

## **NI Native Woodland Group**

**Meeting Held in the Lecture Room, Belvoir Forest Park on Wednesday 5 July 2006 at 2pm**

### **Present:**

Stuart Morwood (Chairperson)	Forest Service
Richard Schaible	Forest Service
Marion Magill (Secretary)	Forest Service
Christine Butler	DARD CMB
Fiona Mulholland	EHS
Bob Davidson	EHS
Alan Cooper	Ulster University, Coleraine
Robert Sheaman	Conservation Volunteers
Brian Poots	The Woodland Trust
Phil Davidson	The National Trust

### **1. Apologies:**

John Gamble - DARD EPU, Declan Little - Woodlands of Ireland, John Cross – Duchas, Patrick Cregg – The Woodland Trust.

### **2. Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Agreed

### **3. Matters Arising**

- Fiona Mulholland advised the meeting that the River Roe and Tributaries area had been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).
- The Secretary has received contact details for Lord Hamilton, Regional Chairman for the Forestry and Timber Association.
- Fiona reported that she had attended the steering committee of the Woodlands of Ireland group and had been co-opted as a representative in the meantime. Any other member of the NI Native Woodland Group may put forward their name. The contact is Declan Little, Woodlands of Ireland (WOI). John Griffin, Forest Service participates in the WOI Technical Advisory Group.
- It was agreed that, pending a review of the Terms of Reference, Neville McKee, nursery industry representative, be kept informed of forthcoming meetings and that copies of minutes are issued to him. The chairperson apologised for an oversight in not sending Mr McKee an invitation to this meeting.
- Alan Cooper confirmed that he wished to remain as a member.

#### **4. Native Woodland Definitions and Guidance**

Richard Schaible issued the final version to the group (Annex A) and explained that the paper was more substantial than when previously viewed by the group as he had included guidance on the application of the definitions and added information on priority woodland types and associated soil types and vegetation. The paper was a pragmatic document which suited those involved with native woodlands. He considered that it would facilitate the classification of new woodlands in terms of priority habitat and hoped that as it was a consensual document it would be valid for 5 to 10 years.

Stuart Morwood thanked Richard and other contributors for the considerable effort put into the Definitions document and proposed that, as the document was a significant and valuable output from the group, it should be published as a small booklet along with an associated press release to highlight the issue and the progress made by the group. Stuart invited comments from the group with a view to having them 'sign off' the document.

Alan Cooper commented that he considered the paper to provide an excellent working framework and was content with its publication, although as a plant ecologist he was not happy about the terms 'natural', 'native' and 'new' and that he wanted ecological standardisation. He further questioned the placing of a size limit (Item 3.1) on woodland as such definitions did not recognise their biodiversity value.

It was agreed to publish the document jointly (showing the logo of each of the members of the group) in booklet form pending a change to paragraph 7 to the effect that the content of the Definitions paper would be reviewed periodically and that updates would be available from the Forest Service website. It was further agreed to forward individual copies to interested parties including local authorities.

**Action:** Forest Service to arrange publication and press release.

#### **5. Scope and Progress of the Parkland Study**

Fiona Mulholland reported that the study, which would last approximately one year, had commenced last Autumn and involved one site in each county covering a range of sizes. On a couple of sites the contractors had found more ancient trees than expected and there was a need to identify lichen, fungi and invertebrates.

**Action:** Fiona to provide an update which Forest Service would circulate by mail.

Phil Davidson stated that she considered that the study, when completed, would be valuable as a yardstick for definitions of this habitat. The National Trust were carrying out a parkland survey at Crom Estate involving veteran trees which had now been tagged.

**Action:** Phil to provide a copy of the report on the survey at Crom to the group when it is available.

## **6. PAWS – Aghaleague Case Study**

Alan Cooper explained how he conducted a baseline survey in respect of the original site. Following the survey the existing Sitka spruce were harvested. Two growing seasons later the site was re-surveyed. He provided the group with copies of the 'Northern Ireland Woodland Group Working Paper' (Annex B) which detailed the restoration of broadleaf woodland from a Sitka spruce plantation, and gave a detailed presentation which explained the process and the results. Alan advised the group that the working paper may be published in about 6 months. Stuart Morwood thanked Alan for the presentation.

## **7. Forest Service PAWS Update**

Richard Schaible provided the group with details of Forest Service PAWS Restoration (Annex C).

Richard explained that for management purposes a further 92 ha of plantation adjacent to PAWS would be converted to native woodland.

**Action:** Richard will publish the table on the Forest Service website.

## **8. Update from Members**

### **Forest Service**

Richard Schaible updated the group on new native woodlands planted in Forest Service owned property and in private woodland under the Woodland Grant Scheme/Farm Woodland Premium Scheme (Annex D).

### **EHS**

#### **Condition Assessments**

Bob Davidson advised that a contract had been commissioned to implement recommendations of the 'Invasive Species in Ireland' report, published in March 2006. The contract had been commissioned jointly between EHS and the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment and Local Government in the ROI.

#### **Habitat Action Plan Groups**

Bob Davidson reported that other groups had been formed, or were in the process of formation, in support of specific Habitat Action Plans e.g. Peatlands and Upland Group, Freshwater and Wetland Group and Coastal and Marine Group. EHS were trying to ensure that all priority species would be covered.

## **National Heritage Grant Programme**

Grant applications were being invited in respect of activities contributing to each of the priority themes: Nature – Biodiversity and Geodiversity, Tomorrow's Landscapes and Access and Countryside Recreation.

### **The Woodland Trust**

#### **Ancient Woodland Inventory**

Brian Poots reported that The Woodland Trust were completing the last of the survey and hoped to complete the work by January 2007. It was agreed that the NINWG be provided with an update in the form of a presentation from Sian Thomas.

**Action:** Brian Poots agreed to organise a presentation by Sian Thomas.

#### **Ancient Tree Hunt**

Funding had been secured for the Identification of Ancient trees programme across the UK. Brian Poots agreed to arrange for the project manager for the tree hunt to provide an update at the above presentation.

#### **Tree For All**

To date in Northern Ireland 20,000 people had been involved in planting 150,000 trees (most of which had been grant-aided). The aim was for 12m to be planted across the UK.

#### **Northern Ireland Forestry Strategy**

A meeting was to be arranged with the Forest Service.

### **The National Trust**

#### **Crom Estate**

Phil Davidson reported that 10 ha of Sitka spruce had been felled last autumn at Crom although no baseline survey had been completed. The land had been left to regenerate naturally.

### **DARD Countryside Management Branch**

Christine Butler reported that there were approximately 10,500 farmers taking part in agri-environmental schemes involving a total of 460,000 ha, including 4,000 ha of woodland. A consultation document had been issued on the agri-environment strand of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan 2007-2013.

## **Conservation Volunteers**

Robert Shearman reported that his group was involved in the BBC initiative presently publicising environmental issues through Bill Oddie's programme. Last year they had acquired a walled garden at Crawfordsburn Country Park and up to 7 acres of land was available for tree nursery work. The group was also involved in an Autumn promotion whereby their NI Tree Campaign would be involving people and communities in growing trees from seed.

### **10. Date of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place from mid October onwards to coincide with Sian Thomas's presentation.

The meeting ended at 17.15 hrs.