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Please find enclosed details of the British Mountaineering Council's (BMC) interests in the future of forestry and woodland policy in England. The BMC is the representative body for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in England and Wales, with a membership of over 70,000 outdoor enthusiasts. We have posed the five questions outlined in the 'call for views' to our members via our website and their views have been incorporated here.

1 What do forests and woods mean to you?

"They are the source of my strength, optimism and well-being, and are my dearest friends that I frequently return to when I am in need of sustenance".

Our woodlands and forests have long been a focus for open air recreation, including walking and rock climbing. Across England there are over 70 individual climbing crags situated within the Forestry Commission Estate; there are many more situated on privately owned woodlands and there are many more to be found on private land but to which access is currently gained through the Forestry Commission Estate (please see the list provided).

Forests and woods are intrinsically enjoyable; they are part of our natural and cultural heritage and are a source of pleasure for thousands of people. These oxygen-rich, tranquil landscapes are timeless and appeal to those of all ages, providing a unique setting in which people, nature and wildlife can come together.

Public access to our forests and woods must be at the heart of the Independent Panel's decisions on the future of forestry, and the ways in which delivery of benefits to both public access and wildlife must be fully explored.

2 What is your vision for the future of England's forests and woods?

"Places of recreation and learning".

The BMC believes our forests and woods should be accessible, healthy, well managed and well balanced landscapes, where the delivery of multiple public benefits – access, biodiversity, landscape conservation and sustainable forest management practices - are all achieved. The Public Forest Estate (PFE) should be an exemplar of good management practice, where commercial and other uses are well balanced.

The Secretary of State made it clear to the House of Commons when announcing the establishment of the Independent Panel, that;

*"the panel looks at all forms of access, including access for walkers, riders and cyclists," and "we want to expand access to our forests and woodlands because it is in everyone's interests that we do so".*¹

The BMC fully supports this sentiment. It is essential that the breadth of recreational opportunities our forests and woodlands provide is fully understood as future policy is

¹ House of Commons 17 Feb 2011 : Column 1169

developed – beyond walking, visitors wish to explore the unique, natural features the wooded environment provides and recreational activities such as climbing and orienteering are equally important to thousands of people.

The PFE makes up only 18% of England's woodland and forests but accounts for 44% of our accessible woodlands. The opportunity therefore exists to consider a broad vision for greater access to our woods and forests across the multitude of public, voluntary and privately owned estates by opening up these areas more widely to the public for quiet enjoyment – bringing social, economic and environmental benefits. Examples from across Scotland and from current Forestry Commission management practices have shown that dedication of land (through section 16 of CROW) and the 'right to roam' have not had a detrimental affect on forestry activities but have demonstrated that commercial forestry can sit happily alongside the management of areas for biodiversity and wildlife as well as for public access and recreational activities.

3 What do you feel to be the benefits of forests and woods to:

a) you personally;

Overall, our membership feels that forests and woods are a source of physical and emotional well-being, bringing multiple benefits to people, wildlife and the environment.

b) society as a whole;

Our forests and woods provide a unique playground, offering a range of recreational pursuits in beautiful, peaceful surroundings. The benefits brought about by access to these areas are wide reaching, from emotional well-being to more challenging, physical benefits. This unique national asset provides the setting for a number of important climbing venues including Shorn Cliff in the Lower Wye Valley and Pillar Rock in the Lake District, and provides thousands of kilometres of well maintained tracks and trails enjoyed by outdoor enthusiasts and families in peaceful, safe surroundings. 'The Health Values', a technical report published by the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (June 2011), clearly details the benefits of access to nature, including our woods and forests.

There are also public sector financial benefits from providing greater opportunities for exercise by reducing the burden on public health expenditure, in accordance with the Government's 'healthy lives, healthy people' agenda.

Our forests and woods provide unique classrooms for outdoor learning and are the setting for numerous volunteer opportunities across the country, through specific woodland conservation and restoration projects. For example, the BMC has recently worked with the Forestry Commission on a local restoration project at Black Rocks in the Peak District with a number of volunteers and a team of trees surgeons to remove saplings and trees from between buttresses and crags helping to improve access and enhance the local wildlife.

Similarly, the carbon sequestration capacity of woodland cover and the positive impact trees have on the incidence of physical and stress related illnesses by filtering out polluted air is a key benefit to society as a whole.

c) the natural environment;

Our woods and forests have a vital role to play as part of a coherent ecological network. Their importance is clearly outlined in chapter 8 of the 'National Ecosystem Assessment', which details a quarter of all UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species that are associated with trees and woods. The BMC supports the restoration of native woodland where appropriate by implementing tree planting schemes.

One of the key aspects of current Forestry Commission management practices has been the successful management of access to areas of high biodiversity value. The PFE contains 67,772 ha of Sites of Special Scientific Interest of which 92.2% is classified as being in favourable or recovering condition (Forestry Commission Annual Report 2009-10). Such beneficial management practices must be allowed to continue.

d) the economy?

Access to our woods and forests brings many economic benefits, not only from commercial forestry ventures but as a result of the effects of allowing public access to these areas, as outlined in chapter 8 of the National Ecosystem Assessment which indicates there are approximately 250–300 million day visits to woodlands each year. This visitor related expenditure occurs in a number of ways from food, fuel and refreshments to hotel accommodation, souvenir buying and other local businesses. As well as local economic benefits brought about by walking, climbing and other recreational activities, expanding these opportunities and the PROW / trail networks can also bring increased opportunities for map makers, guidebook writers and others remote from the locality itself.

4 We would like to hear about your suggestions of practical solutions and good practice which can be replicated more widely.

The BMC has been involved in managing access for our activities on the forested and wooded estates for over 30 years, in particular working alongside conservation organisations and landowners to agree voluntary climbing restrictions during the bird nesting season. In addition, the BMC owns and manages over 15 hectares of woodland and has produced guidelines on maximising the ecological and recreational potential of woodland areas using a number of appropriate management techniques (www.thebmc.co.uk/habitat). This document, Crag & Habitat Management, was produced in partnership with Natural England, The National Trust, The Forestry Commission and The Countryside Council for Wales. Two of our owned and managed sites also have Forestry Commission approved management plans, the aim of which is primarily to manage the woodland to protect the cliff environment and to regenerate the health of the woodland to support more fauna and flora, whilst at the same time allowing people to freely access these areas.

The BMC is also in the process of dedicating all of its landholdings (we have already dedicated 3 sites) under section 16 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, following in the steps of the Forestry Commission which has dedicated 198,000 hectares of its freehold estate. Over 50% of our own dedicated land has also been awarded environmental protection (SSSI, SACs etc) and is in favourable condition, demonstrating the ability to successfully manage access and recreation in areas of high conservation value.

The BMC therefore recommends that where current access provision is not safeguarded in law, dedication through the CROW Act should be sought – this is an appropriate and existing mechanism which can be used to safeguard public access, reduce occupiers' liability and maximise benefits for both people and wildlife. In particular, where Government grants or public money is being used to help manage or maintain our forests and woods (for example through Stewardship schemes or the English Wooded Grant Scheme) that, as a condition of these awards, landowners must dedicate their land, maximising public benefit.

With the public making over 40 million visits a year to the Forestry Commission Estate, the Commission is one of the largest providers of countryside recreation opportunities

and provides some of the best examples of welcoming, well managed public access in England, which any private landowner would be hard pressed to match. It is essential that the Forestry Commission, as the appropriate body, continues to deliver the multiple benefits associated with large scale forestry management.

5 What do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about England's forests and woods?

As previously outlined, the BMC believes that a key priority for forestry policy is to ensure that these areas are maintained so that they continue to provide and protect natural value and the public interest. As a priority, delivery of multiple benefits from our forests and woods (access, landscape conservation, biodiversity etc) must be integrated into policy for forestry in both private and public ownership.

It is essential that current levels of access are maintained and enhanced across our woods and forests. The social and environmental benefits of access to our woods and forests have been valued at £1.2 billion per annum, with recreational visits valued at £484 million per annum (Chapter 8, National Ecosystem Assessment). Walking and climbing are also activities that underpin Sport England's 'active people' agenda as well as the Government's 'Healthy lives, healthy people' agenda. Participation in climbing and hill walking has shown a significant increase in England from 86,100 in 2007 to 111,300 in 2010 – there is clear evidence for more people wishing to get outside and explore our countryside, woods and forests (Sport England Active People survey, 2010).

The BMC recommends that where current access provision is not safeguarded in law, dedication through the CROW Act is sought, as has been the case with all of the BMC's and the Forestry Commissions own land holdings.

Recent reports including the National Ecosystem Assessment, and the Lawton Review looking into how to develop a coherent ecological network for both people and nature, have made strong recommendations on the value and restoration of nature and, in detail, of our forests and woods. The Natural Environment White Paper also outlines Government's commitment to protecting and restoring ancient woodland and asks that the Panel look 'to provide advice on the options for ensuring everyone has the opportunity to experience and enjoy our woodland resource'. It is important that any decisions made about the future of forestry and woodland policy be made in light of these documents, consider the breadth of public backing behind the 38 Degrees 'Save Our Forests' campaign, and above all consider how policy can be used to explore the full potential of our forest and woodland estates. In particular, the overarching challenge must be the ways in which national policy and appropriate delivery mechanisms can safeguard and improve access alongside biodiversity targets. This must be examined across public and privately owned woodland and forests throughout England.

Climbing Crags on the Forestry Commission Estate in England

<u>Region</u>	<u>Area</u>	<u>Crag Name</u>	<u>Grid Ref</u>	<u>Freehold</u>	<u>Leasehold / Access notes</u>	<u>Open Access</u>
Peak District	Cromford	Black Rocks	SK294557	Y		Y
		Whamcliffe	SK296977 - 303970	Partly	Southern half in open access, northern end is not	Y&N
		Windgather	SJ997783	Y	Legal access to rock face but not to top of crag or approach	Y
N. Yorkshire		Bridestones	SE873915	N	Crag not in FC land but surrounding areas is	Y
		Cooks Crag	NZ593097	N	Crag not in FC land but surrounding areas is	N
		Hanging Stone, Silton	SE451944	N		N
		Highcliff Nab	NZ610138	N	Leased from Lord Gisborough	N
		Scarth Wood Pinnacle	NZ463003	N		N
		Beacon Scar	SE460998	N	Arncliffe Estate	N
		Silton	SE448940	N		N
		Whitestone Cliff	SE506835	Y	Leased to Yorkshire Wildlife Trust	Y
Yorkshire Limestone		Norwood north of Otley	SE211512	Y		Y
		Hunters Stones	SE217511	Y		Y
		Wainstones	NZ559036	N	Crag not in FC land but surrounding areas is	Y
		Raven's Scar	NZ566037	N	Crag not in FC land but surrounding areas is	N
Lower Wye Valley	Wales	Wynd Cliff	ST527973	N		N
	Wales	Black Cliff Quarry	ST533980	N		N
		Shorn Cliff	ST541992	Y	Crag open access but area around is not	Y
		Tintern Quarry	ST544981	N		N
Symonds Yat		Symonds Yat	SO558153 - 563158	?	Symonds Yat Rock is open access but not crags	N
		Bixslade Quarry	SO595109	Y	Symonds Yat - only 1 of its 3 crags is open to climbers	Y
		Spion Kop	SO598103	Y	Leased to Gloucester Wildlife Trust - no climbing on sections of crag	Y
		Hang Hill	SO604065	Y		Y
		Staple Edge Quarry	SO648118	Y		Y
		Shakemantle	SO653114	Y	Seasonal nesting restriction (Peregrine)	Y
		Howbeech Slade	SO646090	Y		Y
		Stony Green	SO645086	Y		Y
		Point Quarry	SO604082	Y	RSPB / FC Nature Reserve (Nagshead). No access	Y
Forest of Dean Sandstone		Highmeadow Woods	SO547129	N		N
		Chase Wood	SO602217 - 598220	N		N
		Penyard Park North	SO616232 - 623232	N	Half in FC land - Yew Tree Buttress / Shelf Buttress	N
		East Dean Edge	SO654208 - 648203	Y		Y
		Huntsham Crags	SO559167 - 567169	N	Leased / climbing is not permitted	N

Lancashire		Fairy Steps	SD486789	N	Leased from Dallam Estate. Crag not in FC land but surrounding area is.	N
Lake District	Ennerdale	Bowness Knott	NY109155	Y	Leased to National Trust. Seasonal nesting restriction (Peregrine)	Y
		Raven Crag, Highstile	NY164144	Y		Y
		Gable Crag	NY213105	Y		Y
		Green Gable Crag	NY214106	Y		Y
		Boat How Crag	NY199110	Y		Y
		Raven Crag, Ennerdale	NY178124	Y		Y
		Hind Cove	NY178122	Y		Y
		Pillar Rock	NY172123	Y		Y
		Black Crag, Mirk Cove	NY165117	Y		Y
		Cove Crag	NY162118	Y		Y
		Scoat Fell Crag	NY159113	Y		Y
		Haskett Buttress	NY155114	Y		Y
		Steeple East Face	NY157117	Y		Y
		Steeple West Face	NY156117	Y		Y
	Duddon valley	Brandy Crag	NY225989	N		N
		Kepple Crag	NY219989	N		N
	Eden Valley	Armathwaite	NY505452	Y		Y
Northumberland		Aid	NY920838	Y		Y
		Callaly	NU065092	N	Partly in FC land / partly private	N
		Church Rock	NZ026996	N		N
		Coe Crag	NU074073	Y		Y
		Coquet View	NZ014990	Y		Y
		Drake Stone	NT921044	Y		Y
		Ellis Crag	NT747010	Y		Y
		Great Wanney	NY933835	Y	Partly in FC land / partly private (Wanney Crag on FC land)	Y
		Little Wanney	NY925835	Y		Y
		Main Stone	NZ014988	N		N
		Old Stell	NZ030983	Y		Y
		Paddaburn	NY650788	Y		Y
		Redheugh	NU119069	Y		Y
		Simonside	NZ025987	Y		Y
		Thrunton Crag	NU074096	N		N
		Whiteheugh	NY762940	N	Partly in FC land / partly private	N

Mid Wales	No Crag	Portland	No Crag	South Devon	No Crag	
Pembrokeshire	No Crag	West Penwith	No Crag	North Devon	No Crag	
East Midlands	No Crag	Yorkshire Grit	No Crag	Cornwall	No Crag	
West Midlands	No Crag	Avon & Cheddar	No Crag	Dorset	No Crag	
Swanage	No Crag	Cheshire	No Crag	Wiltshire	No Crag	
Somerset	No Crag	Hampshire	No Crag	Exmoor	No Crag	