



University of Sussex
Life Sciences

25 September 2023

To West Stormont Woodland Group (WSWG),

As a specialist in insect conservation I am very happy to write in support of WSWG's plans to bring Taymount Wood into community ownership, for the benefit of biodiversity and the local community.

WSWG is prioritising nature recovery as a primary objective of woodland management. We are in a biodiversity crisis, and urgently need to act. The emphasis on increasing the diversity and abundance of insect habitat and ensuring ecological continuity of these essential resources will help underpin and regenerate the woodland ecosystem from the bottom up.

The ecological value of trees rises significantly after around 80 years of age due to increased biomass, diversity and abundance of habitat niches such as deadwood habitat, holes and crevices etc. However, under typical forestry management, trees are usually felled at between 40-60 years of age, thus depriving woodland species of these habitats. WWF recently called on European governments to help conserve Biodiversity by substantially increasing deadwood in forests by 2030. WSWG's aim of increasing deadwood habitat will help ensure continuity of essential habitat to a wide range of species while trees mature and natural sites within the woodland become more abundant across future decades.

The proposed substantial increase in flowering plants and shrubs, and tree species such as wild apple and hawthorn in the Nature Recovery zones will afford a valuable feeding resource for insects including adult stages of deadwood specialist beetles. Oak restoration across the woodland will also add great biodiversity value. The aim of creating an oak network across the woodland and linking with the adjacent Kinclaven Bluebell Wood owned by the Woodland Trust is in line with the drive for local landscape scale ecological connectivity.

WSWG plan to implement species-specific measures to halt the decline of vulnerable invertebrate species through targeted actions at forest scale. Such actions are generally absent from conventional forestry management due to lack of knowledge, resource and intent.

The proposed nature-based health and wellbeing activity programmes should help install a greater appreciation of our dependence upon the natural environment and the urgent need to protect it.

WSWG is addressing the limitations of the conventional forestry system that places severe constraints on nature recovery, by challenging the accepted view in the commercial sector that the UK Forestry Standard is as good as it gets for nature conservation and there is no need for disruptive change. Yet our biodiversity is in free fall, and we are called to action. WSWG has adopted the principle of Nature Needs Half and their actions should inspire other communities to follow suit.

Best wishes,

Prof Dave Goulson