

Questions from our consultation

This form sets out the questions we ask in a consultation on restoring and expanding open habitats from woods and forests in England that we launched on 12 March 2009. The consultation ends on 5 June 2009. You can find the consultation at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation or contact Dominic Driver, Forestry Commission for further information (contact details below).

Comments on any aspect of the consultation are welcome, but we are particularly interested in your responses to the questions below. This form is available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation.

Your name:	
Your organisation (if any):	South West England Regional Advisory Committee
Date:	1st June 2009

No	Question.
The nature of the change	
1.	Does your aspiration for the scale of the policy fit within our calculated range of 5,600 to 30,000 ha of restoration or expansion of open habitats from woodland or forest over 10 to 15 years? This is 370 to 3,000 ha each year. What level of intervention would you prefer and how is this justified?
We would prefer to see a few larger projects rather than many smaller ones as these may be easier to manage, monitor and sustain.	
Desired outcomes	
2.	Have we developed a reasonable list of desired outcomes of the policy? Do you wish to suggest any amendments?
We would expect policy outcomes to prioritise the enhanced quality of restored habitats making it clear that areas restored from woodland will deliver greater ecological value than woodland managed to current best practice.	
Measuring the success of the policy	
3.	Have we developed a reasonable set of indicators for evaluation? Do you wish to suggest any amendments to this indicator list?
If, therefore, the principal outcome is to enhance the ecological value of individual sites, then key indicators should be developed to reflect this. There is a lack of evidence on the ecological value of native scrub and young successional native woodland and trees. Collation and dissemination of such evidence is urgently required to inform this policy process.	
Policy proposals	
Elements present in the policy	

No	Question.
We will treat woodland and open habitats as potentially mutually beneficial	
4.	Do you agree that woodland and open habitats are potentially mutually beneficial? Is promotion of this idea helpful in gaining support for open habitat restoration and expansion from woodland?
Yes	
A presumption against removal of 'mature native woodland'	
5.	Do you agree with the principle that there should be a presumption against removal of ancient and 'mature native woodland'?
Yes	
6.	What do you think of our proposed outline definition of 'mature native woodland'?
We will expect practitioners to help local users to participate in development of the initial proposals	
7.	Do you agree that local participation in decision making is helpful? What is your preferred option for how we should apply this element?
<p>This policy has potentially huge implications for heathland restoration in Dorset. The proximity of the Bournemouth/Poole conurbation to the Dorset Heaths generates a key requirement for community participation in decision-making.</p> <p>Effective community participation in the design and maintenance of sites will be essential to help scope sustained provision for local outdoor leisure needs. Participation could also deliver significant benefits for reducing overall restoration costs and enhancing individual project outcomes.</p>	
We will promote mechanisms for prioritising woodland removal at a regional level	
8.	Do you agree that prioritisation at a regional level is appropriate for this policy?
Regional prioritisation, within a national framework, would be welcomed for both the removal of woodland and for compensatory planting.	
We will apply a framework for evaluation to projects	
9.	Do you agree with this framework for evaluation? What is your preferred option for how we should apply this element?
10.	How much and what kind of support do you think we should give to practitioners to help them evaluate their projects using this framework?

No	Question.
	<p>Whilst many landowners/managers may be encouraged to restore open habitats as a result of attractive grant incentives, many will lack the skills and capacity to maintain these habitats in perpetuity. Appropriate training, networking and support at the outset for a robust assessment of long term habitat management may be required.</p>
	<p>To avoid net deforestation in England we will try not to go over a threshold rate of woodland removal due to restoring and expanding open habitats.</p>
11.	<p>Do you agree with the principle of an England scale threshold rate of woodland removal? What is your preferred mechanism by which such a threshold could be applied to policy?</p>
12.	<p>Do you consider that the proposed threshold is about right, too high or too low?</p>
	<p>Key variables</p>
	<p>What is the balance between achieving biodiversity objectives and the need to reduce green house gas emissions?</p>
13.	<p>Is there a way, in the short term, we can better estimate the contribution to biodiversity objectives from different levels of restoration or expansion of open habitats?</p>
14.	<p>Do you agree that management practices to minimise carbon emissions during restoration or expansion of open habitats should be adopted? Do you agree with the outline practices presented? How could we best ensure that such practices are adopted?</p>
	<p>We would strongly support deferred felling of trees until they are economically mature. Policy implementation needs to be realistic as restoration can be relatively long term. A phased deferral will reduce the speed of landscape change and moderate impacts on local communities and restoration costs.</p>
15.	<p>Do you agree that it is appropriate to include impact on long-term average carbon store <i>and</i> loss of potential to substitute timber for higher carbon materials and fuel in the calculations on carbon balance?</p>
	<p>Yes.</p>
16.	<p>Where do you think the appropriate balance lies between achieving biodiversity objectives and the need to reduce carbon emissions? What processes might help to make this judgement?</p>
	<p>We believe that there should be clear evidence to demonstrate that areas restored from woodland deliver greater ecological value than woodland managed to current best practice. There are clear drivers for open habitat restoration in national and local Habitat</p>

No	Question.
	Action Plans but there is a lack of convincing evidence that highlights the benefits to key species.
Should we be managing open habitats to keep them in 'favourable condition' or should we adopt a more dynamic approach to land management?	
17.	Outside SSSIs, do you agree that a more dynamic attitude to land management could deliver equivalent or greater gains for open habitats and species than one where success for all sites is based on assessments of condition as applied to SSSIs?
18.	If so, how might such an approach be developed? Is there scope for modifying the conservation objectives on some SSSIs to incorporate a similar approach? If not, do you consider that the endpoint for all restoration proposals should be judged against favourable condition as defined for SSSI habitats?
What level of woodland removal due to restoring or expanding open habitats could avoid a significant negative impact on the timber industry?	
19.	Can you provide any information on the likely links between any reduction in timber production and economic activity in the timber sector?
<p>Serious consideration should be given to the impact of woodland removal on the timber processing industry – particularly within the Region. A current study being delivered through South West Rural Renaissance, entitled "Assessing the current growing forestry resource and modelling in the SW of England" could help develop thinking in this area.</p> <p>We strongly support the principle that there should be no net loss of woodland cover.</p>	
Different approaches to applying policy	
20.	Which of the three approaches by which we make decisions about woodland removal is your preferred option? Can you see any alternative types of approach based either on a combination of these approaches or on new ideas?
The role of compensatory planting	
21.	What is the appropriate role of compensatory planting in this policy?
Factors to consider when deciding which policy is likely to work best	
22.	Have we developed a reasonable set of questions for informing the decision on which policy is best? Do you wish to suggest any changes to the list of questions?

No	Question.
Implications for delivery mechanisms	
23.	Have we missed any major implications for delivery mechanisms? Would any be particularly welcome or unwelcome to you?
Other comments	
We welcome your input on any other aspect of this consultation.	
The range of habitats included in the consultation is incomplete – for instance limestone pavement is missing.	

Please include the “information about you” form with your response.¹

Please send your completed forms to:

[Dominic Driver](#)

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By 17.00hrs, Friday 5 June 2009.

¹ See www.forestry.gov.uk/england-openhabitats-consultation for a copy.