

Task Group for Trees, Woods and Forest Biodiversity Eighth Meeting – 2pm, Thursday 2nd April 2009

Forestry Commission - West Midlands Regional Office, Worcester

1. Welcome

In Attendance: Jeff Edwards (JE), Tony Fleming (TF), Vicky Hamilton (VH), Greg Jones (GJ), Mike Kelly (MK), Nigel King (NK), Rebecca Lashley (RL), David Lovelace (DL), Justin Milward (JM), Amanda Pearce (AP), Martin Sutton (MS), Judy Walker (JW), Simon West (SW)

Apologies: Simon Barker, Caroline Harrison, Alan Preece, Sara Roberts, Richard Thomason, Stephanie Wickison, Helen Woodman

Welcome to Vicky Hamilton and Mike Kelly - Shropshire Hills AONB (SHAONB), Nigel King from Natural England (NE) and Conor Doherty from the Environment Agency (EA)

2. Minutes of last meeting

Covered by agenda items within this meeting.

3. Exemplar case studies

At last meeting SR agreed would get hold of the FC case studies template. There has been some problem in getting this.

ACTION POINT – carry forward to the next meeting.

SR/JM/DL

4. Parkland/Woodpasture – Update on project progress

- The project contract is complete and is now with NE for peer review.
- The draft report has been circulated.
- Data layer has been supplied for agenda item 8 of this meeting, but is not yet available outside of this meeting. There is more parkland than wood pasture recorded. MS asked if it will be displayed or have wider access eventually, e.g. on a website. JE presumes it will go on to the regional habitat data layer and be held by NE for dissemination to the LRCs. Ultimately it may form part of the National Inventory.
- Contact Clare Edwards at NE Green Infrastructure Unit to arrange use until formally published.

5. RSS/RFF revisions/refresh – Update

The RSS Phase 3, environmental elements Woodland Policy set of options has been submitted to the task group and accepted by the Regional Assembly. There will be a June Consultation running six weeks with proposed questions and statements. JE asked if this TG should submit a response.

In addition to this, the Biodiversity Policy incorporates habitat targets as an amendment to Annex B of the RSS. The revision has gone to consultation with WM Biodiversity Partnership and LBAPs in a separate process, looking at alignment with 2020 LBAP and regional HAP targets. Regional Workshops will be held after to feed into the RSS Phase 3 Options.

ACTION POINT - JE to circulate details

RFF refresh is progressing. FC has employed a fast-track graduate, starting on the 14th April, to undertake some of this work, including gap analysis and business health check. SR has suggested it would be best to carry forward as an agenda item for the next meeting.

6. Severn River Basin Management Plan (SRBMP) consultation

CH introduced TG to the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and the SRBMP. The WFD system has been set up to report to Europe on water quality. The river basin districts are then sub-divided into management catchments, of which there are eleven in England. The aims of each management plan is to:

- Prevent deterioration
- Enhance status of the water environment
- Include all types of water
- Promote sustainable water use
- Reduce pollution
- Improve quality
- Drought and flood mitigation

There are three rounds of six-year planning cycles: 2009 - 2015; 2015 – 2021 and 2021 –2027. The process is co-delivery dependent, with partnership projects to achieve objectives. Getting EA objectives into other regional agendas is vital. A new classification system has been designed for this directive, with a new way of looking and reporting. 37 different parameters will be tested against 'good' or 'better'. All 37 must be achieved to score 'good' in an 'all in; all out' ranking system. If one or two parameters are not met 'moderate' will be noted. EA intends to tackle the more challenging or poorest achievements first and aims to achieve 100% good in the West Midlands by 2027. Liaison panels have been set up and each stakeholder has responsibilities within the planning cycle. Actions already happening include:

- ◆ Extension to vulnerable zone areas
- ◆ Alien species forum (non-native invasion)
- ◆ Restoration, e.g. Living Landscapes Project

Your Water, Your Say – consultation <http://wfdconsultation.environment-agency.gov.uk/wfdcms/en/severn/Intro.aspx> ends 22nd June. There is a 2000+ page document and a 60 page main document, with direction to annexes. Workshops will be held in Shrewsbury 17th April, Droitwich 24th April, Birmingham 1st May and Chepstow 6th May.

'What's in your Backyard' tool on the EA website now includes river basin management plans, 2015 objective and any extensions to targets.

EA will be piloting a number of Water protection zones (WPZ) in the next few years, which will be decided by public consultation and approved by the Secretary of State.

7. Ancient Woodland sub-group: Shropshire Hills AW pilot

VH (student from Holme Lacy) presented Initial PAWS & Woodland Management Study Mar 2009. This is work she undertook with SHAONB to take forward the WOM layer and was initially piloted in the SHAONB area, funded by the Woodland Trust. The initial scoping looked at PAWS and all woodland across the whole AONB.

1st phase

- All woodland in a small area (6000ha from B478 at Craven Arms to Much Wenlock)
- Under all types of ownership
- Current and historic woodland management schemes

Findings – 36% PAWS and 11% ASNW; over half woodland within large private estate ownership; 78% part of Woodland Management Schemes (WMS); most small woodlands not part of any WMS (concluded due to lack of time, resources, inaccessibility or financially unviable).

2nd Phase

- all PAWS within the AONB
- 50 sites (47 visited)

Findings – 81% had historic or current WMS; 42 (74%) in a critical condition*, 2 secure – felled and replanted with broadleaf and 2 other not visited or able to establish replanting; some small woodland areas in HLS schemes.

* Critical - more than 20% exotic species. Less threatened – less than 20%, but still significant

JE pointed out that if a part of a woodland is in restoration then the whole area is labelled 'in restoration' as part of the BAP target.

Now need to look at other funding sources to take project forward. JE suggested the SITA enriching nature fund, which includes delivery and appointments as part of funding package.

A prioritisation process needs to happen, followed by contact with owners. JW pointed out that not all small woodland owners wish to engage in any sort of WMS, but are successfully managing their woodland. Also need to build in monitoring.

Long-term investment in local people, e.g. coppice workers could be a good way of delivering on this. SW said there is scope for a collective management approach and one option would be to engage with other stakeholders for delivery, e.g. the WM Woodland Bird WIG and RSPB monitoring.

ACTION POINT – Engage with Confor in future phases via Graham Taylor, as Caroline Harrison has already expressed interest in the project.

*ACTION POINT – Circulate presentation - **VH***

8. Opportunity Mapping for Woodland: integration discussion

There are opportunities within RSS for revising woodland targets, both restoration and expansion. There are ambitious targets, including sustainable ecosystems and climate change adaption across landscapes. JE showed a series of maps

1. Habitat network map combining existing habitat and land use
2. Woodland pasture and parklands – predominantly parklands
3. PAWS restoration map – LDUs with over 3% woodland within them
4. WM Biodiversity Partnerships vision and opportunity map – shaded green areas considered best landscapes for restoration

In Maps 2 and 4, correlation can be made to assess priorities. SW asked if worth progressing to the next stage and making a combined map. MS suggested applying Keith Kirby's principles to them and focus on expansion or restoration. JE asked if defining species value to woodland areas would be worthwhile. Biodiversity Map 2 is available on the WM BAP website. Map 3 is on the FC website at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infid-6n4gzu>

Strategic river corridors and Growth Point areas are also seen as opportunity areas. SW said that some options are mutually exclusive and decisions about mix of habitats needs to be made at a site level. In BAP habitats there are allowable overlays, e.g. parkland and heathland.

Prompted by the National Habitat Action Group responsible for delivery of targets, the Biodiversity Integration Group will be asking the region what the priorities are and if others can assist in meeting the targets.

WOM SG are considering developing a landscape-scale wood pasture and traditional orchards map.

ACTION POINT- bring a combined map to next meeting and circulate presentation

SW/JE

ACTION POINT – volunteers to form sub-group to take forward

ALL

9. AOB

Orchards – Simon Barker not in attendance to update, therefore carry forward to next meeting

NE's Natural Assets initiative – Nigel King

Natural Assets is an investment by AWM of £3million to natural environment and support for the regional economy. NE has made a bid to the programme to make awards within and outwith NE. Delivery had been worked up for the beginning of June. However AWM have hit severe budget difficulties and want to give the contract, but postpone ability to make awards. For the £2million project bid they are offering 0.2 million to run it; limiting it to capital funding and run over four instead of three years. Roll-out has slipped from June until July and the programme will differ from the original proposal. Capital can be deemed as an end product, so could be something like a report/ could be quite creative.

There will be three themes

1. Promoting and getting economic activity going
2. Improving liaison and work in natural environment
3. Research to lever in more money to continue after project completion.

FC's Open Habitats consultation – <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infid-7fch5d> links to Defra landscape and scale questions

Keith Kirby, NE – Landscape level approach paper – presented with papers for this meeting as a discussion document. Views and comments should go direct to keith.kirby@naturalengland.org.uk

Woodland Opportunities Map: woodland bird layer – Shropshire County Council have initiated using RSPB data. It shows the distribution and role of management in addressing species decline. Link to the WM Woodland Bird Wig has not been made as out of sink. A map is required to inform this new grant scheme however.

ACTION POINT – Circulate to TG

SW

Social Forestry Task Group:

1. Will develop a network of delivery projects to demonstrate re-engagement with society
 2. Good Practice Guide will offer access to agencies for placements
 3. Common evaluation scheme amassing data along common themes
- Following on from this a network of social enterprises, which link improved management of isolated and neglected woodland and employment.

JW suggested that this TG could direct linkages to priorities and woodlands.

Programmes include:

- ◆ Learning pathway to woodlands
- ◆ Forest Schools
- ◆ ELB Diploma
- ◆ Apprenticeships – Work in the Woods Week - 20th to 24th April 2009 organised by the Forestry Commission, SWA and Herefordshire partners including the Duchy of Cornwall and Pryor & Rickett Silviculture.

10. Date of next meeting

TBA in July 2009

Items to include:

- RFF refresh; Opportunity Mapping for Woodland