

A guide to understanding the Scottish Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)

Summary and policy statement

This summary is intended for developers, planners, foresters, ecologists and others who need to use the AWI in their work. It defines Ancient Woodland, briefly describes why it is important and gives the meaning of the categories in the AWI.

Ancient Woodland

In Scotland, Ancient Woodland is defined as land that is currently wooded and has been continually wooded, at least since 1750.

Ancient Woods are important because:

- They include all remnants of Scotland's original woodland; their flora and fauna may preserve elements of the natural composition of the original Atlantic forests.
- They usually have much richer wildlife than that of more recent woods.
- They preserve the integrity of soil ecological processes and associated biodiversity.
- Some have been managed by traditional methods for centuries and demonstrate an enduring relationship between people and nature.
- Woods and veteran trees are ancient monuments whose value to the local community and historians may be as great as that of the older buildings in a parish.
- Once destroyed, they cannot be recreated.

Although there is no legislation specifically protecting ancient woodland, Scottish Planning Policy identifies it as [an important and irreplaceable national resource that should be protected and enhanced](#), as should other native and long established woodlands with high nature conservation value. SNH will seek to use the planning system to protect ancient woodland. The [Scottish Government's policy on control of woodland removal](#) states that there is a strong presumption against removing ancient semi-natural woodland or Plantations on ancient woodland sites, amongst other types of woodland.

Other woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees, especially veteran trees, may also have significant biodiversity value and make a significant contribution to landscape character and quality, so should be protected from adverse impacts resulting from development.

If a development would result in the severing or impairment of connectivity between important woodland habitats, workable mitigation measures should be identified and implemented, potentially linked to the creation of [green networks](#).

The [Ancient Woodland Inventory](#) is a map-based tool that shows the location of many of our most valuable woodlands.

The Ancient Woodland Inventory

The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) is a [PROVISIONAL guide to the location of Ancient Woodland](#). It contains three main categories of woodland, all of which are likely to be of value for their biodiversity and cultural value by virtue of their antiquity:

i. Ancient Woodland (1a and 2a)

Interpreted as semi-natural woodland from maps of 1750 (1a) or 1860 (2a) and continuously wooded to the present day. If planted with non-native species during the 20th century they are referred to as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

ii. Long-established woodlands of plantation origin (LEPO) (1b and 2b)

Interpreted as plantation from maps of 1750 (1b¹) or 1860 (2b) and continuously wooded since. **Many of these sites have developed semi-natural characteristics, especially the oldest ones, which may be as rich as Ancient Woodland.**

iii. Other woodlands on 'Roy' woodland sites (3)

Shown as unwooded on the 1st edition maps but as woodland on the Roy maps. Such sites have, at most, had only a short break in continuity of woodland cover and may still retain features of Ancient Woodland.

A note of caution

The AWI was derived from the Roy maps (c1750) and the OS 1st edition (c1860). It is not definitive and should be used with care; when evaluating woods it is important to:

- a) Examine the site on the ground, looking for archaeological, biological and other indicators of antiquity and of its current biodiversity value
- b) Examine old maps; the OS 1st edition and Roy maps are available on www.nls.uk.
Woods not shown on the AWI, but present on the historic maps, are likely to be ancient and should be treated as such unless evidence is available to the contrary.
- c) seek specialist advice if in doubt

Information on AWI can also be accessed from the [Land Information Search \(LIS\)](#) from the Forestry Commission Scotland.

¹ This category was not originally used, although the information was preserved in the database. At digitisation these sites were reclassified as 1b (Plantation on Roy map) to recognise their greater age.