

WORKSHOP F - ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENT: THE ROLE OF BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANS

Although BAPs have implications for several aspects of the Scottish Forestry Strategy the aim of the workshop was to focus discussions mainly around two of the Strategy's priorities for action, viz:

- improve the management of semi-natural woodlands
- extend and enhance native woodlands by the development of Forest Habitat Networks

A Briefing Note was issued on the subject of Native Woodland Habitat Action Plans in Scotland, and a list of some of the key actions (to implement the HAPs) taken to date; a number of other developments were also mentioned. The following notes are a summary of the discussions (maximum 20 minutes per workshop).

Policy issues [Pre-requisite – clear linkages between SFS and the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy]

Integrate landuse policies by means of a strategic overview, so that woodland biodiversity is not considered in isolation (relative to other important habitats, specifically moorland and montane habitats), including site-specific arguments for deforestation. Consider a catchment scale approach (as in Water Framework Directive River Basin Plans). Revise Indicative Forestry Strategies to develop the concept of Forest Habitat Networks 'from coast to coast' – thereby facilitating complementary actions across ownership boundaries.

Planning guidance should explicitly prohibit (built) development in all woodlands on ancient woodland sites, unless irredeemably degraded by previous land management actions (eg. severe soil disturbance, loss of ground vegetation, etc).

Clarify some aspects of native woodland policy, particularly on prioritisation and timescales. Should we be targeting the 'best' areas, (workshop showed a strong desire for restoration of native woodland in PAWS sites) or in heavily wooded areas (to hasten the benefits of connectivity) or in sparsely wooded areas (to boost an already scarce resource)? Beware of expecting too much too quickly (don't be driven by HAP deadlines) and ensure adaptability to longer-term influences, such as climate change. Also recognise the intrinsic biodiversity value / potential of plantation forests.

Although the SFS explicitly includes achieving BAP targets as part of policy, there were still queries such as what are the 'legal drivers', what about targets gaps (ie. habitats, sub-habitats, transitional habitats and species for which there are no BAPs), who are the 'customers' (who are BAPs aimed at). These tend to confirm the ongoing demand for accessible information on the BAPs, although the need is catered for elsewhere.

Site management issues [Pre-requisite – to deliver quality not quantity]

Prioritise restoration of PAWS, but consider the vegetation layer(s) as well as main canopy components, and be prepared for longer time-scales to achieve full restoration.

Integrate habitat and species requirements (including species of LBAP interest), but beware of sacrificing (general) habitat quality to safeguard only one species. Facilitate appropriate management of pine plantations (technically excluded from the native pinewood HAP) to benefit pinewood species. Even in non-native stands focus particularly on forest edges, both internally and along forest boundaries. A stronger 'line' on deer management and fencing issues may be required, and perhaps there ought to be less emphasis on deer numbers and more on regeneration and condition of vegetation.

Develop and apply continuous cover systems, avoiding clear felling and retaining some over-mature trees indefinitely, accepting also that while favouring native species there will be a continuing role for non-native trees. We may need to practice management of mixed stands (for the foreseeable future) and our techniques for doing so should be reviewed.

Funding issues

Seek greater integration between funding available from different agencies, specifically SFGS, RSS and Natural Care.

Ensure adequacy of SFGS to make an impact on the BAP targets (given the caveat on delivering quality not quantity). These include flexibility of eligibility criteria, funding gap (40% or even 10%) of standard cost in relation to actual costs. There were also calls for more help to deliver LBAP targets.

Information and Advice

Better advice is required at the professional level, through formal training, guidance to information sources, demonstration sites, etc., to fill in gaps in knowledge and to ensure best practice in woodland management (eg. on interpretation of the HAPs, developing Forest Habitat Networks, restoration techniques).

A case was also made for more information at the general level to raise awareness of woodland biodiversity issues locally and in the global context, optimising existing potential opportunities for interpretation such as forest visits, use of display boards, etc. To some extent this was coupled with request for more information on Local BAPs, linkages with the UK BAPs and how individuals and communities could become involved

Research ideas

Silvicultural topics – including appropriate regeneration techniques, impacts of continuous cover type management, canopy management related to light

requirements of key species (like twinflower), the role and value of grazing, effects of disturbance on different species.

Water related topics – role of large woody debris in streams, optimum management of riparian woodlands for fish habitats, acid rain resistance.

Bio-technology – potential impacts on biodiversity.

Monitoring and Inventory

The need for monitoring (BAP progress / targets) was taken for granted. Considerable interest was expressed in the further use of remote sensing, rapid assessment techniques, maximising the use of GIS, and the development of qualitative indicators especially of woodland condition as tools for monitoring the achievement of BAP targets.

Ideally a more detailed and 100% inventory of native woodlands is desirable, coupled with improved (more accessible) information on ancient woodland sites and the extent and quality of riparian woodlands.

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11 December 2002