

Biodiversity Duty Implementation Case Study

Forestry Commission Wales (FCW)

As manager of the Assembly Woodland Estate, FCW plans and implements forest management operations over 106,000ha of woodland. The process involved is one example of how FCW implements its duty to “... *have regard ... to the purpose of conserving* and where “... *practical to further the conservation ...*” of biodiversity.

Each woodland has a Forest Design Plan (FDP) that sets out the 50 year vision for that forest landscape unit and identifies how we will achieve that vision through management (felling and thinning) and future tree species composition and open space management. The development of the FDP is driven by the principles of Sustainable Forest Management as set out in the UK Forestry Standard and Guidelines, FCW policy and programmes, the Forest District (FD) strategies and best practice guidance. The FD's Conservation Manager is a key member of the FDP design team and highlights any biodiversity factors that will influence the plan. We consult with CCW, Unitary Authorities and other stakeholders such as RSPB, Wildlife Trusts and local experts for their views and information. The FDP especially takes account of landscape scale programmes, such as the restoration of Planted Ancient Woodlands or permanent deforestation for open habitat restoration.

The FDP includes a Felling Plan that identifies which areas of the forest are to be felled or thinned. The Forest Districts gather information relevant to each management area in the Coupe Planning Process. Well in advance, 8-18 months, of the planned date for management the FD checks available sources of information for habitat and species records, eg Local Record Centres, and carries out a site survey for biodiversity features. The Conservation Manager applies constraints and opportunities to the management plan that may stipulate exclusion zones, temporal limitations or permitted operating techniques in the eventual working method statement. This process may result in an alteration to the area to be worked or even an amendment to the Forest Design Plan.

The contract manager / forester then plans the operation including the constraints and opportunities identified by the Conservation Manager. If protected area or species licences/permissions are required then an application is submitted. (FCW has developed guidance to guide forest managers as to when and how to apply for a licence. This is available at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-769ERV>

The flow diagram in appendix 1 illustrates the decision process.)

Prior to management operations commencing a further survey is carried out to check if any new biodiversity interest is present that may be affected by the work allowing plans to be adjusted accordingly.

At a pre-commencement meeting operators are made aware of their responsibilities to meet the constraints and opportunities laid out in the method statement and will inform site managers if any new biodiversity issues become apparent during operations, such as schedule 1 birds arriving during works. The Conservation Manager can inspect operations at any point to ensure compliance with his/her recommendations.

All woodland management operations (felling, thinning, road improvements, woodland establishment operations and recreational use such as motor rallies, public and educational events) are subject to this iterative planning process ensuring that biodiversity considerations are met and furthered at every step of the way.

FCW, as Regulator of Woodland Grants and Licences, encourages positive biodiversity action through the implementation of the Better Woodlands for Wales grant scheme. Emphasis is placed on good quality woodland management and FCW offers grants specially designed for Welsh woodlands with grant aid based upon an approved long term management plan. This plan must meet the minimum standards under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme. Specially trained and FCW approved Management Planners help owners decide exactly what work needs to be carried out in the woodland, and work out what steps need to be taken. Approved Specialist Assessors can help with preparing the plan in particular areas such as Continuous Cover Forestry, Woodland Ecology, Deer Management, Social Forestry and Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

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European Protected Species and woodland operations in Wales

Decision tree to aid planning of woodland operations and protecting EPS

The diagram below illustrates the questions that woodland managers and operators should consider when deciding whether they need to apply for an EPS licence. It should be noted that the diagram presents a simplified overview of the decision-making process.



