

New Forest

Fact File

TIMBER INCLOSURES

ECOLOGY AND MANAGEMENT

The inclosures are the timber plantations of the New Forest and those that survive today date from 1700 to 1968. They fall into two legal categories: Statutory Inclosures made under the New Forest Acts of 1698, 1808 and 1851 and the Verderer's Inclosures made under the New Forest Act 1949. Together they comprise one third (8,500 hectares) of the New Forest.

Both broadleaf and conifer species are grown in the inclosures ranging from new plantations to those established in the early 1800s. At present 47% of trees are broadleaves and 53% are conifers.

Some inclosures contain fragments of pre-inclosed woodland, valley mires and heathland habitats. The Pre-Inclosures Woodlands (PIWs) contain old oak and beech pasture woodlands which have survived behind the fences since the 16th and 18th centuries. These woods are ecologically similar to the "A & O" woods on the Open Forest but their age structure has been influenced by their inclosure which has left them ungrazed.

The Statutory Inclosures are the only areas in the New Forest where commercial forestry is practiced. These are fenced to keep commoner's animals out. When the perambulation of the New Forest as a whole was enclosed in 1965 the density of stock on the Forest increased dramatically and there was much penetration of inclosures by stock. This led to a decision by the Forestry Commission in 1969 to open up some of the inclosures for the grazing of stock to reduce the burden of stock control.

The ecological effects of opening up inclosures was dramatic, but it was not until 1983 that this was recognised by the Forestry Commission and a policy of ejecting stock and repairing fences was adopted. Grazing of commoners' stock in the inclosures has dramatically reduced the once rich flora of the forest rides and plantation undergrowth. This in turn has effected butterfly, moth and other nectar feeding and shrub-dwelling insect populations.

Grazing of the Forest inclosures by commoners' stock was also thought to be linked to a decline in roe deer numbers during the 1960s. Roe deer feed mainly on climbers and low shrubs, which were removed by pony browsing, and are not very tolerant of other large herbivores. A reduction in small mammal populations occurred as a result of loss of habitat and this adversely affected buzzard populations. An insect which may have benefited from heavy grazing by commoners' stock is the wood ant (*Formica rufa*) which builds enormous nest mounds of organic debris usually in conifer plantations. The mounds are situated where they benefit from direct sunlight and therefore would not favour dense ride-side scrub.

Conservation is an important part of inclosure management. The New Forest Management Plan (2001-2006) identified key areas for habitat restoration to heathland, mire and pasture woodland. This will increase the area of grazing for depastured stock. Additionally, plantations managed in line with the UK Forestry Standard (1998) will have more open space and wider rides which favour butterflies and moths, and rarer plants that were once found there. Adoption of natural regeneration techniques, extended rotations and a wider range of thinning intensities help create woods with much greater diversity of micro and macro habitats.

Forest Design Plans

The Inclosure Management Plan applies to the timber inclosures on the Crown Lands, an area of 8,500 hectares. Each inclosure has a design plan, called a Forest Design Plan, which were developed and agreed by a Forest Design Plan Forum and through public meetings under the title 'New Forest – New Future'. These Forest Design Plans herald a change in emphasis towards woodlands that provide bio-diversity to enhance the environment; public access and recreation; woodlands which contribute to local employment, support industries using wood products and woodlands which recognise archaeological and cultural features.

Under the Inclosure Management Plan, 800ha will be reverted back to heathland, 1000ha will be restored to near natural and ancient and ornamental pasture and the proportion of broadleaf trees such as beech and oak will gradually increase from 37% to 52%.

Operational Planning

It is the responsibility of the Forestry Commission staff to undertake an **Operational Site Assessment** (OSA) prior to the commencement of any major operation. This assessment details the work to be undertaken and considers the likely impact the project may have upon the wildlife, heritage and recreation interests for the area. Where potentially adverse impacts are identified measures are taken to mitigate those impacts.

All the Forestry Commission's forests have been certified as sustainable by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 1993.

Source: Management Plan for the Crown Lands of the New Forest. 2001-2006. Forestry Commission.



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