

SOUTH WEST FOREST – MONTHLY BRIEFING

January 2004

1. Events

- South West Forest attended a workshop on 12 December to review the aims and priorities of **North Devon's Bio-diversity Action Plan** (BAP). SWF's Forestry Advisor David Rickwood facilitated the workshop for native woodland, acting as "Oak Champion" for the BAP group. Jim White also attended and made contributions at the Farmland, Town and Parkland habitat workshops.
- On 11 December, Jim White attended the Devon Education for Sustainability Working Group meeting at which he presented proposals for the progression and development of **Forest Schools** provision in mainstream education in the New Year. The intention is to demonstrate best practice elsewhere in the country where Forest Schools provision has already been adopted by L.E.A.s (ie. Worcestershire and Oxford). South West Forest will be helping to organise an awareness raising event which will present evidence of the educational, developmental and emotional benefits of Forest Schools. The purpose of this event is to make a case for expanding their provision within Devon and Cornwall. South West Forest is an ideal area for trials of such a scheme, fitting neatly with its role as a National Pilot for Rural Development Forestry.
- Richard Irvine attended a seminar in London, mounted by the Field Studies Council, on outdoor learning where Stephen Twigg (Minister for Schools) responded to the launch of a campaign to promote field teaching and learning. Barbara Young, Chris Baines, Graham Wynne and SWF Chairman, Ian Mercer, were among the speakers and the Forest Schools concept was enthusiastically presented to an audience of teachers and scientists by Somerset based Gordon Woodall.
- South West Forest were represented at the "**Accessible Greenspaces**" Seminar in Sheffield on 2 December. The keynote speaker was Chris Baines who gave an inspiring address on the need to regard "urban" and "rural" as part of a continuum and not as opposite and diametrically opposed entities.
- The latter approach has done little to solve the problems of urban or rural decline and has seen people become detached from a relationship with the natural world. The seminar developed these issue towards a greater understanding of the social need for greenspace on our doorstep, urban or rural, which we can have to 'escape to...' or 'escape from...'. Domestic gardens are regarded as typical "woodland glade" habitat and are registered as such under many Bio-diversity action plans.

2. Progress

- Devon County Council have agreed to fund a **Sustainable Timber Procurement Study** by the South West Forest which will be carried out by consultants during the early part of 2004. This work will help the County Council to develop its Sustainable Procurement Policies relating to timber products and provide a wealth of information that can help us to deliver much greater use of locally grown sustainably managed supplies.

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- The South West Forest has been asked to comment on draft proposals for the **New English Woodland Grant Scheme** which is due to take effect, from April 2005. Our comments were submitted to the Forestry Commission in December; we were able to support most of the proposals but have asked for further consideration to be given to one or two areas.
- **South West Shacks** – South West Forest are looking to build a partnership that will manage a project to build new “Eco-Cabins” in locations that will provide users with a “Wilderness” experience. This would not just be increasing the accommodation in the South West Forest area but would be seen as an activity in itself. The interface with the natural world would be an important part of the marketing of the cabins which would be let for short breaks via the internet.
- The planning issues are significant but far from insurmountable and the challenge for the partnership will be the design of a range of acceptable “templates” for development and a marketing structure to allow individuals to plug a small number of units into a coherent whole.
- **Monitoring Programme (2003 Planting sites)** - Bill Blight has been appointed to undertake the 2003 monitoring survey and this is due for completion by the end of January 2004.
- **Countryside Clinics** - The December clinic was attended 3 visitors. Advice was sought from the following advisors;
 - Forestry Commission - New Planting/Existing Planting 1 enquiry
 - DEFRA RDS – 2 enquiries
 - Ruby Country – 1 enquiry
- Arrangements to transfer the clinic to Holsworthy Market are being investigated and it is likely that the first clinic will take place on 18 February 2004 which will coincide with the dairy market. Timings are to be confirmed but the venue will be two sales sheds at the market.
- In Cornwall, there was no clinic in December due to Christmas holidays. The next clinic at Hallworthy market will be on 30 January 2004.
- **Advisory visits** - Eight advisory visits were undertaken in December, one of which was in Cornwall.
- On 3 December the **South West Forest Collaboration Group** bid team met to continue development of a bid outline for the SW Woodland Renaissance Partnership. The meeting discussed proposals for the establishment and resumption of coppice and coppice management in the South West Forest area. This, along with other bids from the Collaboration Group, will go forward for the **South West Woodland Renaissance** Delivery Plan.
- Two full bids have been submitted to **NW Devon’s Leader plus**. One bid was for support towards a Research and Development Project Post on behalf of the South West Forest Collaboration Group, whilst the other gave proposals for a Farm & Forest Community Access project within the Leader + area. Both submissions now await a decision in the first quarter of the New Year.

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- On 11 December, the **Devon FEI Cluster Group** gave its support for a funding application for the delivery component of a Forest Schools Research proposal by Plymouth University's Early Years department. This will now go up to the executive Committee of FEI England for a final decision early in the New Year.
- South West Forest responded to the strategy proposals for the **North Devon AONB**. Our comments focused on woodland issues and the new strategy is due for publication early in 2004. The most significant guideline affecting new woodlands is the likely preclusion of new conifer plantations within the AONB.
- **Community Woodlands** - Whiddon Valley Steering group met at Cookworthy on 10 December to discuss funding opportunities and draft out a constitution in readiness for the next partnership meeting in the new year. The group is contemplating an application to the Countryside Agency's Local Heritage Initiative as well as the Government's Living Spaces award and the formation of a constitution will be a vital step for the group to be eligible to receive funds.
- 12/12/03 – David Rickwood and Jim White conducted a site visit at Bratton Fleming with the Parish Council and the Tree Warden, to look at a site proposed for the planting of a new community woodland. It is hoped that the new woodland will extend beyond the Millennium Green area of the village and provide a valuable dog walking, recreation and educational resource for the parish. The proposals are also noteworthy in that there is the likelihood of a partnership between the Parish Council and a private landowner to help extend the planting beyond the 5hectare threshold, to enable it to qualify for the South West Forest Supplement. An advisory report will shortly be made available to the parties concerned.
- **Okehampton Primary School** – On 3 December, sixty Year 4 pupils were engaged in forest education activities conducted by acting Education Ranger, Richard Irvine. The children also made Christmas decorations by weaving willow under the instruction of Tessa May of Forest Crafts. Her involvement was brokered by South West Forest on behalf of Okehampton Primary School.
- **Monkleigh Primary School** – On 4 December, a tree planting session took place during the second half of National Tree week. The school has recently acquired a field to extend its grounds, primarily for sports and games. The exposed site benefited from a small 'copse' of Oak, Ash and Rowan trees planted as part of South West Forest's Civic Woodlands programme. The trees, guards and stakes were made available by Silvanus Trust's Western Power Distribution Free Tree scheme. Seventeen Children and seven parents/adults were engaged in the event.
- **Training** - Five technical training courses were held during December with a total of 24 beneficiaries attending, 4 of whom were from Cornwall.
 - All Terrain Vehicle
 - Basic Chainsaw (2 courses)
 - Practical Hedgelaying
 - Horse Logging Diversification

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3. Meetings / Networking

- Three of the South West Forest team met with the **Woodland Trust** on 17 December to discuss a range of issues. Two areas where we may work in partnership are The Forest Schools programme which has a resonance with educational plans being developed by the Woodland Trust and Walking for Health where it may be possible to use Woodland Trust properties when the programme is rolled out more widely.
- The Training Manager and Training Support Officer attended a meeting with **West Country Rivers Trust**. The purpose of the meeting was to offer advice and look at ways of supporting WCRT with the setting up of a new training programme which they are looking to initiate later this year.
- The South West Forest Collaboration Group held its first AGM on 12 January 2004 with a good attendance of twenty people. Its Chairman, Sam Whatmore gave a very positive summary of the opportunities ahead and following the election of officers, Alan Reid from the Forestry Commission gave an excellent talk on Deer Management. This talk was particularly timely following Forestry Minister, Ben Bradshaw's announcement that Defra would be declaring a new policy on deer culling of 25-35% to tackle the rapidly growing national herd now numbering some 1.5 million.