

# WET WOODLAND

## LOCAL HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH

Last Updated: December 2008

### 1 CURRENT STATUS

#### 1.1 Context

Wet woodland is a UK and local Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It has declined nationally due to pressures such as agriculture, industrial and residential development, the lowering of water-tables and flood prevention measures. It occurs on a range of poorly drained or seasonally wet soil types and often forms part of a mosaic with other woodland and other habitat types.

Sites containing wet woodland often encompass other important habitats creating a particularly valuable wetland mosaic. This mosaic can often combine wet woodland with, pools, scrapes, reed bed, wet grassland and scrub. The transition between these habitats and structural diversity offered by complimentary habitats is of particular biodiversity value. Similarly the transition to drier woodland and grassland can be highly valuable within a site. This mosaic of habitats and transition zones therefore needs careful consideration and it would be flawed to consider wet woodland in isolation of the other habitats which may be present. The management of such sites should aim to maximise biodiversity value by carefully balancing the habitat components of the mosaic and managing the inevitable tendency for habitats to undergo succession.

Tree species usually include alder, elm, birch and willows as the predominant tree species, but sometimes including ash, oak and beech on the drier areas. These can be present in coppice and pollard management. As a habitat wet woodland supports a wide range of BAP priority species, for example otters and bats; birds including the Marsh Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Song Thrush; and invertebrates such as Netted and Waved Carpet moth. Wet woodland now only exists as small or localised patches of habitat in river valleys, on ground surrounding bogs or mires, on the transition between open water and drier ground, and beside small streams. It can also be closely associated with mineral workings particularly in the lower laying areas of the county. In these situations it can be limited to a fringe of woodland vegetation around otherwise flooded former pits.

Many alder woods are ancient and have a long history of coppice management which has determined their structure, and may have impeded succession to drier woodland types. Other wet woodland may have developed through natural succession on open wetlands (sometimes following cessation of active management) and structurally are little influenced by direct forestry treatments.

#### 1.2 Biological status

Precise figures on the extent of wet woodland in the UK do not exist, but an approximation is in the region of 50,000 - 70,000 ha. The UK is also thought to host a large proportion of the fen surviving in Europe, on which wet woodland can exist.

From the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough phase 1 habitat survey it has not been possible to estimate the total area of wet woodland within the County. However, there are 4 SSSIs, with a total area of 37ha, which are designated principally for this habitat, and 8 County Wildlife Sites, with a total area of 66ha. A specific wet woodland project for the Peterborough area undertook an inventory of this habitat type. This inventory identified 78ha of wet woodland habitat across 73 sites in the Peterborough District. Of these sites, the majority were less than 1ha in size distributed as outlined above. The project also identified significant (113ha) potential for wet woodland creation 36ha of which was agreed with landowners for restoration to this habitat type by 2006.

A similar project in the Ouse Valley through Huntingdonshire identified a further 62 Ha of wet woodland habitat across 45 sites, with the largest site just over 6 Ha in size and the majority less than 1 Ha. The project identified the potential for the creation of 21 Ha of new wet woodland.

While this should not be taken as typical for the whole of the County it should be noted that wet woodland has been recorded in the situations described even within the Limestone area of the County. Therefore while this habitat type is more closely correlated with landscape areas such as the fens other landscape areas should not be ruled out for the existence and creation of this habitat type.

### 1.3 Species

Wet woodland combines elements of many other ecosystems. Important among these is a scrub component both within and on the boundaries of this habitat type and should be considered and managed as an integral component of the habitat type. It is also important for a wide range of BAP priority species, for example otters and bats; birds including the Marsh Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and Song Thrush; and invertebrates such as Netted and Waved Carpet moth

Indeed the number of invertebrates associated with alder, elm, birch and willows, is very large, although some are now confined to just a few sites, for example the biodiversity priority species beetles *Rhynchaenus testaceus*, *Agonum livens*, *Oberea oculata* and *Gyrophana pseudonana*. Dead wood within the sites can be frequent, and its association with water provides specialised habitats not found in dry woodland types this gives rise to habitats for other insects such as the beetle *Saperda carcharies*. From the Cambridgeshire Red Data book, plant species that have strong connection with wet woodland are Greater Tussock-sedge, Opposite-leafed Golden Saxifrage, Alder Buckthorn, and Yellow Pimpernel.

## 2 CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING WET WOODLAND IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Wet woodland is affected by the following factors that impact directly or indirectly upon its current condition and dynamics:

- Clearance and conversion to other land-uses, particularly in woods recently established on wetland sites.

- Lack of management in formerly coppiced sites may encourage succession to drier woodland types.
- Lowering of water-tables through drainage or water abstraction, resulting in change to drier woodland types.
- Unsympathetic management of areas bordering woods creating abrupt edges causing over drainage problems leading to damage.
- Re-profiling of sharply dug-out ditches and drains.
- Inappropriate grazing levels and poaching of the soil by sheep, cattle and deer leading to a change in the woodland structure, ground flora impoverishment and difficulties for regeneration.
- Flood prevention measures, river control and canalization, leading to loss of dynamic disturbance-succession systems and invertebrate communities, as well as possible reductions in the extent of individual sites.
- Constraints on the spread of woodland from conservation sites onto adjacent ground due to other land uses such as agriculture, industrial or residential development.
- Poor water quality arising from eutrophication, industrial effluents or rubbish dumping leading to changes in the composition of the ground flora and invertebrate communities.
- Invasion by non-native species which alter vegetation composition and lower conservation value; air pollution which may influence particularly bryophyte and lichen communities; and diseases such as *Phytophthora* root disease of alder.
- Climate change, potentially resulting in changes in the vegetation communities.
- Limited availability of funding for wet woodland maintenance and creation.

### **3 CURRENT ACTION**

#### **3.1 Legal Status**

Statutory site protection plays an important part in the conservation of this habitat type, through designation of the best examples as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

National forestry policy includes a presumption against clearance of broadleaved woodland for conversion to other land uses, and in particular seeks to maintain the special interest of ancient semi-natural woodland. Felling licences from the Forestry Commission (FC) are normally required if the woods are not managed under plans approved by them.

Public bodies and Local Authorities are required by Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to have regard to biodiversity in exercising their functions. This can be taken to extend to Priority Habitats such as wet woodland.

Relevant hydrological policy issues include water level management plans, and impoundment licences and consents for abstraction and land drainage issued by the Environment Agency.

Some woods may receive additional protection through local policies and strategies within development plans or by being subject to Tree Preservation Orders. This can include inclusion within County Wildlife Sites which receive protection under local plan policies and which receive support from the Partners of the Biodiversity Partnership.

There is a range of national, regional and local planning policies that, along with other legislation, set out requirements for biodiversity conservation. Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9): Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (ODPM, 2005) is the key national planning policy document for biodiversity in England. It sets out the key principles that regional planning bodies and local planning authorities should adhere to in order to ensure that biodiversity is fully considered in the development of planning policy and determination of planning applications. The seven policies within the Environment chapter of the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England (GO-East, May 2008) set out the requirements for proper consideration to be given to the potential effects of development on the natural, built and historic environment of the East of England. At the local level, the planning policy documents of local planning authorities should take account of BAP and HAP targets and priorities, setting overarching policies for the protection and enhancement of biodiversity.

### **3.2 Management, Guidance and Research**

The Forestry Commission (FC) guide to the management of wet woods was first published in 1994 and reprinted in 2003. Management should follow this guide, as well as other FC guidelines (in particular the Forestry and Water Guidelines published in 2003) in order to qualify for grant aid or felling licences from FC. Guidance on ways of creating new native woodland is also available in the FC Bulletin 112 and on desirable locations for new woods from reports by Countryside Council for Wales and Natural England.

Wildlife and tree management advice is available locally through the statutory conservation agencies, the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group, ADAS plus the voluntary and commercial sectors (e.g. the Wildlife Trusts, and local woodland initiatives). The experience of woodland managers is also developed and promoted by organisations such as the Small Woods Association, the Timber Growers Association, Royal and Royal Scottish Forestry Societies, Institute of Chartered Foresters, Association of Professional Foresters and the Coppice Association.

Grants for, and advice on, management, including regeneration, planting and some other operations, are available from FC and in some circumstances from other government agencies and local authorities. The English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) is the Forestry Commission's suite of grants designed to develop the co-ordinated delivery of public benefits from England's woodlands and includes grants for woodland creation, management and improvements.

## **4 OBJECTIVES AND LONG TERM TARGETS**

### **4.1 Objectives (revised July 2007)**

- Identify the extent of wet woodland habitat type.
- Maintain the current area of wet woodland.
- Re-habilitate wet woodland on known sites, bringing all significant stands of these habitats on SSSIs and CWSs into favourable condition.
- Create new areas of wet woodland, aiming to enlarge and link existing sites wherever possible.

### **4.2 Targets**

1. Maintain the current extent (estimated to be 276 ha) of wet woodland in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
2. Maintain at least the current condition for wet woodland within SSSIs & County Wildlife Sites in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
3. Achieve favourable or recovering condition for 90% by area of wet woodland within SSSIs & County Wildlife Sites\*, by 2010 (95% by 2015 and 98% by 2020).
4. Restore 20 Ha of wet woodland on existing sites, by 2010.
5. Create 50 Ha of wet woodland on improved grassland, arable, or former minerals extraction sites, on, adjacent to and linking existing sites, by 2010, 100 by 2015 and 150 ha by 2020 (there is long-term potential for 300+ ha). Enlarge and link existing site where possible.

\* Most sites have yet to be assessed as resources have thus far been targeted at grasslands, fens & marshes. It is the intent of the CWS partnership that all areas of BAP priority habitats are eventually within this system, this target should therefore give comprehensive coverage for the BAP habitat type.

## 5. ACTIONS

<b>Wet woodland: Habitat management, restoration &amp; creation</b>					
<b>BAP TARGET</b>	<b>PROGRESS TO 2006</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>LEAD PARTNER/S</b>	<b>PRIORITY / DATE</b>	<b>RESOURCES</b>
1. Maintain the current extent of wet woodland (estimated to be 276 Ha) in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	No known net loss of or damage to sites through change of land use or drainage since 2000	1.1 Ensure that all landowners and managers of SSSIs & County Wildlife Sites supporting wet woodland habitats are aware of their importance, through provision of site information	NE (SSSI)  WiT /LAs (CWS)	High On-going	This is the role of Natural England for SSSIs.  A local Wildlife Sites partnership is being formed to address the needs of County Wildlife Sites (see below). This will require support from all local authorities, including financial backing.
	Coverage for HAP area limited to Peterborough and Ouse Valley	1.2 Identify and map all significant stands of this habitat type in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by 2010. Could form a part of a partnership project.	NE, WiT, LAs, FC, WoT	High 2008	While this could form part of the roles of current staff, it may be that a dedicated project officer could progress action more rapidly.
	Plans published recently all have site protection policies	1.3 Ensure all planning policy documents (LDF, Minerals & Waste Plans, etc.) have strong policies protecting SSSIs and County Wildlife Sites	LAs, CCC	High On-going	Existing staff resources

		1.4 Continue to assess planning applications that may affect wet woodland sites and comment on those that may have an adverse impact	LAs, CCC	Medium On-going	Existing staff resources
		1.5 Alert Natural England if a landowner is proposing / thinking of undertaking agricultural improvement activities on a site supporting wet woodland, so that the provisions of the EIA Regulations for Uncultivated Land can be implemented.	NE, WiTr, FWAG	Medium On-going	Existing staff resources
		1.6 Alert the Forestry Commission if a landowner is proposing/thinking of undertaking felling activities on a site supporting wet woodland where a felling licence would be required, so that the Forestry Commissions Impact Assessment of the proposed operation can be carried out.	FC, WiT, LAs	Medium On-going	Existing staff resources

<p>2. Maintain at least the current condition for wet woodland within SSSIs &amp; County Wildlife Sites in Cambridgeshire &amp; Peterborough.</p> <p>3. Achieve favourable or recovering condition for 90% (by area) of wet woodland within SSSIs &amp; County Wildlife Sites, by 2010 (95% by 2015 and 98% by 2020)</p>		<p>2/3.1 Implement appropriate woodland management practices in all wet woodland sites.</p> <p>Ensure that all landowners and managers are provided with information, advice and support regarding management of their sites to enable them to achieve this action</p> <p>2/3.2 Buffer wet woodland sites to prevent damage by external factors, such as agricultural spray drift.</p> <p>2/3.3 Develop a small suite of demonstration wet woodland sites where detailed structure, process and species monitoring is carried out.</p>	<p>NE (SSSIs) WiT / LAs (CWS)</p>	<p>High 2010</p>	<p>This is the role of Natural England for SSSIs.</p> <p>A local Wildlife Sites partnership is being formed to address the needs of County Wildlife Sites (see below). This will require support from all local authorities, including financial backing.</p>
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	The Wildlife Trust has secured funding for advisory work through the Rural Enterprise Scheme until March 2009 and both PCC & the County Council have committed staff time.	2/3.4 Support the development of a local Wildlife Sites partnership to ensure monitoring & assessment of County Wildlife Sites and to provide information, advice & support to landowners	PCC / CCC / WiT / other biodiversity partners	High 2007	Additional support will be required from all local authorities, including financial backing.
	A number of nature reserves are under the management of public bodies and that of the charitable trust	2/3.5 Develop a small suite of demonstration wet woodland sites where detailed structure, process and species monitoring is carried out. Could form part of a partnership project.	NE, WiT, LAs, FC, WoT	High 2008	While this could form part of the roles of current staff, it may be that a dedicated project officer could progress action more rapidly.
		2/3.6 After March 2009, secure alternative funding to support County Wildlife Site advisory work and management of the local Wildlife Sites system	LAs / Biodiversity Partnership	High 2009	It is estimated that the cost of one full-time officer to manage the system on behalf of the partners would be £30,000 - £35,000 per year for both Cambridgeshire & Peterborough (2007 prices)

		2/3.7 Undertake site condition monitoring of all wet woodland SSSI sites at least once every 6 years to record the extent and condition of wet woodland habitats	NE (SSSI)	High On-going	This is the role of Natural England for SSSIs.
	PCC funded the Wildlife Trust to undertake site surveys through an SLA for the period 2003-2006	2/3.8 Undertake site condition monitoring of all wet woodland CWS sites at least once every 10 years to record the extent and condition of wet woodland habitats. All local authorities to fund a rolling programme of site re-surveys / site condition monitoring through an SLA with the Wildlife Trust until 2009 (beyond 2009 this could become part of the broader support of the local Wildlife Sites system – see action above)  Aim to assess condition of all CWS containing wet woodland habitats by 2015	LAs / WIT	High On-going	An SLA for the period 2007-2010 has been agreed at £3500 per year (covering all CWS in Peterborough).

<p>4. Restore 20 Ha of wet woodland on existing sites, by 2015</p>		<p>4.1 Identify and implement opportunities through individual site management plans for restoration of wet woodland on existing sites</p> <p>4.2 Buffer wet woodland sites to prevent damage by external factors, such as agricultural spray drift.</p> <p>Key sites for action in Peterborough: Boardwalks, Stillwells pit, Eyebury pit.</p> <p>Key sites for action in Cambridgeshire: Middle Moor; Railway Lakes</p>	<p>NE, WiT, LAs</p>	<p>High 2015</p>	<p>This is the role of Natural England for SSSIs.</p> <p>A local Wildlife Sites partnership is being formed to address the needs of County Wildlife Sites (see above). This will require support from all local authorities, including financial backing.</p>
<p>5. Create 50 Ha of Wet woodland on improved grassland, arable or former minerals extraction sites, on, adjacent to and linking existing sites, by 2010, 100 ha by 2015 and 150 by 2020. Enlarge and link existing sites where possible.</p>	<p>7.5 ha created adjacent to the River Nene at Stibbington.</p> <p>Other small areas (less than 10 ha in total) along the Nene, Welland &amp; Great Ouse are being allowed to naturally regenerate</p>	<p>5.1 Maintain partnership projects in Peterborough &amp; Huntingdonshire to identify and take forward wet woodland creation opportunities and to work with landowners to commence the creation process.</p> <p>Major opportunity areas in Peterborough are around: Must Farm, Maxey Quarry, Stanground South, Nene Park, Southorpe Quarry, West Abbots and Lounds Woods, Thornhaugh Quarries.</p> <p>Major opportunity areas in Cambridgeshire are around: Little Paxton Pits, Block Fen.</p>	<p>NE, WiT, PCC, HDC, FC, WoT</p>	<p>High 2008</p>	<p>While this could form part of the roles of current staff, it may be that a dedicated project officer could progress action more rapidly.</p>

	Minerals plan includes these policies	5.2 Ensure Minerals & Waste planning policy documents have strong policies promoting biodiversity after-use and habitat creation.	CCC/PCC	Medium On-going	Part of the work of current staff including the Wildlife Officer, Countryside Officer and Minerals Planning officers
	22.5 ha agreed as part of the Maxey Quarry restoration.  7.15 ha agreed as part of Little Paxton Pits restoration	5.3 Identify and secure wet woodland creation opportunities through minerals restoration plans for the following sites:  Little Paxton Pits, Maxey Quarry, Must Farm, Thornaugh Quarries, Block Fen	CCC/PCC	Medium On-going	Part of the work of current staff including the Wildlife Officer, Countryside Officer and Minerals Planning officers
		5.4 Monitor and record the extent of wet woodland being created through restoration of minerals extraction sites	CCC/PCC	Medium On-going	Should be achievable through the work programme of the Minerals Planning Officer, Countryside Officer, Wildlife Officer and LDF process
		5.5 Monitor and record the extent of wet woodland being created through agri-environment schemes	NE	Medium On-going	This should form part of government monitoring of agri-environment schemes
		5.6 Monitor and record the extent of wet woodland being created through England Woodland Grant Schemes	FC	Medium On-going	Should be achievable through the work programme of the FC Woodland Officer covering Cambridgeshire and Peterborough

		5.7 Monitor the condition of newly created wet woodland, assessing sites against the County Wildlife Sites criteria every 10 years	NE/LAs, WiT	Medium On-going	No resources are currently made available for this. (If created as part of a development, should be covered by planning conditions / S106 agreement)  Ideally it would become part of the rolling programme of CWS re-surveys and the work of the CWS partnership in reviewing the CWS criteria.
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### Abbreviations

BSG	Cambridgeshire Biodiversity Steering Group
NE	Natural England, Local Team
FWAG	Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group
LAs	Local authorities
FC	Forestry Commission
CCC	Cambridgeshire County Council
PCC	Peterborough City Council
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
SSSI	Site of Special Scientific Interest
WiT	Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Peterborough
WoT	Woodland Trust

## 6 LINKS TO OTHER PLANS

This plan should be considered in conjunction with the habitat action plans for rivers and streams; woodlands; ponds and standing waters; veteran trees and parklands; and floodplain grazing marsh. It is likely that implementation of the plan will also benefit the objectives of the species action plan prepared for otter.

There may be more BAP species associated with woodland. For a full list of UKBAP species occurring in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, contact the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator.

## 7 REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

Arrange monitoring and review of these targets annually and update targets and responsibilities accordingly.

## 8 REFERENCES

An **Appendix of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough site specific actions** on wet woodland SSSIs and CWSs is available from the Biodiversity Partnership Coordinator. This complements this Wet Woodland Habitat Action Plan.

Buglife: Managing priority habitats for Invertebrates, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. For Wet Woodlands see: [www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/adviceonmanagingbaphabitats/wetwoodland.htm](http://www.buglife.org.uk/conservation/adviceonmanagingbaphabitats/wetwoodland.htm)

Colston, A, Gerrard, C, Parslow, P (1997): *Cambridgeshire's Red Data Book including Huntingdonshire, Old Cambridgeshire & The Soke of Peterborough*

Forestry Commission (2003): *Practice Guide The Management of Semi-natural Woodland & Wet Woodlands*, available on [www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCPG008.pdf/\\$FILE/FCPG008.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FCPG008.pdf/$FILE/FCPG008.pdf)

Planning Policy Statement 9 Biological and Geological Conservation, available on [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps9](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/planningandbuilding/pps9)

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## 9 LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

Anglian Water Services Ltd  
Arboricultural Association  
Beetle specialists  
Bird specialists  
Biodiversity Partnership Co-ordinator  
Buglife  
Butterfly Conservation Society  
Cambridge City Council  
Cambridge Preservation Society  
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Countryside Restoration Trust

East Cambridgeshire District Council  
Environment Agency  
Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group  
Fenland District Council  
Flies specialists  
Flowering Plant specialists  
Forestry Commission  
Froglife  
Fungi specialists  
Grafham Conservation Group  
Huntingdonshire District Council  
Huntingdonshire Fauna and Flora Society  
Langdyke Trust  
Moss specialists  
Moth specialists  
Natural England  
Nene Park Trust  
Opportunity Peterborough  
Peterborough City Council  
RSPB - East Anglia  
South Cambridgeshire District Council  
The National Trust  
The Wildlife Trust  
The Woodland Trust