



What people
told us

September 2021

Scoping a new forestry plan for forests and woodland in West Tyrone

*Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape
valued by everyone.*



An Agency within the Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk

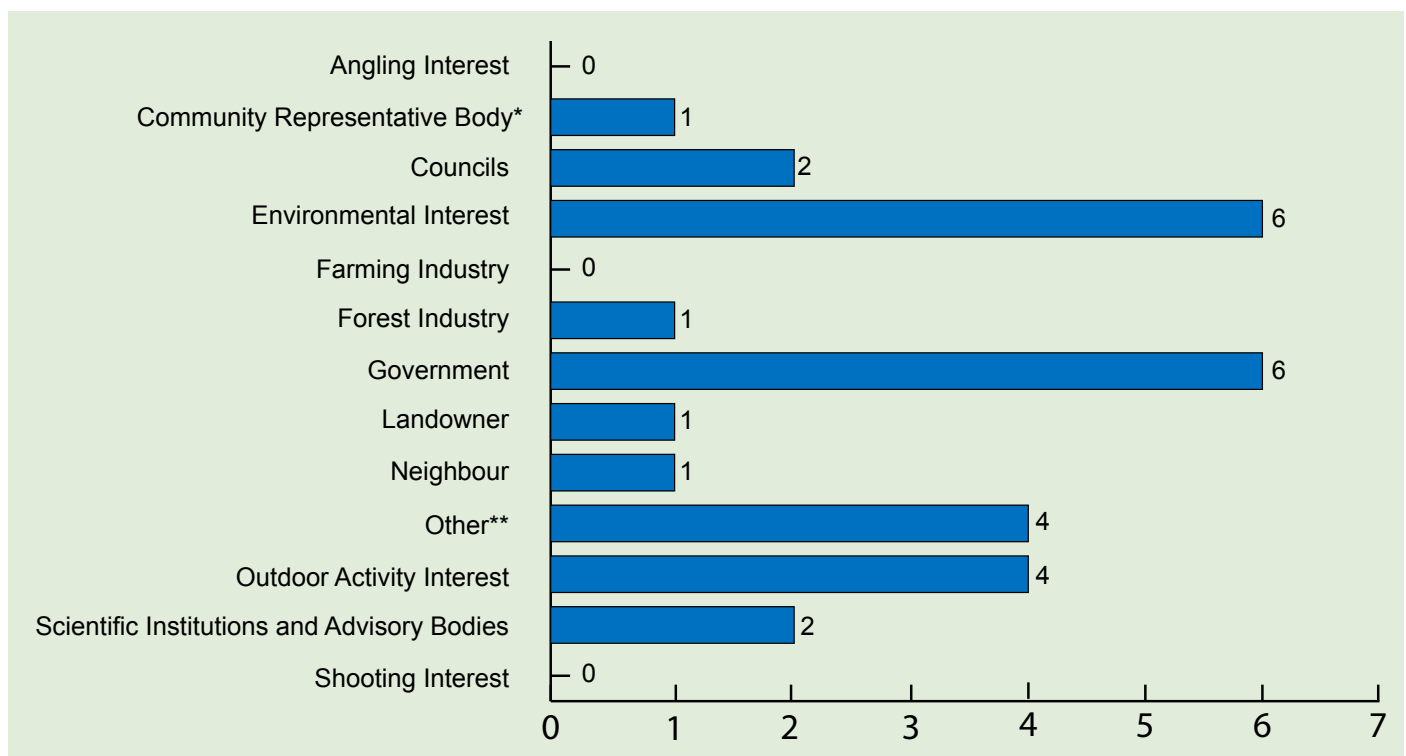
Summary of Responses to the West Tyrone Forestry Planning Area Scoping Consultation

Forest Service, an Executive Agency of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, DAERA, conducted a scoping consultation for the West Tyrone Forestry Planning Area. The consultation started on 27 June 2019 and ended on 27 September 2019. The reason for the consultation was to ask people and organisations to help with the development of a new forestry plan for the West Tyrone Forestry Planning Area. The consultation was designed to reflect the wide ranging social, environmental and economic aspects of forestry in a way that would be both of interest to stakeholders, and, relevant to forestry planning. The consultation is part of a review of the eight Forestry Planning Areas that cover all of Northern Ireland. The West Tyrone scoping consultation document and other forestry planning documents can be viewed via <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/forest-planning>.

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, 28 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](#).

Stakeholder Interest Categories

Stakeholders identified themselves according to the following categories:



* 'Community Representative Body' is a local development association.

** The category of 'Other' includes one stakeholder who identified their interest as a "membership organisation; rural affairs and country sports", and another stakeholder

How Forest Service will use consultation responses

Stakeholders' responses to the scoping document will help the forestry planning team develop a draft forestry plan for the West Tyrone area that meets the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard. Feedback from stakeholders is used to identify areas of competing priorities and to indicate where a balance will have to be found to reflect stakeholders' interests.



Topic 1 - Enhancing Landscapes

Consultation responses demonstrate the appreciation that people have for forests on the landscape, and the desire to further improve the contribution of forests to the landscape. A number of responses agreed with the scoping document that forest design can improve the contribution of plantation forests by softening edges using different tree species and by encouraging tree planting on adjacent land. In particular, the Loughs Agency noted that rivers, streams and lakes form naturally shaped boundaries and suggested that they are used as felling coupe boundaries where possible. The Loughs Agency also suggested that native trees are planted along aquatic boundaries.

Stakeholder responses illustrated the range of considerations when undertaking forest design planning. For example, the Department for Communities, Historic Environment Division, advised that forests should be designed to take account of the historical character and cultural values of the landscape. Likewise, Derry City and Strabane District Council cautioned that uplands should not be blanketed by forest nor should long-range views be curtailed. Other stakeholder considerations received included those from neighbouring land owners and those with an interest in hunting.

A number of stakeholders made helpful suggestions regarding forest design planning. The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management said that reference should be made to character areas as described in The Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment. The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside asked if there is an opportunity to quantify the impact of forest design changes on the delivery of wider targets such as those relating to biodiversity.

Topic 2 - Protecting Rivers and Lakes

Stakeholders recognised the importance of riparian woodland and non-forested buffers for water protection, and cautioned that they must be actively managed in order to be effective.

A range of views and opinions were given about how and where riparian woodland should be established. NIEA Water Management Unit said that riparian woodland should be planted with native tree species taking into account altitude, species provenance, shading and local fish stocks. Although some responses did not express a preference as to how riparian woodland should be established the Loughs Agency, and others, said that their preference is for trees to be planted rather than waiting for colonisation. The Loughs Agency advised that where it is not possible to create riparian woodland non-forested buffers should be created to intercept silt.

The role of riparian woodland in flood risk mitigation was highlighted by a range of stakeholders. For example, the Woodland Trust highlighted how sustainable forest management has multiple benefits for water quality and specifically how it can help to mitigate flood risk. However, the Department for Infrastructure cautioned that new woodlands in flood plain areas will increase flood levels locally. The Department's response referred to guidelines produced by its Rivers Environmental Team on planting trees in buffer strips adjacent to designated watercourses in conjunction with Environmental Farming Scheme planting and Catchment Care planning.

A number of stakeholders expressed an interest in partnership working to improve water quality. NIEA Natural Environment Division said that they would like to engage with Forest Service in relation to mitigating any effect of forestry operations on the River Foyle and Tributaries SAC. They also said that there are opportunities to engage in relation to the creation of riparian



woodland. Similarly, Derry City and Strabane District Council said that they are keen to work with partners to identify suitable riparian woodland to improve water quality and contribute to the aims of the Northern Ireland Long Term Water Strategy.

NIEA Water Management Unit (WMU) advised that extra precautions may be necessary in areas where water bodies are failing under the Water Framework Directive. Noting that drinking water storage areas require particular protection, WMU advised that hydrological connectivity maps are available which could help target specific areas for water and nutrient interception.

Other stakeholders gave advice both about operational practices and statutory obligations. The Woodland Trust noted that most coniferous forests were planted before the development of modern sustainable forest management practices. Many of these forests were prepared for planting by ploughing around a drainage network flowing directly into watercourses. The Woodland Trust advised that there is an opportunity to mitigate the effects of these drains by filling them with large woody debris and constructing leaky wooden dams. Giving advice on statutory obligations, the Department for Infrastructure, Rivers Agency, noted that under the terms of Schedule 6 of the Drainage (Northern Ireland) Order 1973 anyone proposing to carry out any works which might affect any watercourse must submit an application to the Department for consent.

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

A diverse range of stakeholders outlined their appreciation of forest based recreation and offered suggestions both on how to improve current provision and the potential to further increase recreational use of forests.

A number of consultation responses gave examples of how existing features within forests can be used to increase forest recreation. The potential for historic monuments to be a feature was highlighted by the Historic Environment Division of the Department for Communities. Suggesting that monuments are incorporated into paths and viewpoints they asked that consideration is given to providing access to features of historical interest. Similarly, the potential of forests as a resource for gorge walking, white water kayaking and white water rafting was highlighted by the Loughs Agency. Noting that the forest environment can be suitable for a wide range of activities, the Institute of Northern Ireland Beekeepers asked that consideration be given to making areas available for use as apiaries.

Some suggestions were related to specific forests. One stakeholder's suggestion included using the old buildings at Seskinore Forest for community purposes, while a representative of Drumquin Community & Youth Centre suggested it would be possible to create a green-way from Pigeon Top Forest to County Donegal.

Some stakeholders took the opportunity to highlight where improvements could be made to existing facilities. Noting that not all forests have a suitable parking area for horse trailers and boxes, a stakeholder said that most forest roads are unsuitable for horses due to the road stone used. The stakeholder advised that smaller stones and a central grass tracks would make a considerable improvement where horse-riding was permitted.

A number of responses cautioned about the possible negative impact of public use on the forest environment. Both Baronscourt Estate and the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management said that increased recreation has the potential to impact negatively on important ecological features such as protected habitats and species.



The potential for forest based recreation to adversely impact other forest users was noted. Highlighting that they do not want to see traditional field sports adversely affected, Countryside Alliance Ireland said that there needs to be a balance between the development of forestry recreation opportunities and the protection of the countryside. Drenagh Sawmills Ltd said that increased public access would increase the challenges of managing safety on harvesting sites and could curtail forestry operations.

The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside highlighted the role that forest based recreation can play in helping to achieve draft Programme for Government outcomes on health and wellbeing. They also noted that there may also be opportunities for rural development linked to the provision of recreational opportunities.

Topic 4 - Promoting Afforestation and Sustainable Forestry

There was strong support for afforestation and sustainable forest management. Stakeholders advocated increased Government afforestation as well as increased grant assistance for land owners.

Drenagh Sawmills Ltd noted that as the design of existing forests are improved, such as by increasing water buffers, the area of conifer is reduced. They advised that the area of forest capable of producing conifer logs is at risk of diminishing significantly. To ensure that the existing sawmill industry can be sustained they said that there needs to be an equivalent area of conifer afforestation.

Derry City and Strabane District Council noted that within the period of their Local Development Plan (up to 2032) there will be an attempt to increase the amount of trees across the Council area. However, the Council expressed reservations regarding the effect of afforestation on remote rural areas including the cessation of farming and de-population. It was noted that this could undermine the Council's objective to sustain vibrant rural areas.

The RSPB NI said that afforestation should only occur if it has a net positive impact on biodiversity and other ecosystem services. The RSPB NI said that woodland expansion should be integrated with other land uses and deliver multiple benefits, such as filtering pollutants and reducing flood risk downstream.

A number of stakeholders, including The Woodland Trust and Baronscourt Estate, recommended increasing grant assistance for afforestation. Baronscourt Estate advocated more grant assistance for sustainable forest management including assistance towards the costs of transforming the management of forests to continuous cover forestry and other low impact silvicultural systems.

Topic 5 - Supplying Sustainable Wood Products

Drenagh Sawmills Ltd expressed concern that moving towards continuous cover forestry may result in a significantly increased average size of trees being harvested. They noted that the sawmilling sector does not have the infrastructure to process significant amounts of large diameter trees and suggested further discussion would be useful. They also expressed concern that a policy to increase the proportion of timber harvested as thinnings relative to clearfelling would lead to increased costs, and could put Northern Ireland at a disadvantage compared other parts of the UK.



A consultant, responding on behalf of a wind farm owner, said that amending the felling dates of specific coupes could improve the wind resource at wind farms. It was suggested that this could be done with minimal disruption to sustainable wood production plans.

Topic 6 - Regenerating Forest Land

Stakeholders commented about species and provenance choice in relation to regenerating forests.

Highlighting that Sitka spruce is the main tree species used to produce wood manufactured products in Northern Ireland, Drenagh Sawmills Ltd cautioned that reducing the proportion of Sitka spruce and other conifer species in forests in favour of slower-growing broadleaf trees would cause significant supply problems for the timber processing industry. This could result in it being difficult for Northern Ireland to maintain its output of sustainable wood products.

The Loughs Agency welcomed the scoping document activity to assess the suitability of water buffer areas for the establishment of new native woodland. Commenting about how forest are to be regenerated, the Loughs Agency encouraged the creation of riparian woodland by planting rather than natural regeneration.

The Woodland Trust stated that there is a shortage of planting material of local Irish provenance. They suggested that Forest Service considers assisting the creation and development of a native tree nursery in Northern Ireland. In addition to improving the supply of planting stock this could help reduce the importation of tree diseases on to the island of Ireland.

A number of stakeholders, including NIEA Natural Environment Division, expressed an interest in continued engagement with Forest Service in relation to regenerating forests.

Topic 7 - Growing Trees Sustainably

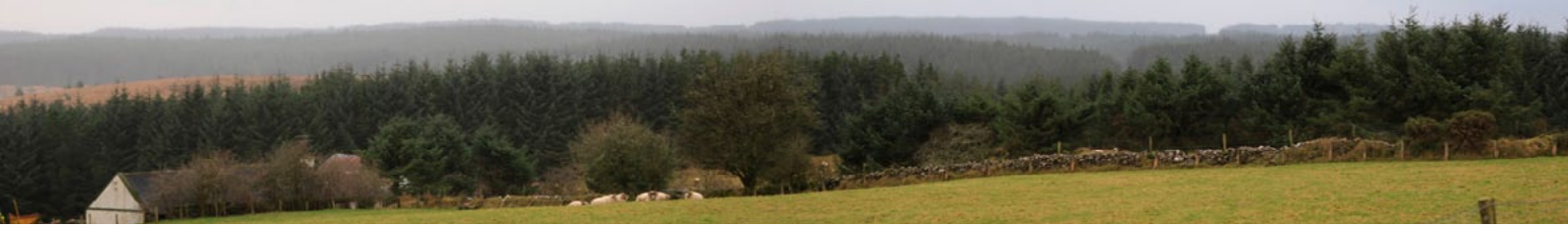
Stakeholders acknowledged the wide range of threats to young trees and forests.

The Woodland Trust said that invasive species, tree diseases and pests are the biggest threats facing forests and noted that these threats could negatively affect recreation, tourism, landscapes and the economics of commercial forestry. It was recommended that a 'fortress Ireland' approach to biosecurity should be adopted and maintained.

The Northern Ireland Environment Link, NIEL, warned that small fragmented areas of native woodland may be at an increased risk from tree diseases and climate change, and called for these areas to be protected through woodland expansion and restoration.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management advised that protecting soils and soil biodiversity is essential for the sustainable growth of trees, and suggested this would enable the reduction in the use of chemical fertiliser.

Noting that they are members of Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW NI), Countryside Alliance Ireland welcomed the opportunity identified to liaise with neighbours and statutory bodies in relation to controlling damage to woodlands and preventing wildlife crime, including deer poaching.



Topic 8 - Minimising the use of Pesticides and Fertilisers

Stakeholders welcomed reductions in pesticide and fertiliser use. However, consultation responses reflected concerns regarding the potential negative impacts of pesticides and fertilisers.

NIEA, Water Management Unit advised that even trace amounts of pesticides entering a river can have a devastating impact on aquatic insects, with possible implications in terms of failing to meet Water Framework Directive requirements.

The Loughs Agency supported the provision of buffer zones and said that run off areas can mitigate the negative effects of pesticides and fertilisers.

While welcoming the adoption of a specific integrated pest management strategy, the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside raised concerns about the future extent of the use of neonicotinoids and glyphosate.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management cautioned that fertiliser applied as an aerial spray can drift onto non-target vegetation. They said that this can have a detrimental impact on habitats that are naturally low in nutrients, notably peatlands and heathlands.

Topic 9 - Targeting Invasive Species

There was widespread interest in the management of invasive species. A number of stakeholders, including NIEA Natural Environment Division, recognised the importance of a collaborative approach to invasive species control.

NIEA Water Management Unit advised that control of invasive species associated with watercourses should be focused on upper catchments. They said this would provide the greatest benefit by preventing downstream spread and would also contribute to improving the local aquatic habitat.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management said that control measures should also target widely-occurring species such as Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam.

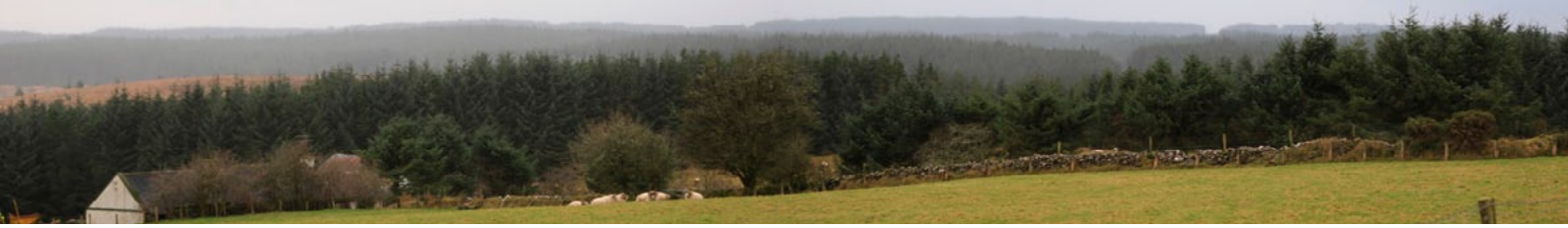
The RSPB NI expressed the view that self-sown Sitka spruce on land adjacent to forests was also an invasive species and should be removed from priority open ground habitats. Noting the problem of invasive species on privately owned land, The Woodland Trust called for greater grant assistance for their removal.

Topic 10 - Protecting Habitats and Species

Stakeholders expressed strong opinions regarding how forest management has the potential to affect vulnerable or threatened natural habitats and species.

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management advised that references to priority habitats should distinguish between those listed in the EU Habitats Directive, and those that are referred to as Northern Ireland Priority Habitats, which are listed on DAERA web pages.

The RSPB NI urged Forest Service to take account of the requirements of species featured on the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) red and amber lists, such as hen harrier



and curlew, when developing forest plans. The Woodland Trust made reference to the importance of protecting a broader range of habitats and species than referred to in the scoping document, including ancient and long established woodland, badgers and buzzards. The NI Environment Link also highlighted the importance of protecting species of conservation concern that may not immediately be associated with woodland habitats, such as breeding waders. The West Tyrone Red Squirrel Group said that maintenance of ecological connectivity is important in sustaining red squirrel populations. They advised that consideration is given to the impact upon red squirrels when sustainable wood production plans and design plans are being drafted.

With regard to aquatic habitats and species, the Loughs Agency highlighted habitat fragmentation as an issue of concern and advised that bridge crossings and culverts could form barriers or partial barriers to fish migration and prevent isolated populations from completing their life cycle. The Agency also suggested that there could be further collaboration with Forest Service to improve aquatic habitats such as bank protection, in-channel substrate improvements, and easement of barriers, and recommended that impassable barriers should be reviewed and, subject to consultation, removed.

A number of stakeholders made reference to wider strategies and plans. The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside encouraged linking Forest Service activities to wider DAERA objectives and targets for biodiversity. Similarly, the Institute of Northern Ireland Beekeepers said that there should be due regard given to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan which is supported by DAERA.

Topic 11 - Restoring Peatland Habitats

Stakeholders welcomed peatland restoration and expressed their willingness to engage and work in partnership with Forest Service.

Derry City and Strabane District Council indicated that the North West Forestry Plan could complement their Green Infrastructure Plan. The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management recommended that relevant stakeholders should be consulted when identifying candidate areas for restoration.

The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, CNCC, welcomed the addition of connectivity with designated areas and non-designated priority habitats as a key part of the selection process. CNCC emphasised that restoration should include forested areas and non-forested areas that have become degraded due to peat cutting or erosion, since these degraded non-forested areas could include habitats that are actively peat-forming.

The RSPB NI referred to a project that they commissioned to highlight potential areas of peatland restoration, which had identified a number of candidate areas in Slievedoo, Glenderg and Moneygal forests. RSPB NI recommended that Forest Service should aim to restore a significant proportion of afforested peatland to realise benefits from the delivery of ecosystem services from functioning peatlands at a landscape scale, in west Tyrone and elsewhere.

NI Environment Link (NIEL) said that forest regeneration should be avoided on deep peats in preference for peatland restoration. NIEL also recommended that the government policy on peatlands, "Conserving Peatland in Northern Ireland" 1993, requires extensive revision.

Appendix

List of organisations who responded to the West Tyrone Forestry Planning Area Scoping Consultation

Baronscort Estate

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)

Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC)

Countryside Alliance Ireland

DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Water Management Unit

DAERA Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Natural Environment Division

Department for Communities, Historic Environment Division

Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Rivers

Derry City and Strabane District Council

Drenagh Sawmills Ltd

Drumquin Community & Youth Centre

Institute of Northern Ireland Beekeepers

Loughs Agency

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB NI) Northern Ireland

The Woodland Trust Northern Ireland

West Tyrone Red Squirrel Group