

Woodland Habitat Network Wild Challenge Action Plan



Wild Challenge Long Term Vision 2040

The application of the ecosystem approach, building on the Important Plant Area in the west and The Great Trossachs Forest at the centre, has created a fully functioning native woodland network through the National Park and increased the resilience of woodland habitats for native species.

The conversion of all the FCS conifer plantations on East Loch Lomondside to native woodland will be nearing completion, including the particularly challenging Ptarmigan block. All designated woodland sites are in favourable condition. Management within private sector and state forests supports the creation of woodland habitat networks connecting habitats within and between forests managed primarily for timber production. With the forest and wider woodland habitat network being strengthened through targeted woodland creation and tree planting.

The restoration of Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) back to native woodland is underway where suitable potential has been identified as part of the on-going restructuring of productive conifer woodlands. The ecological resilience (ability to adapt and withstand change from both climate change and pests and diseases) of woodlands in the National Park has been significantly improved through a combination of improvement in native woodland conditions, age and species restructuring of productive conifers, creation of new native woodlands, and woodland management. Forest managers have responded to plant health issues and are working to address their impacts across the National Park.

Introduction

Around 30% of The Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park is covered in woodland. There are opportunities to increase the contribution of many woodland areas to a large scale Woodland Habitat network. This Wild Challenge will facilitate this at a landscape scale across a variety of land ownerships and management objectives.

This Wild Challenge will pull together existing large projects which include The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve, the woodlands within the Ben Lomond Memorial Landscape and the National Forest Estate on East Loch Lomondside. It will examine the woodland habitat network in the National Park and would involve working in partnership with the woodland managers in the National Park, to carry out management which increases habitat connectivity and improves condition at a landscape scale. The existing work such as completing the conversion of the conifer plantations in the East Loch Lomondside area back to native woodland, continuing the woodland establishment round Loch Katrine and additional measures to establish a diverse woodland network means that the extent and quality of the woodlands in the National Park will become truly exceptional at a national level.

Within the National Park there are already woodlands designated for their biodiversity value particularly the Loch Lomond and Trossachs Woods Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) along with several Sites of Special Scientific Interest including the most southerly Caledonian Pinewood. The Loch Lomond SAC forms part of a core area of the West Coast Important Plant Area (IPA) as identified by Plantlife for Atlantic Oak woodland, primarily for their associated bryophytes and lichens. The IPA identifies core areas and zones of opportunity for Atlantic woodland throughout the park.

The contribution of field trees and woodland pasture to Woodland Habitat Network is recognised and encouraged where a landowner has a variety of land use objectives. This woodland habitat network will create connectivity across ownership boundaries.

There are also other habitats within the area which need to be conserved for their landscape and biodiversity value, which make up a diverse habitat mosaic, for example wood pasture, sub-montane scrub, blanket bog, heath and species-rich grasslands. Part of this Wild Challenge will be to take an ecosystem approach so that there is a balance of the different habitats within the National Park.

There is already a partnership approach taken to The Great Trossachs Forest National Nature Reserve, which aims to create a diverse habitat mosaic. This Wild Challenge will build on this partnership approach across the National Park.

The term woodland habitat network is intended to be synonymous with forest habitat network, with a core woodland habitat network being predominately native species.

Wild Challenge delivery

Objectives	Actions	Target date	Measures of Success
Target woodland creation where it will maximize benefit to WHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce woodland creation potential maps (using Ecological Site Classification (ESC) principles, Woodland Expansion Advisory Group Report recommendations and FHN and IPA data) and agree use with partners and stakeholders - Discuss with FCS how to further incentivise woodland creation in target areas - Secure incentive by start of new grant scheme at latest 	<p>2016</p> <p>2017</p> <p>2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant Partners (1) to engage with landowners in priority area - Woodland creation is undertaken in very suitable and suitable areas - %age (and actual ha) occurring within the above areas
Target native woodland and designed open space as part of productive conifer restructuring where it will maximize benefit to WHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce productive conifer restructuring potential maps showing native woodland and designed open space target areas (using ESC, FHN, IPA and PAWS & Native Woodland Survey of Scotland data) and agree use with partners and stakeholders 	2016/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant Partners (1) to engage with landowners in priority area - native woodland and designed open space as part of productive conifer restructuring is undertaken in very suitable and suitable areas - %age (and actual ha) occurring within the above areas
Target partners' efforts on native woodland improvement in condition (restoration) where it will maximize benefit to WHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Produce restoration priority map using Designated sites, IPA and PAWS with FHN data and agree priority sites with partners 	2016/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Agree with SNH and FCS priority designated sites for proactive advice and support - Relevant Partners (1) to engage with landowners in priority area

(1) Woodland Trust Scotland (WTS) (as the National Park is a WTS Treescape Area), Plantlife, NPA and FCS Conservancy

Objectives	Actions	Target date	Measures of Success
Implement positive management to improve woodland condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Secure FGS grant or other support for Designated site/ Native woodland management - FES undertaking woodland management (respacing, non-native species removal etc.) - Promote voluntary UK Woodland Assurance Standards (UKWAS) certification to woodland owners and managers - All rhododendron work will be recorded via the rhododendron Wild Challenge 	<p>2020</p> <p>2020</p> <p>2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No of Designated Sites in management to improve condition - ha of PAWS in restoration - - number of FGS funding native woodland management - ha of additional Native woodland in management to improve condition - %age of woodland in UKWAS certification schemes
Landscape scale herbivore control is undertaken to maintain sustainable populations and improvement of habitat condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active Deer Management Groups (DMGs) over the whole National Park - All DMGs will have approved Deer Management Plans (DMPs) - Actions detailed in DMP undertaken by members - Pastoral management is undertaken to maintain or improve habitat condition 	<p>2020</p> <p>2020</p> <p>2020</p> <p>2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - %age of NP in a DMG - %age of DMPs approved by SNH - % Native Woodland showing improvement in condition in relation to herbivore impact - Any woodland areas receiving basic payment for grazing are monitored to ensure no degradation in habitat.
Incorporate WHN principles into all management and strategic plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All NPA Integrated land management plans will contribute to creating or improving WHN - Any future Forestry and Woodland Strategy/ Land Use Strategy, National Partnership Plan, Local Development plan will contribute to the aims of WHN Action Plan 	<p>2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relevant plans incorporate these principles
Promote variety of woodland management which would benefit WHN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Events by partners to demonstrate to woodland management 	<p>2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of events - Number of people attending events
Provide opportunities for volunteers to get involved in the conservation and monitoring of woodland habitat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plantlife Flora Guardian - NPA Tree Health Monitoring - NPA and Partner organisations providing volunteer tasks 	<p>2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of events - Number of people

Key challenges for delivery

1. Lack of stakeholder buy-in to the opportunity map.
2. Land owner reluctance to create woodland or restructuring existing woodland in target areas due to conflicting land management objectives.
3. Funding constraints or lack of flexibility in Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) in current funding period.
4. Reluctance for woodland owner and managers to expand species diversity and proportions beyond UK Forestry Standards/UK Woodland Accreditation Standards minimum requirements.
5. Expansion of Woodland habitat connectivity could be constrained by other priority habitats and species.

Opportunities for delivery

1. The outcomes from this Wild Challenge will contribute to the Big Step 1, Priority Project 2 of the Scottish Biodiversity, a Route Map to 2020.
2. Long timescales of objectives enables strategic policy to be in place for next FGS scheme and to influence the review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy.
3. Potential for further PAWS restoration, The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland identified 3,500 ha of PAWS with circa 50% having 5 or more per cent of native woodland feature. Productive forests under certification are required to maintain and enhance ancient woodland features.
4. Diversification in productive conifer species and increase in the use of continuous cover forestry techniques will lead to a greater contribution to a WHN from the productive conifer element of the forests.
5. Partner organisations are already investing in woodland habitat networks in the park area and developing partnership would offer value for money for all partners.

Woodland Habitat Network Wild Challenge Group	Key Partners
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