

NI Native Woodland Group

**Meeting Held in the Crawfordsburn Countryside Centre, Crawfordsburn
Country Park on Friday 27 April 2007 at 10.00am**

Present:

Stuart Morwood (Chairperson)	Forest Service
Richard Schaible	Forest Service
Marion Magill (Secretary)	Forest Service
Christine Butler	DARD CMB
Patrick Cregg	CNCC
Tim Hodges	The Woodland Trust
Brian Poots	The Woodland Trust
Robert Shearman	Conservation Volunteers
Richard Weyl	EHS
Melina McMullan	EHS
Rachel Bain	Ulster Wildlife Trust

1. Apologies

Phil Davidson - National Trust, Alan Cooper – Ulster University, John Gamble – DARD EPB, Neville McKee – Ulster Native Trees.

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

3. Matters Arising

Item 4 – Native Woodlands Definitions and Guidance

Richard Schaible reported that he had produced and issued a mock up of the guidance publication and that it would be helpful if members provided images and suggestions regarding layout.

Richard suggested that Annex 1 of the native woodland definitions and guidance, covering use of the guidance in relation to environmental and forest regulation, should include descriptions of the origin and genetic quality of forest reproductive material in respect of the Forest Reproductive Material Regulations (NI) 2002. It was agreed that this would be useful and that a paragraph should be drafted and issued to the group for comments.

Item 5 – Progress of the Parkland Study

This item to be dealt with at agenda item 6

Item 10 – Recommendations for Policy Changes – NI Ancient Trees and Native Woodlands

Melina McMullan reported that Brian Sutton of Faber Maunsell would be giving a presentation to CNCC on the recommendations in the near future.

Item 11 – Work Programme

Melina McMullan reported that the original work programme had been amended and re-formatted and should be easier to follow. A copy is to be emailed to the group by the end of May for comments.

4. PAWS in NI, the Gradual Approach and Engaging Owners

Tim Hodges gave a presentation and summarized the position in NI as a relatively small resource so turning around the sites would be achievable. He further stated that engaging private owners and securing incentives for them to take action would be a challenge. The important point was that the process was more important than the end point. There was an urgency to start but no mad rush to finish.

Stuart Morwood thanked Tim and commented that there were a large number of small owners scattered widely with a wide degree of interest in ancient woodland sites. The approach outlined could be of great benefit. He invited questions.

There was some discussion on the variation of incentives in the form of grants between GB and NI and uptake of grants generally. Tim Hodges explained that FC was the main source of grant aid in GB and offered a high percentage grant aid on operations including top-up grants for sustainability. Stuart advised that in NI woodland grants representing 50% of eligible costs were available for actions or operations for which a social or environmental benefit could be demonstrated.

Tim Hodges agreed to Rachel Bain's request to give a presentation for the Ulster Wildlife Trust.

Patrick Cregg advised that the Woodland Trust would be interested in holding workshops at which Tim would be invited to give a presentation. Stuart agreed that the workshops would be helpful and commented that the information available from the new ancient woodland inventory would be a guide for FS deliberations. He was also glad to hear that UKWAS had been a useful vehicle that provided assurance; NI has the highest proportion of UKWAS certified woodland in the UK.

5. Review of the Forest Service PAWS Strategy

Richard Schaible reported that in response to issues with regard to its approach to PAWS restoration brought forward by William McCrea MLA on behalf of the Woodland Trust, Forest Service had suggested setting up a sub-group within NINWG to look at restoration opportunities including PAWS not managed by FS. Only around 30% of the area identified in the inventory

was managed by FS and engagement with private owners would be required to encourage restoration of PAWS not owned by Forest Service. While there was a clear requirement for PAWS restoration in certified woodland, this was unlikely to apply to the majority of private woodland owners. It was agreed that EHS and Forest Service will jointly co-ordinate and keep the group advised of progress through email.

6. Update on the Parkland Study

The preliminary report was sent to EHS in early March. The report is draft at this stage as the data is still being assessed. Full reporting of the project will be available towards the end of May 2007.

There are detailed results presented for each of the 4 main attributes recorded: tree structure and population dynamics; fungal associates; epiphytic lichens and associated invertebrates.

Key statistics arising from the study are:

- A total of 1446 veteran trees were mapped across the six sites, each site varying from 101 (Drenagh) to 483 (Glenam),
- A total of 341 fungus species, including a very significant number new to the Northern Ireland list, as well as Ireland as a whole;
- A total of 159 lichen species, including 37 which are used to calculate indices of ecological continuity;
- A total of 199 invertebrate species which develop in decaying wood were found across the six parklands;
- The total of epiphyte invertebrate associates was 47 species of which five are additions to the Irish list.

The investigations have confirmed the great nature conservation value of the veteran tree populations surviving within historic parklands in Northern Ireland.

Melina McMullan agreed to forward the finalised parkland study to the group.

7. Identification of Ancient Trees Programme

Patrick Cregg advised that the Ancient Tree Forum along with The Woodland Trust have committed to an ancient tree hunt over the UK over the next 5 years. The UK had a higher concentration of ancient trees than anywhere in Europe. The Woodland Trust wanted to build awareness through the identification of ancient trees and the project was an opportunity to engage with people. Patrick explained that the aim for NI was to have 100 active recorders; to hold 2 of the planned 150 public events in NI and to hold teacher training days (including primary schools). NI now had 6 x verifiers. During January to March 6 workshops were held across NI at which training was provided to authenticate information gathered. Partnerships had been set up with FC, HM Prison, National Trust and others. He is finalizing details for a launch in June 2007.

Richard Schaible stated that the literature could be made available in Forest Parks. Richard further advised that it would be helpful if the group would agree a definition for ancient trees. Brian Poots advised that definitions were published on the Woodland Trust website and that he had brought brochures on the subject for issue to the group.

8. Work Programme

This was dealt with under Matters Arising, Item 11.

9. Presentation on Condition Assessment Standards

Richard Weyl gave a presentation on Faber Maunsell's report on condition assessment standards for woodlands outside ASSIs. Melina McMullan agreed to forward the report by email to the group members for comments.

Richard Schaible commented that any area of woodland conforming with the definitions of native woodland priority habitats that the NWG had already agreed and managed for biodiversity as a main objective should be subject to a condition assessment process.

Stuart Morwood commented that it was necessary that any assessment process should be practical and not unduly onerous on the landowner.

10. Update from Members

Countryside Management Branch

Christine Butler reported that the agri-environment schemes had been closed since December. The new proposed NI Countryside Management Scheme document had been submitted to Brussels. It includes a Special Projects option which could benefit ancient woodland restoration projects. No response had yet been received from Brussels. There had not been many changes to the woodlands section.

Ulster Wildlife Trust

Rachel Bain advised that a lot of staffing changes had taken place due to restructuring as a result of a review of direction. UWT would continue to manage nature reserves with woodlands. There are 6 biodiversity offices employed by the Trust and they are looking at completing woodland action plans. The 6 areas are:

Coleraine
Omagh
Fermanagh
Newry
Mourne
Banbridge.

The Woodland Trust

Brian Poots reported that awareness was being raised in respect of the "Tree for All" campaign. The aim, in partnership with conservation groups and FS, was to plant ½ m trees in NI. 30,000 had been planted last year.

The Easter period had seen an increase in fires and 700 calls relating to woodland fires had been reported by the fire brigade. In Carnmoney Hill 55,000 trees had been planted but 5,000 to 6,000 had been lost through fires.

Conservation Volunteers

Robert Sheaman reported that the production of local provenance trees had been increased if anyone wished to make a purchase. The process had been mechanized and could now be carried out on a larger scale resulting in increased amounts of trees being grown. Also, the Development Implementation Plan had been published.

EHS

Melina McMullan advised that she had taken over the group's responsibilities from Fiona Mulholland who had moved on secondment to the EHS Strategy Unit.

Forest Service

Richard Schaible referred to the report on New Native Woodlands in NI 1999 – 2006, which he had circulated prior to the meeting. The Forest Service figures excluded native woodland resulting from PAWS restoration. The area of new native woodland on private land could increase further as in many cases the main reason that plantations did not conform with new native woodlands definition and guidance was because of the inclusion of sycamore and beech.

11. AOB

Richard Schaible advised that he would attend meetings of the Woodlands of Ireland Steering Group in place of Fiona Mulholland.

12. Next Meeting

The next meeting was arranged for Thursday 27 September at Castlewellan Forest Office to include a field visit in the afternoon.

The meeting ended at 13.00 hrs. A guided tour of woodland at Crawfordsburn took place in the afternoon.

