

PROPOSED WORKING GROUP ON FORESTRY AND BIODIVERSITY

Background

1. At the meeting of the England Forestry Forum on 10 January 2001, the Minister invited members to write to the Secretariat to suggest topics to be addressed by new working groups. The issue of forestry's role in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was discussed at previous meetings. There are many aspects of forestry that relate to the UK BAP. Those aspects directly associated with the UK Native Woodland Habitat Action Plan (HAP) are addressed in the England Native Woodland Partnership.
2. However many, especially those related to non-woodland habitats that occur inside and outside forests and which may be affected by forest management or afforestation practices, have no clear reporting process into the England Forestry Strategy, or into the England Forestry Forum.
3. Forestry policy and practise clearly have implications on BAP delivery. Regional strategies/audits and other emerging procedures will require clarity and transparent targets to which the England Forestry Strategy can contribute. A short assessment of the issues, identification of current initiatives and ideas for new work would benefit from scrutiny by the Forum.
4. A working group is proposed to progress the role of forestry in delivering the UK BAP.

Working Group Aims

5. The following issues have been identified:
 - Conservation of species linked with forest types not covered by the UK Native Woodland HAPs.
 - Management of important open-ground habitats and species that occur within open spaces in forests.
 - The importance of ensuring better protection for open ground habitats and species from inappropriate afforestation.
 - Restoration of important open-ground habitats (e.g. heathland and peatland) through forest restructuring or removal.
6. The intention is to help provide clear guidance and advice to identify best practice relating to forestry which could affect priority habitats. Such activities as forest removal and areas where there should be a presumption against Forestry Commission approval or grant aid for new planting could be included.



Approach and Timetable

7. Establish a small group to detail the brief. At present DEFRA, English Nature, the National Trust and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds have indicated an interest in the proposed group. The membership of the group would be offered to all members of the Forum. The RSPB is willing to provide the facilitation. Most work would be done by e-mail with one or two workshops.
8. If the group is established immediately after the Forum meeting on 15 October, then a report would be produced to present to the Minister at the following meeting.

John Waldon
May 2001