

# Mapping ancient and native woodland habitat networks in the South West

Keepers of Time in action



**Keepers of Time is the Government policy for protecting and enhancing ancient and native woodland. Mapping the South West of England's best ancient and native woodland habitat networks is a key stage in this process, identifying where resources should be increased to yield better and longer lasting outcomes. These priority areas have increasingly become a focus for other activities such as advice and partnership working areas for delivery. Climate change is a particular threat and establishing resilient, landscape-scale ecological networks will help species adapt to changing conditions.**

## objectives

- With stakeholders, to establish an evidence-based understanding of the ancient and native woodland habitat networks in the South West of England, based upon ecological principles.
- To improve understanding and commitment of regional partners and stakeholders to the mapping process.
- To identify key habitat network clusters.
- To use this information to maximise Government outcomes by targeting resources.
- To develop local delivery partnerships.

## actions

- The South West Ancient Woodland Working Group was established to bring together private, public and voluntary sectors with an interest in woodland issues and take overall responsibility for mapping work.
- The Forestry Commission's Forest Research Agency was commissioned to undertake a mapping exercise bringing together survey data including Land Cover Map 2000, National Biodiversity Network Habitat Inventories, the National Inventory of Trees, the Ancient Woodland Inventory and Ordnance Survey. Over this base data habitat networks were identified and mapped.
- Initial priority areas were identified from mapping.
- Enhanced resources are flowing to these areas in support of common outcomes.
- Forestry Commission grants support is targeted to these areas.
- Initial local delivery partnerships have been established and refocused on the basis of the mapping work.

## achievements

- We now have spatial data to enable us to identify key areas for promoting appropriate management of habitats (woodland and other) to support long-term resilience of the habitat and therefore the species.
- We have fostered existing partnerships and developed new ones to identify common objectives and work together on bringing ancient and native woodlands back into management.
- We have identified preferred areas for appropriate woodland creation, which will maximise public benefit by enhancing habitat networks, making them more robust in the face of climate change and other external threats.

## background

Protecting and enhancing our ancient and native woodlands is at the heart of Government forestry policy, and this project contributes to the South West Region's implementation of Keepers of Time. One of the Regional Woodland and Forestry Framework's objectives is to promote resilience to climate change and this work will help achieve this.

Review of the Higher Level Scheme of Environmental Stewardship targeting will consider the inclusion of Ancient Woodland Priority Areas derived from the mapping.

As well as offering support across the region, four priority areas have been established in Exmoor, Dartmoor, the Cotswolds and the Forest of Dean. Within these four areas we are working with partners and offering enhanced targeted funding.

## quotes

*"The early involvement of the private sector, through ConFor and key local estates, in formulating regional priorities and an acceptance of the role of productive woodlands within the overall policy should lead to more positive long term management, resulting in both ecological and economic gains.*

*"Implementing a regional stakeholder's interpretation of a national policy using evidence-based targeting of priority areas has reassured owners in the South West that restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites will be guided by a sound understanding of ecological opportunity balanced against other stakeholder interests. A partnership approach to policy delivery is building confidence and renewed commitment for the future."*

Chris Roberts, South West Regional Director, ConFor.

## partners

ConFor  
Cotswolds AONB  
Dartmoor National Parks Authority  
The Deer Initiative  
Exmoor National Parks Authority  
Forest Research  
Forestry Commission  
Natural England  
Woodland Trust

## funding

Forestry Commission  
Exmoor National Park  
Dartmoor National Park

## lessons learnt

- The importance of engaging a wide range of partners and stakeholders in the early stages to ensure full understanding, ownership, support and better outcomes.
- Methodologies for habitat network mapping are in the early stages of development. Engaging Forest Research ensured a scientifically robust and rigorous process.
- The appeal and power of evidence based research. This will engender actions through partnerships both now and in the future as new opportunities for funding arise