



THE NATIONAL TRUST

for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty

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Your Ref Open Habitats Consultation
Our Ref
Date 22:5:2009

Dear Dominic

Restoring Open Habitats from Woods & Forest: a Consultation

The National Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We have been deeply involved with the consultation process from the onset, but due to unavoidable temporary capacity issues are only able to submit our response in the form of a letter as follows. We would however be very happy to participate in helping to shape the policy details of this programme.

The Trust believes that during the middle decades of the 20th century considerable damage was done to what are now biodiversity priority habitats, and associated species, by what is now considered inappropriate “forestry”, in and outside of traditional woodland. Much of this damage has been caused by establishing non-native tree species.

Considerable efforts have been made to address some of these problems, particularly through the FC’s excellent Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) programme and through the UK biodiversity process (habitats). The Trust has participated in such restoration proposals and is committed to continuing to do so. Efforts have been concentrated on restoring ancient woodland and lowland heathland.

We would like to see such effort continue. We do, though, strongly feel that other habitats need equal prioritisation and that it would be inappropriate to concentrate too heavily on lowland heath, in particular, at the expense of other habitats.

We would therefore like to see equal weighting given to removing inappropriate tree cover, especially of non-native species, from afforested sand dunes, bogs, fens, all peatlands, calcareous grasslands, old meadow systems and old parks and wood pasture/pasture woodland. The restoration of ancient parks and wood pasture systems is a very high priority for the Trust.

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The Trust recognises the role of trees and woodlands in helping to mitigate climate change, together with the important role of peat as a sink and store for carbon respectively. This must lead to the creation of woodland of native trees in the right place, notably on low grade agricultural land, rather than the retention of plantations in inappropriate sites. It also must lead to the removal of trees from any significant peatlands.

Compensation planting needs to be restricted to such situations and carried out only when environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. In effect, we do not view it as being a pre-requisite, and it should enhance rather than jeopardise existing biodiversity interests.

With regard to the future of woods and forests, we believe that large woodland systems should consist of mosaics of woodland of varied structure and open habitats that offer connectivity and diversity. We are, of course, fully committed to public access and engagement, and to integrated land use management, both of which are compatible with compensatory planting in appropriate sites.

Finally, we would make a plea for strategic planning of woodlands as open habitats at the landscape scale, and an acceptance that open-closed habitats are dynamic mosaics rather than static or homogenous. It is also important that any open habitat restoration is carried out where management will enable it to be maintained in a financially sensible way. This has not necessarily always been the case to date.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew Oates, Nature Conservation Adviser
Ray Hawes, Head of Forestry