

Julie James AS/MS  
Y Gweinidog Newid Hinsawdd  
Minister for Climate Change



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1333  
Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/01084/23

Jack Sargeant MS  
Chair - Petitions committee  
Senedd Cymru  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

17 May 2023

Dear Jack Sargeant MS,

Thank you for your letter of 25 April regarding Petition P-06-1333 entitled “Stop Natural Resources Wales from tree felling that threatens red squirrel survival”.

This petition references issues of a lack of squirrel data and poor stakeholder communication as raised in a previous petition, P-06-1208 regarding new laws to protect red squirrel habitat which was debated in Senedd in December 2021. Following this and at your request, I wrote to Clare Pilman CEO of NRW in March 2022, asking that Natural Resources Wales (NRW) consider continuous improvement through applying best practice in Clocaenog to the management of woodlands for red squirrel conservation on Anglesey.

Since then, the work commissioned by NRW to update red squirrel population data and collate best practice for working in red squirrel areas has been completed. The report has been published and NRW are enacting the recommendations. NRW now hold regular liaison meetings with squirrel groups or directly with the Red Squirrel Trust Wales (RSTW) in each area.

This petition appears to have arisen following NRW’s most recent liaison meeting with the representative of the RSTW, Dr Craig Shuttleworth where the planned felling work at Parc y Bwlch, Mynydd Llandygai, Gwynedd was discussed. Parc y Bwlch is part of the Bethesda and Abergwygregyn Forest Resource Plan (FRP) managed by NRW which was renewed in 2021 following public consultation. Dr Shuttleworth informed NRW that he disagreed with the Forest Resource Plan and that felling should not take place despite Parc y Bwlch not being part of a red squirrel focal site.

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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.

NRW don't carry out any red squirrel monitoring outside the known red squirrel focal areas. However, they have recognised that Gwynedd has become an important area for red squirrel. At the time of the consultation in 2021, there weren't any reports of red squirrel sightings at Parc y Bwlch, but these have increased over the past few months. NRW are encouraging sightings to be recorded through the UK Squirrel Accord.

The felling area is predominantly larch, which is prone to Phytophthora Ramorum or Sudden Oak Death, and is part NRW's larch removal programme. The trees are even aged, have reached their full height and are prone to windblow. However, following the public consultation in 2021, NRW halved the felling coup size, delaying half of the felling until the 2026-32 period.

Felling operations on the remaining half of the coupe will be carried out in a precautionary way to safeguard any red squirrel present and will be undertaken outside of the breeding season. Conservation coupe checks done before felling will identify any dreys present and inform management accordingly. A monitoring methodology being trialled in Anglesey this year will assist NRW in developing a better approach in future.

NRW staff from the northeast and northwest areas meet regularly to discuss issues and share best practice. Staff work to the same NRW guidance that provides consistent and specific direction, although there are understandable differences in approach as squirrel conservation is at a different stage in each place. Red squirrel management is integrated into NRW's commercial forestry management, reflected in the notable increase in red squirrel population on Anglesey. As Parc y Bwlch is not part of a red squirrel focal area, its management should not be compared with Clocaenog where there has been a long history of continuous cover forestry (CCF) management which favours red squirrel. CCF is not possible at Parc y Bwlch where the trees are at risk of blowing over but is included in the wider Forest Resource Plan where feasible. The felling work at Parc y Bwlch will help diversify the age of the trees and this will benefit the red squirrel in the long term.

Yours sincerely,



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