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WOODLANDS
FOR WALES

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Grants and support for creating
and improving woodlands

Approach to Native Woodlands

Introduction

Native woodlands are those where the majority of trees and shrubs are indigenous to the site. They are important habitats for many of our native species of plants and animals and they often have high cultural and landscape value. This is especially true of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands, which have existed in this state for at least 400 years and are the most natural woodlands that we have.

The government is committed to reversing the decline in the extent and condition of important habitats and species, through the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. The Forestry Commission plays an important role in this programme by acting as the lead body for Native Woodland Habitat Action Plans. These plans include targets for expanding the area of native woodland and improving their condition.

The purpose of this document is to provide woodland owners, Management Planners and Forestry Commission Wales (FCW) staff with an overview of the way that the Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) scheme addresses the management of native woodlands. It does not include the management of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) which is described in a separate document (see Further Information).

Definitions

Ancient Woodlands are those which have been in continuous existence since before AD 1600. Where such woodland is composed mainly of locally native trees and shrubs it is referred to as **Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW)**.

The term **Ancient Woodland Site** refers to the site of ancient woodland irrespective of its current tree cover. Sites where the native tree cover has been felled and replaced by planting of non-native tree species are referred to as **Plantations on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS)**. Note: Sites where native species comprise more than 50% of the canopy cover will be treated as native woodlands and not PAWS although many of the same management principles may apply to these sites.

Other semi-natural woodlands are those that have developed from natural colonisation of open ground by site native species sometime within the last few centuries.

The **UK Biodiversity Action Plan** (BAP) describes the UK's biological resources and includes detailed Species Action Plans, Habitat Action Plans and Local Biodiversity Action Plans which provide detail and actions for the protection of biological resources.

The **UK Woodland Assurance Standard** (UKWAS standard) is a certification standard for verifying sustainable forest and woodland management in the United Kingdom. Woodland owners can achieve certification for their woodlands if they gain independent verification that they are complying with the standard.

BWW Approach to Native Woodlands

The requirements of BWW are linked to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS standard). The Standard states that it will be a priority to improve the condition of native woodlands by:

- Identifying and controlling threats, e.g. invasive non-native plants, the impacts of grazing, etc.
- Providing standing and fallen deadwood habitats throughout the woodland (where this does not conflict with Health and Safety management)

BWW seeks to encourage owners to fence woodlands so that grazing can be controlled and managed. The majority of native woodland in Wales is on farms and many of these woods are grazed by livestock. Grazing is usually the most significant factor affecting farm woodlands in Wales and it has a profound effect on their structure. Continuous grazing for decades prevents regeneration of trees and can lead to the loss of woodland ground flora and shrub layers. Ultimately it can lead to the loss of the woodland altogether.

Farmers often value the shelter that woodlands can provide for livestock, and woodlands have often formed an important part of their 'forage area'. However, the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has led to changes in the way in which farmers should utilise their woodlands. The Single Payment System (SPS) introduced in 2005, precludes any supplementary feeding in woodlands. It also provides scope for farmers to exclude livestock temporarily, in order to secure an environmental benefit without losing the SPS. This should be done as part of an environmental scheme (such as BWW or Tir Gofal). Where this is the case, it must be stated clearly within the Management Plan that livestock exclusion is a temporary measure. It should not be regarded as a permanent change in land-use but rather, as a means of allowing time for the woodland to recover and regenerate.

Many native woodlands have the potential to grow good timber, although the quality of timber in most is poor due to neglect in the 20th century. BWW provides support in the form of grants to those owners who wish to grow quality timber from their native woodlands providing that they do so in a way that meets the requirements described above to improve the ecological condition of the woodland over time.

Planning Process

The BWW scheme provides an effective planning process for the evaluation and monitoring of native woodlands in order to ensure that they are managed appropriately. Native woodlands are identified at an early stage in the planning process and the Management Planner will identify any threats to them in the Foundation Plan.

BWW will grant aid a Specialist ecological assessment of native woodlands where:

- An important species or habitat is thought to be present. The assessment will consider how the woodland could be managed in a way that provides for the requirements of the species or habitat.
- There are more than 10ha of native woodland. The assessment will enable the condition of these larger areas of woodlands to be investigated and will establish the baseline condition for future monitoring. Assessments may be grant aided for smaller woods below 10ha at FCW's discretion.

As with other Specialist Assessments, ecological assessments must be carried out by one of the people approved by FCW to undertake this work.

The Management Planner will take into account the ecological assessments when preparing the objectives in the Management Plan, and when identifying the management required in the first five years.

BWW Grants for Native Woodlands

The scheme offers two main types of grant for native woodland:

Woodland Improvement Grants (WIGs)

WIGs are available under BWW to support a wide range of operations including:

- Control of invasive species, such as rhododendrons*
- Creating the infrastructure needed for management e.g. tracks
- Uneconomic thinning and felling operations
- Work needed to secure natural regeneration of native species*
- Fencing**

* The grant rates for the control of invasive, exotic plant species and for the work to secure natural regeneration of native tree species will be paid at 75%. The grant rate for all other eligible operations is 50%.

** The grant rate for stock fencing is the same as that in the Tir Gofal scheme and other agri-environment schemes. Note: BWW does not provide any compensatory payments for loss of agricultural income associated with the exclusion of livestock.

For work that does not fit any of the above categories, 50% WIGs are available for other work needed to bring woodlands up to current environmental standards or contribute to the delivery of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. This could include BAP species conservation work, or work for other operations, for example, to increase the amount of standing deadwood.

Restocking Grants

Restocking grants are available where natural regeneration is unlikely to be successful. FCW would not normally approve clearfelling in Native woodland other than small clearfells of non-native trees. BWW restocking grants include provision for patch-planting of small areas which may be helpful in native woodland situations.

Further Information

UK Forestry Standard (2nd Edition)

Forestry Practice Guides 1-8 “The management of Semi-Natural Woodlands”

BWW Approach to PAWS

BWW Grant Structure

FC Information Note 28 “Domestic Stock Grazing to Enhance Woodland Biodiversity”

FC Bulletin 102 “Forest Fencing”

BWW Approach to Environmental Issues