

# Environment and Sustainability Committee

## Inquiry into Sustainable Land Management

### Response from Coed Cadw (The Woodland Trust)

Coed Cadw (The Woodland Trust) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Our role is to champion native woodland and trees, working with others to ensure woods and trees are valued and protected. As well as caring for our own woods, we work with other landowners to do the same on their land, and we lobby and campaign for woods and trees in general.

We have 300,000 members and supporters spread throughout the UK and over 1,200 sites in our care covering approximately 23,000 hectares. These include over 130 sites in Wales, with a total area of 2,624 hectares.

Trees and woodlands can help illustrate, and make understandable, the principles of sustainable development. They demonstrate the delivery of multiple benefits across the full range of sustainable development objectives, and this is supported by the availability of an established independent sustainable woodland management standard and audit process.

### **What do we want sustainable land management in Wales to look like and what outcomes do we want to deliver in the short, medium and longer term?**

In relation to trees and woodland we think there are two requirements:-

#### **a) The sustainable management of the existing woodland resource for multiple benefits and to ensure future resilience.**

Trees and woodland deliver the full range of sustainable development outcomes. These go far beyond the forests and include positive benefits across the landscape, contributing to farming, water supply, health and recreation, nature conservation, and community quality of life and economic development.

Within the forest, the requirements for the sustainable management of woodland are defined in the standard created by the Forestry Stewardship Council and incorporated by Government into the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS)<sup>1</sup>. The Woodland Trust's estate is managed in compliance with this Standard, as is the Welsh Government's woodland estate and that of many other organizations and companies.

This Standard provides an example of how sustainable land management can be defined and audited. . For example, it address how timber can be produced on a sustained basis and the need to protect ancient woodland – our most precious

resource for woodland wildlife – and move towards the restoration of ancient woodlands that were damaged by conversion to conifer plantations.

**b) The identification, control and mitigation of threats that could destroy or cause irreversible decline in the resource**

We need to ensure our trees and woods, and the wildlife, services and products dependent on them, are resilient enough to cope with the challenges they face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Our ancient woods are small and fragmented, vulnerable to the effects of surrounding land use such as intensive farming, industry and urban sprawl. They are often isolated, making it harder for wildlife to move across the landscape. Woodland wildlife is also being impoverished by the impact of diffuse pollution, for example leading to soil acidification and nitrogen enrichment.

None of these impacts can be effectively addressed by on-site woodland management measures and more strategic approaches are required including substantive new habitat creation.

Climate change is the biggest generator of uncertainty and disruption – it may alter the natural ranges of our trees, and put them out of step with other species that depend on them. More extreme weather events like flooding and drought will affect vulnerable tree species.

More new pests and diseases are reaching our shores, mainly because of global trade, some – like ash dieback – severely affecting our native trees, and others including Phytophthora ramorum are having serious economic impact by destroying important timber trees. To make things worse, climate change may create more favorable conditions for some pests and diseases.

Direct damage to ancient trees and woodlands continues to arise from new housing and transport schemes. The wildlife that is characteristic of these habitats cannot reliably be translocated or re-established by using biodiversity offsetting to create new habitat elsewhere.

A comprehensive summary of the state of British Woodland was published by the Woodland Trust in 2012.<sup>2</sup>

**1. What are the barriers preventing us from delivering these outcomes now?**

In our view the main barriers to sustainable woodland management include the following issues. These also widely apply to other ecosystems:–

**a) the desire for single purpose management, especially over-intensive exploitation**

Sustainable management requires a multi-objective approach. For example, the creation of single species plantations managed on a clear-fell and replant cycle for purely economic objectives is not sustainable. Such management creates vulnerabilities to pests and diseases and damages water quality and wildlife habitat. We believe it is important to re-state the commitment to multipurpose forestry laid out in the Woodlands for Wales Strategy first published by the Welsh Government in 2001 and renewed in 2009<sup>3</sup> and to re-invigorate the demonstration of this commitment on the Welsh Government forest estate.

Multi objective management is not delivered by crude zoning or prioritization, nor does it justify the marginalization of environmental concerns. We have concerns that the targeting of Glastir grants is failing for these and other reasons.

We think it is important to encourage multi-purpose management of farms whilst acknowledging the vital importance of food production. This will encourage farm business diversification and increase farming resilience.

#### **b) widespread threats to woodland which cannot be addressed by on-site management**

Landscape and wildlife is changing in response to drivers such as climate change, the intensification and simplification farming land use, and ubiquitous pollution that has lead to rising soil nitrogen levels and acidity. Much of our valued and characteristic wildlife was a product of pre mechanization farming practices within a relatively unpolluted environment. Defining success in terms of a widespread return to or perpetuation of those landscapes and species seems unhelpful.

We need to find a way to work with the forces driving land use. In Wales these are predominantly linked to agricultural practice. However agricultural practice is not just about the techniques and technologies of land management, it is about the social fabric of agricultural and rural communities, the cultural identity created by farming, particularly in upland Wales (i.e. almost all of Wales) and the political impetus such identity creates.

#### **c) superficial attractions of “more management” on one hand and “re-wilding” on the other**

We wonder if both sides in the recent “Monbiot v. ‘traditional conservation sector” debate in Wales have missed the point. The traditional conservation sector as Monbiot pointed out, appears wedded to the belief that if only there was more land management for conservation objectives all will be well, whilst Monbiot subscribes to a wilderness myth which is at best insensitive to the social objectives of sustainable development.

## **2. How do we overcome these challenges?**

We believe that to create diverse, resilient landscapes that will continue to provide for people and wildlife, we need to four complementary strands of action pursued in combination:

- *Conserve the best.* Ancient woods cover only around 2 per cent of the UK and account for about a fifth of all woodland . There must be no further loss of this most precious resource, so we campaign against development that would destroy or severely damage ancient woodland.
- *Restore degraded habitats.* We work with partners and other landowners to bring ancient woods planted with non-native conifers into programmes of gradual restoration
- *Create new habitat.* . Planting next to and between existing ancient woods and other important habitats buffers them from neighbouring land use, and creates links between them, making landscapes easier for wildlife to move across.
- *Engage with the public and landowners.* Public support is essential and is repeatedly indicated through public opinions and actions. Farmers manage 80% of Wales and their involvement is crucial. We believe a sustained investment in incentivizing and facilitating voluntary action is crucial. We lobby for more native woodland creation, including incentives, and work to advise other landowners. We also provide packs of free trees to communities and schools to create their own hedges and copses.

All four strategies are essential, and are mutually supportive. These principles can equally apply to other habitats. There is a challenge to the environmental sector to invest more in the latter two strategies rather than over rely on legislative and regulatory measures. Whilst the latter are vital they are not sufficient as the persistent downward decline of wildlife has shown.

We need to think of biodiversity as an emergent property of the predominant land use, rather than solely pockets of protected habitat. This means actively engaging with land use and the preoccupations and concerns of those directing that land management. That implies that the conservation of the landscapes of the past cannot define what success will look like in the future.

The precautionary principle is often used as an argument to prevent action whereas it is properly defined as the willingness to take action which could prevent an environmental harm ahead of the acquisition of full evidence. It has three elements, the threat of harm, the uncertainty of incomplete knowledge, and the responsibility to take action. It implies we should proactively seek to change the landscape to build resilience and sustainably deliver ecosystem services. Increased woodland cover is one way of doing this.

We support the sustainable development task given to Natural Resources Wales and the challenge to them to achieve environmental protection whilst delivering social and economic outcomes. We believe it is crucial they demonstrate success in this in their approach to managing the Welsh Government's forestry estate.

### **3. What are the main policy drivers and how can these be shaped to overcome these challenges?**

- A landscape / ecosystem wide approach –we suggest one based on whole river catchments as the management unit. Such an approach necessarily supports co-operation across land ownerships.
- A drive to guarantee space for wildlife. Ie more habitat on the farmed landscape. This requires a reversal of the landscape simplification that has systemically removed small pockets of habitat and unmanaged land from all components of the landscape.
- A definition of success that incorporates sustainability in the face of non-reversible environmental change.
- The introduction of the concept of resilience as an important policy outcome. This requires more risk management, diversification and multi objective land management.
- An agri-environment scheme that works with the forces driving land use decisions, incentivizing voluntary participation and facilitated by a professional field advisory service. We fear that Glastir has succumbed to rule driven process that has marginalized the judgment of professional land managers, including farmers, and does not provide the necessary flexibility for complex multi-objective land management decision making.
- Unlocking the Potential of the Uplands. We think further work is needed on upland policy and we commend the earlier Upland Framework document published by CCW in 2007 <sup>3</sup>.
- The SSSI resource. Some 20% of Wales is scheduled as SSSI. SSSIs can only be successful within a wider landscape which is managed in a complementary way. We suggest that farms which include SSSIs should be prioritized for entry into the higher level agri-environment scheme.

### **4. How we define the key ecosystems and ecosystem services in a way that makes sense for Wales?**

We support ecosystem services principle as basis for guiding land management strategies at a landscape scale. This recognised that food production, forestry products, water supply and biodiversity are all ecosystem services, and that multiple ecosystem services need to be delivered from same landscape. Attempts to impose

simplification through prioritising may be counter-productive and lead to damaging outcomes.

Ecosystem services should not be shorthand for maintaining the status quo in current land management. The value of ecosystem services is not necessarily maximised by maintaining the current landscape. In some cases, for example on peat rich soils, carbon storage and water management for instance may well be maximised by maintaining open ground, in others however conversion to woodland may deliver higher levels of ecosystem service benefit.

Mechanism for payments for ecosystems services are already in place. It can reasonably be seen as the role of government at either central or local level to ensure the provision of public goods either through direct or indirect payment or through regulation or fiscal incentive. We accept this mechanism for roads, schools, hospitals, public parks, the police and fire services, dustbin collection, agri-environment schemes and so on. The new generation of public goods linked to the natural environment i.e. ecosystem services, has arisen at a time of fiscal austerity and a particular political philosophy, and this may have given rise to the apparent need to generate 'markets' for these services, rather than accept that they are a public good for which a range of mechanisms, including direct payment by government, is necessary.

## **5. How we develop a baseline from which to measure progress? This includes how we collect, coordinate and use data to support sustainable land management in Wales.**

An example of successful and valuable long term surveillance monitoring is provided by the report on long term ecological change in British Woodland published by English Nature in 2007.<sup>5</sup> This illustrated the value in being able to return and rigorously resurvey sites where monitoring plots had been established 30 years earlier. We suggest that more of such long term monitoring is established based on sampling that is independent of whatever land or species management initiative is current.

We wonder whether the local Biodiversity Record Centres in Wales can be tasked with responsibility for such a programme, given suitable academic support. It would require a more strategic approach to data gathering than is currently routine.

## **6. What incentives we can provide land managers to develop sustainable practices, and in particular, any new sources of investment we can attract to support these?**

- a) Agri-env scheme that supports habitat maintenance and habitat creation to reverse landscape simplification, but in ways which work with the forces that drive land use. The Pontbren project illustrates how this can be achieved. . Much of this can be

- achieved by a simple small capital grant scheme that would run in parallel with Glastir to support small scale capital works across the farm over a 5 year period,
- b) Within Glastir itself, the desirability to support multiple objectives does not remove the need to give due priority to vital environmental measures and to target grant aid at meeting those vital requirements. We share concerns expressed by Wales Environment Link that Glastir, including Glastir Woodland Management is failing to adequately support the most environmentally necessary activities and risks distributing funding too widely and too thinly. We appreciate that the Welsh Government's view is that Tir Gofal was unsustainably expensive but we do think Tir Gofal achieved some significant successes and it is a pity that it has not been more effectively monitored and assessed.
  - c) Field advisory service. We think there is currently inadequate provision of expert advice and this is much preferable to a reliance on desk based decision making based on scoring schemes and maps. Many organisations who can contribute under a framework managed by Government. The need is for flexibility derived from on-site decision making between the landowner and a suitably experienced adviser.
  - d) Field based facilitators in each river catchment with a vision for improvement, flexibility in approach and able to direct funding at key activities.

## **7. How we ensure that our sustainable land management policies maintain vibrant rural communities and attract new entrants into the land-based sector?**

We think diversification in land management objectives and income sources in both farming and forestry is important. This includes developing mechanisms to reward land managers for delivering the public benefits implicit in non-market ecosystem services including water supply, flood control, carbon emission mitigation and landscape quality and biodiversity. It also includes encouraging business diversification for example into tourism, and renewable energy.

Grants have an important part to play in encouraging this diversification. An example is a farm in Monmouthshire that include SSSI woodland a sheep enterprise and a firewood business. Grant received from NRW is important in enabling conservation management of the SSSI woodland but is matched by income from a small firewood business that this work supplies. The farm has been supported by Tir Gofal and the combination of adjoining farm and woodland under suitable management has delivered very high wildlife interest. The future of this is now threatened by the uncertainty over entry into Glastir advanced.

We would be pleased to facilitate a visit by the Committee to this farm.

## **8. The most appropriate geographical scale(s) at which we should be delivering sustainable land management policies and practices in Wales?**

We suggest that river basins and river catchments offer the most appropriate range of scales and fit with the importance of water management objectives.

### **9. If there are key actions we can take to deliver short-term 'quick wins' and the actions we should be taking for the long-term**

We suggest employing experienced land managers as catchment based facilitators. Their task would be to provide the vision, leadership and drive to work with landowners to realise multiple objective catchment improvement plans. They would provide flexible support to landowners to promote take up of Glastir and other existing schemes but would also have funds to direct at their discretion. These roles could be hosted by a variety of organisations and partnerships and we would be interested in participating in a pilot scheme.

1. The UK Woodland Assurance Standard. <http://ukwas.org.uk/about-us/purpose>
2. The State of the UK's Forests, Woods and Trees: Perspectives from the sector (2011). The Woodland Trust. <http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/en/about-us/publications/Documents/state-of-the-uks-forest-report-4865.pdf>
3. Woodlands for Wales. The Welsh Assembly Government's Strategy for Woodlands and Trees (2009). Forestry Commission Wales 2009. [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/EnglishWfWstrategy.pdf/\\$FILE/EnglishWfWstrategy.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/EnglishWfWstrategy.pdf/$FILE/EnglishWfWstrategy.pdf)
4. A Framework To Set Conservation Objectives And Achieve Favourable Condition In Welsh Upland SSSIs. CCW 2007. <http://www.ccg.gov.uk/pdf/Upland%20Framework%201.pdf>
5. Long Term Ecological Change in British Woodland (1971–2001). English Nature in 2007 <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/94019>