



Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs



Forestry Commission

NATURAL  
ENGLAND



## **New trees and peat guidance: helping to inform where to establish trees and where to restore peat in England**

Mark Owen  
Principal Adviser - Uplands  
Natural England

Neil Riddle  
Head of Natural Environment  
Forest Services

# Setting the Context



- Ambitious targets for forest expansion and peat restoration.
- Opportunity for Foresters and other land managers
- Help deliver targets for woodland creation, nature recovery and tackle climate change.
- Important these activities are delivered in an integrated and complimentary way.
- Guidance reviewed in June 2023



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FOR OUR  
PLANET

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# The England Trees Action Plan 2021-2024

May 2021



UK Government

- **Develop new guidance for England** that will help determine when afforested peat should be restored to bog, and to minimise impacts on peaty soils from tree planting.
- **Develop metrics** that allow decision-makers to assess the realistic costs of forest to bog restoration.





## England Peat Action Plan

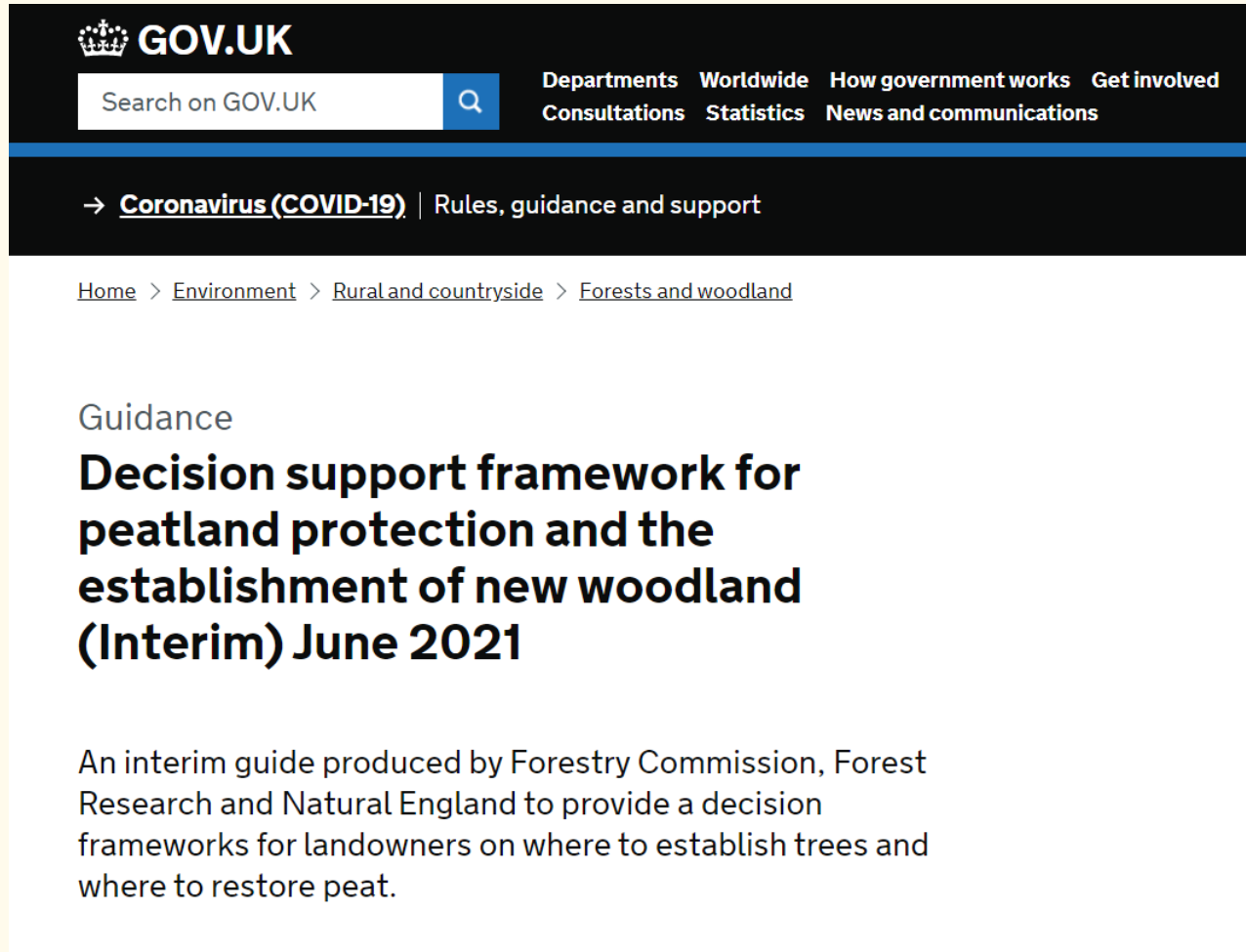
May 2021



 UK Government

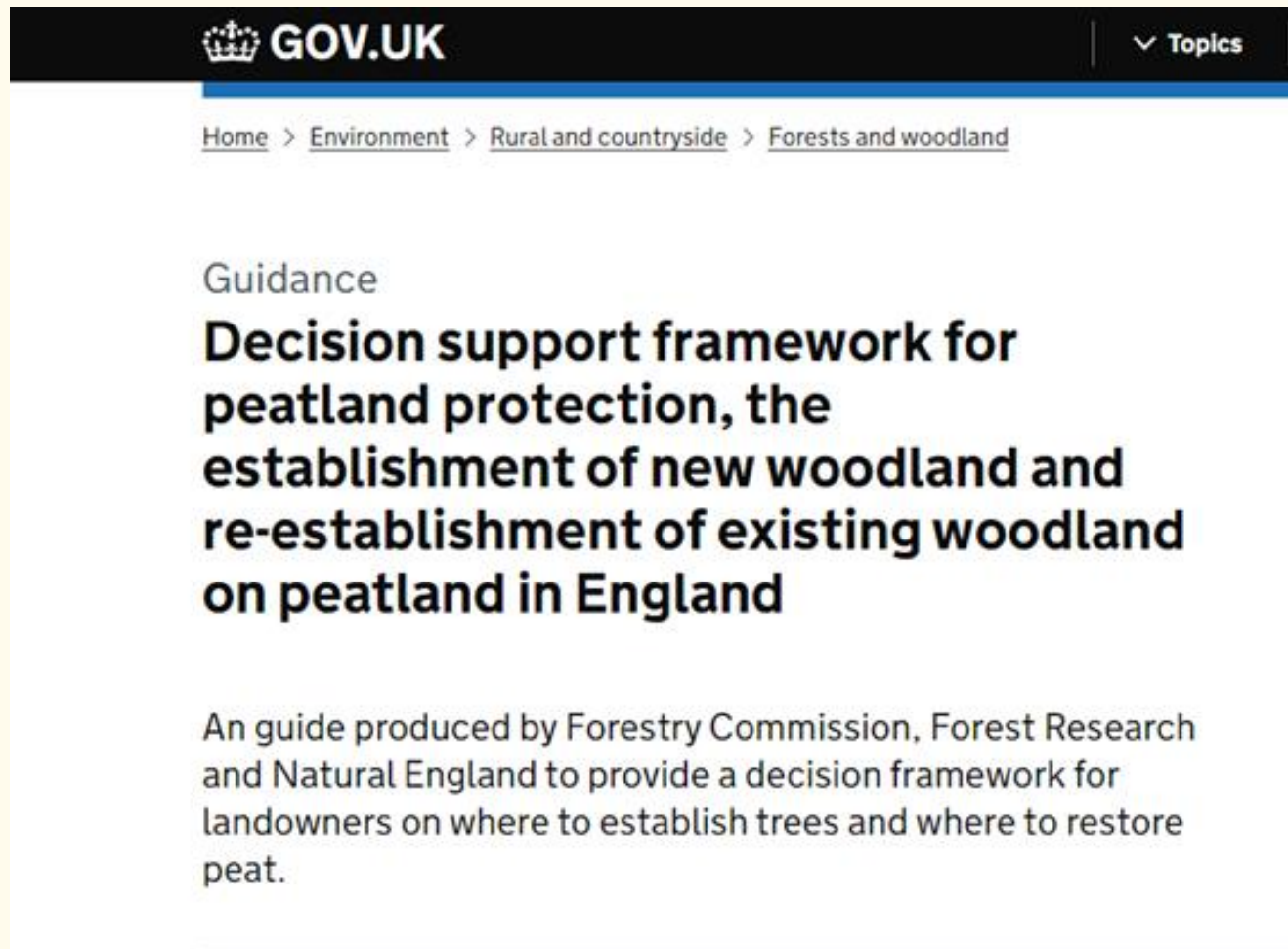
- **Develop new UKFS guidance for England** that will help determine when afforested peat should be restored to bog, and to minimise impacts on peaty soils from tree planting
- **Develop metrics** that allow decision-makers to assess the realistic costs of forest to bog restoration.
- **We will embed Local Nature Recovery Strategies**, a new system of spatial planning for nature, which will be introduced through the Environment Bill
- **We will improve land use decision-making** through the new peatland map data, once it is complete in 2024.

# Interim Guidance published June 2021



The screenshot shows the GOV.UK website interface. At the top left is the GOV.UK logo. To its right is a search bar with the text "Search on GOV.UK" and a magnifying glass icon. Further right are navigation links: "Departments", "Worldwide", "How government works", "Get involved", "Consultations", "Statistics", and "News and communications". Below this is a dark blue banner with the text "→ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#) | Rules, guidance and support". Underneath is a breadcrumb trail: "Home > [Environment](#) > [Rural and countryside](#) > [Forests and woodland](#)". The main content area features the word "Guidance" in a smaller font, followed by the title "Decision support framework for peatland protection and the establishment of new woodland (Interim) June 2021" in a large, bold font. Below the title is a paragraph: "An interim guide produced by Forestry Commission, Forest Research and Natural England to provide a decision frameworks for landowners on where to establish trees and where to restore peat."

# Full Guidance published 30 June 2022



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Guidance

## **Decision support framework for peatland protection, the establishment of new woodland and re-establishment of existing woodland on peatland in England**

An guide produced by Forestry Commission, Forest Research and Natural England to provide a decision framework for landowners on where to establish trees and where to restore peat.

# Peat and Definitions

## Background

- There are approx. 1,420,000 hectares of peatland in England
- Deep peat (more than 40 cm depth) accounts for 678,000 ha
- Shallow peat (between 10 cm and 40 cm) also provides a suite of ecosystem services, including significant carbon stores

## Existing woodland on peat

- National Forest Inventory (2012) estimates 51,500 ha of woodland is on deep peat
- 60% of the woodland on deep peat is conifer plantation, with the remainder broadleaf woodland
- 42% of the woodland on deep peat is within the Public Forest Estate
- 18% of the woodland is on Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) designated for either priority habitat or species interest

# Peat and Definitions

## Deep peat definitions:

- Natural England's peat map for deep peat – >40cm
- Nature for Climate Peatland Grant Scheme criteria – >30cm
- UKFS Guideline for afforestation avoid peat - >50cm

UKFS (England update - 2021)

**Afforestation** on peat soils - **>30cm**

UKFS (England update - 2022)

**Restocking** on peat soils - **Restoration potential**



# What's in Scope ?

## **Location**

- New proposals for tree felling or woodland creation on peatland in England only

## **That require Forestry Commission scrutiny and approval under:**

- Felling licences
- Current grant scheme rules
- Environmental Impact Regulations for forestry

# The Decision Support Frameworks

## Should be used to:

- Ensure that woodland establishment or woodland re-establishment only occurs on peat where there are **clearly justified** biodiversity and carbon benefits
- Ensure there is **no risk** is posed to the long-term integrity of the surrounding peatland and its long-term carbon store.

## It is important to consider all positive and negative impacts of:

- Woodland establishment
- Woodland restocking
- Woodland removal

It is vital that desk-based assessments are confirmed by field survey including to establish whether a proposal is worth pursuing.

# Peatland protection and the establishment of new woodland

## 7 Steps

**Step 1** - Does any part of the site that is proposed for woodland establishment have peaty soils, including wasted peat, indicated on the Natural England peat map or as directed by NE/FC advisers?

NO

**Step 2** - Is the site a statutory protected site (e.g., SSSI) or adjacent to one?

NO

**Step 3** - Are there priority habitats or priority species present on site following survey confirmation?

NO

**Step 4** - Is the area specifically targeted in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for peatland/priority habitat restoration?

NO

**Step 5** - Does the site contain peat greater than 30 cm in depth?

NO

**Step 6** - Does the site include shallow peat on which drainage and woodland establishment could indirectly drain adjacent deep peat or cause it to be colonised by trees?

NO

**Step 7** - Woodland creation may be approved, subject to following legal and good practice requirements and the site may be eligible for woodland creation grant.

YES

Undertake peat and vegetation surveys to inform further steps

YES

Engage with NE; establishment of native woodland may be appropriate: if so, proceed to next step; if not, woodland planting is unlikely to be approved

YES

Engage with NE; establishment of native woodland may be appropriate: if so, proceed to next step; if not, woodland planting is unlikely to be approved

YES

Woodland creation\* will not be approved

YES

Woodland creation\* will not be approved on areas of peat greater than 30cm deep and hydrologically linked surrounding areas.

YES

Can the recommended buffer distance (see figure 3) be followed? If yes, proceed to next step; if not, woodland creation\* will not be approved

# Peatland restoration, protection and the regeneration of woodland

## 7 steps (New)

**Step 1** - Is the site a statutory protected site (e.g., SSSI, SAC, SPA)?

NO

YES

Engage with NE, and any other established expertise involved in site management (e.g., for HRAs), replanting of woodland may be appropriate, if so, proceed to next step if not, replanting or regeneration is unlikely to be appropriate.

**Step 2** - Is there priority habitat present on the site?

**Step 3** - Are/were the trees having a negative impact on the integrity of notified features of any adjacent, nearby or hydrologically connected protected sites?

NO

YES

Engage with NE; establishment of native woodland may be appropriate: if so, proceed to next step; if not, woodland planting is unlikely to be approved

Engage with NE, and any other established expertise involved in site management, replanting of woodland may be appropriate but only if it allows restoration of hydrological integrity, if so, proceed to next step if not, replanting or regeneration is unlikely to be appropriate.

**Step 4** - Does the site have high restoration potential and/or has the site been specifically targeted for peatland habitat restoration in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy?

NO

YES

Removal\* will be encouraged/ supported by the Open Habitats Policy and *site will be eligible for restoration grant.*

**Step 5** - Is not restocking the woodland likely to have negative implications for flooding downstream?

NO

YES

. If so, a felling licence is only likely to be granted with the normal restocking condition

**Step 6** - Is the present yield class for the site less than YC10 for spruce?

NO

YES

Permanent removal\* will be supported by the Open Habitats Policy. *Site may be eligible for restoration grant.*

**Step 7** - Replanting or re-establishment can proceed subject to following UKFS legal requirements and good practice.

# Forest to Bog Metrics Tool

- Hosted on an on-line platform
- Link to it is included in the published guidance
- Support decision-making rather than to make the decisions
- Tool will help land owners and regulators **consider the merits of proposed forest plans** and felling or grant applications
- National map scores can be adjusted following site assessment/survey
- Basic summary statistics are produced at national/regional or county level alongside barplots showing the proportion of land in each level that falls within each of the suitability scoring deciles.
- Restoration costs, opportunity costs, revenue and natural capital accounting are being developed to sit within the tool as additional functionality



# The datasets used and how suitability is scored

Dataset	Score_1	Score_2	Score_3
National Forest Inventory Interpreted Forest Type (NFI IFT)	Conifer, broadleaved, mixed	Low density, Failed, Shrub, Groundprep, felled, windblow	Young trees, bare area, assumed woodland
Slope (in degrees)	>10 degrees	10- 5 degrees	<=5 degrees
Peat status (peatmap 2014)	Soils with peaty pockets	Shallow peaty soils	Deep peaty soils
Yield class estimates (Sitka S.)	Yield class 18+	Yield class 10-16	< Yield class 10
Peatland status	Not a priority habitat or a designated site	Priority habitats	Designated sites

# Forest to bog metrics tool - User feedback

- Is the app easy/intuitive to use? Are the pop-up boxes and instructional material sufficient to allow you to use the app properly?
- Methodology: have we got the right datasets to indicate restoration potential? Is there anything we haven't covered? Have we scored the environmental variables correctly (i.e., NFI IFT types, yield classes)?
- Summary statistics: are these useful to you in their current form? Are there any other values you would like to view? Is the frequency histogram easy to interpret?
- Would it be useful to indicate a suitable high restoration threshold or range on the 0-1 scoring scale? If so, what would it be?
- Are there any other features which you think might be useful in the app?



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Any Questions ?