

Natural Capital Trade-offs In Afforested Peatlands

Why we are doing this?

This data collection is part of a project to synthesise evidence around afforested peatlands and their future management. The project is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council through their Valuing Nature programme (<http://valuing-nature.net/>). To identify where the focus should be and guide future research we are keen to get the opinions of stakeholders on the key open questions. The project won't be able to provide definitive answers to all questions but aims to establish the current state of knowledge and guide where future, more detailed, research is required.

Who are we sending this to?

We are interested in the opinions of everybody with a stake in the future of peatland forestry and afforested peatlands in the UK. We are sending this request to a wide variety of participants with a professional interest in forestry, peat and peatlands. These include people in the Forestry Commission, private forestry industry, peatland conservation organisations, statutory bodies, land owners and land managers. Assembling a definitive list of such people is, of course, difficult so please feel free to forward this to others inside or outside your organisation who might have a view on the subject. In some cases we have sent this request to generic organisational email addresses and we would be grateful if you could forward this to whoever would be most appropriate within your organisation. If you have received this invitation but do not work on afforested peatland (e.g. you work on forestry but only on mineral soils or on peatlands but not afforested peatlands), please ignore this invitation. For this survey we are only interested in the views of people with professional interests in this subject matter, not members of the public (which is not to say that we think public views are unimportant). The project is about the situation in the UK so we are only looking for participants from the UK or with interests in UK peatlands. Participation is entirely optional, you are free to participate or not as you wish. Once you have contributed it will not be possible to remove your contribution as responses will not be identifiable to an individual contributor.

What do we want you to do?

We want to identify the most important open questions where answers are needed in order to shape the future of afforested peatlands. What evidence would help your organisation plan for the future of peatland forestry or forest-to-bog restoration? What questions would you like researchers to address? The project is funded through a funding scheme that focuses on 'natural capital' which in this context would include issues like carbon storage, biodiversity, water quality etc. However we are also interested in broader considerations including the economics of forestry on peat. You can nominate as many or as few questions as you wish.

How will the process work?

This will be a *two-stage process*. In the first stage we are making an open call for questions to everybody we have identified as potentially having an interest in this topic. Please enter your responses using the link provided. The form simply contains a box where you can enter what you think are the most important question(s). The survey is anonymous and we will not collect any data about you which you do not directly provide (we won't log IP addresses or any other identifying

information). To allow us to assess the representativeness of respondents the form includes a box which asks you what type of organisation you represent; please choose the closest match. If you would rather not say, the form also includes a 'prefer not to say' box. We will collate the questions you nominate to take forward into the second round. At this stage we will edit questions for clarity and consistency of formatting and will combine questions which are the same or similar to avoid replication. We expect to take all questions which meet our criteria through to the second stage of voting but reserve the right to remove or edit any questions. In the second stage we will ask the same group of contributors to vote on all of the nominated questions. We will distribute a second online survey and ask you to vote for the questions you consider most important. You *can* vote for your own questions but please only vote once. When this is complete we will collate all the results and identify the questions which are considered to be the highest priorities by the community.

What makes a good question?

Sutherland et al. (2011 *Methods Ecol Evol*) propose the following features which would constitute a useful question: (i) answerable through a realistic research design, (ii) that have a factual answer that does not depend on value judgments, (iii) that address important gaps in knowledge, (iv) of a spatial and temporal scope that reasonably could be addressed by a research team, (v) not formulated as a general topic area, (vi) not answerable with *it all depends*, (vii) except if questioning a precise statement should not be answerable by *yes* or *no* (i.e. not 'is X better for biodiversity than Y'), (viii) if related to impact and interventions, contains a subject, an intervention, and a measurable outcome. We believe these are useful principles for this study.

What will we do with the information?

We will use this information to help understand what stakeholders view as the most important questions for the future of afforested peat. We have been commissioned to write a report on this work for the NERC Valuing Nature programme which will be made available on their website. We also intend to use this information to help guide the ongoing IUCN commission of enquiry on UK peatlands and may write academic papers using the results. If you provide us with an email address we will be happy to keep you informed about these outputs. The role of contributors will be acknowledged in all outputs but the requirement for anonymous responses means this will necessarily be on a collective basis.

Having problems with the form?

Our experience suggests that google forms may be blocked by some institutional IT systems. If you have this problem you can provide your information directly by email: just send your answer to the question 'When deciding the future of afforested peatlands, what is the most important outstanding question?' to Dr Richard Payne at richard.payne@york.ac.uk Information submitted in this way will clearly not be anonymous on receipt but will be otherwise treated as for other responses.

Any questions?

If you have any questions which are not covered by the information above please contact Dr Richard Payne on richard.payne@york.ac.uk.