



Agenda Item 6

16th July 2010

WNC 21.10

WOODLAND STRATEGY ADVISORY PANEL REPORT OF MEETING ON 15 & 16th JUNE

Purpose

1. To present an update to the National Committee on recent WSAP business.

Report

2. The meeting consisted of visits to two privately owned woodlands with the theme of improving the diversity of Welsh woodlands - a key objective of *Woodlands for Wales*.

Bryn Arau Duon woodland - 15th June

3. The woodland is owned by Illchester Estates and managed by Philippe Morgan (SelectFor Ltd) and Huw Denman both of whom led the visit. The woodland comprises 700ha of upland plantations (elevation 200m-430m) planted since 1962 with the main planting taking place in the 70s and 80s. Sitka spruce accounts for 87% of the forest and Lodgepole pine, Japanese larch and broadleaves account for most of the remaining area. The woodland is certified under UKWAS and is managed primarily for profitable timber production. Key points demonstrated on the sites visited were:

- Improving tree form and quality and creating species diversity in a Sitka spruce compartment managed for timber production. This is being achieved by a 4-year thinning cycle removing large, poor form trees so that growth is concentrated on the best quality trees. Thinning is followed by underplanting of Western red cedar, Douglas fir, Norway spruce and broadleaves with the aim of creating intimate mixtures and structural diversity. Members saw thinning operations by a harvester producing chipwood and sawlogs.
- Management of a woodland area for red squirrel conservation. The area comprises Sitka spruce, Lodgepole pine and larch. The aim is to concentrate growth on the trees with greatest potential to produce cones mainly by removal of Sitka spruce and allowing pines to flourish. Thinning is followed by underplanting of Western red cedar, Douglas fir, Norway spruce and broadleaves.
- Mire and heath restoration. The area was cleared of poor quality Sitka spruce in 2009 to restore semi-natural vegetation suitable for black grouse habitat. Vegetation recovery has been rapid.
- Low intensity thinning in a high windblow hazard compartment managed for timber production. Thinning is taking the form of severance cuts to create boundaries for small areas, which will then be clearfelled. Restocking will be with

a range of species including Western red cedar, Douglas fir, Norway spruce and broadleaves.

- Steep-sided valley managed for biodiversity. The site was clearfelled in 2007 and replanted with birch, alder, aspen and oak.

Llangoed Estate - 16th June

4. The estate (900 ha) is owned by Mr and Mrs Chichester. Woodlands comprise 213 ha and are managed by Paul Raymond-Barker who led the visit. The woodland is situated on the Wye valley at elevations ranging from 120-350m. Over 50% of the woodland comprises Sitka spruce and Douglas fir and other species include: larch, Norway spruce, Grand fir, Noble fir, Western hemlock, ash, oak, poplar and cherry. The woodland is certified under UKWAS. The area of woodland has doubled since 1920 and most of the present tree crop dates from the 1950s and 60s.
5. The owner has a range of management objectives including:
 - producing the maximum volume of sawlog material;
 - maintaining a diversity of tree species;
 - enhancing biodiversity of the woodlands and increasing the broadleaved content of PAWS sites;
 - preserving and enhancing the visual aspect of the woodlands particularly along roadsides and valley slopes.
6. The main silvicultural system used involves stocking small blocks (0.4 - 0.8ha) with a single species. Each block is thinned regularly followed by clear felling of the block on rotations of 35-40 years for Sitka spruce and 60 years for Douglas fir. It was explained that this system of small blocks of single species compared with intimate species mixtures made for easier management and marketing of timber. The first four site visits demonstrated various aspects of this system with stands of Sitka spruce, Douglas fir, larch and Western red cedar. The fifth site was a 12 year old ash Norway spruce line mixture established on agricultural land.
7. During both visits there was extensive discussion of the various ways of creating and managing woodlands with greater species and structural diversity. Broad conclusions from these visits are:
 - where woodlands are being managed primarily for timber production the cost of management and the marketability of the timber are crucial influences on the silvicultural systems used by woodland managers;
 - woodland managers are uncertain of the future market uptake of a wider range of species and log sizes;
 - a good forest road/track infrastructure is vital for profitable harvesting-thinning and clearfell particularly with intimate mixtures;

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- private owners rely strongly on their woodland managers for advice on silvicultural systems to adopt;
- FCW has an important role in demonstrating to private owners and woodland managers different approaches to creating greater species and structural diversity in existing woodlands.

8. The Panel is very grateful to the Ilchester Estate and to Mr and Mrs Chichester for inviting us to visit their woodlands. We also wish to thank Philippe Morgan, Huw Denman and Paul Raymond-Barker for their excellent programmes for the two visits. We also thank Oliver Combe (BSW) and Forestry Commission Wales staff for organising the visits.

Recommendation

9. The committee is asked to note the report.

Roger Cooper
Chair, Woodland Strategy Advisory Panel
9th July 2010