

Notes of a meeting of the Woodlands and Forestry Group, Biodiversity SW, held at the EA meeting centre on 19 November 2008.

Present: Justin Milward, WT(Chair), Chris Roberts, ConFor, Mick Bracken, SW Forests, Brian Muelaner, NT, Richard Knott, EA Devon & Cornwall team, Simon Tame NE Devon & Cornwall, Elly Andison, Regional Conservation Principal Officer EA, Deborah Elton, FC

Apologies: Naomi Brookes, BSW, Steve Russell, Wilts CC, Colin Hawke, Cornwall CC, Sally Glass, WT.

1. **Introductions.** All introduced themselves, JM explained that Naomi was ill, DE had agreed to take notes. The EA staff were welcomed especially.
2. **Minutes of previous meeting.** Agreed. Matters arising:
 - 1) Elly has replaced Emma-Rose Herrera
 - 2) Regional HAP targets for woodland. NB had agreed the NE proposals which align with those in RSS. All agreed that targets for new woodland very difficult to realise in present economic climate. CR also expressed concern that the complexities of grant and felling licence process now having negative impact on industry - with likely knock on effect on skills and future achievement of targets for eg restoration.
 - 3) RSS – proposed changes by Government. JM highlighted that the woods and forests para had been strengthened by inclusion of specific reference to protection of ancient and veteran trees.

3. Future of the group

JM outlined the issues: concern that attendance had been declining, need to check whether group still serves a useful purpose and to clarify what that should be; it had been one of several habitat sub groups established to further SW Biodiversity Implementation Plan and pick up actions not being undertaken elsewhere, but was it still working well? General discussion included the following points: Steve Russell favoured continuation; Sally Glass ditto so long as specific outcomes; MB useful for keeping abreast of new developments/current topics; BM the practice of reporting activity seemed to have disappeared; DE said that FC concerned that there were perhaps too many groups with some overlap between them and hard for organisations to maintain representation and keep them going. This could be reviewed as part of ‘refresh’ of the Regional Woodland and Forestry Framework implementation plan that is due by April 09; CR felt that some duplication with AW working group. A number liked the idea of an e-group for contact (serviced by ?), together with specific projects running when required – as the wet woodland one under discussion. An annual get together with a specific focus was also suggested. JM also mentioned a paper from Pete Brotherton at NE suggesting a shift in approach to biodiversity conservation, which might be relevant.

Action: JM to take these ideas back to NB and BSW Steering Group on 5 Dec and compare notes with other working group Chairs.

4. Case studies.

Those provided by WT (PAWS restoration in Bovey Valley) and Steve Russell (Oakfrith Wood community project) were circulated. Agreed they could/should reflect the contributing organisation’s standpoint, even if this wasn’t always shared by others in the group – the website would make this clear. Others suggested to provide a ‘balanced’ suite reflecting what BSW wants to achieve: Cotehele orchard project, NT (Brian to produce); Stanway estate in Cotswolds if possible to provide private owner perspective in AWP (as per article in SW Woodland News). DE thought that case studies being prepared for RWFF review could also be used or adapted for use. Need for NB to provide guidance for length and format to go onto website and to identify ‘gaps’ to be filled.

5. Wet Woodland project – current initiatives

- i) Richard Knott outlined a project to scope possibilities for establishing flood plain woodland in Devon and possibly beyond (see attached paper). £10k had been made available for scoping this f/y. This would look at extent and distribution of wet woodland (using existing data), compare with floodplain mapping to decide where to target restoration and creation of fpw, subject to future funding from partners (and EA?). Anticipate that NE and FC would be very involved in delivery side.

- ii) Dartmoor NPA already have a wet woodland project under 'Action for Wildlife' led by Frances Cooper. This is BAP focussed, to improve management of wet woods in two areas in NW and SE (Manaton area). Approaching landowners, seeking to use ESA and HLS schemes, working with NE. Their policy based on advice from Keith Kirby regarding conservation management – limited intervention desirable, eg fencing to reduce grazing pressure, allowing degraded wet grassland (rhos pasture) to revert to wet woodland.
- iii) DE mentioned that this year's Woodland Creation Grant scoring had included 'extra points' for planting within erodable soil zones in Catchment Sensitive Areas, as a trial. However it was not known yet whether this option had been taken up by applicants. EA had expressed enthusiasm in developing practical projects with FC to test out the theory of using woodland strategically to slow down water. The Semington Brook upstream of Bradford on Avon was one suggestion (but in Bristol Avon not SW catchment area). Exmoor was another area where new planting could be/was being considered, in river valleys ?
- iv) Proposed event: Woodlands and Water

JM outlined the proposals to date, with an event timed to 'feed in' to consultation on the draft River Basin Management Plans EA would be launching in late December (consultation until June 09). Following discussion it was agreed to hold a seminar in March or April, at EA (Elly to find out available dates), mid morning to mid pm to include lunch. The theme would be the role of woodland – existing and new - within water catchments, rather than the biodiversity value of wet woodland which was already well understood. Agreed audience should be ngos, stat agencies, anglers and other key reps, eg CLBA, major woodland mangt companies. EA's list of stakeholders for WFD workshops could be useful. 30-40 max. Costs – to be discussed.

Action: JM to circulate separate note giving more details and possible speakers etc. [Now attached].

6. AOB

Mick asked for views on pros and cons of beavers.

7. Next meeting

This would depend on the outcome of the discussion regarding the group's future, and the outcome of the proposed seminar.