

Media release

State investment in forests vital for wellbeing

Panel must 'bust myth' and shout about nature's value

The Independent Forestry Panel must bust the Treasury myth about the Public Forest Estate and shout about the value of nature.

As the Forestry Panel launches its interim report today, The Wildlife Trusts look to the Panel to explain to the Government the true value of our woodlands and to 'bust the myth' that the Public Forest Estate is a burden on the state.

"If the Budget recognised the full range and scale of benefits our natural environment provided there would be no question of the Treasury pressing for forest sales, or reducing the investment it made in the Public Forest Estate. We have to bust this myth once and for all," said Paul Wilkinson, Head of Living Landscape for The Wildlife Trusts.

The net annual cost to the Treasury of Forest Enterprise, the arm of Forestry Commission England that manages the PFE, is under £20m. Yet the expenditure on just one of the road schemes announced last week in the Autumn Statement (A453 widening between Nottingham, the M1 and East Midlands Airport) is £160m. You could have eight times the Public Forest Estate and all its public benefits for the price of just one road scheme.

The UK National Ecosystem Assessment report, issued in June, highlights the hidden value of nature, worth billions of pounds to the UK economy. It estimates the value of social and environmental benefits of woodland in the UK alone as £1.2 billion per annum.

"The costs to Society of not investing in our woods and forests as part of our natural environment and well-being far outweigh the comparatively small costs to the Treasury of doing so. These places provide substantial physical and mental health benefits, a natural means to counter flooding and important wildlife habitats, Paul continues.



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“Just as we cannot be separated from nature, so forestry cannot be separated from the future of our natural environment as a whole. Many of us are deprived of the sights and sounds of nature in our day-to-day lives and opportunities to explore wildlife-rich places. Our woodlands must play their part in an equally rich network of other habitats such as gardens and parks, meadows, wetlands and moorland. And some places, dark pine plantations should be opened up to give way to more diverse and wildlife-rich habitat¹.”

Paul concludes: *“The Wildlife Trusts, through its submissions, have pressed the Panel to articulate the numerous and substantial benefits drawn from our woodlands. Enhancing wildlife is not a luxury for our nation – it is an essential. Woodlands are just one part of a bigger picture: England's nature. Taking the right approach to England's public forest estate could help us to redress the vast declines in wildlife during the twentieth century.”*

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Notes for editors:

¹Making Space for Nature, The Lawton Review report

The Lawton Review report 'Making Space for Nature' recommended that: *‘Public bodies owning land which includes components of England's current or future ecological network should do more to realise its potential, in line with their biodiversity duty. Further, before disposal of any public land, the impact on the ecological network should be fully evaluated. Where such land is identified as having high wildlife value (existing or potential) it should not be disposed of unless its wildlife value is secured for the future.’*

The Independent Panel on Forestry

The Independent Forestry Panel was established on 17 March 2011 by the Secretary of State, Caroline Spelman, to advise government on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England. The Panel is chaired by the Right Reverend James Jones, Bishop of Liverpool, and members have wide experience, knowledge and interests in the economic, social and environmental aspects of forestry and woodlands. The Panel will make its final report in spring 2012. Stephanie Hilborne OBE, chief executive of The Wildlife Trusts, sits on the Panel in a personal capacity.

The Wildlife Trusts' involvement with woodland management

The Wildlife Trusts manage more than 16,000 hectares of woodland in England and work in partnership with the Forestry Commission (FC) throughout the country.

The Wildlife Trusts' approach to considering forests and woodlands

Decisions about wooded land need to be taken as a part of a coherent strategy for the country's natural environment. Our forests are an important element of what needs to become a resilient ecological network across England. This is true whether forests are in public, private or voluntary sector ownership. Land in public ownership offers the Government a key opportunity to demonstrate its commitment to securing nature's recovery - as sought in the 2010 Lawton Review.

There is great potential for the Public Forest Estate to contribute to the large-scale habitat restoration sought in the Natural Environment White Paper. Currently an estimated 60,000 hectares of the Public Forest Estate in England consists of habitats such as ancient woodlands or heathlands that have been damaged by inappropriate coniferous plantations. The Wildlife Trusts believe these habitats need to be

restored sensitively to improve their value to wildlife. Wildlife Trusts throughout England work in close partnership with the Forestry Commission to restore such habitats as well as to develop the value of other woodlands for people and wildlife.

The Wildlife Trusts (TWT) wildlifetrusts.org

There are 47 individual Wildlife Trusts covering the whole of the UK. All are working for an environment rich in wildlife for everyone. We have more than 800,000 members including 150,000 members of our junior branch [Wildlife Watch](#). Our vision is to create [A Living Landscape](#) and secure [Living Seas](#). We manage around 2,300 nature reserves and every year we advise thousands of landowners and organisations on how to manage their land for wildlife. We also run marine conservation projects around the UK, collecting vital data on the state of our seas and celebrating our amazing marine wildlife. Every year we work with thousands of schools and our nature reserves and visitor centres receive millions of visitors. Each Wildlife Trust is working within its local communities to inspire people about the future of their area: their own Living Landscapes and Living Seas.