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From: **Forestry Commission**
Date: Fri, 21 Jan 2022, 14:47
Subject: RE: Tree felling query

Thank you for your email.

I have been working closely with the woodland agents, Tilhill for the last 6 months at this site. A statutory Plant Health Notice (SPHN) was served on the site last year after the discovery of Phytophthora ramorum (Pr) <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/ramorum-disease-phytophthora-ramorum/>. Pr is a serious disease which affect larch trees and leads to rapid mortality of the trees infected.

During routine surveillance the disease was identified in the larch stand which contains the majority of the down hill mountain bike track. On a visit to site in the summer, I noted that this stand is now around 75% dead or moribund which illustrates how quickly the disease can kill healthy trees and also the seriousness of the infection. As a result of this infection, the FC served a Statutory Plant Health Notice on the site in 2020. An SPHN requires the owner of a site to fell or kills larch (and other sporulating hosts) within the treatment area within 6 months.

Unfortunately, the woodland block does not have very good vehicle access and it has not proved possible to fell the infected trees. In the meantime, further outbreaks of Pr have been identified in the woodland and a further SPHN is now being served requiring the destruction of all remaining larch. Due to the nature of the site the FC are working with Tilhill to agree realistic timescales for compliance with these notices.

The result of these SPHN is that areas of the main sitka spruce (SS) blocks will need to be felled. The reasons behind this are complex, but essentially due to the nature of the site windblow is a serious risk, as are difficult ground conditions. By harvesting ss stands access can be gained to larch stands while creating brash to create access and extraction routes.

Planted in the 70's the block is reaching harvesting age. Upland woodlands such as this have a limited life span as the trees reach a size and age at which they can no longer support themselves on the thin wet upland soils and catastrophic windblow begins in the stand. Such windblow is even more likely when the windfirm edges, currently the larch, are removed.

Tilhill are fully aware of the complexities of this site and are currently drafting a 10 year woodland management plan (WMP). The broad purpose of the WMP is to restructure the woodland into a number of compartments with a range of ages of trees within the woodland block. WMP are placed on the public register for consultation and if you check on the FC registers when it is submitted, you will be able to comment. The FC also has a list of statutory consultees as well as in-house landscape advisors, ecologists and heritage experts who will all be consulted when we receive the plan.

I can assure you that all felled trees will be replanted. This is a commercial woodland and it is in no one's interest to remove trees without replacing them. All proposals will be assessed against the UK

Forestry Standard <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-forestry-standard> which carefully considers all the concerns you raise including landscape impact and flood and water quality. Only schemes which align with the UKFS will be consented by the FC. There is no blanket felling licence, and no felling will be allowed until the correct permissions are in place (beyond any felling of larch trees under the SPHN notice).

If I could directly address one of your points *'the landowner wishes to clear fell the entire forest as a more economically-minded alternative to making it safe'*. This is categorically not the case. However, it must be remembered that forestry work is not cheap and it pays for itself by producing timber for market. Therefore, to carry out some works, such as felling SPHN larch, or clearing windblow, basic economics will sometimes require larger areas to be harvested to allow work to be carried out viably and not as a loss to the owner. This is a commercial plantation planted with the production of timber in mind, To date no harvesting has been carried out as the trees were not at marketable size. However, they are now, and going forward the site will become a well-managed upland commercial block.

It is also important to point out the larch trees through which the downhill track passes are dead and dying and will, over time become a hazard. The only way to abate such a hazard is to fell the larch trees, or close the course to remove the risk to its users. Therefore, good woodland management should be welcomed as a way of protecting everyone's safety.

I also must stress the importance of biosecurity. Pr can and will spread on the wheels and shoes of bikers. This carries a serious risk of spreading this terrible disease to currently uninfected sites and I would encourage all bike users to take careful biosecurity measures.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/prevent-the-introduction-and-spread-of-tree-pests-and-diseases>

Happy to answer any questions you may have.

Regards

Woodland Officer; Yorkshire

Yorkshire & North East

Forestry Commission