

## **Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group**

**Meeting held at Inishkeen House on Monday 15 June 2009**

### **Present:**

Richard Schable (Chairman)	Forest Service
Henry Shaw	Countryside Management Branch
Paul Corbett	NI Environment Agency
Richard Weyl	NI Environment Agency
Mark Edgar	LBAP Forum
Mansil Miller	Planning Service
Neville McKee	Ulster Native Trees
Bobbie Hamill	NI Environment Agency
Ian McCurley	National Trust
Maeve Rafferty	Ulster Wildlife Trust
Christine Butler	Countryside Management Branch
Orla Maguire	Belfast City Council
Melina McMullan	NI Environment Agency
Alan Cooper	University of Ulster
Declan Little	Woodlands of Ireland
Richard Hyde	Forest Service
John Griffin	Forest Service

### **Apologies:**

Stuart Morwood (Forest Service), John Cross (National Parks and Wildlife Service), Robert Shearman (CVNI), Brian Poots (Woodland Trust).

### **Absences:**

Confor, CNCC, CVNI, Woodland Trust, Forest of Belfast

### **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 expansion has still to be circulated to the group. **Action – Richard Weyl**

Lindsay Matthews (Biodiversity Officer with Newtownabbey Borough Council) and member of the NI Local Government Association should be invited to the next meeting to represent District Councils. **Action - Melina McMullan**

### **Work Programme 2009 – 2012**

Melina McMullan outlined the Work Programme (WP) for 2009 – 2012 which had been circulated to all members in advance for comment. The WP places an emphasis on a woodland and parkland inventory prior to assessing condition. ) It was decided that the WP would be reviewed by the Group annually at the December meeting. The following sections are to be amended –

5.2.1 Remove reference to parklands

5.2.3 A booklet similar to the format used in the Native Woodlands Definitions and Guidance should be produced to address the cultural value of parkland and wood pasture as well as a guidance note on the management of this habitat for land managers. Countryside Management Branch agreed to take the lead, supported by NIEA (including Built Heritage), National Trust and other Group members. Target date for completion is 2011.

#### **Action**

- **Melina McMullan to amend the Work Programme and to circulate to Group**
- **Mansil Miller to report on points 1.2 and 3.1.1 of the Work Programme.**

### **Woodland Inventory/ Estimate for Northern Ireland**

John Griffin outlined a meeting between Forest Service and NIEA. The preferred approach to developing a woodland inventory for Northern Ireland would be to overlay the ortho-photography and Ordnance Survey NI GIS layers with the Land Cover Map (to be published in 2009/ 2010). Unnecessary digitising would be avoided by overlaying relevant woodland GIS layers. Some of the GIS DATASETS will allow woodlands to be assigned into a HAP type. It was emphasised that the NI Countryside Survey could provide the basis for validating the inventory.

**Action: Forest Service to progress once the land cover map is published.**

### **Condition Assessment of ASSI Woodland**

Paul Corbett presented the findings of a condition assessment of ASSI woodland. A woodland is considered to be in favourable condition if each attribute such as deadwood, regeneration of native species and the presence of non native species are above threshold levels. Most ASSIs are in unfavourable condition or unfavourable recovering primarily as a result of overgrazing or the

presence of invasive plant species. Work is underway in Conservation, Designations and Protection (CDP) to identify management regimes to improve the condition of these woodlands.

## **NI Countryside Survey update**

Alan Cooper informed the Group that the *summary/final* report of the NICS 2007 has been sent to NIEA and he gave an overview of woodland changes over this period. Since 1998 -

- Broadleaf woodland (plantation and semi-natural) has increased by 29%, resulting mainly from scrub development on open habitat.
- Some scrub development has taken place on species-rich grasslands, grasslands within agri-environmental schemes and fragmented heath and bog edges.
- The area of coniferous woodland has not changed significantly.

Quadrats have been placed in a sample of woodlands in the wider countryside, and the resulting data may be useful in assessing woodland condition. Data will be available by the end of 2009.

*what indicators are being surveyed – WD recording sheet*

## **Parkland update**

It was agreed that Countryside Management Branch would take the lead in producing a booklet to promote the cultural and biodiversity value of parkland and wood pasture as well as a section on appropriate management - with support other Group members particularly NIEA (including Built Heritage) and National Trust. The booklet would take a similar format to the Woodland Definitions and Guidance booklet and would be published by the NINWG. (*suggestion to consult J Cross in order to consider all Ireland context*). Target date for completion is 2011.

**Action – CMB to meet with NIEA and National Trust and to provide the Group with details on the proposed format**

ASSI surveys of the parkland resource are ongoing at Caledon and Tynan.

## **Signposting action for Northern Ireland priority species**

Richard Weyl provided an update on the signposting exercise. The delivery actions for UK priority species has been addressed to date through individual species action plans. A new less bureaucratic approach is being adopted for new UK priority species – signposting actions. This indicates those species can be

addressed by simple actions e.g. research/survey, priority habitat action or specific site management. Further information on this approach can be found at: <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/Signposting.aspx>

This signposting approach will be rolled out in Northern Ireland by the Species Delivery Group after the new Northern Ireland Priority Species list is drafted later this year. List will be completed by December 2009.

Actions for many Northern Ireland priority species will be addressed through priority habitat actions being co-ordinated by the five habitat Biodiversity Delivery Groups. The application of the signposting approach will be an important part of the work programme of each these Groups during the forthcoming year.

**(Original text** - Richard Weyl reported that a revised priority species list will be available by September 2009. Once this is done, signposting of many woodland species will be carried out to streamline the BAP reporting process by linking conservation actions for individual species to the appropriate key habitats. This process will be largely driven by habitat delivery groups rather than sitting within separate Species Action Plans).

## **Members updates**

### **Countryside Management**

Approximately 1000 people have entered a new scheme opened in 2008. Landowners with environmental designations on their land have received priority. A new category is needed to cover developing semi-natural woodland within this scheme.

### **NIEA**

A sub-group will be formed to assess condition of woodland in the wider countryside (i.e. non designated sites). Although planned to take place earlier this year, it is now considered appropriate to delay this until results from the Northern Ireland Countryside Survey woodland quadrats are available (see NICS update above). ~~after the woodland inventory has been completed.~~

### **Forest Service**

There is a renewed urgency to publish a revised UK Forestry Standard.

Forest Service has been reorganised and two stewardship areas have been created – East (based at Castlewellan) and West (based at Enniskillen).

The new forestry bill is shortly to be placed in front of the Assembly.

### **Woodlands of Ireland**

Declan Little took the opportunity to inform the Group that there were still places remaining on the 3 day native woodland scheme training course.

**Date of next meeting**

The next meeting is planned to take place in December 2009.