

Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group

Meeting held at Peatlands Country Park on Wednesday 30th June 2010

Present:

Richard Schaible (Acting Chair)	Forest Service
Richard Weyl	NI Environment Agency
Declan Little	Woodlands of Ireland
Robert Shearman	CVNI
Maeve Rafferty	Ulster Wildlife Trust
John Hetherington	Confor
Peter Archdale	CNCC
Melina McMullan	NI Environment Agency
Patrick Cregg	Woodland Trust
John Griffin (Secretary)	Forest Service

Apologies/Absent:

Stuart Morwood (Forest Service), Mansil Miller (Planning Service), Mark Edgar (LBAP Forum), Ian McCurley (National Trust), Orla Maguire (Belfast City Council), Lindsay Matthews (Newtownabbey Borough Council), Christine Butler (Countryside Management), Neville McKee (Ulster Native Trees), Alan Cooper (University of Ulster), John Cross (National Parks & Wildlife Service)

Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

Matters arising:

Condition assessment - A workshop on condition assessment will be arranged once the additional woodland quadrat data from the NI Countryside Survey becomes available.

Parkland booklet – Alan Galbraith (Countryside Management Branch) replied to Richard Schaible that due to limited resources of staff and money, his Branch could not progress the booklet at this time. Other alternatives were discussed. It was considered that a focus needed to be given to those areas which members could readily agree such as the provision of advisory material for landowners. The importance of this habitat to biodiversity should be emphasised with particular reference made to the Parkland HAP. The distinguishing features of parkland from wood pasture should also be included. The document will be created in a PDF format suitable for downloading and will include a list of useful references.

Action M McMullan : Draft a 3-4 page advisory document on parkland in the wider countryside

A workshop on parkland ASSIs took place on 14th June and is considered relevant to the NINWG

Action P Archdale : Minutes of the meeting to be circulated to the Group

Forestry Bill

The Forestry Bill has now moved through the assembly, and is expected to receive royal assent shortly. The Bill is composed of different parts, some of which may come into force immediately. Where subordinate legislation is required, commencement of the respective sections of the Bill may be delayed.

P Cregg welcomed the inclusive process through which the Bill was drafted and there was recognition that area of felling licences would need to be adequately resourced.

Woodland Expansion

P Cregg gave a presentation of Woodland Trust's new campaign to encourage more tree planting 'More Trees, More Good'. It provides people with an opportunity to fund native tree planting programmes as well as encouraging landowners to plant. The emphasis is to encourage planting on land that is not owned by Woodland Trust. Although doubling the woodland cover by 2050 is a government target, Pat emphasised that it should be a collective aim and Woodland Trust intends to play its part.

<http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/more-trees-more-good/Pages/campaign.aspx>.

Pat announced that Jackie Morgan had become the Woodland Trust's new advice and partnership manager and will be meeting landowners once she becomes familiar with the range of forestry grants available.

D Little considered that the objective of wood production within native woodlands would further encourage landowners to plant.

The acting Chair congratulated P Cregg on the venture and stated it was a campaign that Forest Service could support.

P Cregg stated that some individuals would like to plant their land but do not qualify for forestry grants because they do not have a farm business number. The current definition of 'farmer' is also recognised to be a barrier to woodland expansion.

J Hetherington stated there were administration difficulties associated with the Woodland Environment Grant and the scheme was unnecessarily complicated.

Action : Forest Service: Inform the Group at the next meeting of forestry grant-aid options in relation to furthering the aims of the NINWG.

Woodland Inventory

J Griffin outlined work currently underway within Forest Service to establish baseline data of woodland cover and type in Northern Ireland based on existing data sources. The findings of the NI Countryside Survey 2007 indicated woodland cover in Northern Ireland to be just over 10%. Even allowing for the inclusion of scrub within the woodland category

of the NICS, the inference is that there are many areas of woodland still to be captured. Several GIS woodland datasets have been obtained- the most useful of these demarcate woodland areas by polygons, whereas some datasets only show woodland areas as a point feature.

It is hoped that members of the NINWG will fully engage with this process. An update will be provided at the next meeting and an initial baseline estimate will be produced by 31 March 2011.

Work Programme 2009 – 2012

P Archdale suggested that it would be beneficial if the Group were to be involved in the development of subordinate legislation associated with the new Forestry Act, and that this should be included in the Work Programme. Currently the Work Programme (WP) is reviewed annually by the Group and normally at the winter meeting.

Action: J Griffin – Send out Work Programme in advance of the next meeting

Action: All - Review the Work Programme with a view to recommending changes in content or priority at the next meeting.

Target setting for priority habitats in Northern Ireland

R Weyl circulated a paper and provided an update on target setting and the recent changes made to the reporting system. Each region within the UK is now responsible for setting their own targets, although there are structures in place to collate regional figures to provide UK totals.

In general, it is intended that priority species will be integrated into relevant Biodiversity Delivery Groups. There is scope to include habitat network targets.

The meeting accepted that the current woodland HAP targets will remain unchanged at the present time. The targets will be reviewed when NICS woodland data analysis is complete. Further analysis will assign priority habitats to the existing broad woodland data.

Biodiversity Duty

R Weyl provided the meeting with the reasons behind its introduction and it will be incorporated within the planned Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill. The broad aim of the duty is to raise the profile of biodiversity and to allow biodiversity issues to gain more prominence when developing new policies throughout the public sector thereby helping Northern Ireland to meet its EU and international commitments towards halting the loss of biodiversity. Within forestry in Northern Ireland, this will normally be met through the certification of woodland in respect of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard.

R Weyl stated that DOE Core is currently drafting guidance for public bodies. The intention is that this guidance will be supported by information on the NIEA website.

Ancient Woodland Survey

Declan Little presented the findings of an inventory of native woodlands carried out between 2003-2008 with an emphasis on ancient and long-established woodland in the Republic of Ireland. Long established sites were based on woodland cover being present continuously since at least 1840. A preliminary list of ancient woodland indicator species (excluding bryophytes) was produced - 15 of these species were included on a similar list for NI. The results of this survey will be used for targeting native woodland expansion.

In the past there have been discussions about a North/South project delivering woodland management. It was agreed that a sub-group of the NINWG should investigate EU and other funding sources.

Action: R Weyl – to head a funding sub-group and liaise with D Little

National Ecosystem Assessment (NEA)

The background to this assessment was provided in a paper by Neil McCulloch (NIEA). Forest Service with input from the Woodland Trust has prepared a draft introductory section on woodlands in Northern Ireland. Alan Cooper has also prepared a section on habitat changes from 1998 – 2007 which reflect the findings of the recent Countryside Survey.

Action: M McMullan to inform N McCulloch that the NINWG would like to view the final draft of the woodland chapter and to notify S Christie of this

Action: M McMullan to circulate NEA paper

Deer and forests

M Rafferty stated that the growth rate projections for deer populations in Ireland were alarming at the All Ireland mammal Symposium held in Waterford. She reported that approximately 10% of the population were culled annually and this would need to increase to 30% to maintain the populations at existing levels. D Little stated that Woodlands of Ireland commissioned work to initiate a national deer strategy based on the participation of key stakeholder groups. A seminar is planned for the Autumn and it was suggested that D Little should approach Jamie Dick (QUB) to provide a Northern Ireland perspective.

Members' updates

Forest Service

Acting chair stated that the internal Forest Service planning system has been revised to reflect the NI Forestry Strategy and to facilitate reporting in relation to sustainable forest management.

UK definitions for protected and protective forest areas have been developed by Sandy Greig of the Forestry Commission in consultation with the NI Forest Service. These definitions form the basis of a set of indicators of Sustainable Forest Management to fulfil MCPFE reporting requirements. In Northern Ireland, protected and protective forest areas will be defined by woodland designated as SAC, ASSI or NNR and will include woodland areas covered by TPOs.

Acting chair reported that a meeting to co-ordinate the eradication of muntjac between neighbouring landowners, deer stalkers and other stakeholders is planned to take place at Mount Stewart in July.

Date of next meeting

The next meeting is planned to take place at the RAPID offices with a field trip to the Faughan Valley in October 2010 which will be hosted by Woodland Trust.