

A new approach: Talybont Catchment Partnership

We have been working in partnership with Welsh Water since 2014 to make changes to the management of the WGWE forest which makes up 30% of the Talybont Reservoir catchment. The catchment covers an area of approximately 24km² within the Brecon Beacons National Park. The reservoir is strategically important, supplying about 300,000 customers in the Eastern Gwent Valleys.

Approximately 15% of the forest has had to be cleared over the last few years due to *Phytophthora ramorum*. This has provided the opportunity for a fundamental review of forest design and management to support wider ecosystem service provision.



A study considered the impact of changing the structural and species diversity of the forest to the delivery of ecosystem services including: timber, fibre and fuel; biodiversity; pest and disease regulation; erosion and sedimentation regulation; water regulation; recreation; ecotourism; aesthetics; and cultural heritage. Three different scenarios were considered:

- Maintaining the status quo (approx.80% conifer);
- Restructuring to achieve mixed broadleaves (approx.70%); and
- Restructuring to achieve a 50:50 broadleaf/conifer mix.

A score was given for each ecosystem service at the relevant scale, which in turn provided the Total Ecosystem Delivery (TED) score for the forest. The third option produced the highest score and has been adopted, with silvicultural management changes underway. As part of a Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) trial, Welsh Water will pay for the additional management costs of implementing the new regime, over and above the management costs associated with maintaining the status quo (i.e. predominantly conifer).

Commenting on the study, Joanne Burford, Catchment Manager, Welsh Water said:

“Working in partnership allowed us to discover and deliver new and innovative ways of working with nature to safeguard drinking water. We believe this holistic, evidence-based approach is the first silviculture project to be delivered on a catchment scale in the UK”.

Michael Cresswell, Land Management Officer, Natural Resources Wales said:

“The successful partnership at Talybont could be further replicated on other parts of the WGWE and should become an exemplar for other river basin areas in Wales”.

Pursuing SMNR:

