

6.1 Woodland – mixed ash woodland, oak woodland and wet woodland

Definition: woodlands are areas where the tree canopy covers at least 50% of the ground area. The canopy must contain at least 50% native broadleaf tree species. There are three types of woodland – mixed ash, oak and wet woodland.

Mixed ash woodland is usually dominated by ash, although oak, birch and hazel may be abundant. Other species found in mixed ash woodland include rowan, holly, sycamore or beech. Typical ash woodland plants include bluebell, wood anemone, primrose and wild garlic.

Oak woodland is dominated by oak, but other tree species such as birch, rowan, holly, ash and hazel may be present. Typical oak woodland plants include bluebell, wood anemone, bramble, wood-rush, ferns and bracken with a large number of mosses and lichens likely to be present.

Tree species commonly found in **wet woodland** include alder, birch and willow. Ash, oak or other tree species can be found on drier areas within wet woodlands. Typical plants of wet woodland include lesser celandine, marsh marigold, marsh-bedstraw, opposite-leaved golden saxifrage, heather, sedges, mosses and lichens. Plants, indicative of nutrient rich conditions, such as nettle, docks and grasses, may also be present.

There are **two** options for managing woodland – no grazing and light grazing. The ‘no grazing’ option is suitable for woodlands which have been subject to prolonged grazing, used for over-wintering of livestock and where there is little evidence of natural regeneration. The ‘light grazing’ option will only apply to woodlands which have been closed off to livestock for a considerable length of time, where saplings are present indicating successful natural regeneration and where there is a well developed shrub layer such as bramble, ivy, honeysuckle and other climbers. The most suitable grazing option will be agreed at the outset of the agreement and will be noted on the farm management map.

Aim: to maintain and enhance the conservation value of woodland habitat by encouraging natural regeneration of native species and increasing the diversity of woodland ground flora.

Biodiversity objectives: the woodland option contributes to the NI Biodiversity Action Plan targets for Wet Woodland, Mixed Ash Woodland, Oak Woodland, Small cow wheat, Wood cranesbill and Red Squirrel.

Management requirements

- **No grazing option** - livestock must be excluded throughout the year.

OR

- **Lightly grazed option** - during the period 1 June to 30 September the stocking density must not exceed 0.50 LU/ha at any time. No grazing is permitted from 1 October to 31 May.
- Retain all deadwood. Individual windblown trees must be left where they lie. Living trees must not be cut down without the prior written consent of DARD.
- Retain important features, such as old vehicular tracks, natural open space and existing ponds. Brashings must not be burned.
- No cultivation, ploughing, fertilisation, drainage, infilling, dumping, burning or application of fertiliser, slurry, farmyard manure, lime, herbicide, pesticide, sheep dip or any other material is permitted.
- Supplementary feeding sites, temporary silage clamps and the storage of big bale silage or hay are not permitted.
- The spread of non-native species eg rhododendron or laurel must be controlled.
- Tree management must not be carried out between 1 March and 31 August.

Further advice

If lightly grazing woodland use mature cattle if possible. Where no cattle are available sheep, goats or horses may be used. The annual payment includes an element for routine positive management such as control of non-native species (see Appendix IV), keeping pathways open and an annual inspection to remove rubbish. Pathways can be kept open by cutting overhanging branches. Natural open space should be retained by hand cutting regenerating trees and shrubs. New fencing, repairs to existing fencing or installation of traditional wooden gates may be grant aided under Enhancement Plan Funding.

Important husbandry considerations when grazing woodland

- Oak acorns poison cattle, sheep and horses when eaten in autumn and the young buds and leaves are poisonous when eaten in spring.
- All parts of the yew tree are poisonous. The poison is not reduced by wilting or drying, so clippings and fallen leaves are as toxic as the fresh plant. One mouthful may be enough to cause death.

- Hemlock is a tall flowering plant, similar to cow parsley, found along the margins of watercourses and in wet woodlands. It is poisonous to all livestock and humans.
- Rhododendron is extremely poisonous to livestock, particularly sheep and goats - as little as three leaves of the shrub is fatal to sheep.
- Sheep and lambs are likely to get caught in briars, thorn scrub and holly bushes. If forage is limited sheep will strip the bark of trees. This may kill the trees.
- Fluke may be a problem in wet woodlands.

Management plans are provided for
participants in the
**Environmentally Sensitive Areas and
Countryside Management Schemes**

