

## “Save our Woodland Walks” – Campaigns Briefing

### What is Walk in the Woods Week?

The Ramblers is hosting “Walk in the Woods Week” to show how magical woods are, especially in the autumn when the leaves are changing colour.

The festival ties in with the Ramblers campaign to “Save our Woodland Walks” which was launched following plans for the mass disposal of England’s Public Forest Estate (land managed by the Forestry Commission).

### What does the Ramblers want?

The Ramblers believes the public has an emotional affinity to our woodlands, that the enjoyment of them is part of our culture, and it is integral to our inherited beliefs and values. Public access to them, and the enjoyment that it brings, must be extended.

The primary aim of our Save our Woodland Walks campaign is to protect all levels of access, (CROW open access/permissive access/by custom access/public rights of way) currently enjoyed to the Public Forest Estate (Forestry Commission managed land)

We need to protect this access as the woodland within the Public Forest Estate plays a major role in countryside recreation with the public making over 40 million visits a year to them.

These woods account for 44% of accessible woodlands in England but are only 18% of the total woodland, leaving large swathes of our woodland in England and Wales are out of bounds. This is why the Ramblers is calling for access to all woodland in England and Wales, regardless of ownership.

### What has the Ramblers done to stop the sales of Forestry Commission Woods?

Concerned about proposals in the Public Bodies Bill that would allow for the sale of the Public Forest Estate in November last year, Ramblers met with peers, MPs and civil servants and encouraged supporters to write to peers expressing our concerns. We set the Government five tests which we felt protected access.

In January, the Government produced proposals on the “Future of the Public Forestry Estate”. It not only failed to meet our 5 tests but failed to protect any permissive access and so we came out firmly against the proposals and called for no sales to take place.

On 11th February, the Government announced they were putting all current proposals on hold and setting up an Independent Panel to discuss the future of forestry in England. Tom Franklin, Ramblers CEO is on the panel and is the only representative from an access/user-group organisation.

The panel will produce their preliminary report on the “Future of Forestry in England” in the autumn. The Ramblers is hoping that it will provide a vital opportunity to lobby for guaranteed access to all forests, not just those owned by the Forestry Commission.

### What has the Ramblers said to the Independent Panel on Forestry?

The Ramblers has made a detailed submission to the Independent Panel on Forestry, but in summary we have told the panel that:

- No one else does what Forestry Commission does.

No one else provides the high levels of access and expertise Forestry Commission does and this cannot be lost, it needs to continue.

- The Public Forest Estate should be expanded, not sold.

We need a Public Forest Estate of a size able to provide cross-subsidy to maintain and enhance the current levels of public access, ideally it should be allowed to expand.

- We need a right of access to all woodland.

All woodland to be given a public right of access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

- Woodland – If we pay for it - we should have access to it

All woodland which receives public funds should have public access and so should be dedicated as open access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act.

The full document can be found on our website

<http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Resources/Ramblers%20Association/Website/Campaigns/Documents/Independent-Panel-Forestry-Ramblers-Response.pdf>

### What you can do to help us achieve our vision?

- Write to your MP telling them how important woodland is to you and that you support the Ramblers call for greater public access.
- As soon as the Panel makes its preliminary report we will be calling for more action so sign up to be kept up-to-date with Ramblers campaigns at <http://tinyurl.com/ramblerscampaigns>
- Visit our “Woodland Walks” website to see further action that you can take [www.ramblers.org.uk/Campaigns+Policy/forestry.htm](http://www.ramblers.org.uk/Campaigns+Policy/forestry.htm)

Note: Campaigns scope: - Why just England?

The “Save our Woodland Walks” campaign is centred predominantly on woodland in England and is a response to moves to sell off the Public Forest Estate in England and the risk this brings to public access. It is also aimed at influencing and shaping the outcomes of the Independent Panel which has an England only remit. However, our larger goals of access to all woodland apply in Wales. It is not directly relevant to Scotland due to the levels of guaranteed access to woodland under the Land Reform Act.