18th January 2019

Evidence to the Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee Inquiry into Biodiversity

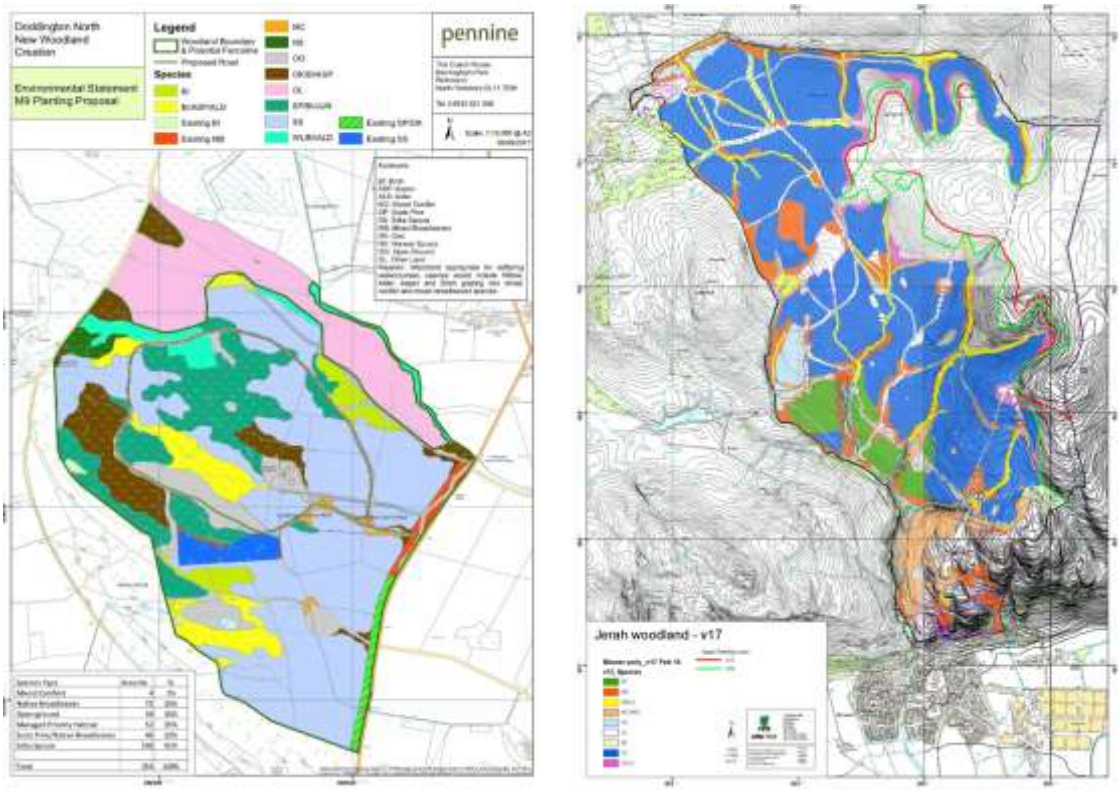
Confor: Promoting forestry and wood (www.confor.org.uk) is a not-for-profit membership organisation which represents 1500 sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses across the UK. Confor represents the whole forestry and wood supply chain and focuses on strategic issues vital to the success and sustainable future of the sector.

In Wales, Confor works with businesses, Assembly Members, government departments and relevant stakeholders to increase understanding of forestry and timber and to remove barriers to new woodland creation in Wales, resulting in larger, healthier, better-managed and more productive forests and woodlands for multiple benefits.

The biodiversity value and potential of forestry

Forestry quickly diversifies an agricultural landscape, and restores a historically-deforested landscape closer to its natural state while remaining economically productive.

Under the UK Forestry Standard, all new productive forests, as well as existing forests when they are restocked, are required to include a minimum of 25% of



Two new productive forestry projects: Doddington North Moor in England (2017, left) and Jerah in Scotland (2015, right), showing the diverse habitat network created by a new forest.

their area managed for biodiversity. This includes a minimum of 10% diverse conifer, 10% open space and 5% native broadleaves.

In reality, site constraints usually mean the biodiversity element is larger than this. New forests planted in England and Scotland in recent years (such as the examples above) have allocated 40-50% of the site to biodiversity management. Forests in Wales would conform to the same standards, but unfortunately no applications to plant new productive forests of any size have been approved in Wales for many decades.

The majority of timber-producing woodlands in Wales are independently certified to the FSC standard, developed in conjunction with WWF and RSPB.

Productive forests create some of our richest micro-habitats including:

- **Edge habitat:** Margins, where one land use meets another, are some of the richest and most important for wildlife. As the maps above show, modern forests create numerous edges between forests of different ages and species and with open areas.
- **Deadwood:** forest management for timber production accelerates the accumulation of deadwood in the forest by leaving a proportion of standing and fallen deadwood at thinning and harvesting.
- **Dynamic habitat:** A forest's coupes succeed quickly from one habitat-type to another: 'pseudo scrub' of young trees, closed-canopy creates deep shelter, thinning creates light, clearfell creates open areas.
- **Freshwater habitat:** A pond, stream or wetland in an agricultural environment is subjected to annual pressures and continuous risk of disturbance or pollution from humans, animals or chemicals. Within a forest, they are hidden and protected from interference for decades at a time, and are able to develop as rich wildlife habitats. At the forest design stage, measures must be taken to enhance their value and improve water quality, by keeping forestry activity at least 10 metres from water features, and implementing measures such as blocking former agricultural drains which accelerate run-off.
- **Native woodland:** In addition to a minimum of 5% new native woodland creation (over 1,000 native trees for every 10 hectares productive planting[1]), any existing native woodland on the site is brought under professional forest management. This ensures that any invasive species such as rhododendron are tackled, and signs of pests or disease identified. The forester will also have the experience and expertise to identify opportunities to enhance the native woodland's biodiversity value of which the owner might have been unaware.

There is a perception that productive conifer is of lower biodiversity value than native woodland. This is not the case for woodlands of similar age, and, given

[1] 10 hectares of productive conifer would require a 13.3 ha site to include a 25% diverse element; this would include 0.6 ha native broadleaves, which planted at 1,500 trees per hectare is 1000 trees.

the poor management of many native woodlands at present, is often not the case even for ancient woodland. A 2003 UK-wide study recorded 623 different species in upland Sitka spruce forests, a higher total than was recorded in the Oak and comparable with the figures recorded for the Scots pine in the study.

The single biggest threat to biodiversity, both worldwide and in Wales, is climate change. Growing trees and locking up the timber in long-term products such as buildings is the only effective technology we possess for removing carbon from the air, an essential component of any zero-carbon strategy.

How could the Welsh Government's proposed Public Goods scheme, set out in Brexit and Our Land, be applied to restore biodiversity?

While the initial costs of this at the design stage of the forest are covered by planting grants, when these are available, at present any subsequent biodiversity benefits must be met out of the business income of the forest.

Providing more sustained support for these benefits under the Public Goods Scheme would:

- ensure that forestry is not economically disadvantaged by competing land uses which do not provide this added value;
- develop an understanding by both the forest owner and the wider public of the value of the biodiversity in forests, by giving it financial value;
- provide opportunities to monitor and research the value of the biodiversity in productive forests, which at present is poorly documented;
- provide opportunities to create additional value on forestry sites by providing additional funding for specific biodiversity objectives which would not be included in ordinary forest management: for example, grey squirrel control or management of rivers or native woodland.

Large areas of woodland in Wales are at present unmanaged and unproductive. These are largely native and ancient woodland, and should be some of Wales' most valuable biodiversity sites. However, their low economic value means their biodiversity value is reducing due to undermanagement and in many cases the woodland itself is slowly disappearing. For woodlands like these, funding for biodiversity under the public goods scheme is essential to bring them back into professional management and growing biodiversity value.

It is important in considering the proposed public good scheme that an owner or land manager can blend both public good and economic value. In turn the owner should be able to access a blend of economic resilience support and public good payments. This combined access would for example allows projects initially designed to produce productive timber to enlarge their biodiversity element and manage that segment of the forest to a higher standard.

How could the various existing Welsh Government policies and legislation for biodiversity restoration be applied in the design and implementation of the proposed Public Goods scheme?

What lessons can be learned from the Glastir Monitoring and Evaluation Programme (GMEP) to ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of schemes to support the restoration of biodiversity. How should the new Environment and Rural Affairs Monitoring and Modelling Programme (ERAMMP) be designed and implemented effectively for this purpose?