

## **News: Climate change will increasingly blow down Cumbria's trees**

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Following the January storms that brought down half a million trees in just ten minutes in Cumbria, forestry chiefs are re-thinking woodland design for the region with the anticipation that climate change will increase such events .

70% of public rights of way affected by the wind blown trees has been officially re-opened just in time for the Easter tourist hordes.

The hard-work was imperative because walking is the main attraction for tourists to the area, and is the essential support to the tourist economy. The backlog clearance was announced by the forestry partnership, of Cumbria Woodlands and the Forestry Commission (FC).

Established in 1991, Cumbria Woodlands focus is to work with farmers and businesses to show how woodlands and forests can contribute to a vibrant rural economy. Partners include the Forestry Commission, Rural Regeneration Cumbria and English Nature.

During one night in January, winds of up to 102mph battered Cumbria's woodland areas felling a staggering 0.5 million trees in ten minutes, equalling approximately 800 trees felled every second.

The wind damage, which consisted both of trees completely uprooted and those snapped off at the trunk caused havoc and left a large proportion of the region's walking routes impassable or dangerous.

Cumbria attracts around 12 million visitors every year, with around 60% of these stating the main reason for their visit as the opportunity to go walking in the countryside.

Waking up the morning after the wind damage, the forestry community in Cumbria faced a massive challenge with 200 hectares of forest estimated to be flattened on FC land alone. This damage needed to be cleared along with the scattered dangerous trees on footpaths and other routes to ensure public access could be safely restored.

Said Edward Mills, Director of Cumbria Woodlands. "Pulling together our resources, we have achieved the impossible in record time to open up Cumbria's network of paths and trails in time for the start of the trekking and outdoor pursuits season.

FC's figures suggest the cost of clearing the damage to public land following the windblow could reach half a million pounds. With the inclusion of private owners and other bodies total costs could well increase this amount dramatically, although some of the costs could be recovered through insurance.

Although the storm in mid January was the most severe recorded in the area since 1968, the working partnership warns that changes to the climate due to global warming could mean that wind damage on this scale may well be a regular catastrophe.

Edward Mills highlights the fact that climate change is beginning to have a greater impact on our weather systems, which will result in more extreme conditions that our natural environments have to withstand.

"Tree species that we commonly see in our region's woodlands may no longer be appropriate to plant, and our woodland designs and planting techniques will have to change dramatically to help our region's tree stocks flourish."

Cumbria Woodlands and the FC will be holding an event, on 21st June 2005 at Newton Rigg College, Penrith in Cumbria, which will look at the many problems associated with windblow damaged trees - from the safety implications of clearing debris to the causes of extreme weather and how to design woodlands to minimize wind damage.

#### CUMBRIAN WOODLAND FACTFILE

- \* Woodland in Cumbria covers over 65,000 hectares - amounting to 9.5% of the land area.
- \* Conifer woodland covers 45.5% of the county and broadleaved woodland 36.5%
- \* About 25% of Cumbria's woodland is ancient in origin. About a third of this ancient woodland has been replanted with alien species.
- \* Cumbria Woodlands was established in 1991 and the main area of work is focussed on working with farmers and businesses to show how woodlands and forests can contribute to a vibrant rural economy. They are encouraging the land-owning community and wood-using businesses to think in a different way about how their woodland resources can help them make a sustainable living.

Up-to-date information about the Forestry Commission in Cumbria with details on public access routes closed off due to windblow can be found at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/northwestengland>