What sort of treescapes do we want? What can we reasonably expect?



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A long time ago (in a far-off galaxy)..

- Conservation objectives based on landscapes of late 19th/early 20th Centuries.
- Key features summarised by Ratcliffe 1977
- Declines clearly documented (NCC 1984)







We knew what was needed!

- Designate important sites (W&C Act 1981)
- Restore traditional management (coppice, woodpasture) with slight tweaks (Steele & Peterken 1982)







So where did it go wrong?

- Actually there have been a lot of successes!
- But many species and habitats still in decline –why?
- Do we need a new philosophy?







Traditional management did not always work

- Coppiced areas became sedgefields
- Re-pollarded trees died
- Declines due to factors outside our control.





Sites and conditions had changed

- Lack of understanding of traditional management in practice
- Long gaps in management
- Rise in deer populations
- Eutrophication/pollution
- Good first approximation but we need a stronger evidence base for what works where







Protected sites do not exist in isolation

- 1980s development of 'landscape ecology'
- Need for wider countryside measures
- Agri-environment schemes
- Broadleaves Policy
- Need to work across the countryside





More, bigger, better, more joined-up

- Need to expand, restore, create new habitat
- National Forest, Community Forests
- Biodiversity Action Plans
- Lawton Report
- Nature Improvement Areas
- Nature reserve management cannot be replicated everywhere



Approaches include: improving the quality of habitat patches (a); making existing sites bigger (b), which can include creating ecotones (c – see section 5.1.3); enhancing connectivity through a continuous corridor (d) or a stepping stone corridor (e); creating new sites (f); and reducing pressures on sites either by establishing buffer zones (g) or enhancing the wider environment (h).





Brexit – Threat and Opportunity

- Countryside support under review
- More devolution
- Financial pressures
- Institutional changes
- What is it we really, really want?





Our landscape is a cultural one

- Woodland history more complicated than we thought
- All different products of human intervention, valued for different reasons
- Which bits will we value in future, which do we drop?







Adapting to climate change

- Species distributions and habitats will change
- What does future-proofing landscapes mean in practice
 - Letting habitats/species go?
 - Assisted migration?
 - Redefining native ranges?
 - Introducing new species/provenances?
- Framework for discussion needed







Which tree dies next?

- Dutch Elm Disease long seen as one-off
- Semi-natural stands thought generally safe!
- Consequences of impacts of AOD, Ash dieback etc
- Do we need more or less intervention to cope?
- Resist or accept change?







"We're Doomed, Captain Mainwaring" (or perhaps not?)

- Changes are *inevitable*, but not all are *immediate*
- Short-term maintenance of past legacies
 - Ancient woods
 - Veteran trees
 - Scattered trees and hedges
- Pool from which future patterns will develop







Transitional period

- Trialling landscape management
- Learn from past
 - Community forests
 - Ground flora introductions
- Broad consensus needed on
 - Why (conservation, timber, carbon)
 - Where
 - What forms (trees, woods, grazed)
 - How do we make it happen
 - Who takes lead?







Future with more of the same?

- Continue with land sharing?
- Production dominant landuse
- Conservation fitting in with production (food or timber)
- Trees on farms for cobenefits
- Better for people, but is it better for wildlife etc?







Land-sparing/rewilding

- Big reserves
- Rewilded or managed
- More cost-effective?
- May happen by default?
- But do they maintain the species we currently value?
 - Knepp Estate
 - Downland scrub
- Does that matter!
- Do they conserve things where people are?







Who decides – a slippery slope?

- 1980s conservation/forestry 'experts' made the decisions;
- Strong pressure on landowners to follow suit
- Now, conservation sector highly fragmented; FC much weaker
- Distrust of expert authority
- Public opinion easily mobilised through web, cf Fracking, Forest Enterprise sell-off – for good or ill!
- Individual landowners will do what they want
- Top-down visions likely to be challenged during implementation





Conclusions (1)

- We want:
 - More, bigger, better, joined up treescapes
 - Planned, with the right tree in the right place
 - Resilient, if not resistant, to disease and climate change
 - Delivering a wide range of ecosystem services (including biodiversity and production)
 - Widely accessible
 - For not much more (preferably less) than we pay now
 - Minimum bureaucracy.





Conclusions (2)

- We might reasonably expect:
 - Slowing of rates of decline in existing high-value features
 - Patchy increases in area/numbers of trees
 - Increasing rates of change in the composition and structure of our treescapes
 - More acceptance of different ways of achieving aims (farm-forestry, rewilding, assisted migration, novel ecosystems)
 - More structured debate about where we are going
 - But with a lot more 'bottom-up' activism over implementation
 - More reliance on novel sources of funding
 - Messy regulation from the Brexit fall-out
 - More institutional change (with consequent costs).





Conclusions (3)

- Cautiously optimistic that things will improve
- But I am retired.
- So over to you and good luck!







Thank you





