



## Northern Ireland Forestry Bill

Briefing paper for the Second Reading of the Forestry Bill; 15 September 2009

### Introduction:

RSPB Northern Ireland and the Woodland Trust welcome the new Forestry Bill, which will replace legislation introduced over 50 years ago. The two are calling for the new legislation to ensure the protection of ancient woodland – a resource particularly scarce in Northern Ireland. It should also promote biodiversity within all state, public and private woodland, and encourage the expansion of Northern Ireland's woodland cover, in line with Forest Service's existing commitment.

### Summary:

#### 1. Sustainability duty for DARD

The Section 1 'General Duty' must include a sustainability clause to protect all native woodland and the biodiversity it supports. This should relate to all forestry policy, practice and its regulation for all woodland types and ownerships. The current proposals have useful comment on the role of state forestry in delivering environmental objectives. However they omit the Department's key responsibility for ensuring the sustainability of all woodland management, including that on private land.

#### 2. Incidental Powers

Forest Service must exercise any Incidental Powers under Section 7 in an environmentally sustainable manner. We are concerned about any ill-defined powers that might result through use of this clause.

#### 3. Felling Licensing

There should be a presumption against granting a felling licence in respect of all woods identified on the Ancient Woodland Inventory. Moreover, licences should avoid wildlife disturbance and permit the restoration of open ground habitats and Planted Ancient Woodland Sites. Forest Service and other land in public ownership must not be exempt from felling licensing. Appropriate management plans must be agreed for any sites granted felling permission.

#### 4. Woodland survey and monitoring

A statutory duty for Forest Service to survey and monitor the extent and condition of all of Northern Ireland's woodland is essential. This inventory should include the extent and biological condition of priority native woodland habitats and species. Such an inventory would be an essential tool in enabling the Northern Ireland Executive to monitor the protection, enhancement and expansion of woodland.

#### 5. Research

We support the principal (Section 6) of Forest Service carrying out research in respect of the wider social and economic benefits of forestry. Information gathered should be freely available to all stakeholders.

#### 6. Stakeholder advisory input to forestry regulation, practice and policy

We would welcome the establishment of an oversight body to advise on issues of sustainable forestry; for example felling licences and Environmental Impact Assessments, research needs and policy recommendations.

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