in the landscape surrounding woods, particularly on adjacent land, as in what goes on within their boundaries. While we adopt a habitat and landscape approach to conservation, we appreciate that others focus on individual sites or species. However, we believe their conservation should be part of wider efforts to ensure that the widest biodiversity survives.

We aim to engage people with our work and believe that positive and inspirational experience of trees and woodland at a young age is a key step towards a long-term environmental commitment. Regular contact



WTPL/John McKinlay

with woodland and trees is powerful in influencing people to value them and their place within the environment. Gaining understanding of woodland and trees, and the issues facing them, provides a basis for deeper commitment and engagement.

Management of Woodland Trust woods

We own over 1,000 sites across the UK, covering in excess of 22,000 hectares (ha). This includes more than 4,000ha of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW) and 3,000ha of non-native conifer plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS). We have created a substantial area of new native woodland, over 5,000ha to date. Our estate also includes more than 4,000ha of open ground of value for its biodiversity, landscape and archaeological interest.

Woodland management is the process by which the objectives of a woodland owner are achieved. A decision not to intervene in woodland can be regarded as much an act of management as one to do regular thinning, provided that decision is based on achieving the stated objectives. Any conscious woodland management decision is framed by legal and regulatory obligations, and the objectives of the owner.

The framework for management of our woods is the same as other landowners but is additionally shaped by charity law and the scrutiny of our members. We adhere to the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard. We have also voluntarily adopted the requirements of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.

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We manage our woods as effectively as possible to achieve our objectives. These address four primary outcomes:

- No further loss of ancient woodland
- The biodiversity of woods restored and improved
- An increase in the area of new native woodland
- An increase in people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Timber and other products are harvested from our woods where it contributes to achieving our primary outcomes.

We do not intervene in our sites unless there is evidence that it will improve woodland biodiversity or public understanding and enjoyment. Where there is a conflict of objectives, we favour the interests of biodiversity.

In seeking to improve woodland biodiversity and increase people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland:

1. **Our ancient semi-natural woods are allowed to develop naturally, unless there is a need to maintain habitat continuity for species that are most reliant on it, where they survive.**
2. **Our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible but tree surgery is only undertaken to extend their lifespan as a last resort.**
3. **All of our non-native conifer plantations on ancient woodland sites are restored to a predominantly semi-natural composition and structure.**
4. **We encourage new native woodland to establish naturally wherever it will create opportunities for woodland biodiversity within a reasonable timescale, unless significant benefits for people's understanding and enjoyment of woodland will accrue from tree planting.**
5. **Our semi-natural recent-secondary woodland, which includes all new native woodland, is allowed to develop naturally.**
6. **Our existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are maintained wherever it is reasonable to assume that their management and the species that they support can be sustained.**
7. **The long-term vision for all of our non-native conifer recent-secondary woods is either to convert them to predominantly native woodland or to restore them to semi-natural open ground, wherever there is a past history of semi-natural open ground and its future management can be sustained.**
8. **We believe that when considering the need to control a species, its native or non-native status is unimportant. The key issue is whether it is causing significant ongoing habitat change or loss of other species, additional to that from climate change. However, even where this is the case, remedial action is only undertaken if it can be sustained.**
9. **The heritage value of our woods and trees are taken into account while recognising conservation should be informed by history not ruled by it.**
10. **In addition to their biodiversity and heritage value, the public benefit of our woods lies principally in their beauty, tranquillity and timelessness.**
11. **We provide free public access to sites for quiet, informal recreation and woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.**
12. **We believe in the benefits of community woodland management and enable or support management of woods by local people.**
13. **We work with neighbours, local people, relevant organisations and interest groups.**



Nick Collinson