

Restoring Marches Coppice

Progress report

February 2007

Small Woods Association / Green Wood Centre



MARCHES COPPICE RESTORATION

1 Background.

There has been a recent resurgence in the demand for coppice products, due mainly to the increase in demand for wood fuel, the use of hazel hurdles in gardens, and the increase in traditional hedge-laying brought about by the new single payment scheme from Defra (hedge-laying is reliant on stakes and binders from hazel coppice).

However, the English coppice industry has been in decline for many years, as shown in the *Crafts in the English Countryside* Report by Prof. Ted Collins, and requires support to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the increased demand for coppice products (this demand is currently met by imported goods from Poland and other eastern European countries).

A programme to re-establish coppice as a standard form of woodland management is supported by recent reports from English Nature and the RSPB regarding the need for better woodland management to improve habitats for woodland birds, butterflies and ground flora, which all benefit from the restoration of coppice management. Such a programme would also help support the move towards renewable fuels. Neglected coppice provides a ready stock of timber for wood fuel in log or chip form.

2 Role of the Green Wood Centre (Small Woods Association)

The Green Wood Centre (formerly the Green Wood Trust) has been based in Coalbrookdale since 1984, and delivers a comprehensive training programme to increase rural diversification and skills, focusing on coppice management and crafts. The Centre has recently achieved accredited status with the Open College Network, and has developed accredited courses in coppicing and woodland management.

3 Coppice Restoration

GWC has a lead role in the delivery of support for the coppice industry from the Forestry Commission nationally, and is developing a national programme aimed at achieving a sustainable coppice industry with five main themes:

- Promotion of coppice (for biodiversity, wood fuel and sustainable rural industries) to a wider public audience through popular articles and programmes
- The establishment of coppice restoration projects for wood fuel, biodiversity and the rural economy
- Provision of better marketing for coppice craft businesses as sustainable rural industries, and local branding of coppice products
- The establishment of new groups and support for existing coppice groups across England with the formation of a national coppice federation
- The wider availability of accredited training for coppice based industry and conservation groups

4 Marches Coppice Restoration

The 'Restoring Marches Coppice' initiative is the West Midlands element of this national programme. The project aims to initiate and support the restoration and

sustainable management of neglected coppice woods within the West Midlands Region in the following main ways:

- Identify and bid for funding for coppice restoration
- Undertake and support coppice restoration projects throughout the region, for species habitat improvement, woodfuel and local wood products
- Develop partnerships with groups working with coppiced woods
- Develop a management agreement for coppice workers
- Develop a better understanding of the issues facing the coppice industry within the region especially those preventing sustainable management.
- Improve local networking and sign posting to existing regional networks and support.

5 Outputs

The outputs agreed for 06/07 were as follows

- Appoint project officer
- Develop partnerships with Wildlife Trusts, Butterfly Conservation and coppice workers across the Marches area
- Identify woods for coppice restoration
- Submit revised bid to Sita and Shropshire Hills AONB
- 2ha of coppice restored, 2 management plans, 50 volunteers engaged
- Develop the coppice restoration programme for 07-08

6 Progress towards achieving outputs 06/07

- Richard Thomason has been appointed Project Officer and has been working with Wildlife Trusts, Butterfly Conservation and other agencies across the Marches area, focused on Worcestershire and Staffordshire initially
- Five woods have been identified for coppice restoration and have management plans completed. These are:
 - § Wrinehill wood - Staffordshire
 - § Round Hill Wood - Worcestershire
 - § Brick Kiln Wood - Herefordshire
 - § Edge Wood - Shropshire
 - § The Wrekin - Telford and Wrekin
 - § Alder Carr (Cannock Chase) and Hornhill (Worcestershire) have had management plans completed which are subject to consultation
- An application to fund 'The West Midlands Woodland Species Restoration Project' has been submitted to the Sita Trust for £80,000. The project will support the restoration of 4 coppice woodlands within Staffordshire, Herefordshire, Shropshire and Worcestershire. The woodlands are privately owned and have an agreement with a local coppice worker or local coppice group to continue the restoration program beyond the initial 3 year programme. The project will promote the wildlife potential of stable hazel

coppice woodland that is managed for an economic benefit. The project will promote long term management plans above species led management plans. A monitoring program will be devised to attract volunteer support to undertake monitoring beyond the scope of the project. A standard coppice restoration agreement between woodland owners and coppice workers will be developed and made available on request. A response is expected from Sita in mid-March

- An application to fund the 'National Coppice Restoration Programme' has been submitted to the Esmee Fairbairn Trust. The project will fund a part-time project officer who will support coppice restoration projects by helping to submit funding applications and distribute the project funding. The project will create a central marketing resource and a 'coppicing in progress' information signs, promote marketing and advice for the use over stood coppice as a fuel wood. The project officer will support the formation of a National Federation of coppice groups. A response is expected from Esmee Fairbairn in mid summer
- 2 ha of coppice have been restored, working in Hornhill Wood, Tick Wood, Westhope Estate, The Wrekin and at the Green Wood Centre. Management plans have been completed for the Embankment Wood at the Green Wood Centre
- 50 volunteers have been engaged, working at Hornhill Wood, Tick Wood, the Green Wood Centre and the Wrekin

7 Development of the programme for 07/08

The coppice restoration programme for 07/08 will include:

- Delivery of the Sita Programme
 - Delivery of the Esmee Fairbairn programme in the West Midlands
 - Mapping of worked coppice and coppice workers
 - Establishment of new coppice networks, and support of existing groups
 - Promotion of woodland owner and local group coppice restoration agreements
- (1) The Sita programme will see coppicing re-introduced into four woodlands for biodiversity reasons, working with local groups such as the Wildlife Trusts and Butterfly Conservation to encourage these groups to use a professional coppice worker instead of volunteers to undertake their coppice contracts. The project officer will work with Heartwoods to identify good practice and to promote the concept of coppicing as a management prescription. A management agreement will provide the professional coppice worker with some security for the future.
- (2) The Esmee Fairbairn programme will see coppicing re-introduced for the production of woodfuel and products, working again with Heartwoods to develop clusters of woodfuel producers around new installations. This programme will bring in £50,000 of investment to the West Midlands coppice sector, and will establish a national coppice federation which will lead the industry for the future.

- (3) The mapping exercise will provide a quick reference to aid local networking and help identify clusters of activity for potential future coppice initiatives. In 07/08 the project will provide coppice practitioners an opportunity to voice their concerns, provide ideas and opinions on current policy and other issues which they consider could be improved to promote sustainable woodland management. Informal discussions with coppice workers and anecdotal evidence will continue to be noted. Coppice workers within Worcestershire have been interviewed and asked to discuss the single most important issue which they consider affects their work. Additional interviews from each of the other areas will be undertaken. A compilation of transcripts, notes and other evidence will be used to form a report. Information gathered through this exercise will help set future support strategies undertaken by the SWA.
- (4) Although networks exist within each sector there is little evidence of effective networking within a formal structure between the different coppice sectors. Poor networking has prevented the most efficient use of the limited natural resource. It is suggested that County wide networks will improve the efficient use of the natural resource, help reduce suspicion and prejudice between the different sectors, attract broader support for county wide initiatives and provide a mechanism for the flow of information between national, regional and local initiatives.

A series of meetings have been held within Worcestershire to help create the formation of the 'Worcestershire Coppice Network' The initial meeting was hosted by Worcestershire County Council at the Countryside Centre. Woodland owners, greenwood craft workers, coppice workers and conservation and wildlife groups were invited. All subsequent meetings have been held within member's woodlands and all have been well attended. At this early stage of development there is no desire within the group to create a formal constituted group. The group has decided to set a simple target for this year to ensure all coppiced material is made available for use within the local area before it is destroyed. A guide will be provided to wildlife volunteers indicating the types and standard of material required within the area.

A simple directory of members has been made indicating the services or areas of interest available from within the group. Agreement has been made to set up an email group via a group member web site. The email address and directory will be distributed to larger organisations to seek additional support before distributing more widely.

The intention is to provide sufficient support to allow this group to develop at its own pace.

The concept of starting other county wide groups will be continued and recent work with Holme Lacey College may result in the formation of a Herefordshire group.

Judy Walker
Small Woods Association