



What people  
told us

September 2019

Scoping a new forestry plan for forests and woodland in Antrim

# Summary of Responses to the Antrim Forestry Planning Area Scoping Consultation

A scoping consultation was initiated via the DAERA website from 30 March until 18 May 2018. The reason for the consultation was to ask people and organisations to help with the development of a new forestry plan for the Antrim Forestry Planning Area. The consultation was designed to reflect the wide ranging social, environmental and economic aspects of forestry in Northern Ireland in a way that would be both of interest to stakeholders, and, relevant to forestry planning. The scoping consultation document can be viewed at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/scoping-new-forestry-plan-antrim-area-forests-and-woodland>

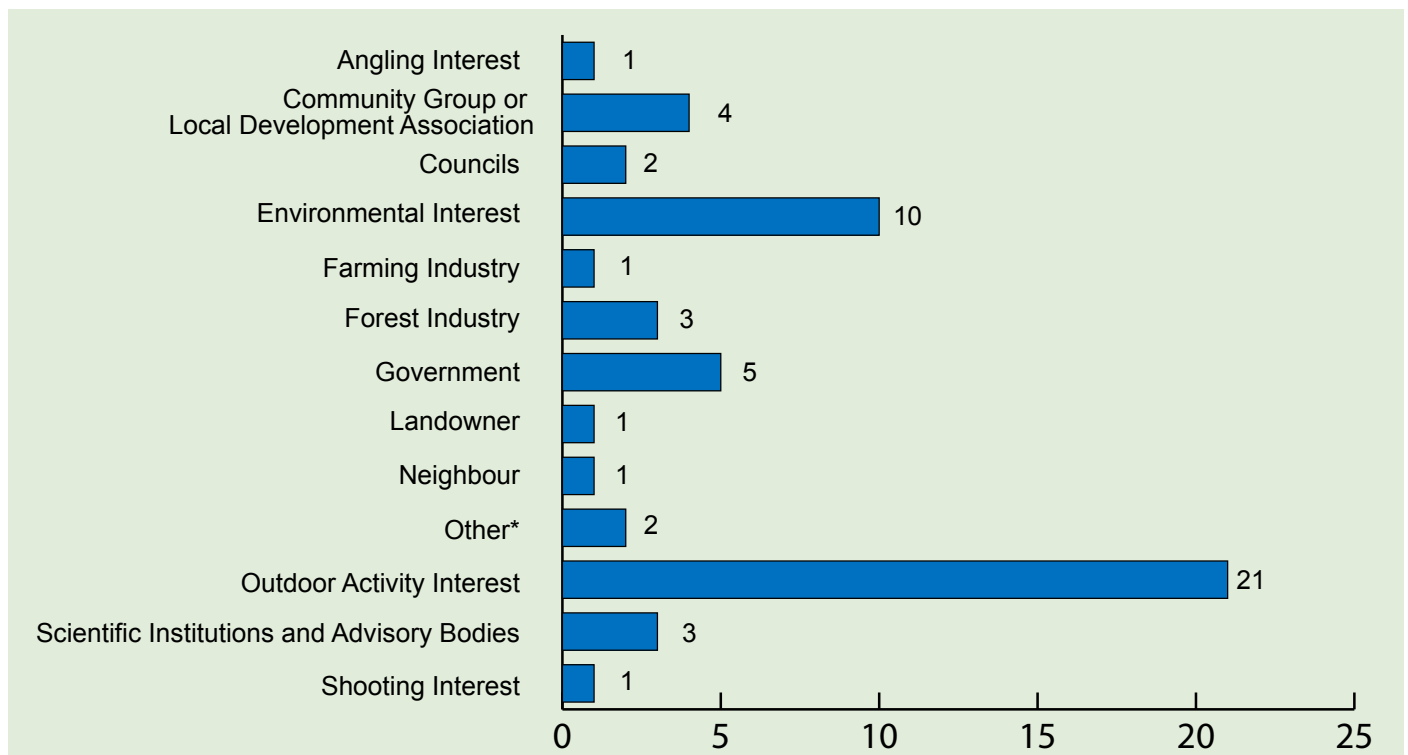
This summary report provides feedback on the results of the consultation to those who contributed, and others who may be interested in participating in future consultations. In total, 55 responses were received from representatives of organisations, groups and private individuals, as shown in the chart below. Organisations and groups who responded are listed in the Appendix.

## How Forest Service will make use of Consultation Responses

Stakeholders' responses to the scoping document will help the forestry planning team develop a draft forestry plan. Feedback from stakeholders has also helped the forestry planning team identify areas of competing priorities, and has indicated where a balance will have to be found in order to draft a forest plan that reflects stakeholders' interests while meeting the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard.

## Stakeholder Interest Categories

Stakeholders identified themselves according to the following categories:



\* The category of 'Other' includes two stakeholder who identified their interest as tourism.



# Summary of Responses by Scoping Topic

## **Topic 1 - Enhancing Landscapes**

NIEA Countryside, Coast and Landscape stated its concern in relation to the sensitivity of the landscape of the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and the adjacent Causeway Coast AONB, and their capacity to accommodate further development of all forms, including afforestation and sustainable forestry. While acknowledging that the appearance of forests and visual impact of forest management has a direct bearing on the attractiveness of the wider area to tourists, visitors, and the local community, one stakeholder, representing outdoor activity providers, commented on the potentially adverse effects of extensive felling in scenic landscapes, as, for example, was necessitated by the need to remove areas of diseased larch trees in Glenariff Forest Park.

Stakeholders recommended that forest plans should include the softening of 'hard edges' by diversifying tree species, through natural regeneration or replanting felled areas with native tree species, and the redesigning of felling boundaries to give a more natural appearance by following contour lines and the natural relief of the landscape. Incorporating rides and glades, as recommended by Butterfly Conservation and BugLife NI, and leaving unplanted water buffers were also identified as ways to make forests look more attractive. The Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI) proposed that greater use of agroforestry would provide a means of softening the visual appearance of forests while also contributing to the sustainable use of grassland.

NIEA Regional Operations and the Woodland Trust recommended the greater use of low impact silvicultural systems (LISS), or 'Continuous Cover Forestry', to reduce the visual impact of clearfelling on sensitive landscapes; the Woodland Trust also suggested that impacts could also be mitigated by designing smaller felling coupes.

NIEA Countryside, Coast and Landscape welcomed the contribution of landscape design requirements and guidelines contained in the UK Forestry Standard and its implementation in forest design planning. NIEA also recommended that the NI Regional Landscape Character Assessment should be used to provide the most up-to-date baseline information on the existing landscape character within the forestry plan area.

## **Topic 2 - Protecting Rivers and Lakes**

Stakeholders were mindful of the potential impacts of forestry operations on water and strongly supported creation of water buffers and establishment of riparian woodland either by regeneration, colonisation or planting. Ulster Wildlife and the Woodland Trust expressed concern that acidification in the Glen Dun catchment was associated with afforestation and forest management operations. The Woodland Trust advised that using spatial datasets to manage the risk of diffuse pollution was not a substitute for site assessments.

NI Environment Link advised that riparian habitats, including wet grassland, fens and mires, should remain as open habitats to benefit breeding waders and other wildlife, and advocated catchment-scale planting schemes that filter pollutants, stabilise sediment, provide shade, slow water flow and reduce flood risk downstream. The Department for Infrastructure Rivers advised that a suitable working strip may be required along certain watercourses to facilitate ongoing and future channel maintenance requirements.



Ballycastle and District Angling Club expressed their appreciation that Forest Service had engaged with them in relation to planned forest operations that had the potential to affect the salmon hatchery below the car park in Ballycastle Forest.

### **Topic 3 - Enabling Enjoyment of Forests by Local People and Visitors**

Stakeholders agreed there was ample scope for the sustainable development of forests in County Antrim for recreational and social use, and tourism, especially in forests located near towns, for example Ballycastle and Woodburn Forests, and would welcome its contribution to the local economy. NIEA added that access to forests should be encouraged for personal enjoyment, positive social interaction, enrichment of the senses, and improvement to health and well-being. NI Environment Link suggested that forest plans should seek to maximise the recreation and amenity value of woodland, possibly in conjunction with Tourism NI and Outdoor Recreation NI, and that the best way of achieving the full involvement of communities locally was through community asset transfer mechanisms.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council referred to a number of forest recreation initiatives it was currently pursuing, including an Outdoor Recreation Strategy for the Borough which will look at, amongst other areas, Gortgole Forest, Portglenone Forest, Bracknamuckley Wood, Woodburn Forest and Glenarm Forest as sites for outdoor recreation opportunities, an outdoor recreation scoping study for Woodburn Glen, and, in conjunction with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, a Glens Greenway running from Ballymena and/or Broughshane to Cushendall, taking in Glenariff Forest Park. DAERA Veterinary Service and Animal Health advised that it was reviewing the provision of off-road riding facilities for equestrian enthusiasts.

There were contrasting opinions about gates and barriers at forest entrances. Some respondents felt these restricted access, while others considered these essential to deter anti-social behaviour. The Ulster Farmers' Union asked that Forest Service should ensure that there is appropriate signage and information to ensure that the public are aware of boundaries and do not stray onto adjacent agricultural land unless there are access agreements in place.

Some individual stakeholders complained about dog fouling and inadequate dog waste disposal facilities, and muddy conditions in car parks at access points. A number of stakeholders called for specific improvements and developments including interpretation, toilets, seating, improved surfacing of paths and reductions of gradients to improve accessibility, children's play areas, forest schools and environmental education opportunities, equine trails, mountain biking and running trails, and some facilitation of wild camping. Scouting and Girlguiding groups expressed interest in restoring the campsite in Glenariff Forest Park. Stakeholders also highlighted the potential for Forest Service to engage in further partnership working opportunities with other bodies, including a multi-agency plan for Woodburn Forest, improving pedestrian and cycle paths in Rea's Wood, near Antrim, and contributing to Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council's Community Plan.

A number of stakeholders were concerned about the potential effects of human disturbance on habitats and wildlife; the NI Bat Group suggested that this could be better managed by the use of well defined tracks and paths. NIEA Countryside Coast and Landscape suggested that under some circumstances boardwalks could be built in conjunction with the restoration of peatland habitats to improve accessibility. Ulster Wildlife and the Woodland Trust emphasised the need for balance between enabling access and protecting those areas of woodland that have historical, biodiversity or habitat importance, and expressed particular concern with regard to the potential environmental effects, including the risk of disturbing rare and vulnerable species during breeding, of events involving high impact activities such as motorsports and mountain biking. The NI Bat Group advised that artificial lighting could affect the foraging and roosting behaviours of bats.



## **Topic 4 - Promoting Afforestation and Sustainable Forestry**

Stakeholders agreed that forest expansion was an important aim of Government, and that the current rate of afforestation should be increased. However, not all stakeholders were in favour of expansion to produce timber and wood for industrial purposes, and the majority of respondents strongly favoured expansion that delivered a wider range of ecosystem services. The NI Environment Link, the Woodland Trust, Ulster Wildlife, RSPB, and others, including the NI Bat Group, emphasised the need for afforestation to enhance biodiversity, for instance by planting new native woodland in river valleys, and between existing areas of woodland to improve connectivity. NIEA Regional Operations suggested that native woodland could be managed to produce material for use by local artisans that would help to perpetuate traditional wood associated crafts.

Some stakeholders, including NI Farm Forestry, indicated that more could be done by Forest Service to promote afforestation. The Woodland Trust called for a standardised site survey methodology that would provide the basis for environmental regulation, and provide better publically available information on land that is potentially suitable for afforestation.

Mid and East Antrim Borough Council recognised the many benefits forests and woodlands bring to local residents, visitors and our ecosystems, and the importance of safeguarding our forests and woodlands for future generations.

## **Topic 5 - Supplying Sustainable Wood Products**

While stakeholders acknowledged the beneficial aspects of the timber industry, in terms of employment creation, carbon sequestration, renewable energy from sawmilling residues, and maintaining the recreational and social use of forests, the Woodland Trust and others suggested that more could be done to promote the use of alternative, low impact approaches to harvesting, particularly in sensitive areas. Balcas Timber Ltd. cautioned that reduced volumes of timber reaching the market as a consequence of greater reliance on lower impact methods could impact on economic activity.

The timber industry acknowledged the comprehensive framework for sustainable forest management provided by the UK Forestry Standard, and the value generated by annual auditing of forest management associated with forest certification, in which it plays a key role through the operation of chain of custody and controlled wood certification procedures in all of its timber processing facilities.

## **Topic 6 - Regenerating Forest Land**

Stakeholders emphasised that plans to regenerate forest land after felling should aim to improve the delivery of ecosystem services, including improving the appearance of forests, protecting water, serving the needs and interests of local communities, and enhancing biodiversity. A number of stakeholders, including Ballycastle Community Development Group, Butterfly Conservation NI, and BugLife NI commented that forests that are predominantly commercial, or 'working' forests, are detrimental to the interests of communities, of limited value for wildlife, and were less attractive visually. The NI Bat Group advised that, in order to benefit bats, native broadleaved species (especially oak) should be prioritised wherever possible, and that the long-term aim in lowland landscapes should be to create and maintain mature deciduous woodland.

A range of stakeholders strongly supported an increase in the use of tree species to regenerate



forests. The sawmiller, Balcas Timber Ltd., welcomed an increased availability of alternative conifer species including Norway spruce, Douglas fir and western red cedar, while AFBI recommended that Forest Service should plant more mixed species forests, and make greater use of low impact silvicultural systems (LISS) where possible. Balcas Timber Ltd. also supported the use of more productive Sitka spruce planting material in regeneration plans where appropriate.

NIEA Regional Operations, the Woodland Trust, the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and others strongly encouraged the widespread use of native species grown from locally collected seed. The use of natural regeneration as a means of achieving this was encouraged, although the Woodland Trust cautioned that monitoring of water buffer areas awaiting natural regeneration was necessary to ensure that conifer species could be removed and supplementary planting carried out where needed.

The Woodland Trust stated there was a shortage of planting material of local Irish provenance, and suggested that Forest Service should consider supporting and assisting in the creation and development of a native tree nursery in Northern Ireland.

## **Topic 7 - Growing Trees Sustainably**

A number of stakeholders acknowledged the threats to sustainable forestry identified in the scoping document; the Woodland Trust warned that invasive species and pests and diseases could lead to the loss of recreational facilities, natural capital services, landscape resilience, tourist offering, and economic impacts through lost stock in commercial forestry. Individual stakeholders referred to the need for effective barriers to prevent access by unauthorised vehicles, and to deter fly-tipping.

DAERA Veterinary Service and Animal Health expressed concern regarding the disease risk to livestock both from illegal dumping of carcasses of farm animals, and the release of live animals, and advised that wild deer are also a potential disease risk to livestock.

Ulster Wildlife drew attention to the important role that Forest Service has in taking action in relation to new plant health threats, and maintaining vigilance regarding those already present, through the various provisions of the Plant Health Order (Northern Ireland) 2018 (as amended).

One stakeholder observed that squirrel damage to broadleaved trees in Randalstown Forest was particularly severe, and emphasised the need for careful management of young broadleaved areas to safeguard the potential to produce good quality timber. NIEA Regional Operations suggested that a requirement for fertiliser application indicated that trees were planted in the wrong places.

## **Topic 8 - Minimising the use of Pesticides and Fertilisers**

While the majority of stakeholders agreed that minimal use of pesticides and fertilisers would benefit insect, fish and mammal populations and reduce adverse impacts on the wider environment, it was recognised that the restricted use of pesticides to control invasive plants was appropriate, provided it did not negatively impact on adjacent habitats or water bodies. NIEA Biodiversity and Conservation Science advised that use of chemicals near any designated site should be supported by scientific evidence that there could be no adverse effect to the site's features. Ulster Wildlife noted that buffer areas in and around water courses could help reduce risks to the wider environment.



NIEA Regional Operations also expressed concerns about any plans involving fertiliser use due to its negative impact on water quality. The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC) recommended that, given concerns about the effects of pesticides on pollinators, Forest Service should engage with appropriate environmental organisations and local beekeeper associations.

Although Balcas Timber Ltd. agreed with a reduction in pesticide and fertiliser use, they cautioned that doing so may lead to reduced timber volumes reaching the market and could negatively impact on economic activity.

### **Topic 9 - Targeting Invasive Species**

Stakeholders were aware of the potentially harmful effects and wide ranging occurrence of a number of invasive species in Antrim forests, including rhododendron, laurel, snowberry, salmonberry, Himalayan balsam, and pheasant berry. Some sensitive areas had become extensively colonised, including Rea's Wood and Farr's Bay Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and regenerating ancient woodland sites in Glenarm Forest. NIEA Biodiversity and Conservation Science also advised that Japanese knotweed and giant hogweed also commonly occurred, and that piri-piri, which is easily spread via its burrs by visitors and their pets, is widespread.

A number of stakeholders also referred to the threat of the invasive grey squirrel to populations of red squirrel, and called for greater efforts to reduce their impact.

The Ulster Farmers' Union expressed the view that self-sown Sitka spruce on land adjacent to forests was also an invasive species. The Woodland Trust called for the active management and removal of Sitka spruce, conifers or invasive plants from planted ancient and long-established woodland sites.

Respondents felt that there was a need to target a wider range of invasive species and control measures should not be restricted to one or two target species only, such as rhododendron and laurel. A multi-agency long-term landscape scale strategy involving partnerships with other landowners, and community groups was suggested as the best approach to effectively tackle invasive species. CNCC recommended public education as a vital tool in any control or eradication programme.

### **Topic 10 - Protecting Habitats and Species**

Stakeholders acknowledged that forests and woodland in County Antrim were important wildlife habitats for species referred to in the scoping document, and also for some other species with restricted distributions such as the wood warbler, and several species of lepidoptera (butterflies and moths). Butterfly Conservation and BugLife NI jointly advised that these required sensitive forest and woodland planning to provide habitat networks, including rides, glades and broadleaved margins and deadwood.

Stakeholders also referred to the importance of protecting and promoting native woodland, including ancient and long-established woodland, and the extensive area of wood pasture and parkland at Glenarm Estate. The NI Bat Group advised that restoring native oak woodland would be particularly beneficial for bats.

NI Environment Link recommended that non-native trees should be removed from plantations on



ancient woodland and replaced with native species, and that self-seeding non-native conifers such as lodgepole pine and Sitka spruce should be removed from priority open ground habitats.

A number of stakeholders expressed concern about the negative effects of afforestation on breeding waders, including curlew and lapwing. Some stakeholders were also concerned about the potential risk of disturbing sensitive species in the course of forest management or recreational activities. Ulster Wildlife was particularly concerned about the impact of excessive noise during rally events on breeding merlin.

While acknowledging its important contribution, both CNCC and Ulster Wildlife suggested that Forest Service should take a stronger lead within DAERA in enhancing biodiversity and in the delivery of the NI Biodiversity Strategy.

## **Topic 11 - Restoring Peatland Habitats**

Stakeholders recommended that peatland restoration should be prioritised, and take place at a landscape scale to re-establish ecological networks and maximise the potential for flood risk mitigation and carbon sequestration. The Ulster Farmers' Union urged that the impacts of any proposed restoration work may have on neighbouring land be fully considered and neighbouring landowners be consulted prior to any restoration work being undertaken.

NIEA Regional Operations advised that peatland habitats could also be achieved by removal of conifer seedlings from areas of bogland adjacent to forests, the conversion of areas of forest with poorly performing trees back to open bogland and the reconnection of remnant patches of isolated peatland.

CIEEM recommended that the identification of candidate restoration sites should be carried out in conjunction with stakeholders, and suggested it would be useful to broaden the approach to include restoration of other NI Priority Habitats.

RSPB identified a number of specific areas in Antrim forests where peatland restoration should be prioritised to benefit biodiversity, and highlighted the potential economic benefits of restoration of peatland habitats in drinking water catchments, including an area in Ballyboley Forest, through a reduction in water treatment costs. While RSPB stated that clearfelled peatland forestry sites should not be replanted, NI Farm Forestry expressed concern that peatland restoration could, potentially, result in an overall decrease in woodland cover, and suggested that any decrease in forest area due to restoration work should be matched by afforestation on appropriate land elsewhere in the country.



# Appendix

## **List of organisations who responded to the Antrim Forestry Planning Area Scoping Consultation**

Agri-Food Biosciences Institute (AFBI)  
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council  
Arbortec  
Balcas Timber Ltd.  
Ballycastle and District Angling Club  
Ballycastle Community Development Group  
British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)  
BugLife Northern Ireland (BugLife NI)  
Butterfly Conservation Northern Ireland (BCNI)  
Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)  
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC)  
DAERA College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)  
DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Natural Environment Division - Regional Operations  
DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Natural Environment Division - Countryside Coast and Landscape  
DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Natural Environment Division - Biodiversity and Conservation Science  
DAERA - Veterinary Service Animal Health  
Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Rivers  
Dog Trails Northern Ireland  
Girlguiding Ulster  
Glenarm Castle Demense  
Glenarm Tourism  
Irish Grouse Conservation Trust (IGCT)  
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council  
Northern Ireland Bat Group  
Northern Ireland Farm Forestry (NI Farm Forestry)  
Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)  
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) Northern Ireland  
The Scout Association  
Trailshadow  
Tourism Northern Ireland  
Ulster Farmers' Union  
Ulster Wildlife  
Woodburn Community Group  
The Woodland Trust Northern Ireland

13 September 2019

ISBN 978-1-8387-060-7