

Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group

Meeting held at Belvoir Park Forest on Thursday 21st January 2010

Present:

Richard Schaible (Acting Chair)	Forest Service
Henry Shaw	Countryside Management Branch
Richard Weyl*	NI Environment Agency
Mark Edgar	LBAP Forum
Neville McKee	Ulster Native Trees
Peter Archdale*	CNCC
Phil Davidson*	National Trust
Maeve Rafferty	Ulster Wildlife Trust
Brian Poots	Woodland Trust
Christine Butler	Countryside Management Branch
Orla Maguire	Belfast City Council
Melina McMullan	NI Environment Agency
Georgina Thurgate*	NI Environment Agency
John Griffin (Secretary)	Forest Service

*not present for entire meeting

Apologies:

Stuart Morwood (Chair, Forest Service), Mansil Miller (Planning Service)
Declan Little (Woodlands of Ireland)

Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Matters arising:

The paper on the impacts of the single farm payment scheme on woodland was circulated. Peter Archdale and Phil Davidson requested it to be forwarded to them. **Action – M McMullan**

Lindsay Matthews (Biodiversity Officer with Newtownabbey Borough Council) will represent the NI Local Government Association (NILGA) at future meetings.

M Millar provided M McMullan with an update on the work programme as requested.

Woodland Inventory of Northern Ireland – Chair stated that Forest Service will initiate work in advance of the publication of the Land Cover Map.

Ancient Tree Hunt

B Poots provided an update on the Ancient Tree Hunt (ATH) to the Group. A total of 3,327 trees have been recorded on the ATH database for NI, which includes 58 ancient trees, 1,118 veterans and 571 notables. P Archdale is a senior verifier for NI and outlined the verifying process. A training course for potential verifiers is scheduled to take place on Sat 27th February at Shane's Castle. Those interested should contact Woodland Trust. The Chair encouraged Brian to contact Aubrey Fennell who has been carrying out similar work for the Tree Register of Ireland project http://www.treecouncil.ie/tree_register_of_ireland.htm

A series of publications on ancient trees have been published by the Woodland Trust and the Ancient Tree Forum – hard copies are available from the Woodland Trust. [Ancient tree guides](#)

The ATH Annual review is to be forwarded to all members highlighting the most relevant parts to Northern Ireland– **Action B Poots/ J Griffin**

The ATH data would be particularly useful to NIEA and Forest Service if it could be made available as a GIS shapefile. **Action B Poots/ J Griffin**

Parkland booklet

Henry Shaw presented the meeting with a proposal which detailed the format and content for a parkland booklet. The Group appreciated the substantial efforts that went in to developing the proposal. After much discussion, the following key points emerged –

The booklet should –

- reflect the resources that individual organisations could commit to the project.
- stimulate interest in parkland from a wide range of people particularly landowners
- refer to the historic value of parkland
- identify measures to protect parkland
- be of a quality comparable to the Native Woodland Definitions and Guidance booklet

The Chair asked that all group members email their views on the proposal to J Griffin before the 5th February 2010 with particular reference to the content, target audience and size of the publication. J Griffin to collate responses and forward to all members

Action ALL/ J Griffin

The Chair stated that it was important there was corporate support from Countryside Management Branch, because of the level of resources required to produce a high quality booklet. Woodland Trust assured the group of their support in terms of committing staff time to the project. It was emphasised that

one individual at the helm is preferable to drive the project and ideally should have experience in producing a quality publication.

The subject was revisited later in the meeting and it was agreed that the Group, through the Chair, should seek endorsement by NIEA of the need for a parkland booklet, and assurance from DARD Countryside Management Branch that there would be an adequate resource commitment to producing it.

Action Chair

Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy Report

P Archdale gave a brief background on the role of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC). He also focussed on key points from the recent review by the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Group (NIBG) of the NI Biodiversity Strategy covering the period 2005-09. He stated that although the NIBG recognises that some positive measures have been undertaken to enhance biodiversity, the report concludes that the government will fail in its targets to halt biodiversity losses by 2016, unless significant changes are made quickly. Recommendations within the report include-

- The need for a comprehensive review of the NI Biodiversity Strategy
- Improvements to methods of data collection and collation involving the use of GIS
- A landscape approach to biodiversity management is required

The Chair thanked P Archdale for his presentation and suggested that responses to the report made by statutory bodies and other organisations represented on the Native Woodland Group could be reviewed at the next meeting. It would be helpful if the findings of this report could be placed in a UK context, if for instance, comparable reports for England, Wales or Scotland were available.

Action P Archdale

Update on native woodland expansion and PAWS

B Poots reported that Woodland Trust has been working with Forest Service to promote native woodland expansion in Northern Ireland. There have been 200 enquiries from the public to date corresponding to an approximate area of 1000 acres. A total of 280 acres are currently being processed. In general, Woodland Trust targets landowners who are ineligible for Forest Service grants.

Woodland Trust was unsuccessful in their bid for funding to support landowners with planted AWI woodland. Currently work is being undertaken to identify ownership of planted AWI woodland.

Advice on the layout and design of new native woodlands will soon be available on the Woodland Trust website.

J Griffin provided an update on areas of new native woodland (NNW) within Forest Service forests or supported by Forest Service grants. A breakdown of these areas was given by priority woodland habitat (see attachment). The area of NNW formed 72% of the total area supported by Forest Service grants for 2009 and the average size of each woodland block was just below 2ha. This represented the second highest annual total of NNW since recording began in 1999. The NINWG publication, Native Woodland Definitions & Guidance was considered to have had a desirable impact particularly in highlighting the need to avoid invasive tree species.

J Griffin also stated that Forest Service was currently looking at ways to capture data using an updated FSGIS to determine the area of AWI woodlands under restoration or partial restoration.

Work Programme 2009 – 2012

It had been agreed previously that the work programme is to be updated annually.

Update from Planning Service (via Mansil Millar):

All draft Area Plans are to progress to the next stage; i.e. they will undergo a Public Enquiry before the Adopted Plan is published. The Banbridge, Newry and Mourne Public Enquiry is currently taking place.

Update from NIEA:

Woodland Restoration Plan for designated sites - In response to the ASSI condition assessment results, Conservation Designations & Protection (CDP) are developing a Woodland Management Plan which will assist woodland owners in managing and restoring woodlands. The document aims to improve the condition of woodland ASSIs which are in unfavourable condition. NIEA have consulted Forest Service and are currently consulting colleagues within Natural Heritage. Other stakeholders will be consulted shortly. CDP intend to present the document to the NINWG at a future meeting.

CDP has met Forest Service to discuss the use of forestry grants to fund ASSI management.

Sub-group to be set up to look at condition assessment and workshop to be arranged for June. **Action M McMullan**

Update from DARD

Parkland booklet – need to determine if resources are available.

It was highlighted that the target of 130ha for wet woodland restoration by 2016 may not be met.

Action: All - Provide updates and comments to M McMullan by 31st March. (Include the potential for your organisation to contribute to the wet woodland restoration target)

Mammal Symposium

M Rafferty attended the recent All Ireland mammal Symposium held in Waterford. Deer damage in Ireland is reported to be escalating significantly in some areas due primarily to insufficient culling. The Chair highlighted the recent work carried out by Woodlands of Ireland in advancing deer policy in Ireland.

Action M Rafferty to email the main points relating to woodland mammals to J Griffin for forwarding to the Group.

Members' updates

N McKee

Seed collections of native species are ongoing.

NIEA

Mapping of ASSI selection features

CDP have initiated the mapping of ASSI site selection features which will graphically display the location and extent of selection features. The pilot project will cover 10 - 15 sites and it is hoped that this will lead to a valuable resource being provided particularly to managers of designated sites.

Digitising of hard copy NIEA habitat data

Habitat data that is currently held on paper files is being digitised. Although this is a slow process, it will allow data to be more widely used. This will contribute to a woodland inventory and will also assist in locating areas that are suitable for new planting.

Forest Service

As above, under Native Woodland Expansion and PAWS.

Woodland Trust

The Heritage Lottery Fund has been awarded to the Rural Area Partnership in Derry (RAPID), Derry City Council and the Woodland Trust to revitalise the Faughan Valley landscape. This will involve woodland restoration and expansion and will in some cases link fragments of existing woodland together.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting is planned to take place at Faughan Valley in June 2010 and will be hosted by Woodland Trust.