

## **Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group**

**Meeting held at Bellaghy Bawn on Thursday 5 June 2008**

### **Present:**

Stuart Morwood (Chairman)	Forest Service
Patrick Cregg	Council for Nature Conservation & the Countryside
Richard Weyl	Environment & Heritage Service
Melina McMullan	Environment & Heritage Service
Maeve Rafferty	Ulster Wildlife Trust
Dr Alan Cooper	University of Ulster
John Hetherington	Forestry and Timber Association
Orla Maguire	Belfast City Council
Richard Schable	Forest Service
John Griffin (Secretary)	Forest Service

### **Apologies**

Alan McHaffie (Belfast City Council), Phil Davidson (National Trust), Declan Little (Woodlands of Ireland), John Cross (National Parks & Wildlife Service), Robert Shearman (Conservation Volunteers), Christine Butler (DARD Countryside Management Branch)

### **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

### **Matters arising**

Parkland Study – The minutes erroneously identified Dr Roy Anderson rather than Keith Alexander as the person to present the findings of this report.  
Work Programme – Issues relating to the Work Programme will be addressed by the Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group (NINWG) itself rather than a sub-group.

### **Northern Ireland Countryside Survey**

Dr Alan Cooper outlined some preliminary findings of the Northern Ireland Countryside Survey carried out in 2007, with a focus on woodland habitats. This is the third in a series of surveys (begun in the late 1980s and repeated in 1997) to identify and quantify rates of change in habitats throughout Northern Ireland. Early draft results suggest that there has been a relatively large increase in the

area of broadleaved woodland since 1998, mainly through broadleaf planting and by scrub development. Most of the broadleaf planting and scrub development was on grassland habitats, a small proportion of which was semi-natural habitat such as species rich grassland. These changes were also identified in 1997, but were then much smaller. The NICS formal report is expected to be published in November this year. The Chairman expressed his gratitude on behalf of the Group to Alan for his timely presentation and accepted that a full analysis of the data had not yet been carried out.

### **Implementation of the Northern Ireland Native Woodland Group (NINWG) Work Programme**

A review of the Work Programme is required in order to identify outstanding areas of work and review priorities. This will facilitate UKBAP reporting through BARS at the end of November and provide an update to the NI Biodiversity Group in February 2009. Activities up to September 2007 were reviewed under contract by Fauber Maunsell.

Some actions within the programme lie outside the remit of NINWG members, e.g. Planning Service and Local Authorities

EHS are awaiting the final outcome of a UK review on signposting before proceeding with same in NI. Refer to the UKBAP website for further information <http://www.ukbap.org.uk/bapgroup.aspx?id=102>

### **Action**

Melina McMullan to

- forward the Work Programme and review conducted by Faber Maunsell to each Group member.
- forward the Work Programme to Planning Service and local councils which do not have a Local Biodiversity Officer.
- determine if DoE Planning Service should be represented in future meetings

All to insert any relevant activities into the work programme to forward to Melina McMullan for collation by 29<sup>th</sup> August 2008.

Orla Maguire to email work programme to other Biodiversity Officers to keep them informed.

### **NINWG web-page**

Work has been carried out by Larry Toal (EHS) to develop the NINWG web-page on the internet. The NINWG web-page is located on the EHS website beside web-pages belonging to the other habitat delivery groups. The page follows a

similar format to that which has been adopted by the other habitat delivery groups.

### **Action**

John Griffin to forward links to the website to all members of the Group.  
Group members to provide feedback to Melina McMullan by 30<sup>th</sup> July 2008.

### **Update on native woodland expansion and PAWS restoration**

Data on woodland expansion by priority habitat was provided by Richard Schaible for areas owned or managed by the Forest Service (FS) or through forestry grant schemes. Areas of New Native Woodland (NNW) established by the Forest Service have decreased since 2004. This is mainly due to increased use of natural colonisation and natural regeneration rather than planting for areas managed for nature conservation. Although the area of planted NNW has decreased, the amount of land currently awaiting natural colonisation or natural regeneration has increased from 123ha in 2006 to 212ha in February 2008.

The area of privately planted grant aided NNW also decreased in 2007. The area of broadleaf planting (excluding short rotation coppice) supported by grants administered by Forest Service decreased to 221ha in 2007, although this still represents more than 90% of the total area planted under woodland grants. The decrease may reflect the reluctance of landowners to commit land to a long term use such as forestry at a time when land prices are high.

A total of 23 PAWS restoration management plans have now been prepared. Some management plans remain in draft form to denote that they are awaiting approval which can only be obtained through an internal planning review process.

### **Impacts of Single Payment Scheme on woodland expansion**

Richard Weyl outlined the key points identified within a UK report on 'Impacts of the Single Payment Scheme (SPS) on Woodland Expansion' which was prepared for the Land Use Policy Group. The report aims to assess early indications of the impacts of the Scheme on woodland expansion. Although the SPS is not considered a direct barrier to woodland expansion, the following perceptions by the farming community are considered to have a detrimental impact: (1) the necessity for farmers to remove 'unwanted vegetation' such as scrub to comply with cross-compliance issues, (2) the necessity to maintain permanent pasture and (3) tree planting is considered to reduce their SPS entitlement. However, landowners are permitted to consolidate their entitlements (stack them) when creating woodland on up to half of their holding, hence maintaining their SPS income. Other factors considered to have an impact on

woodland expansion include - confusion over rules and inspections, apprehension due to the long term nature of forestry and a preference by farmers to maintain their productive capacity.

It was stated that Countryside Management Branch may be the competent body best placed to develop guidance on appropriate management of areas with developing scrub.

The chairman thanked Fiona Mulholland and Richard for their contribution.

#### **Action**

Richard Weyl: circulate paper to the group

### **Forest Service Ancient Woodland Inventory woodland management strategy**

Richard Schable presented the FS Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) Woodland Management Strategy to the group. This strategy succeeds the PAWS Restoration Strategy and includes the 3,400ha of AWI woodland within the FS estate. AWI details have been provided to relevant operational managers in FS.

#### **Action**

All: Comments on this strategy are invited from all members and should be emailed to Richard Schaible by 31 August 2008.

### **Member's updates**

Maeve Rafferty provided the Group with details of a recent Ulster Wildlife Trust event promoting coppicing and conservation activities involving control of invasive species.

Richard Weyl reported that Brian Sutton (Fauber Maunsell) has identified priority woodland habitats within Sites of Local Nature Conservation Importance (SLNCs).

#### **Action**

Melina McMullan to circulate to all Group members.

Richard also stated that a report has been completed on condition monitoring by Brian Sutton. The Group agreed that a workshop in the autumn would provide the best way of advancing this issue. Data from the most recent Northern Ireland Countryside Survey will inform this process.

Dr Alan Cooper highlighted the need for an agreed habitat classification system which would lead to a consistent and structured data recording method.

**Action**

Dr Alan Cooper to circulate habitat descriptor sheets and data recording sheets used in NICS 2007.

Richard Schable

- thanked the Ulster Wildlife Trust for their further contribution to the Native Woodland Definitions and Guidance booklet.
- stated that in keeping with the revision of the UK Forestry Standard members of the Group should be proactive in the preparation of management plans for woodland managed by their respective organisations
- brought to the Group's attention Native Riparian Woodlands produced by Woodlands of Ireland. Copies can be obtained directly from Declan Little [woodsofireland@iol.ie](mailto:woodsofireland@iol.ie) or through Richard Schable.
- provided a brief account of matters discussed at the recent Woodlands of Ireland AGM, including the importance of the hedgerow resource and the recent completion of a survey and classification of native woodland by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). He noted that the existence of *Tilio Acerion* woodland in Ireland was not accepted by NPWS and that this marked a significant difference in interpretation of the *Habitats Directive* in relation to ash woodland between the North and the South.

**Action**

Richard Weyl to clarify the basis of the classification of ashwood within Northern Ireland.

**AOB**

A recent publication by the Woodland Trust 'Woodland actions for biodiversity and their role in water management' was brought to the attention of the Group by Patrick Cregg.

Patrick also stated that Declan Little requested that steps be taken to identify potential seed stands for native species in Northern Ireland.

The Group agreed to a request by Orla Maguire that a representative from the Biodiversity Officers Forum be co-opted into the Group.

Melina McMullan referred to the recent visit of Roger Catchpole and the seminar on habitat network modeling which incorporated AWI woodland and deciduous woodland from Land Cover Map. Several members of the NINWG attended the seminar and a copy of the presentation has been forwarded to attendees.

**Action**

Melina to forward copy of Roger Catchpole's presentation to Dr Alan Cooper.

**Date of next meeting**

October 2008