

To whom it may concern

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to comment on the matter of open habitat restoration or re-creation that will benefit lowland heathland. This is an important natural habitat, much diminished over the years, and this is now a real opportunity to get a whole lot of it back, by thoughtfully removing coniferous plantations from previous heathland habitat

The new policy needs to set ambitious targets for the restoration of heathland and other threatened open habitats lost to plantation forestry. This is urgent, so I am very pleased to see that the Forestry Commission are looking seriously into this matter and I would like to urge you to do the right thing. Please set quick wins, those in line with the targets set in the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan. There also needs to be a long-term plan to realise the potential for heathland restoration, before the remnant heathland conditions are lost. Please do not miss this chance to redress earlier decisions to plant conifers on heathland in the past

Please also ensure that restoration is targeted at the areas that will ensure the best outcomes for wildlife and sustainable management, because nature needs more space, not less and creating larger areas of heathland near existing habitats will help ease the vulnerability of the dependent wildlife to threats, such as disturbance, scrub encroachment and climate change. Open habitat restoration on plantation areas on previous heathland should be bold and is essential if we are to help the extraordinary range of threatened and unique wildlife adapt in the face of climate change. Restoring lost habitats near existing areas will help species spread, locally and across borders in response to both local and national changing weather patterns linked to climate change and also help buffer wildlife from other related threats.

If all that wasn't enough, open heathlands, present and future restored areas, with their small areas of gorse, wet mires and copses, provide valuable areas for relaxation and the enjoyment of nature. These areas are often found close to towns and provide first class areas for people to enjoy these wild landscapes and appreciate its unique wildlife.

And finally, I am concerned that a call for taking plantations off heathland can be interpreted as being anti-tree at a time when climate change would suggest that trees have carbon benefits or that they have high landscape and wildlife value. In the right place, with the right trees, and the right management, these things are true. There is big BUT though. The importance of achieving genuine and wide biodiversity and environmental benefits cannot be overstated in England. The removal of plantations on heathland habitat is essential for wider biodiversity benefit and is also good for climate change and landscape value.

I can see that the Forestry Commission of 2009 recognises the environmental importance of open habitats and that previous policies that saw plantations set up on lowland heaths were not necessarily the best. You have my full support in redressing that situation now, by setting a policy that will bring back valuable heathland and other important open habitats to the countryside

Your faithfully



(Anon 04.06.09)