TREND IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Historical decline but currently stable.

ESTIMATED EXTENT IN THE PEAK DISTRICT:

Estimated at approximately 200 - 250 ha.

NATIONAL BAP HABITATS:

Wet Woodland (priority habitat).

ASSOCIATED NATIONAL BAP PRIORITY SPECIES:

Otter, pipistrelle, bullfinch, spotted flycatcher, song thrush, a cranefly (*Lipsothrix errans*), and possibly also nightjar.

ASSOCIATED PEAK DISTRICT AUDITS:

Wet woodlands.

INTRODUCTION

Wet woodland comprises a range of alder, birch or willow dominated semi-natural woodland habitats and is most frequent in the Dark and South West Peak Natural Areas. It is most widespread on flushed slopes, valley sides and moorland cloughs where the ground is permanently waterlogged. It also occurs in association with other semi-natural woodland such as oak/birch or ash woodland (a good example is Clough Wood, Darley Dale) or within conifer plantations, or may form transitions to open habitats such as acid grassland, heath or acid flush. Due to these interconnections, particularly within the Dark Peak cloughs, the conservation of wet woodland is also being addressed within the Upland Oak/Birch Woodland Action Plan. Although most sites are restricted to the Dark and South West Peak Natural Areas, spring-lines on dalesides sometimes support wet woodland which, although usually on a small scale, may be important for biodiversity locally.

Wet birch woodland occurs in a few locations on deep peat around the margins of blanket bog. It may form mosaics with marshy grassland or wet heath and in some situations forms transitions to other semi-natural woodland. Sites include isolated areas on the Eastern Moors such as Ramsley Moor and birch/willow scrub on Warslow Moors.

Wet woodland, typically dominated by alder, also occurs on the floodplain of rivers such as the Derwent, Wye and Dove, where it has survived on waterlogged land not reclaimed for agriculture. Such sites may include transitions to other habitats including other priority woodland types and other wetland habitats, but also includes isolated areas separated by agricultural land.

Wet woodland has also developed in mineral extraction sites, disused railway lines and tip sites, not all of which are recent. Examples include Rowsley Sidings, Hogshaw Sidings (Buxton) and Gamesley Sidings.

Wet woodland combines elements of several other ecosystems and as such is important for many species. The flora can be very rich with species such as marsh marigold and tussock sedge. It can provide cover and breeding sites for otters and the retention of this habitat, especially along river valleys, is an important factor in the potential re-colonisation of the Peak District by this species. The numbers of invertebrates associated with birch, alder, willows and elm is large, although some are confined now to just a few sites. This is an important habitat for some groups including moths, hoverflies and craneflies that require a natural, seasonably variable, hydrology. The River Corridor Action Plan, in seeking a more natural riparian eco-system including the re-connection of rivers with their floodplains, even in upland areas, may assist with this requirement. Dead wood within the sites can be frequent and provides good habitats for associated beetles, especially longhorn beetles, other invertebrates and fungi, whilst dead branches and trunks in streams is a particularly specialised habitat supporting a rich invertebrate fauna.

ADVERSE IMPACTS	Historic	Current
Land Management		
Cessation of management e.g. pollarding/coppicing.		✓
Clearance of woods for agriculture/other uses.	✓	
Intensification of agriculture.		✓
Grazing levels, stock type and poaching.	✓	✓✓
Fragmentation due to changes in land use.	✓✓	✓
Removal of wet woodland from habitats of perceived higher value e.g. bog and marsh.	✓	✓
Lowering of water tables due to drainage, abstraction, flood protection or drought, causing drying out and gradual loss of sites.	✓	✓
Flood prevention measures, river controls, canalisation, loss of connectivity between rivers and floodplain, leading to loss of natural processes and succession.	✓	✓
Pollution, Disease and Climate Change		
Poor water quality/eutrophication affecting flora and fauna.		✓
Alder disease (*Phytophthora*).		✓
Climate change.		✓
Invasive Species		
Increase in Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed.		✓

Others		
Natural succession to drier woodland.	✓	✓
Browsing by deer.		✓
Lack of recognition of value for biodiversity.	✓	✓
Perceived low value as woodland, including wood products.	✓	✓

An impact ✓ *Significant impact* ✓✓

CURRENT ACTION

Designated Sites

- Broomhead Wood (Dark Peak SSSI) and Clough Wood occur within SSSIs.
- A number of wet woods have been identified as 'Wildlife Sites'.

New Initiatives

- Since 1999 large estates have been encouraged by the FC to manage their woodlands within long term Forest Plans.
- Since 1997 landowners have had the opportunity for creating new areas of wet woodland through the FC's 'New Native Woodland in National Parks Challenge Fund'. This fund is currently under review.

Land Management

- A proportion of known sites are owned or managed by a conservation body or are within management agreements.
- Management of wet woodland may be part of, or incidental to, plans for larger areas of other woodland types. Only in a few exceptional cases are wet woodlands managed as an entity.
- The FC, in reviewing its forest plans, is incorporating management such as the removal of conifers from streamsides to encourage native species.
- National forestry policy includes a presumption against clearance of broad-leaved woodland for conversion to other land uses, and in particular seeks to maintain the special interest of ancient semi-natural woodland. Felling licences from the FC are normally required if the woods are not managed under plans approved by them.

Research and Surveys

- The majority of ancient woodlands have been surveyed by the PDNPA during the period 1970s - 1990s.

ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

National Targets

- Maintain current area (currently estimated at 24000 - 30000 ha.) of ancient semi-natural wet woodlands and the total area of the type.
- Initiate measures intended to achieve favourable condition in 100 % of wet woodlands within SSSIs and SACs, and in 80 % of the total resource by 2004, and achieve favourable condition over 70 % of the designated sites and 50 % of the total resource by 2010.
- Initiate restoration of 3200 ha to native wet woodland. Complete restoration to site-native species over half of this area by 2010 and 100 % by 2015.
- Initiate colonisation and/or planting of 6750 ha of wet woodland on un-wooded or ex-plantation sites. Complete establishment of 50 % of this by 2010 and 100 % of it by 2015.

A Vision for the Peak District

Wet woodland is a habitat of surprises, often comprising a hidden and diverse spectrum of woodland types occurring over waterlogged land. Many sites remain as true un-trodden wildernesses of intertwining branches, standing dead and fallen wood, pockets of rushes and sedges broken through with flushes and

glades of sunlight. The future of this variable and unusual Peak District habitat depends on protecting the current extent and quality of existing sites and enhancing the degraded woodland network by concentrating efforts to reduce the fragmentation of this scattered habitat. Ultimately such a process should lead to a larger, inter-connected and more robust wet woodland network of increased nature conservation and landscape value.

The greatest opportunity to achieve targets has been identified as occurring within the closely linked action plan targets for expansion/restoration of riparian upland oak/birchwood within the Dark Peak. It has been assumed that 10 % of this new riparian oak/birchwood will essentially be wet woodland. Additional opportunities for expansion occur with the restoration of quarries and other mineral sites. Opportunities in the South West Peak are more limited, especially in view of the importance of wet pasture for breeding birds. Most opportunities are likely to be in plantations (mainly conifer) where wet woodland would have been the dominant habitat, e.g. in cloughs and valleys. Within the White Peak Natural Area only small scale expansion is possible, for example in quarries, along railway lines and in the bottom of some limestone dales.

OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

Objective 1

Maintain extent of wet woodlands and bring all ancient semi-natural wet woodlands into favourable condition.

Target

Initiate measures by 2005 to achieve favourable condition in 100 % of wet woodlands within SSSIs and SACs, and 80 % of all ancient semi-natural wet woodlands. Review and set a new target for 2005 - 2010.

Objective 2

Bring important examples of non-ancient semi-natural woodland into favourable management.

Target

Introduce appropriate management regimes by 2010 to bring approximately 25 ha of secondary wet woodland into favourable management, focusing on linear routes.

Objective 3

Restore areas of semi-natural wet woodland in each Natural Area, prioritising Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

Target

Initiate measures by 2005 to restore 18 ha of wet woodland on priority sites, and a further 17 ha by 2010.

Objective 4

Reduce woodland fragmentation, through expansion of wet woodland, prioritising river valleys and links with other types of woodland where possible.

Target

Create 30 ha of new wet woodland in two stages – 50 % by 2010 and 100 % by 2020.

Main Factors Likely to Affect Achievements of Targets

Land Management

Implementation of the Rural Development Regulation and reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

Resources

Availability/adequacy of financial incentives for woodland management or creation.

Planning and Regulations

Planning policy.

Conflicts with Other Conservation Priorities

Resolution of conflicts between habitats of high value.

Potential conflicts with archaeological and landscape priorities.

Practical Difficulties and Lack of Knowledge

Constraints on colonisation due to unsuitability of adjoining land as a result of unsympathetic management.

Inadequate survey/base data and the difficulty of completing adequate surveys in the national time-scale, especially for groups such as invertebrates.

Difficulties of identifying and separately managing wet woodland within other woodland types (e.g. conifer plantations), due to problems of access for survey and lack of resources, time or skills to revise management plans.

Constraints of planting in floodplains.

Adequate supply of local provenance stock of suitable species for restoration and re-creation schemes.

Pollution and Climate Change

Climate change.

Others

Perceived low value of wet woodland, both economically and for wildlife.

ACTIONS

Key to the achievement of the proposed targets is a whole landscape approach to the conservation and enhancement of river corridors and clough woodland. Key actions within the plan include:

- Identification of the existing resource (Action WW1) coupled with awareness raising with regard to its importance and management needs (WW13 – 18);
- Ensuring opportunities are considered for the conservation, restoration and creation of areas of wet woodland within any proposed new oak/birchwood (WW22 and WW23), and
- Identifying the potential for conserving, extending or creating new wet woodlands in river corridors when implementing the River Corridors Action Plan (WW7, WW24 - 27).

	ACTIONS	**TIMESCALE**	**LEAD AGENCY** & Partners
DATA COLLATION AND SURVEY			
	Data Collation		
WW1	Collate existing information and identify gaps in the knowledge for wet woodlands outside of SSSIs. (All Objectives)	2001	**EN**/PDNPA/WTs/LAs/LRCs Voluntary Sector
WW2	Compile a register of wet woodland sites from existing knowledge including classification into types, level of importance (including 'Wildlife Site' status), Natural Area, important species and conservation status, and initiate a programme for regular updating. (Objectives 1, 2 and 3)	2001	**PDNPA**/WTs/EN/NT/FC/WCs
WW3	Compile a register of PAWS which are likely to be capable of supporting wet woodland. (Objective 3)	2001	**FC/**EN/PDNPA
	Survey		
WW4	Complete detailed habitat surveys of sites where existing information is inadequate. (Objectives 1, 2 and 3)	2005	**PDNPA**/FC/WTs/EN/NT
EVALUATING THE IMPORTANCE AND CONDITION OF SITES			
	Evaluating Importance and Identifying Key Sites		
WW5	Agree methodology for the evaluation of wet woodlands and identification of 'Wildlife Sites'. (Objectives 1, 2 and 3)	2002	**WBAPG**

	Defining Favourable Condition		
WW6	Agree definitions of favourable condition for the complete range of sites found in the Peak District, including the requirements of important species. (Objectives 1, 2 and 3)	2001	**WBAPG**
WW7	Review opportunities for the creation of wet woodland in river corridors as part of their evaluation under the River Corridors Action Plan. (Objective 4)	2006	**WBAPG/ABAPG** (joint leads)
WW8	Agree guidelines for the range of appropriate management needed to achieve favourable condition including: *The identification of priority sites/areas for conservation, restoration and re-creation, focusing on the importance of linkages and extensions to reduce the fragmented nature of the habitat *Restoration and re-creation management including species mixes, stock provenance, planting strategies and options for natural re-generation, with cross-reference to other action plans where relevant (All Objectives)	2001	**WBAPG**
	RESEARCH		
WW9	Encourage further research into disease of riverside alder and willow and develop a mitigation strategy. (Objective 4)	2001 onwards	**EA/FC** (joint leads)
WW10	In collaboration with other woodland action plans, evaluate the impact of numbers of deer in Peak District woodlands and implement any necessary mitigation action. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	**WBAPG**
	INVASIVE SPECIES		
WW11	Develop a strategy for the control of Himalayan balsam, giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed and implement where necessary and appropriate. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	**WBAPG/ABAPG** (joint leads)
	MONITORING		
WW12	Agree methodology for, and implement, effective monitoring of wet woodlands. Ensure that the results of the process are collated and used to update the wet woodlands register. (All objectives)	2001	**WBAPG**
	AWARENESS RAISING		
WW13	Share information on the wildlife importance and management needs of key conservation, restoration and re-creation sites with the landowners/managers, including feedback from surveys. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/EN/WTs FWAG/FC
WW14	Increase awareness through appropriate means amongst landowners/managers, local people and conservation organisations of the importance of the habitat for wildlife and other values. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	**WBAPG**
WW15	Make guidance available to land owners/managers and conservation organisation staff on restoration techniques. (Objective 3)	2003	**WBAPG**

WW16	Consider the establishment of demonstration site(s) as a focus for discussion of best practice management, restoration and creation. (All Objectives)	2005	**WBAPG**
WW17	Promote appropriate new native woodland grant schemes. (Objective 3)	2003	**FC**/LAs/PDNPA
WW18	Increase awareness, through appropriate means, of the value of dead wood in streams and rivers amongst riparian landowners, managers and agencies. (Objectives 1 and 4).	2001 onwards	**WBAPG/EA** (joint leads)

CONSERVATION ACTION AND INCENTIVES

	Designations		
WW19	Review coverage of wet woodland within SSSIs and notify further sites as appropriate. (Objective 1)	2002	**EN**
WW20	Consider wet woodland key sites in any programme of acquisition/lease/management of nature reserves including NNRs and LNRs. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	**EN/LAs** (joint leads) PDNPA/WTs/RSPB/NT
	Grant Schemes		
WW21	Consider recommending reviews of woodland, agri-environment and conservation schemes to ensure that: *Targeting gives adequate priority to wet woodland at a local, regional and national level *Management prescriptions for small areas of woodland and buffers are considered *Payments for stock exclusion, small areas of woodland and buffers are introduced/increased to reflect particular management issues *Incentives are sufficient to encourage uptake. (Objectives 1, 2 and 4)	2001 onwards	FC/MAFF/EN/PDNPA WEG/WBAPG
	Negotiation and Review of Agreements		
WW22	Review management of all sites within SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers to ensure maintenance or restoration of favourable condition. (Objective 1)	2005	**EN**
WW23	Ensure that wet woodland conservation, restoration and re-creation is comprehensively addressed when implementing the Upland Oak/ birchwood and Upland Ashwood Action Plans, targeting: *Priority conservation sites *PAWS *Sites for woodland creation Include a consideration of buffers where appropriate. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	FC/EN/PDNPA
WW24	Negotiate appropriate agreements to conserve important wet woodland sites, particularly in river corridors. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	**PDNPA**/FC WTs MAFF/ FWAG/NT
WW25	Review management of wet woodlands in existing conservation agreements, outside of SSSIs. Where necessary agree revised management regimes with owners/managers to ensure that favourable condition is being maintained or restored. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2002 onwards	MAFF/NT/WTs/PDNPA FWAG

WW26	Review whole holding agreements which include unprotected wet woodland. Consider the opportunities for upgrading the agreement to incorporate favourable management. (Objective 1 and 2)	2002 -2010	MAFF/NT/WTs/PDNPA FWAG
WW27	Negotiate agreements to restore and create wet woodland in appropriate river corridor locations, following survey and evaluation proposed in the River Corridors Action Plan. (Objectives 3 and 4)	2007 - 2010	**PDNPA**/WTs/MAFF FWAG/NT
WW28	Ensure action plan objectives and targets are incorporated into the production of Forest Plans. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	**FC**/EN/PDNPA
	Alternative Incomes		
WW29	Develop a strategy for increasing the economic benefits of woodland products and uses where this would encourage appropriate conservation management. (Objectives 1 and 3)	2001 onwards	**FC**/TGA/CLA
	Land Acquisition		
WW30	Consider negotiating purchase/lease of priority wet woodland sites where this would be the most effective way of achieving conservation objectives and when a negotiated conservation solution has not succeeded. (Objectives 1 and 4)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/NT/WTs/WdT
	Direct Action		
WW31	On land owned by public bodies or conservation organisations ensure that: *Management maintains and where possible enhances the value of wet woodland *The restoration of PAWS on such land is considered *Opportunities are taken for new native woodland creation *Opportunities for involvement of local communities in site management are taken where possible (Objectives 1, 2, 3 and 4)	2001 onwards	PDNPA/FC/LAs/WTs WdT/NT/EN
WW32	Continue to ensure that the nature conservation interest of river corridor habitats are taken into consideration by the EA when carrying out their annual programme of maintenance work on main rivers, and in any proposed flood defence works. (Objectives 1 and 4)	2001 onwards	**EA/**ABAPG
REGULATION			
	Planning		
WW33	Ensure all planning applications and General Development Orders are adequately assessed in relation to their impact on wet woodland; that loss or damage to wet woodland is avoided; and that opportunities for the enhancement or creation of wet woodland is considered in relevant planning decisions. (All Objectives)	2001 onwards	LAs/EN/WTs/PDNPA
WW34	Encourage a review of Permitted Development Rights that currently allow potentially damaging recreational activities for 14 days per year – such as 4-wheel drive trials. (Objectives 1 and 2)	2001 onwards	**WBAPG**

WW35	Ensure policy documents, including LEAPs, include appropriate guidelines for the safeguard, enhancement and, where appropriate, creation of wet woodland. (All Objectives)	2001	**WBAPG/EA** (joint leads)
	Other Regulatory Mechanisms		
WW36	Consider the need for a review of both groundwater and surface water abstraction consents in catchments with sensitive wet woodland sites. (Objectives 1 and 3)	2001 onwards	**EA**/WBAPG

RESOURCES

It is envisaged that the majority of actions proposed will be carried out by the relevant organisations using current resources. These include:

- continuing investment by landowners and managers managing their land sympathetically for wildlife;
- the FC's Woodland Grant Scheme;
- proposed restructuring of major conifer plantations by WCs, the FC, SCC and private landowners;
- MAFF's Farm Woodland Premium Scheme;
- MAFF's Environmentally Sensitive Area and Countryside Stewardship Schemes;
- continuing management of woodlands in the ownership of conservation organisations and public bodies (EN, NT, WTs, WdT, LAs, FC, PDNPA) and WCs.

A mechanism is needed to replace the FC's 'New Native Woodland Challenge Fund' which closed in 2000 (currently under review), in order to provide financial aid for woodland creation.

Additional resources are likely to be required:

- for the survey and negotiation of wet woodland creation measures in river corridors, as part of the survey work proposed in the River Corridors Action Plan (2004 - 05);
- to provide adequate financial incentives for the conservation, enhancement and restoration management of existing woodlands and for woodland creation (2001 onwards);
- to aid in the production of the proposed registers (2001 onwards);
- to implement effective monitoring (2001 onwards).