WOODLAND TRUST

Blackaton Copse

Management Plan 2014-2019

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THE WOODLAND TRUST

INTRODUCTION

The Trust's corporate aims and management approach guide the management of all the Trust's properties, and are described on Page 4. These determine basic management policies and methods, which apply to all sites unless specifically stated otherwise. Such policies include free public access; keeping local people informed of major proposed work; the retention of old trees and dead wood; and a desire for management to be as unobtrusive as possible. The Trust also has available Policy Statements covering a variety of woodland management issues.

The Trust's management plans are based on the identification of Key Features for the site and setting objectives for their management. A monitoring programme (not included in this plan) ensures that these objectives are met and any necessary management works are carried out.

Any legally confidential or sensitive species information about this site is not included in this version of the plan.

PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATING

The information presented in this Management plan is held in a database which is continuously being amended and updated on our website. Consequently this printed version may quickly become out of date, particularly in relation to the planned work programme and on-going monitoring observations.
Please either consult The Woodland Trust website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk or contact the Woodland Trust (wopsmail@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to confirm details of the current management programme.

There is a formal review of this plan every 5 years and a summary of monitoring results can be obtained on request.

WOODLAND MANAGEMENT APPROACH

The management of our woods is based on our charitable purposes, and is therefore focused on improving woodland biodiversity and increasing peoples' understanding and enjoyment of woodland.

Our strategic aims are to:

- Protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future
- Work with others to create more native woodlands and places rich in trees
- Inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees

All our sites have a management plan which is freely accessible via our website www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. Our woods are managed to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) and are certified with the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) under licence FSC-C009406 and through independent audit.

In addition to the guidelines below we have specific guidance and policies on issues of woodland management which we review and update from time to time.

We recognise that all woods are different and that the management of our sites should also reflect their local landscape and where appropriate support local projects and initiatives. Guidelines like these provide a necessary overarching framework to guide the management of our sites but such management also requires decisions based on local circumstances and our Site Manager's intimate knowledge of each site.

The following guidelines help to direct our woodland management:

1. Our woods are managed to maintain their intrinsic key features of value and to reflect those of the surrounding landscape. We intervene when there is evidence that it is necessary to maintain or improve biodiversity and to further the development of more resilient woods and landscapes.
2. We establish new native woodland using both natural regeneration and tree planting, but largely the latter, particularly when there are opportunities for involving people.
3. We provide free public access to woods for quiet, informal recreation and our woods are managed to make them accessible, welcoming and safe.
4. The long term vision for our non-native plantations on ancient woodland sites is to restore them to predominantly native species composition and semi-natural structure, a vision that equally applies to our secondary woods.
5. Existing semi-natural open-ground and freshwater habitats are restored and maintained wherever their management can be sustained and new open ground habitats created where appropriate.
6. The heritage and cultural value of sites is taken into account in our management and, in particular, our ancient trees are retained for as long as possible.
7. Woods can offer the potential to generate income both from the sustainable harvesting of wood products and the delivery of other services. We will therefore consider the potential to generate income from our estate to help support our aims.
8. We work with neighbours, local people, organisations and other stakeholders in developing the management of our woods. We recognise the benefits of local community woodland ownership and management. Where appropriate we allow our woods to be used to support local woodland, conservation, education and access initiatives.
9. We use and offer the estate where appropriate, for the purpose of demonstration, evidence gathering and research associated with the conservation, recreational and sustainable management of woodlands. In particular we will develop and maintain a network of long-term monitoring sites across the estate.
10. Any activities we undertake will conform to sustainable forest management principles, be appropriate for the site and will be balanced with our primary objectives of enhancing the biodiversity and recreational value of our woods and the wider landscapes.

SUMMARY

This public management plan briefly describes the site, specifically mentions information on public access, sets out the long term policy and lists the Key Features which drive management actions. The Key Features are specific to this site – their significance is outlined together with their long (50 year+) and short (5 year) term objectives. The short term objectives are complemented by a detailed Work Programme for the period of this management plan. Detailed compartment descriptions are listed in the appendices which include any major management constraints and designations. A short glossary of technical terms is at the end. The Key Features and general woodland condition of this site are subject to a formal monitoring programme which is maintained in a central database. A summary of monitoring results is available on request.

1.0 SITE DETAILS

Site name:	Blackaton Copse
Location:	Gidleigh
Grid reference:	SX678886, OS 1:50,000 Sheet No. 191
Area:	4.86 hectares (12.01 acres)
Designations:	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, National Park, Nature Conservation Zone

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Summary Description

A small, rocky woodland on the uplands of Dartmoor, this ancient woodland has lichen communities alongside oak and birch trees. The Blackaton Brook is important for spawning trout and salmon and old stone field boundaries traverse the site.

2.2 Extended Description

Situated within the National Park this tranquil and beautiful semi natural woodland is set in an area of mixed farming on the eastern upland edge of Dartmoor close to the open moor. The nearest village is Gidleigh and the wood is about 10 minutes' walk from the church.

The woodland covers a steep granite boulder slope which runs westwards down to a narrow floodplain containing the Blackaton Brook. The main area of woodland is principally sessile oak and downy birch, with an understory of hazel and holly. Throughout there are some significant older "parkland" oaks with rich lichen communities, many of these date from the 19th century a period of more open "wood pasture " when the woodland was regularly grazed. The woodland ground flora is diverse and the floodplain against the stream adds greatly to the range of species present on this site.

The stretch of Blackaton Brook which runs through the wood is an important tributary of the Upper Teign for spawning salmon and trout.

There are old stone field boundaries traversing the site that show remnants of Dartmoor farming practices on the upper slopes.

Public access is very informal and limited primarily to local use along the brook linking the lanes to the north and south of the wood.

3.0 PUBLIC ACCESS INFORMATION

3.1 Getting there

Access is gained directly from the lanes (public highways) which run along the northern and southern boundaries. All access within the wood is permissive, and there are no public rights of way directly adjacent to the wood. The only managed permissive footpath, runs parallel to the Stream, along the western bank providing a very attractive link between Blackaton and Highbury Bridges.

Blackaton Copse is situated west of the village of Chagford. The road from Chagford to the woodland is very hilly, narrow and without a pavement. There is a narrow pull in next to the gate at the top end of the woodland and the same at the south side although both are off road and not suitable when wet unless in a four wheel drive. The top entrance is over a one step stile and this leads onto two paths. The higher of these involves stepping over a number of boulders and the lower path is flat but has muddy patches. The lower path follows the river through the wood to the exit which is also a one step stile. It is much quicker to go back through the wood than to follow the road back to the top entrance as the road is steep and is almost a 1km detour.

The nearest bus stop is in Chagford at the cross roads, approx three kilometres from the wood. The nearest toilets are in Okehampton at Fairplace, Market Street and Okehampton Station all of which are RADAR accessible (Direct Enquiries Website www.directenquiries.com)

This information was correct on 19/06/2007. For up to date local travel information see the travel line website www.travelline.org.uk

3.2 Access / Walks

4.0 LONG TERM POLICY

The present semi-natural structure of woodland is highly desirable and the long term intention will be to maintain this structure to a point where natural processes of decline and regeneration dominate.

Intervention will be necessary to prevent increasing dominance of the woodland understory and canopy to beech, holly and the risk of conifer regeneration all of which will be detrimental to the most important biodiversity features of the site.

The key biodiversity features of the site include rare lichens; ground nesting birds, woodland mammals and the importance of this section of the Blackaton Brook to spawning salmon and trout.

In 2012 the remaining conifer species Sitka spruce, Lawson cypress and western red cedar were removed or ring barked in the main woodland. However, some mature conifer mainly larch remain on the stream island at the southern end of the site and spruce at the northern end. Conifer seeding has taken place and the impact of conifer regeneration will need to be monitored, the adjoining land contains a number of very significant conifers dating from 1930s and the Douglas fir in particular is seeding freely.

Historic field boundaries will be maintained along the roadside but within the woodland no active management is intended.

Increasing river flows and the likely influence of climate change will result in an increasing periods of flood. In the upper catchment of the River Teign this means high flow rates for short periods of time and this will impact on the river morphology at Blackaton, the alignment of permissive paths and extent of the flood plain area.

Permissive access will be maintained in perpetuity, but changes to alignment and the recent and future improvements to paths are intended to prevent paths in wet areas ‘extending’ and damaging fragile woodland flora and to accommodate the dynamic nature of the water course.

The Woodland Trusts intentions for Blackaton Copse meet the corporate aims of protection and restoration and our overall charitable objective; “Our vision is a UK rich in woods and trees, enjoyed and valued by everyone.”

5.0 KEY FEATURES

The Key Features of the site are identified and described below. They encapsulate what is important about the site. The short and long-term objectives are stated and any management necessary to maintain and improve the Key Feature.

5.1 Ancient Semi Natural Woodland

Description

Varied stands of ancient semi-natural ancient woodland, predominately national vegetation classification W11a: Sessile Oak- Downy Birch -Wood Sorrel community, but W16b, W10c, W8e and W7b also occur. A heavily developed understory exists particularly at the northern end of the wood. Approximately 1ha of holly was cleared in 2000 but re-growth is widespread along with increasing development of beech. Some adhoc grazing by deer is helping to slow re-growth but this is insufficient to maintain structure. The site was historically managed as pasture woodland but areas of coppice and high forest are present. A number of veteran trees, walls and woodland boulders host rare lichen species and good light levels are required to maintain presence. Small scale intervention to coppice holly and remove small clusters of conifer have lifted light levels in some areas. A number of small groups of conifers exist on the islands, but those within the woodland were finally removed or ring barked in 2013 but some conifer regeneration is present. The wood contains features illustrating the past with old field boundaries occurring. A feature of the wood is the riparian zone around the stream but is considered separately as a key feature.

Significance

The western upland oak woods of Dartmoor are internationally important and significant areas are recognised by designations such as a Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Whilst Blackaton Copse is outside this core area it is still of significant conservation value. The density and large areas of ancient woodland and adjacent semi natural habitats in the wider landscape are also recognised by the Woodland Trust as of significance for biodiversity and as a component of a resilient landscape of sustainable semi-natural habitats . The value of upland oakwoods are also recognised within the Dartmoor Biodiversity Action Plan, having their own separate Habitat Action Plan (HAP). Protection of archaeological features is an objective of DNPA management plan. Management of this area of SNAW and archaeological features helps assist the Trust in meeting its core aims of protection and restoration.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: Management access is generally over wet or steep ground and rocky terrain. Historical features limit management access routes in places Opportunities: Small scale intervention to ensure diversification of stand structure, to increase structural biodiversity. Maintenance of historical roadside boundaries will help create a stock proof boundary of some value to future grazing potential.

Factors Causing Change

Regeneration of and succession too shade tolerant species holly, beech, conifers, mortality and instability of veteran trees, increasing river flows and flash flooding. Tree growth, wind throw, uprooting and consequent damage to historic features.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Maintain semi-natural structure associated with western acidic woodland habitat in a favourable condition and maintain and enhance associated flora and fauna. Intervention may be necessary to ensure sufficient light levels and to ensure a managed understory and formalised grazing may desirable. All known sites and features of historic interest will be identified as far as possible and protected from damage by identification and avoidance during woodland operations.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

The wood will be allowed to develop through largely natural processes forming gaps in the canopy and allowing the establishment of regeneration. Small scale intervention is necessary to maintain current semi natural structure long term. Short term objectives during the plan period include:

1. Cut and control developing holly, beech and monitor and control conifer regeneration as necessary
2. Review and develop options to remove mature conifer from island areas at the southern end of the site
3. Identify archaeological features, seek professional advice
2. Maintain historic roadside boundaries
3. Monitor condition of historic features internal to the woodland

5.2 Informal Public Access

Description

Tranquil and beautiful semi-natural woodland, with rough paths in a wooded, upland setting adjacent to an attractive stream. Permissive access will be maintained in perpetuity, with changes to alignment and future improvements to paths are undertaken as necessary to prevent paths in wet areas ‘extending’ and damaging fragile woodland flora and to accommodate the dynamic nature of the water course.

Significance

The site is important locally as there is little public access to ancient woodland in the immediate vicinity. The path forms an important link in the local path network and is part of the promoted long distance walk, the Two Moors Way. The Woodland Trusts intentions for Blackaton Copse meet the corporate aims of protection and restoration and our overall charitable objective; “Our vision is a UK rich in woods and trees, enjoyed and valued by everyone.”

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraint: biodiversity value and sensitivity of some species carrying capacity of site and local infrastructure, outweighs further promotion of site. In places the wet ground is easily damaged by horses/cycles and is not suitable for use as a bridleway or heavy pedestrian use. Opportunity: Visitor enjoyment of a quiet woodland of high biodiversity value.

Factors Causing Change

Pedestrian erosion in wet areas, visitors dogs causing disturbance in stream and to ground nesting birds on the upper slopes.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

An informal pedestrian route over rough terrain running at times close to the stream - the route will be varied as the structure and nature of the wood develop with the onset of veteran tree maturity forcing diversion due to safety reasons or changes in the alignment of the water course and areas of wetland.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Ensure that access provision for the woodland is safe and the condition of the path surface is clear and suitable for pedestrian access. Over the next management plan period maintain access and seek to improve access over/around "wet/bog" areas

1. At the southern entrance which has seasonally flooded in recent years and in December 2012 when the woodland gate was washed away twice, improve drainage and path surface through “seasonally flooded” section circa 10m in length.
2. Undertake annual tree safety surveys.
3. Check level of use of permissive path, gates, seats and stiles
4. Review success of boardwalks and the recovery of ground flora and lessons for option 1 above.

5.3 Watercourses

Description

The Blackaton Brook is an upland 'Torrent Stream'. Deep pools and shallow gravel beds occur interspersed with 'riffle' beds - are used by spawning salmon and trout. The woodland edge on the western bank in particular is also rich in lichen flora requiring open grown conditions.

Significance

Torrent Streams are a national biodiversity action plan habitat (HAP). The habitat at Blackaton is critical to spawning salmon for which there is a national species action plan (SAP) . There are a number of other significant species of flora and fauna included in regional and local biodiversity action plans (BAPs), many with individual SAPs, that occur along the riparian edge, most notably lichens. Management of this habitat helps assist the Woodland Trust in meeting its core aim of protection and restoration.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: poor access, sustainability of management. Lack of information on wider range of species groups utilising habitats. Opportunities: to contribute to action and protection of Local, Regional and National BAP and SAP, by maintaining and enhancing populations, also contributing to research programmes about a number of threatened species.

Factors Causing Change

Progressively increasing river flows as a result of long term climatic change, causing flash floods and immeadiate damage and structural change to river morphology. Public access and in particular dogs causing disturbance.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

Maintain and enhance flora and fauna associated with woodland edge and riparian habitat, paying particular attention to areas of wet flushes and bogs, and any geological exposures. Special attention will be focused on BAP priority species.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

Ensure that bank vegetation is managed in line with current management practices for salmanoid species associated with the stream:

1. Coppice stream side areas in particular around riffles to maintain light levels suitable for spawning and to protect river morphology from the collapse mature coppice stools.
2. During the next plan period review support offered by West Country Rivers Trust and management options to limit bank erosion and specific disturbance of gravel spawning areas.

5.4 Historic Features

Description

The wood contains features illustrating the past with old field boundaries occurring. The roadside walls and former field boundary features are obvious however some of the internal features of the woodland thought to be of some historic significance require further examination before a proper assessment of their management requirements can be considered.

Significance

Protection of archaeological features is an objective of DNPA management plan. Management of conservation features ensures the Woodland Trust is meeting its core aim of protection and restoration.

Opportunities & Constraints

Constraints: Features limit management access routes in places. Opportunity: Maintenance of roadside boundary helps to create stock proof boundary.

Factors Causing Change

Tree growth, tree mortality, windthrow, uprooting and damaging historic features.

Long term Objective (50 years+)

All known sites and features of historic interest will be identified as far as possible and protected from damage by identification and avoidance during woodland operations.

Short term management Objectives for the plan period (5 years)

1. Identify features, seek professional advice.
2. Maintain roadside boundaries
3. Monitor condition of historic features internal to the woodland.

6.0 WORK PROGRAMME

Year	Type of Work	Description	Due By

APPENDIX 1: COMPARTMENT DESCRIPTIONS

Cpt No.	Area (ha)	Main Species	Year	Management Regime	Major Management Constraints	Key Features Present	Designations
1a	4.86	Oak (sessile)	1900	Wood pasture	Archaeological features, Mostly wet ground/exposed site, No/poor vehicular access within the site, Sensitive habitats/species on or adjacent to site, Services & wayleaves, Very steep slope/cliff/quarry/ mine shafts/sink holes etc	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, Historic Features, Informal Public Access, Watercourses	Ancient Semi Natural Woodland, National Park
Small, rocky woodland with some steep ground and also a narrow floodplain containing the Blackaton Brook which also contains some small islets. Principally a Sessile Oak -Downy Birch - Wood sorrel community (W11a) which is believed to be reasonably typical in terms of ground flora. The sub canopy is unusually well developed for this type of Dartmoor woodland with holly becoming increasingly dominating. Small areas of other woodland communities ranging from Oak - Birch - Wavy Hair Grass (W16) to Alder-Ash (W7) also exist. This damp zone also contains abundant marsh violet and the river is known to be used by spawning salmonoids. Throughout there are some older trees with lichen communities.							

GLOSSARY

Ancient Woodland

Ancient woods are defined as those where there has been continuous woodland cover since at least 1600 AD. In Scotland ancient woods are defined strictly as sites shown as semi-natural woodland on the 'Roy' maps (a military survey carried out in 1750 AD, which is the best source of historical map evidence) and as woodland all subsequent maps. However, they have been combined with long-established woods of semi-natural origin (originating from between 1750 and 1860) into a single category of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland to take account of uncertainties in their identification. Ancient woods include Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland and plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (see below). May support many species that are only found in ancient woodland.

Ancient Semi - Natural Woodland

Stands in ancient woods defined as those consisting predominantly of native trees and shrubs that have not obviously been planted, which have arisen from natural regeneration or coppice regrowth.

Ancient Woodland Site

Stands in ancient woods that have been converted to plantations, of coniferous, broadleaved or mixed species, usually for timber production, including plantations of native species planted so closely together that any semi-natural elements of the understorey have been suppressed.

Beating Up

Replacing any newly planted trees that have died in the first few years after planting.

Broadleaf

A tree having broad leaves (such as oak) rather than needles found on conifers (such as Scots pine).

Canopy

The uppermost layer of vegetation in a woodland, or the upper foliage and branches of an individual tree.

Clearfell

Felling of all trees within a defined area.

Compartment

Permanent management division of a woodland, usually defined on site by permanent features such as roads. See Sub-compartments.

Conifer

A tree having needles, rather than broadleaves, and typically bearing cones.

Continuous Cover forestry

A term used for managing woods to ensure that there are groups or individual trees of different ages scattered over the whole wood and that some mature tree cover is always maintained. Management is by repeated thinning and no large areas are ever completely felled all at once.

Coppice

Trees which are cut back to ground levels at regular intervals (3-25 years).

Exotic (non-native) Species

Species originating from other countries (or other parts of the UK) that have been introduced by humans, deliberately or accidentally.

Field Layer

Layer of small, non-woody herbaceous plants such as bluebells.

Group Fell

The felling of a small group of trees, often to promote natural regeneration or allow planting.

Long Term Retention

Discrete groups of trees (or in some cases single trees) that are retained significantly past their economic felling age. Operations may still be carried out within them and thinning is often necessary to maintain stability.

Minimum Intervention

Areas where no operations (such as thinning) will take place other than to protect public safety or possibly to control invasive exotic species.

Mixed Woodland

Woodland made up of broadleaved and coniferous trees.

National vegetation classification (NVC)

A classification scheme that allows an area of vegetation to be assigned to the standardised type that best matches the combination of plant species that it contains. All woodlands in the UK can be described as being one of 18 main woodland types (W1 - W18), which principally reflect soil and climatic conditions. For example, Upland Oakwoods are type W11, and normally occur on well drained infertile soils in the cooler and wetter north and west of Britain. Each main type can be subdivided into numerous subtypes. Most real woods contain more than one type or sub-type and inevitably some woods are intermediate in character and can't be properly described by any sub type.

Native Species

Species that arrived in Britain without human assistance.

Natural Regeneration

Naturally grown trees from seeds falling from mature trees. Also regeneration from coppicing and suckering.

Origin & Provenance

The provenance of a tree or seed is the place where seed was collected to grow the tree or plant. The origin is the geographical location within the natural range of a species from where seeds/tree originally derives. Thus an acorn collected from a Turkey oak in Edinburgh would have an Edinburgh provenance and a southern European origin.

Re-Stocking

Re-planting an area of woodland, after it has been felled.

Shrub Layer

Formed by woody plants 1-10m tall.

Silviculture

The growing and care of trees in woodlands.

Stand

Trees of one type or species, grouped together within a woodland.

Sub-Compartment

Temporary management division of a compartment, which may change between management plan periods.

Thinning

The felling of a proportion of individual trees within a given area. The remaining trees grow to fill in the space created.

Tubex or Grow or Tuley Tubes

Tubes placed over newly planted trees or natural regeneration that promote growth and provide protection from animals such as rabbits and deer.

Weeding

The control of vegetation immediately around newly planted trees or natural regeneration to promote tree growth until they become established. Either by hand cutting or with carefully selected weed killers such as glyphosate.

Windblow/Windthrow

Trees or groups of trees blown over (usually uprooted) by strong winds and gales.