



TREND IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Between 1909 and 1974 there was a loss of 8 – 68 % in different areas. However, currently the extent is stable although quality is gradually declining locally.

ESTIMATED EXTENT IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

2050 - 2200 ha.

NATIONAL BAP HABITATS:

Upland Oakwood (priority habitat).

ASSOCIATED NATIONAL BAP PRIORITY SPECIES:

Pipistrelle, dormouse (extinct), red squirrel (extinct), black grouse (extinct), bullfinch, nightjar, spotted flycatcher, song thrush, tree sparrow, northern wood ant, shining guest ant and possibly common fan-foot.

ASSOCIATED PEAK DISTRICT AUDITS:

Upland Oak/Birchwoods.

INTRODUCTION

Semi-natural woodland dominated by oak and/or birch was probably one of the commonest habitats over much of the Peak District, including the limestone plateau of the White Peak, prior to woodland clearance by prehistoric people. Today it is largely confined to Dark Peak cloughs and valley-sides where it is the main woodland type, with particular concentrations along the valley of the River Derwent. Smaller areas occur in similar situations in the South West Peak, with a handful of remnants on the White Peak Plateau and upper dalesides. Many oakwood sites contain small fragments of wet or ash woodland along flushes and on the lower slopes and clough bottoms. Such features are an integral part of the woods and contribute significantly to their wildlife value and are therefore also covered by this action plan. However separate Wet Woodland and Upland Ash Woodland Action Plans have also been produced to cover typical examples of these woodland types where they dominate a site.

Nationally, upland semi-natural woods have declined by about 30 - 40% over the last 60 years. The historical decline in the economic value of coppice for charcoal production and oak bark for tanning has probably been an important factor in the deterioration of clough woodlands locally. This has led to a decline in sustainable management and consequent woodland loss and deterioration through livestock grazing. Up to 1985 forestry policy also encouraged replacement with productive conifers on some sites. Rates of loss in the Peak District between 1909 and 1974 range between 8 - 68% in different areas. Many of the original clough woodlands are now little more than a handful of relic scattered trees/shrubs, though often still supporting important species.

Upland oak/birchwoods are at the south-eastern edge of their British range in the Peak District. They often support irreplaceable ancient woodland communities with notable species such as hazel, aspen, wood-sorrel, wood anemone, wood sage, bird cherry, common cow-wheat and bluebell, and upland birds such as pied flycatcher and wood warbler. A considerable number of notable invertebrates including northern wood ant, ash-grey slug and the locally increasing purple hairstreak are also characteristic. The interface between woodland and moorland is of particular wildlife and landscape value, providing an important habitat for birds such as nightjar, tree pipit and, formerly, black grouse. In addition to their wildlife value, oak/birchwoods are often of considerable landscape importance and ancient woodland sites in particular may show features of archaeological/historical significance such as charcoal pits.

Particularly good examples of upland oak/birch woodland are Yarncliffe Wood (Padley), Abney & Bretton Clough and the Shell Brook Valley (Wincle).

ADVERSE IMPACTS	Historic	Current
Land Management		
Fragmentation caused by past woodland clearance.	✓	
Grazing pressure in un-enclosed woods.	✓	✓✓
Historical replacement of native communities by planting (notably conifers, sycamore and beech) up to the early 1980s.	✓✓	
Invasion by non-native species, notably sycamore, beech and rhododendron.		✓
Reduction in diversity through historical management for oak.	✓	
Pollution		
Air pollution has adversely affected lower plant communities.	✓	✓
Recreation		
Paintball games.		✓
Motorbike scrambling and 4x4 trials.		✓
Others		
Lack of structural diversity, particularly old/dead wood habitats.	✓	✓
Browsing by deer.		✓

An impact ✓ Significant impact ✓✓

CURRENT ACTION

Designated Sites

- Approximately 625 ha (28 - 30%) of upland oakwoods are included within SSSIs.
- Several upland oakwoods are included within the South Pennine Moors cSAC.
- A number of oakwoods are identified as 'Wildlife Sites'.

New Initiatives

- Since 1999 large estates have been encouraged by the FC to manage their woodlands within long term Forest Plans.
- Since 1997 landowners have created over 100 ha of new native oakwood in the Peak District encouraged/supported through the FC's 'New Native Woodland in National Parks' Challenge Fund. This fund is currently under review.

Land Management

- A small proportion of existing woodlands are owned and/or managed by conservation bodies.
- Several organisations (including the NT, DWT, NWW, STW and FC) have encouraged regeneration of relic woodland, particularly in the Upper Derwent Valley and Longdendale.
- National forestry policy includes a presumption against clearance of broad-leaved 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 FC are normally required if the woods are not managed under plans approved by them.

Research and Surveys

- Most ancient woodlands have been surveyed by the PDNPA during the period 1970s - 1990s.
- Economic incentives for sustainable management are being investigated through the development of markets for wood products by the Objective 5b Farm & Environment Project.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National Targets

- Maintain the existing area (70000 - 100000 ha) of the upland oakwood system and improve its condition, by a mixture of management for timber (predominantly as low intensity high forest), as sheltered grazing, and minimum intervention.
- Avoiding other habitats of high nature conservation value, expand the area of upland oakwood by about 10 %, on to currently open ground, by some planting but particularly by natural regeneration, by 2005.
- Identify and encourage the restoration of a similar area (about 10 %) of former upland oak woodland that has been degraded by planting with conifers or invasion by rhododendron.

A Vision for the Peak District

A positive future for upland oak/birch woodland lies with an expanded and inter-connected network of well managed woods spanning the many moorland fringe areas and extending into the enclosed farmlands along cloughs and valley sides to form an integral component of the upland habitat mosaic. Objectives set by this action plan therefore address issues relating to both the current condition of these sites (Objectives 1 and 2) and to the potential for future expansion and restoration of the wider woodland network (Objectives 3 and 4).

Owing to the long time-scales involved with woodland management the action plan targets set have taken a staggered approach towards bringing oak/birch woodland areas into favourable condition. These targets are roughly in line with those of the national BAP. The action plan objectives for woodland expansion and restoration are more ambitious than national targets in reflection of the perceived opportunities for relatively rapid actions to occur through the conversion of plantation woodlands to native cover and the expansion of woodland cover within currently degraded, partly wooded upland cloughs.

OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

Objective 1

Maintain extent of upland oak/birchwoods and bring all existing ancient semi-natural woodland on the Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) into favourable condition.

Target

Initiate measures by 2005 to bring 300 ha (approximately 30 %) of oak/birchwoods on the AWI into favourable condition, and the remainder by 2015.

Objective 2

Bring priority examples of non-ancient semi-natural oak/birchwoods into favourable management.

Target

Introduce appropriate management regimes by 2010 to bring 100 ha (approximately 10 %) of oak/birchwoods which are not on the AWI into favourable condition.

Objective 3

Convert Plantations on Ancient Woodland sites (PAWS) back to oak/birchwoods where this is a priority.

Target

Introduce appropriate management regimes over 80 ha (15 %) of relevant PAWS by 2005, to restore site-native species over appropriate time spans. Review and set a new target for 2005 - 2010.

Objective 4

Reverse woodland defragmentation by creation of new woodland, particularly by natural regeneration. Prioritise the extension/linking of existing ancient woodlands and relic clough woodland.

Target

Initiate measures by 2005 to create 200 ha of new oak/birchwood, including at least 100 ha of clough woodland in relic sites adjacent to existing ancient woodland, following current best practice. Review and set a new target for 2005 - 2010.

Main Factors Likely to Affect Achievement of Targets

Land Management

Implementation of the Rural Development Regulation and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Resources and Financial Incentives

Availability/adequacy of financial incentives for woodland management/creation.

Planning and Regulation

Planning policy.

Conflicts with Other Priorities

Potential conflict with other areas of conservation interest such as rush pasture, wading birds and heather moorland.

Potential conflict with archaeological or landscape priorities.

Practical Difficulties and Gaps in Knowledge

Practicality of fencing clough woodlands.

Adequate supply of local provenance tree/shrub stocks.

Co-ordination of management on sites in varied ownership.

Browsing by deer.

Pollution and Climate Change

Climate change.

Others

Importance of woodland for stock shelter and movement in some areas.

Public perception.

ACTIONS

Key to the achievement of the proposed targets is the securing of appropriate financial incentives to bring oak/birchwoods into good condition, to restore priority ancient woodland sites and to re-create new woodland in priority locations. The expansion of oak/birch woodland is crucial to the provision of a richer woodland habitat, particularly in moorland fringe areas and cloughs. Key actions within the plan include:

- Considering a review of relevant grant schemes (Action OW20 and OW21);
- Negotiating management to control heavy grazing and non-native species on existing priority sites (OW22 - 25);
- Identifying priority sites and negotiating measures for restoring native woodland on PAWS (OW8, OW11 and OW23 - 25);
- Identifying and surveying potential woodland sites in cloughs, and negotiating restoration and re-creation in priority locations (OW1, 5, 6, 11 and 23 - 25), and
- The establishment of local provenance seed sources for key tree and shrub species (OW31).

ACTIONS	TIMESCALE	LEAD AGENCY & Partners
DATA COLLATION AND SURVEY		
Data Collation		
OW1 Collate existing information and identify gaps in the knowledge for upland oakwoods outside of SSSIs. (All Objectives)	2001	EN/PDNPA/WTs/LAs LRCs/Voluntary Sector
OW2 Compile a register of oak/birchwood sites including level of importance (including 'Wildlife Site' status), Natural Area, NVC category, condition, important species and conservation status, and initiate a programme for regular updating. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	PDNPA/FC/EN
OW3 Compile a register of relic clough woodland. (Objective 4)	2001	PDNPA/FC/EN
OW4 Compile a register of PAWS which are likely to be capable of supporting oak/birch woodland. (Objective 3)	2001	FC/EN/PDNPA
Survey		
OW5 Complete detailed habitat survey of woodlands on the AWI. (Objective 1)	2005	WBAPG
OW6 Carry out habitat survey of relic clough sites with inadequate existing information. (Objective 4)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN (joint leads)

EVALUATING THE IMPORTANCE AND CONDITION OF SITES

Evaluating Importance and Identifying Key Sites

OW7 Review the wildlife value of existing grazed open woodland sites. (Objective 1)	2001	WBAPG
OW8 Agree criteria for defining priority PAWS for restoration and non-ancient semi-natural woods for conservation. (Objectives 2 and 3)	2001	WBAPG
OW9 Agree methodology for the evaluation of upland oakwoods and the identification of 'Wildlife Sites'. (All objectives)	2002	WBAPG

Defining Favourable Condition

OW10	Agree definitions of favourable condition for the complete range of sites found in the Peak District including the requirements of important species. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001	WBAPG
OW11	Agree guidelines for the range of appropriate management needed to achieve favourable condition including: *The identification of priority sites/areas for conservation, restoration and creation, focusing on the importance of linkages and extensions to reduce the fragmented nature of the habitat *Restoration and re-creation management including species mixes, stock provenance, planting strategies, options for natural regeneration and the interface with the moorland habitat (All Objectives)	2001	WBAPG

RESEARCH

OW12	In collaboration with other woodland action plans, evaluate the impact of numbers of deer on Peak District woodlands and implement any necessary mitigation action. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	WBAPG
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MONITORING

OW13	Agree methodology for and implement effective monitoring of oak/birchwood. Ensure that the results of the process are collated and used to update the oak/birchwoods register. (All Objectives)	2001	WBAPG
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AWARENESS RAISING

OW14	Share information on the wildlife importance and management needs of key conservation, restoration and re-creation sites with the landowners/managers, including feedback from surveys. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/WTs FWAG/FC
OW15	Ensure local interpretation of FC guidance on restoration of PAWS to semi-natural woodland is made available to land owners/managers and conservation organisation staff. (Objective 2)	2001	FC
OW16	Ensure effective communication and distribution of FC guidance on control of rhododendron species and interpret locally where required. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002	WBAPG

CONSERVATION ACTION AND INCENTIVES

Designations

OW17	Review coverage of oak woodland SSSIs and notify further sites as appropriate. (Objective 1)	2005	EN
OW18	Implement obligations under European (Natura 2000) legislation with regard to the inclusion of oak/birch woodland within the proposed South Pennine Moors SAC. (Objectives 1 and 3)	2001 onwards	EN
OW19	Consider oak woodland key sites in any programme of acquisition/lease/management of nature reserves including NNRs and LNRs. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	EN/LAs (joint leads) PDNPA/WTs/ RSPB/NT

Grant Schemes

OW20	Consider recommending a review of woodland, agri-environment and conservation schemes to ensure that: *Management prescriptions and payments encourage stock exclusion from existing semi-natural woodland, new native woodland creation in appropriate locations		
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	and restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites		
	*Encouragement is given to the production of long term management plans		FC/MAFF/EN
	*Incentives are sufficient to encourage appropriate management (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/WEG WBAPG
OW21	Seek the development of new native woodland grant schemes. (Objective 4)	2003	FC/WBAPG
Negotiation and Review of Agreements			
OW22	Review management of all sites within SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers, to ensure maintenance or restoration of favourable condition. (Objective 1)	2005	EN
OW23	Negotiate appropriate conservation agreements with land owners/managers of sites outside SSSIs and existing agreements, targeting:		
	*Priority conservation sites	2001 onwards	FC/PDNPA
	*PAWS for woodland restoration	2003 onwards	MAFF/FWAG
	*Sites for new woodland creation (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	NT/WTs
OW24	Review management of oak/birch woodlands in existing conservation agreements, outside SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers to ensure that favourable condition is being maintained or restored. (Objectives 1, 2 and 3)	2002 - 2005	MAFF/NT/WTs PDNPA/FWAG FC
OW25	Review whole holding agreements which include unprotected oak/birch woodlands or sites for restoration/re-creation. Consider the opportunities for amending the agreement to ensure that favourable management is incorporated. (Objectives 1, 2 and 3)	2002 - 2005	MAFF/NT WTs/PDNPA FWAG/FC
OW26	Ensure action plan objectives and targets are incorporated into the production of Forest Plans. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	FC/EN/PDNPA
OW27	Consider and encourage options for stock shelter which allow woodland regeneration on farms. (Objectives 1 and 3)	2002	WBAPG/MAFF
Alternative Incomes			
OW28	Develop a strategy for increasing the economic benefits of woodland products and uses where this would encourage appropriate conservation management. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002	FC/TGA/CLA
Land Acquisition			
OW29	Consider negotiating purchase/lease of priority sites where this would be the most effective way of achieving conservation objectives and when a negotiated conservation solution has not succeeded. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/NT WTs/WdT
Direct Action			
OW30	On land owned by public or conservation bodies, ensure that:		
	*Management maintains, and where possible enhances, the value of oak/birch woodland		
	*Options for the restoration of PAWS are reviewed		
	*Opportunities for new native woodland creation are taken		PDNPA/EN/LAs
	*Opportunities for involvement of local communities in site management are taken where possible (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	FC/NT/WTs WdT
OW31	Identify appropriate sources of local provenance Peak District upland oak/birchwood trees and shrubs (particularly the scarcer relic clough woodland species) and encourage their supply. (Objectives 3 and 4)	2001 - 2003	WBAPG PDNPA/FC/NT DWT

REGULATION

Planning

OW32	Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on oak/birch woodland, that loss or damage is avoided and that opportunities for the enhancement or creation of oak/birch woodland is considered in relevant planning decisions. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	LAs/EN/WTs PDNPA
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RESOURCES

It is envisaged that the majority of actions proposed will be carried out by the relevant organisations using current resources. These include:

- continuing investment by landowners and managers managing their land sympathetically for wildlife;
- the FC's Woodland Grant Scheme;
- EN's review of woodland management in SSSIs, and its grant and management agreement schemes;
- the PDNPA's advisory and grants service for landowners/managers;
- MAFF's Farm Woodland Premium Scheme;
- MAFF's Countryside Stewardship and Environmentally Sensitive Area Schemes;
- proposed restructuring of major conifer plantations by water companies, major estates, SCC and the FC;
- continuing management of woodlands in the ownership of conservation organisations and public bodies (LAs, FC, PDNPA, NT, WTs, WdT) and WCs.

A mechanism is needed to replace the Forestry Commission's 'New Native Woodland' Challenge Fund which closed in 2000 (currently under review), in order to provide financial aid for woodland creation.

Additional resources are likely to be required:

- for survey and negotiation of management for new clough woodlands and PAWS (2001 onwards);
- to provide adequate financial incentives for the conservation, enhancement and restoration of existing priority woodlands (2001 onwards);
- to aid in the production of the proposed registers (2001 onwards);
- to implement effective monitoring (2001 onwards).