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Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1225
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/11977/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee

petitions@senedd.wales

23 November 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 4 November regarding Petition P-06-1225 entitled "Make Natural Resources Wales undertake and publish annual wildlife surveys before felling woodland."

The petition raises important issues on the protection of wildlife and their habitat in the planning of felling operations. This is related to the petition P-06-1208 regarding a call for new laws to protect the habitat of red squirrel which the Petition Committee considered recently.

The woodlands that Natural Resources Wales (NRW) manage on behalf of Welsh Ministers are certified to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS). This is an independent certification standard for verifying sustainable woodland management in the UK that is used for both Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) certification. The Standard sets out the need to take appropriate measures to protect identified [priority habitats and species](#) in accordance with plans agreed with nature conservation agencies.

NRW do this through the development of Forest Resource Plans. These set out long-term objectives and are the basis for 10-year programmes of work. A Forest Resource Plan (FRP) details any protected species or priority habitats that could be affected by operations within the Woodland Management Unit (WMU) or surrounding area at a landscape or connectivity scale. This is also done at smaller individual management unit or coupe level within the FRP. This information is gathered as part of the refresh and redevelopment of these plans every 10-years using NRW's Forester GIS system that is constantly updated following site surveys and data obtained through the Local Records Centre. The redevelopment of FRPs also involves consultation with internal and external stakeholders to provide further information on species and habitat.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

A Habitat Regulation Assessment (HRA) is also undertaken where necessary in relation to European Protected Species (EPS), detailing the mitigation measures needed during operations. This entails considering the effects that operations could have on protected species and the extent of the habitat required to support that species both within and outside the WMU.

Site surveys are undertaken as part of the coupe planning process within the FRP, to establish if any additional constraints are present. If EPS are in the vicinity of the operational coupe, an EPS Licence is applied for and the appropriate mitigation measures are listed in the coupe plan such as exclusion zones (no operations permitted to protect a required proportion of the habitat) and timing of restrictions. This is also done for other protected species if these are within the vicinity of the coupe. The EPS licencing process and guidance, particularly in relation to dormice, takes into account the area of suitable habitat proposed for felling (thinning and clearfell) over multiple years to assess potential cumulative impacts. This can involve the retention of a required extent of habitat to ensure the population is maintained while the surrounding area recovers back to suitable habitat. Proportions and length of protection from operations e.g. 5 years depends on the condition of habitat and species concerned.

Once completed, the FRP is placed on NRW's public register to provide further opportunity for external consultees to feedback comments on the plans. Approval for felling is then granted if the FRP conforms to the UK Forest Standard (UKFS).

Publicly available data is held by the Local Records Centres. Survey data collected to inform the FRP and coupe plans within it is not shared externally due to the sensitivity of the data. Exclusion areas or restricted areas are shown on contract maps but do not include specific locations. Mitigation measures are included within the Timber Sales particulars to ensure purchasers are aware of the measures they are required to adopt during operations. A further site survey is undertaken prior to operations commencing to establish if any new constraints are present. If so, Forester GIS is updated and any additional mitigation measures are conveyed to the contractor.

Yours sincerely,



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