

A sustainable future for planted forests



Confor supported a major event which attempted to find answers to some of the most pressing issues facing forestry across the globe.

Andrew Heald reports

How do we find the balance between conserving and restoring the world's forests for social and environmental reasons, while also increasing sustainable production of forest products for a range of uses? How can we do this while also adapting to climate change and increasing the resilience of our landscapes? And what role can plantation forestry play in meeting the increasing demand for forest products?

These were the questions which the WWF's New Generation Plantations (NGP) platform tried to answer as it celebrated its 10th anniversary in London and Edinburgh on June 21-25. The celebration and annual Encounter was co-hosted by WWF-UK and the UK Forestry Commission, with support from Confor.

The NGP platform aims to share and promote the highest standards of plantation management around the world. It is based on the premise that well-managed planted forests in the right places can help conserve biodiversity and meet human needs, while contributing to sustainable economic growth and local livelihoods.

While the event celebrated the achievements of the past 10 years, the focus was also on the future, and how can we sustainably expand forestry plantations, and how can we do that quickly, a key issue for the UK as well as elsewhere in the world.

One of NGP's biggest success has been developing trust and transparency between the participants. International pulp and paper companies like UPM,

Mondi, Stora, Fibria and Navigator are normally business rivals competing for market share but within NGP they cooperate and share sustainability challenges and most importantly sustainability solutions.

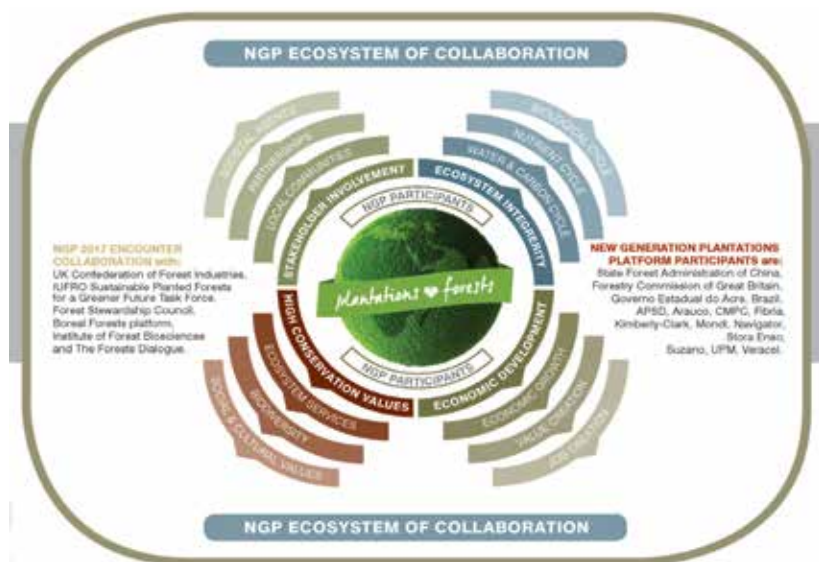
Andrew Heald of Confor who has worked with NGP since 2010, said "We wanted to bring NGP back to the UK, so that we could show forestry stakeholders, that the challenges facing plantation development here, are common around the world."

Estevao Braga of Brazilian pulp company Suzano said that "NGP is the best opportunity to show society that well managed plantations, can bring substantial benefits both socially and environmentally, and fight climate change, in a way that few other industries can do. This meeting is a great opportunity to share best practices with leading plantation companies from all over the world."

The NGP meeting was spread out over several days in London, Edinburgh and a field trip to Perthshire, to enable as many people as possible to participate and learn from the 10 years of hard work around the world.

Tim Liddon of Tilhill who attended the Edinburgh events said that "It was in many ways comforting and disappointing at the same time, that many nations represented in NGP are still coming up against similar issues that we have been through in our relatively recent history of our industry in Scotland."

There are a number of similar international forestry related conferences and dialogue platforms, but NGP is unique in that it focuses so heavily on partici-





mands, government, society, foresters and politicians and NGOs need to be involved in this.”

Andrew Heald summarized the week by saying “Often in our daily work, we think our challenges are unique and focused on our local forest our landscape. NGP is a great opportunity to learn and realise that our challenges are global, and also that our impact and our forestry footprint is global. As WWF points out, we need a lot more sustainable plantations, and we need them now.”

The final stop on the field visit was the Blair Atholl Estate, made famous by the “Planting Dukes” of Atholl in the 18th and 19th Century, who used newly imported tree species to establish their extensive planted forests, and to diversify their estate. Many of the international participants were surprised to see the growth rates and size of many of the conifers on the estate.

Two hundred years later, the challenges we face are similar, a growing population and demand for raw materials but compounded by climate change and an international spread of pests and diseases.

In the current uncertain UK climate both politically and environmental, there remains some key certainties, the global demand for timber and forest products is rising and the UK remains heavily dependent on imports. Almost everyone agrees that we should plant more trees, the challenge is where will they be planted and how will this be regulated and supported.

The public perception of plantation forestry in the UK, has been framed by the practices of the 1970’s and 80’s. Today’s new generation of plantations are a very different proposition, comprising a diversity of species and ages, with conservation areas, restored riparian vegetation and recreational opportunities as well as timber production. There’s also increased focus on sharing the benefits with communities and providing high-quality rural employment.

The value of projects like NGP is that these challenges and their solutions are common all over the world, by sharing best practice and using NGP to help facilitate discussions with key stakeholders, we can demonstrate why the UK needs to take much greater responsibility for growing the forest products we all use.

pation and engagement. There can’t be many events which attract such a diverse audience from Scottish Cabinet Secretaries to Westminster MPs and from major international organisations like WWF and World Resources Institute to the Community Woodlands Association and the Woodland Trust, as well as a range of Confor members.

The Forestry Commission helped organise many of the week long activities, and their Chairman Sir Harry Studholme at the Westminster reception said that “The challenge we face everywhere is getting trees in the ground. Against a background of finding money, high land prices, issues of landscape and misinformation about the differences between fast growing species and planting native forests, there is much to do. If we are to meet global timber de-

Top: Craigvinean Forest
Above (l to r): Julia Young, WWF’s Global Forest and Trade Network; Dave Gibson, IFC, part of World Bank; Fiona Wheatley of Marks and Spencer
Below: Cameron Maxwell, Forestry Commission Conservator, and Rod Taylor, Head of Forestry at World Resources Institute



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- WWF NGP – 10 things we need to do next
<http://newgenerationplantations.org/multimedia/file/d5c452d6-66cd-11e7-a380-005056986313>
- NGP Blog from the meeting
<http://newgenerationplantations.org/en/studytours/11>
- WWF International – article on working forests and need for plantations
http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/deforestation/forest_sector_transformation/better_production/index.cfm
- Good summary of NGP activities - NGP Video
www.youtube.com/watch?v=VMV8wu8eGGs&feature=youtu.be&list=PL_YdtxsDh9Td4L7DpD1IBXu6Y17Wd-bNht