

**EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY****3 September 2002****PROPOSED NATIONAL NATURE RESERVES AT HAWKCOMBE AND TARR STEPS****Report of the Head of Conservation and Land Management****Purpose of Report:**

To invite Members to agree to seek National Nature Reserves status for its woodlands at Hawkcombe and Tarr Steps.

**Legal Implications:**

National Nature Reserves may be declared by English Nature under section 19 of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 or Section 35 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

**Financial Implications:**

No financial implications are anticipated.

**National Park Objectives:**

The designation of these woodlands as National Nature Reserves would further National Park purposes by highlighting their outstanding wildlife value and recognising the work of the Authority in their conservation and enhancement.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Members are asked to:

- (i) CONFIRM the previous decision (7 September 1999) to seek National Nature Reserve status for woodlands in the National Park Authority's ownership at Hawkcombe, Porlock; and
- (ii) AGREE to seek National Nature Reserve status for woodlands in the Authority's ownership at Tarr Steps, near Dulverton.

---

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) have been established since 1951 to protect the most important areas of wildlife habitat and geological formations in Britain. They are all areas of national importance and are recognised as being among the best examples of a particular habitat type.
- 1.2 In England, NNRs are mostly managed by English Nature although an increasing number are managed by 'approved' bodies. An approved body is an organisation

whose land is of national importance for nature conservation and is managed to such a high standard that English Nature can, with the landowners agreement, declare it a National Nature Reserve.

- 1.3 There are now 208 NNRs in England covering 83,703 ha but only one on Exmoor – the Dunkery and Horner Wood NNR, owned and managed by the National Trust..

## 2. **HAWKCOMBE WOODS**

- 2.1 Some Members may recall that in September 1999 the Authority resolved to seek National Nature Reserve status for its woodlands at Hawkcombe, Porlock. A new management plan for the woodlands had recently been approved and this had confirmed the outstanding wildlife importance of the woods and that they merited NNR status. Members agreed to seek this but English Nature officers, while supporting the application in principle, have been unable to pursue the proposal until the dispute about rights to graze sheep in the woods had been resolved.
- 2.2 The woodlands, which cover 101 hectares, have been notified as being of Site of Special Scientific Interest and are within a candidate Special Area of Conservation. They are particularly notable for their lichens, heath fritillary butterfly, red wood ant colonies, dead wood invertebrates and ancient pollards.
- 2.3 Members will recall the long standing dispute with a local farmer about sheep grazing in Hawkcombe Woods. The dispute was settled last December on the basis that the farmer had a right to graze no more than 10 sheep in the Woods. More recently the Authority considered another claim from an adjoining farmer that he too enjoyed grazing rights in the Woods and this was settlement on the basis that he enjoyed rights to graze no more than 10 sheep in the Woods.

## 3. **TARR STEPS WOODLANDS**

- 3.1 In October 2001, the Exmoor National Park Authority, with funding from Heritage Lottery Fund, purchased 33 hectares of woodland at Tarr Steps. A management plan for the land was written and approved by English Nature on 7 February 2002.
- 3.2 The woodlands are part of the Barle Valley Site of Special Scientific Interest and the Exmoor and Quantock Oakwoods candidate Special Area of Conservation. The site is of exceptional importance for its Atlantic oakwoods, lichens and bryophytes and for the River Barle, notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest in its own right.
- 3.3 The woodlands at Tarr Steps are well visited by the public and present many opportunities to interpret their special qualities.
- 3.4 These woodlands also merit NNR status and Members are invited to agree to pursue this with English Nature.

**Sarah Bryan**  
**Team Leader (Woodlands & Landscape)**  
**August 2002**