

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

Briefing

Public Forest Estate



The Public Forest Estate plays a key role in balancing the commercial needs of timber production and income generation, with public benefits such as landscape conservation, recreation, tourism and wildlife conservation. Government is now setting up a new panel to consider the role of the Public Forest Estate.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust believes that at a time when the Government is due to publish a White Paper on its vision for the Natural Environment and has welcomed the findings of *Making Space for Nature*¹, this consideration of the Public Forest Estate must both protect and enhance our natural environment for wildlife and people.

To safeguard the future of the Public Forest Estate, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust believes that:

- All important areas of wildlife habitat must be protected and enhanced – not just those that carry existing statutory protection
- The potential for restoring, creating and linking areas of important habitat must be considered in assessing the wildlife value of the Public Forest Estate
- Sustainable funding, particularly the revenue costs associated with ongoing management of important areas of wildlife interest must be maintained
- Managed public access that allows people to enjoy the natural world, without compromising its value, must be maintained
- A strong regulatory body to ensure future management of the Public Forest Estate must be retained, alongside incentive schemes for other woodland owners to provide public benefits
- Where areas are kept as commercial forest, good management practices that support wildlife must be retained - for example rotational felling supports threatened species such as woodlark and nightjar

Key facts

- The Public Forest Estate makes up 18% of all woods and forests in England, and only costs the taxpayer some £13m per year to run
- The Public Forest Estate isn't just woodland – it contains important areas of other habitats such as heathland and wetland
- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust believes that Sherwood Forest should be given special consideration in any review of the Public Forest Estate because of its outstanding wildlife value
- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust manages over 350 hectares of woodland habitat across the county and all our woodlands are FSC accredited
- The Public Forest Estate in Nottinghamshire includes areas designated as of international and national importance for wildlife

¹ A report which highlights that land owned by public bodies has an important role to play in maintaining a sustainable ecological network

Why is the Wildlife Trust concerned about this review?

The Public Forest Estate doesn't just include woodlands – it includes significant areas of other habitats such as heathland which are particularly important in Sherwood Forest. This area has been identified as one of our key Living Landscapes in the county, where large scale habitat restoration is needed to help wildlife adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust has been working to conserve the county's cherished habitats for over 40 years with the protection of Sherwood Forest at the heart of our efforts. We are active partners in the Sherwood Habitats Steering Group and the Sherwood Forest Regional Park Board, seeking to secure the future of Sherwood Forest as a thriving destination that combines an outstanding natural environment with sustainable business opportunities, tourism and the visitor economy.

We also recognise that our woodlands are important to people in ways that are difficult to quantify. Whether it is escaping the stress of modern living, experiencing nature at close quarters or simply enjoying the outdoors, our woodlands have a special place in people's minds.

What would the Wildlife Trust like to see happen?

Much of the debate on the Public Forest Estate has focused upon the principles of ownership. Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust believes that the most important issue is the capacity for the Public Forest Estate to be managed

strategically and sustainably. Any management body must have the skills, vision and resources necessary to protect the wildlife value of sites for the future.

The Wildlife Trust believes that the Forestry Commission plays a key role in regulating forestry activity, supporting protection of important wildlife areas, and in providing incentive schemes to ensure that habitats of wildlife value can be managed. We believe that these essential functions must be retained and strengthened by this review.

How will this affect proposals for the Sherwood Forest Regional Park?

The Wildlife Trust believes that any land transfers in the Sherwood Forest area must be agreed with the Sherwood Forest Regional Park Board and, crucially, support the objectives of the Regional Park.

“Sherwood Forest is one of our most treasured landscapes. Any decisions over the future of the Public Forest Estate must not only safeguard but enhance its wildlife riches.

At a time when we are working with partners to create a Regional Park for Sherwood Forest, it would be a tragedy if any new proposals destroy or damage its unique natural heritage“

**John Everitt, Chief Executive
Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust**

February 2011

For further information on Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust visit our website www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org

With nearly 11,000 members, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust is the county's largest environmental charity run by local people for the benefit of local wildlife and wildlife habitats. Improving people's understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of the natural world is fundamental to our work. We manage more than 60 nature reserves covering more than 2,000 acres, liaise with farmers and landowners to promote and encourage conservation stewardship, campaign for the protection of threatened species and habitats and work to influence government policy and decisions affecting the future of wildlife. Our efforts are part of a nationwide network of 47 local Wildlife Trusts working in partnership to protect our precious natural heritage.