

## **HLS Restoration Update Jul-Oct 2020**

**Holly pollarding** - This programme covers the management of holly within lichen-rich woodlands where the shade from dense holly can have a negative impact on lichen diversity. It is guided by the results from a 2018/19 survey, which show that holly cutting can be beneficial for lichen conservation in the New Forest (N. Sanderson, 2019: *New Forest Holly Management and Epiphytic Lichen Conservation*). In the July update we provided maps of eight plots within five woodland areas. In error we reported that these sites had been selected for this winter's programme - the sites were areas where holly management was carried out last winter (at the start of 2020). The programme for winter 2020/21 is currently being prepared with the aim to cut understorey holly in around 18 plots spread across different woodlands. The total area treated will be roughly double that of last year and the programme will target sites highlighted in the 2018/19 survey report as 'urgent priority' and 'priority' areas for cutting.

**Botanical survey** - In 2019 Forestry England developed a proposal to carry out vegetation survey for monitoring wetland restoration works but the work was put on hold pending feedback from the Freshwater & Wetlands Restoration Forum (FWRP) Evidence & Monitoring Sub-Group. Once we receive the E&M Sub-Group's recommendations we will review the methodology and consider our options for carrying out surveys in 2021.

**River Habitat Surveys** - Repeat River Habitat Surveys (RHS) are planned for five wetland restoration sites where surveys were carried out in previous years prior to restoration. The RHS is a system for assessing the character and habitat quality of rivers based on their physical structure. The Pondhead RHS has been carried out and the contractor is finalising the report. A survey at Wootton was also planned this year but could not be carried out due to high water levels, it will now be completed in 2021. The remaining RHS surveys have also been postponed to 2021; they were originally scheduled for April/May and could not be carried out due to Covid-19 restrictions.

## **Summary of Key Events/Progress during the period**

### **Terrestrial Restoration**

#### **Ridge & furrow removal and stump shearing**

Work recommenced in September in areas that were left over from February 2020. By the end of October, full ridge & furrow and stump removal had been completed at Turf Hill (10.46ha) and Markway (1.5ha), while stump shearing had been completed at North Slufters (4.6ha), Markway (0.9ha), Highland Water (5.2ha) and Ferny Knapp (4.9ha).

Further stump shearing work is either in progress or due to start before the end of 2020 at Highland Water (10.7ha), Norley (2.4ha) and Longdown (4.09ha).

Work is also being planned for a number of other sites to be restored during winter 2020/21. These include sites at Marchwood, Ipley, Dibden and Fawley.

#### **Rhododendron management**

The summer herbicide application programme aims to treat rhododendron stump re-growth and new growth. Different areas across the New Forest are treated on rotation as it usually takes more than one application to be fully effective. This year the contractors

started work in April and finished in August, completing 66 days of work. Making the most of the great weather and an early start to the season, they treated areas in Turf Hill, Godshill, Bramshaw, Castle Malwood and surround, Kings Garn, Janes Moor, Rhinefield and Clumbers, covering 44 hectares in total.

Preparation for the winter programme to cut rhododendron bushes and burn the arisings is underway. Areas to include: Bramshaw, Amberwood, Shave Green, Anderwood, Dames Slough, Ferny Knapp, Fletchers Thorns, Rhinefield, Hinchleslea and Setthorns, totalling 18.3ha.

### **Lost lawns**

The programme for this winter includes restoration in Tantany Wood (3.2ha), which has been agreed previously with stakeholders.

### **Mature Scots Pine removal from heathland**

Clumbers - All timber has been cleared and this area is now complete.

Woodcrates - The remaining timber on site from phase 1 will be cleared this winter. The timber has not been cleared yet due to Covid-19 restrictions, ground nesting bird constraints in the summer and current wet ground conditions. It will be cleared as soon as we have drier conditions. Regarding phase 2, the ongoing Covid-19 restrictions are limiting our ability to run a consultation site visit where all interested parties are able to attend at the same time (see Consultation below). We also do not have capacity to carry out the felling work this winter. We plan to organise a consultation in early 2021 and carry out the work in winter 2021/22.

Slap Bottom - The area remains signed and goalposts are erected. The timber felled to date is to be cleared and further discussions for this area are to be held.

### **Seedling and sapling pine**

Dibden (1.8ha) and Dunces Arch (1.04ha) will be worked this autumn, as soon as weather and ground conditions allow.

Preparation for areas in Markway are in progress.

## **Bracken Management**

An Emergency Authorisation to permit the use of Asulam for bracken control was granted for the 2020 season and Forestry England had planned to treat a selection of sites amounting to approximately 50ha. Between 13<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> July, Forestry England's contractors treated 32.1ha of open heathland habitat in the north west of the forest at Turf Hill, Hampton Ridge, Island's Thorns and Holly Hatch. We stopped the work as soon as we received confirmation that a condition of the Emergency Authorisation was to exclude livestock from treated areas for 1 month after application, which was impractical for areas such as the New Forest. A decision on an Emergency Authorisation for the 2021 season is expected in early 2021 but it is likely to include a similar condition to exclude livestock.

In addition, a bracken forage harvesting programme was completed upon 37 sites across the forest throughout September and early October. The total area treated was 46.2ha.

## **Verge Restoration**

With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, the Verge Restoration Officer (VRO) has received a large amount of emails and phone calls from residents/locals and partner organisations about persistent verge parking and reporting areas of parking erosion. Sites including Woodlands Road, Denny Campsite, Linford and Ogdens have suffered from increased levels of displacement parking causing extensive verge erosion and vehicles blocking access ways and/or the public highway. The VRO has carried out considerable liaison with residents, parish councils and Neighbourhood Watch, and has worked with other teams in Forestry

England to get emergency measures in place. Further measures will be implemented over the winter, including work under the HLS project to install new signage and new sections of dragon's teeth (DTs) to protect verges at Ogdens.

#### **Work completed**

During summer 2020 outstanding work was completed at a number of sites to install DTs: **Wootton - Brownhills** - DTs installed to protect eroded lay-bys and extended bell mouth into Little Wootton Inclosure.

**Aldridge Hill** - Displacement parking from where previous DTs ended. Temporary signage had been installed and stickers were issued but the road was still being blocked, so additional DTs were installed.

**Ocknell** (old lay-by previously restored) - DTs installed along the lower sections of roadside bank to stop trespass and vehicles parking by the trees.

**Janesmoor** - Additional DTs installed.

#### **Ongoing work**

Preparations are underway for a programme of work that is due to take place during late winter and into 2021, to include the following sites:

**Linwood - High Corner Inn to Red Shoot** - Vehicle erosion through overrun and parking. Working with residents and businesses, measures will be installed (mostly DTs) around the High Corner Inn and by the Red Shoot. The old fence in the car park at High Corner Inn will be removed and DTs installed to allow free access to commoning stock. The area also will be monitored to assess the need for additional measures.

**Furzey Lane/Rans Wood** - Works proposed and previously agreed. Several meetings have taken place to discuss issues with residents and representatives of the Verderers, Agisters, CDA and Forestry England. Temporary signage has been installed, new signage ordered and awaiting installation at the entrance into Furzey Lane and by the Pound. DTs and barrier by entrance into Rans Wood car park to be installed in due course.

**Pilley Pound and East End** - Outstanding work previously agreed. DTs to be finished at East End. Pilley Pound - as work had been delayed from December 2019 due to flooding, the VRO arranged an onsite meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> August with representatives of the Verderers, Agisters, CDA and Forestry England to look at the various issues, barrier locations and the extent of ditch and bank. Since the meeting, due to the proximity of tree roots and pond (which is used by great-crested newts), the ditching will now stop by the trees and DTs will be installed past the pond. DTs will also be installed on the triangle and along the road by the bus stop. Our ecologists are liaising with Natural England regarding mitigation for great-crested newts.

**Bank/Gritnam - Opposite White House** - Previously delayed due to contractors' vehicles parking. Work to finish this section will involve lifting turf and using the bank to help with the reinstatement and DTs added to protect the verge.

**Burley - Pound Lane, Randells Lane, Castle Lane** - Some snagging work to be completed. Displacement parking and replacement of removed DTs previously put in under HLS project.

**Blackfield by Cemetery/Bell Lane roadside verge** - Displacement parking and vehicle erosion to sides of gravel road at Bell Lane. VRO has started the liaison and consultation process.

**Godshill - Various properties and opposite car park** - Various issues with residents and others persistently parking outside properties and along the roadside verge. VRO is using educational tools - leaflets, speaking to drivers and using stickers to enforce better parking. Some intervention and further liaison may be needed, any measures necessary are likely to be installed this winter.

## **Wetland Restoration**

The Wetland Restoration Officer completed all the necessary preparations and supervised a programme of wetland enhancement work between July and September at the following sites: Penny Moor, The Noads Mire, Brick Kiln Mire, Corbets Hat, Akercome, Amberslade and North Sluffers.

Work had to stop on several occasions in August due to heavy rain, which led to the programme falling behind schedule. Pondhead and Wootton Phase II were also planned for 2020 but there was a risk of not being able to complete the work by 30 September, so these sites have been deferred to 2021 rather than do partial works.

A programme to reduce/remove exposed stakes at a number of previous wetland restoration sites was also completed as follows: Ditchend, Claypits, Buckherd, North Sluffers, Dibden Bottom Mire 2, Linford Brook Mire, Soldiers Bog, Cowleys Heath East and Central, and Picket Mire. Approximately 2000 stakes were either pushed further into the ground or cut to ground level, depending on site specifics.

The Wetland Restoration Officer is now surveying previous restoration sites across the forest to assess whether any further enhancement work is required and is putting together a programme of work for summer 2021.

## **Wetland Restoration Monitoring**

The HLS Monitoring Officer (MO) has continued to collect data from various ongoing surveys as part of the HLS monitoring programme. As mentioned above, Forestry England is planning to review the monitoring programme and make any necessary adjustments once the FWRP agrees an evidence and monitoring plan.

### **Hydro-Chemistry**

Forestry England is working in partnership with the Environment Agency to monitor water level and water temperature over time using eight large scale hydrological loggers located at Millersford, Wootton and Pondhead. Staff from EA and FE visit the loggers every 3 months to retrieve the data and this was completed once more in September.

Forestry England is also piloting the use of remote telemetry units to measure water level and temperature. The units enable data to be downloaded and viewed remotely. There are four units installed through the Latchmore catchment and one installed on Dockens Water. The HLS MO has been working with the supplier (Metashpere) to resolve data communication issues at two of the sites by installing additional antennae to boost the signal. Further improvements will be made in November.

Water quality readings are usually taken with an aquaprobe during the monthly Extended Riverfly surveys. Due to Covid-19 restrictions (see below under Biological Monitoring), readings have been minimised to sampling points at the following sites: Millersford, Latchmore, Thompsons Castle, Redhill/Holmhill and Harvestslade.

### **Physical Monitoring**

Modular River Physical (MoRPh) surveys are carried out at several sites to monitor the geomorphological status of New Forest streams pre- and post-restoration. Twelve repeat MoRPh surveys have been completed in the period at the following sites: Latchmore, Millersford, Wootton, Ferny Croft and Pondhead.