

UKWAS Interpretation Note 2 - Felling rates and coupe size in poplar plantations

PLEASE NOTE: THIS INFORMATION NOTE RELATES TO THE SUPERSEDED FIRST EDITION OF THE UK WOODLAND ASSURANCE STANDARD

Key Words: felling rates, coupe size, poplar, plantations.

Relevant requirement references: 3.4.2, 3.4.4, 3.1

Date: Discussed and agreed at Interpretation Panel meeting on 28th February 2000.

Question:

In a large, even-aged plantation of poplar (>20 ha), with a rotation length of possibly only 25 years, spreading the felling over a 20-year period would not be feasible. Would more rapid felling, and use of larger coupes, be justified?

Discussion:

Requirement 3.4.2 states that larger coupes and more rapid felling could be acceptable if the felling was presented as part of an adequate felling design plan. In this case, the rationale for such a plan would need to refer to the high growth rates of poplar, and the maximum size limits for poplar timber, and hence the short rotations.

The aim of the requirement is clearly to encourage the development of a diverse, and possibly normal, age structure, and to prevent excessively rapid rates of change. Relaxation of the felling rates would in fact facilitate the achievement of a normal age structure. However, they might still be unacceptable on the grounds of rapid change.

The owner would need to consider the landscape scale impacts of any felling operations, as required in Requirement 3.1.

Strictly speaking, broadleaved plantations fall between Requirement 3.4.3 (stipulating lower impact systems for semi-natural woodland) and Requirement 3.4.4 (stipulating favouring such systems for 'windfirm conifer plantations'). It is possible that the word 'conifer' is deleted in subsequent revisions to the standard so that broadleaved plantations are included in Requirement 3.4.4.

Conclusions:

The proposed felling would be acceptable as long as there was an adequate felling design plan which ensured that the owner would achieve age diversity and ameliorate any adverse environmental impacts associated with rapid rates of felling.