

Continuous Cover Forestry Group

Response to Call for Views on the future direction of forestry and woodland policy in England.

The Continuous Cover Forestry Group www.ccfg.org.uk

Professional foresters and others, including scientists and academics, who advocate more natural forest management methods in Great Britain, with a co-ordinator in England. It is formally associated with a wider European movement and organisation, Prosilva Europe www.prosilvaeurope.org

We believe that our views may be of particular value to the Independent Group, since they represent significantly different ideas about how forests can be managed from within the profession, industry and its associated scientific and academic interests.

The Group's Objective

To promote the transformation of even-aged plantations like those established by the Forestry Commission, and the majority of commercial forestry companies, into structurally, visually and biologically diverse forests, in which sustainable production of quality timber is undertaken with the application of the principles of continuous cover management.

Question 1 – What do forests and woods mean to you?

We do not see mono-specific even-aged plantations managed by clearfelling and artificial regeneration by planting as “forests” in the true sense of the word. As forestry professionals and experts, we are convinced that there is a viable alternative. For us a true forest is a *permanent* (i.e. not periodically destroyed by clearfelling), and developing diverse woodland environment from which timber and other benefits can be sustainably produced.

Question 2 – What is your vision for the future of England's forests and woods?

That all forests in England are managed by methods closer to natural processes, progressively becoming more diverse in stand structure, species mixture and biodiversity. That such forests will, across the whole estate, automatically provide most of the benefits society seeks from its forests. We strongly believe that the sum of integrated benefits significantly outweighs narrow industrial forestry and agricultural methods.

Question 3 – What do you feel to be the benefits of forests and woods to:

b) society as a whole;

Evidence from Forestry Commission surveys suggests that people value woodland primarily for wildlife and recreation, agreeing with the statements that woodlands 'are important places for wildlife', 'are places where people can relax and de-stress' and 'are places where people can have fun and enjoy themselves'.

CCFG believes that more naturally managed diverse and multi-structured forest can better meet these needs than current plantation based approaches.

c) the natural environment?

More natural management with maintenance of forest conditions will almost always benefit biodiversity more effectively than more artificial plantation approaches. By its very nature close to nature forestry provides ecosystem services without making concessions to productivity or profitability.

d) the economy?

Continuous cover methods have been pioneered by private sector foresters, often because of the cost-effective economic advantages of natural systems using natural regeneration rather than expensive artificial regeneration by planting. The overriding principle of continuous cover forestry is to enhance the overall qualities of the forest and to concentrate growth on the highest quality stems to maximise the production of the best quality timber.

Question 4 – We would like to hear about your suggestions of practical solutions and good practice which can be replicated more widely.

The Continuous Cover Forestry Group has developed guidance on our approaches and a basic description is appended.

International experience should be considered by the Panel for instance:

- Lower Saxony in Germany, where clearfelling has been phased out in all state forests in recent years.
- Slovenia where clearfelling has been illegal for over fifty years.

CCFG would recommend that the group considers widespread examples of good continuous cover practice in England that can be visited to demonstrate the practical benefits of this type of management.

Question 5 – What do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about England's forests and woods?

Continuous cover forestry management provides the simple mechanism to manage risk in the face of the uncertain future facing woodlands in England. CCF provides the most cost effective and efficient means of integrating multiple outputs and objectives whether financial, environmental and social. The alternative systems concentrate single outputs onto specific areas requiring intensive management and trade-offs to resolve conflicts of interest resulting in severe inefficiencies and because of the long time scales involved in growing

trees expose woodlands to unacceptable risks. The government has a duty to manage the state forests in England as a permanent forest resource and to improve and to manage their asset efficiently in order to provide the maximum benefit to society. The forest resource in England is still largely imperfect due to the history of forestry in this country; it has however benefited from huge investment in finances, in human effort and creativity and in accumulated biological growth in order to provide us with an important resource now able to yield timber and non-timber benefits. Liquidating the resource by clear-felling removes the opportunity for adaptation to change in climatic conditions, in markets and differing demands placed upon our forests, and the ability to improve the growing stock and quality of our forests.

Continuous cover forestry improves the timber quality of the growing stock, allows species mixtures to form and to develop, and creates beautiful landscapes through site adaptation. The systems involve continuous improvement, which fits well with current drives to improve the genetic quality of native hardwoods and introduced conifers; management of CCF stands involves thinning and removing the weaker and poorer stems in favour of a best quality or best potential stems providing genetic conservation, there is a degree of local adaptation through the selection process; through natural regeneration the best individuals are naturally retained on the site; CCF has the potential to minimise risk of leaching nitrates and other potentially damaging chemicals into water courses improving ground water and soil chemistry, this is especially true on slopes and in areas feeding drinking supplies or influencing fisheries; CCF maintains high levels of carbon onsite for carbon storage, both above and below ground. CCF should be viewed as a major carbon and climate mitigation tool for the UK, CCF forests provide a mediated climate that is important for biodiversity and conservation, high levels of woody debris and deadwood are important in woodlands as are veteran and old-growth trees which are retained in CCF stands.

CONTINUOUS COVER MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Adapt the forest to the site

CCF seeks to work with the site and to respect ecological processes and inherent variation rather than impose artificial uniformity. In practice this leads to a presumption towards the use of natural regeneration and the development of mixed species and mixed aged stands.

Adopt a holistic approach to forest management

CCF regards the forest ecosystem as the production capital of the forest. This includes the soil, the forest micro climate, associated fungi, flora and fauna as well as the trees themselves. Management for timber production is directed towards the creation, maintenance and enhancement of a functioning ecosystem rather than the periodic creation and removal of individual crops of trees.

Maintain forest conditions and avoid clear felling

CCF regards the maintenance of forest conditions as an essential tool in achieving its aims. The use of overstorey to influence the amount of light reaching the forest floor, to limit ground vegetation, trigger regeneration and then control its development is crucial. If clearfelling takes place, forest conditions are lost, the benefits of shelter reduced and regeneration becomes more difficult.

The growing stock

Under CCF management, stand improvement is concentrated on the development of preferred individuals rather than the creation of a block of stems with uniform spacing and average stem characteristics. The handling of individuals or groups of stems takes place within the context of the whole growing stock of the stand, the size and composition of which is manipulated to achieve the desired rate of regeneration and to produce the required range of timber products. A characteristic of permanently irregular stands is that yield control is based on measurements of stem diameter and increment rather than area and age.

Stand structure

The CCFG feels that British forests managed in accordance with the principles described above, will generally develop a permanently irregular structure at the compartment level over a long period. At this time, however, it is uncertain whether permanently irregular structures will develop in stands composed entirely of light-demanding species or in certain upland forests types. In such cases, higher rates of natural disturbance will lead to a mosaic of structures, some of which may involve regeneration gaps of a significant size. The transformation process, i.e. the initial period when CCF principles are applied to even-aged stands, may also involve even-aged elements, either through the use of small-scale clear felling or the adoption of shelterwood systems.

We would like to be kept in touch with the work of the Panel

Name: Phil Morgan, Chairman CCFG

E-mail address: administrator@ccfg.org.uk

Organisation (if applicable): Continuous Cover Forestry Group

Location (if applicable): The Library Wing, Abbey St. Bathans House, Duns, Berwickshire, TD11 3TX

Whether you are interested in the whole subject or specific issues (please list):

- Management methods for woods and forests.
- Sustainable timber production.
- Economics of forestry.