Position Statement

Climate Change

The Woodland Trust's view

May 2019

WOODLAND TRUST

An accelerating crisis for climate and nature

Joel Goodman/ WTML

Fires in peatland and woodland habitats will become more frequent and intense – such as in summer 2018 on the Woodland Trust's Smithills Estate in Greater Manchester.

The Woodland Trust's view

There is a mounting and comprehensive body of evidence that shows how our global climate is changing in unprecedented ways and how that might impact on both people and our natural environment. In particular, two recent global reports – one from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change[1] and the associated UK recommendations from the Committee on Climate Change[2]; the other from the Intergovernmental Panel on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services[3] – have issued a stark message to the world, that we need to act NOW with radical changes to our lifestyles (travel, energy consumption, diet) and the way we use land and resources, if we are to avoid dangerous climate breakdown and a devastating loss of nature. Even with strong international action to slow down greenhouse gas emissions, there is a 50% chance that global temperatures will rise above a globally catastrophic 2 degrees. The evidence around the vital role of land – and most importantly, of how we manage it – in both mitigating and adapting to climate change, is clear and compelling.

Although they make grim reading, taken together, these reports are not without hope and opportunity, particularly for the role of woods and trees. Modelling suggests we have a window of 12 years to make a difference to ensure global warming is kept to a maximum of 1.5°C[1], and trees and woods have a major role to play in global adaptation and mitigation. A rapid increase in the rate of woodland creation has been proposed by the UK's Committee on Climate Change[2], to provide a key mechanism to lock up carbon in trees and soils, provide an alternative to fossil fuel energy and resource hungry building material, and importantly to stem the declines in biodiversity.

Social movements such as The Climate Coalition (which successfully lobbied to secure the Climate Change Act and mainstreaming of climate change), and more recently Extinction Rebellion and School Strike for Climate, and David Attenborough's 'Our Planet' broadcast, have significantly raised the profile and public acceptance of the issues and created energy and commitment behind delivering solutions.

We believe there has never been greater opportunity to align land use and biodiversity policy and action with the need to protect and restore the UK's very significant carbon stores, particularly in soils, peatland, trees and native woodland.

References

[1] https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/
[2] https://www.theccc.org.uk/publication/net-zero-the-uks-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming/
[3] https://www.ipbes.net/global-assessment-biodiversity-ecosystem-services

The impacts of climate change

Climate change is the biggest long-term threat faced by our natural environment and ecosystems, and thus our own life support systems. We are already seeing signs of long-term changes in weather patterns and an increase in extreme weather events such as droughts, fires, floods and storms. In recent years we have seen an increase in climate-induced catastrophes affecting people and wildlife around the globe.

Conservation land use and management, on and off our own estate

The Trust will:

- Promote and demonstrate the role of trees and wood products in directly **mitigating climate change** by locking up carbon through:
  - substantially increasing the area of native woods and trees in the UK through planting and natural regeneration;
  - lobbying governments to ensure that policy and funding frameworks across the UK will enable the expansion in cover required;
  - promoting the use of sustainable timber;
  - enabling peatland restoration on our own estate and encouraging it elsewhere;
  - encouraging renewable biomass for energy production, where this delivers genuine greenhouse gas savings and is sourced from UK woods;
  - working with companies and individuals to mitigate their climate impact;
  - working to incorporate trees and woods far more extensively into farming systems;
  - identifying, developing and trialling innovative funding mechanisms.
- Work to support adaptation of landscapes and wildlife to climate change by increasing the **resilience** of natural ecosystems through direct action on our estate, and through our advice and advocacy with others. We will protect and restore valued woods and treescapes, and increase connectivity of landscapes for wildlife, through more trees and woods in the right places. This will involve actions including:
  - Restoring ancient woodlands damaged by plantation forestry to a more natural composition of native trees and shrubs, thus increasing the amount of 'home habitat' for climate-threatened woodland wildlife.
  - Enabling regular cycles of natural regeneration of native trees at scale wherever this is possible and appropriate, to help woods and trees adapt faster to changing environmental conditions. Herbivore populations must be monitored and sustainably managed to allow regeneration to take place.
  - Planting trees and enabling others to create more native woods and trees at scale, delivering landscapes that are better protected and connected from climate impacts.
  - Promoting greater tree and shrub species diversity and structural complexity in existing woods, through

C Reid/WTML

We will need to change the way we use land, with agroforestry and natural regeneration of trees an essential part of adapting to climate change.

[4] See https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/genetic-considerations-provenance-choice-native-trees-under-climate-change-england/ and https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/publications/is-the-introduction-of-novel-exotic-forest-tree-species-a-rational-response-to-rapid-environmental-change-(725af6fe-4ef8-4345-8f06-634eb59414ff)/export.html

ALAMY

Pine forest specialist, the Scottish crossbill (the UK's only endemic bird) risks extinction in a warming climate.

for example more direct management of woods and the use of a continuous cover forestry approach, which creates diverse structure and protects soils.

- Restoring peatland habitats to become functioning carbon sequestration systems.
- Working in collaboration with other key landowners in priority landscapes to enable us to achieve true landscape- scale action such as integrated habitat creation and restoration as part of large scale ecological networks, deer management to enable natural regeneration, or catchment approaches that strengthen resilience to climate change.
- Using UK sourced and grown trees for any planting to avoid introducing tree diseases that might survive better in a warmer climate. Evidence shows that native species suited to a site are more resilient than exotics or natives from different provenances[4].
- By undertaking seed collections from a wide range of sites and locations we will continue to expand the genetic diversity of our native planting stocks and therefore the resilience of future planted woodlands and trees. Ideally this will be of a local provenance matched to the site, to give the best chance of being adapted to prevalent conditions, and of adapting further in subsequent generations.
- Facilitating the replacement and increase in number of trees outside woods (hedges, roadsides, riversides, tracksides, field trees, and agroforestry systems) to increase the 'permeability' of agricultural land, enabling species under climate pressure to move through the landscape, and increasing gene flow between trees in scattered woodlands.
- Using trees and woodland to support the resilience of rural and urban areas to climate change, for instance through: tree planting and woodland creation to protect water resources and help to reduce flooding and soil erosion; by increasing the amount of large woody debris in river systems to slow the flow in catchments; and by increasing urban woods and trees to lower temperatures and reduce air pollution impacts.

Reducing our own climate impact

The Trust will:

- Commit to further reduce the Trust's own climate change impact, for example through encouraging carbon accounting on our land and property, promoting greener travel, alternative energy sourcing, waste reduction and reducing use of plastic and chemicals. We are working towards the Green Dragon Accreditation environmental standard.

Science and evidence

The Trust will:

- Engage in research, monitoring and demonstration to fill gaps in our knowledge of climate change impacts; and use evidence to develop and demonstrate solutions, building on, for example, the Nature's Calendar phenology change records.
- Make greater scientific use of our estate – our own outdoor laboratory. Key areas for investigation include: how species move through landscapes and colonise new woodland; what contribution natural regeneration makes to carbon lock-up; the role of street trees in urban cooling; and maximising greenhouse gas benefits of UK sourced biomass.

Policy and advocacy

The Trust will:

- Use campaigning and advocacy to secure urgent commitments and action from UK administrations to tackle climate change, highlighting the impact on woodland habitats and species, and the role of native woods and trees in climate solutions. We will use our position as a member of The Climate Coalition, Greener UK and Wildlife & Countryside Links to help us do this.
- Use advocacy to embed best climate practice in woodland and tree protection, creation and management into national policy, standards and guidance.
- Promote partnerships for positive action by our corporate partners and business in general to reduce their environmental footprint, by encouraging reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and by harnessing the potential of native woods and trees to mitigate energy use and reconnect our landscapes.

Supporter and public engagement

The Trust will:

- Involve people in campaigns to protect ancient woodland and trees.
- Organise tree planting events for the public.
- Communicate with the public and supporters about the science and evidence of climate change and the actions that people can take.
- Track the impact of climate change through our Nature's Calendar citizen science project.

Engaging people in recording nature through Nature's Calendar to track climate impacts.

(From top left) Phil Formby/WTML, Louise Holmes, Jane Leigh, Richard Gibbs.

WOODLAND
TRUST

The Woodland Trust, Kempton Way, Grantham, Lincolnshire NG31 6LL.
woodlandtrust.org.uk