

WHITBARROW FOREST DESIGN PLAN 2009

CONTENTS

1. **Background Information**

Introduction

Survey

Appraisal

Delivery of the NWEFD strategic Plan

2. **Maps**

Location Map

Current Tree Species

Stock Map

Nature Conservation & Heritage

Recreation & Access

Achievements Over Last 10 Years

Review Issues & Design Concept

Felling Plan

Future Tree Species Plan

3. **Appendices**

Conservation & Heritage Statement

Recreation & Community Statement

Charts

WHITBARROW FOREST DESIGN PLAN 2009

Introduction

Whitbarrow is situated on a carboniferous limestone ridge overlooking the Lyth Valley approximately eight kilometres to the south-west of Kendal. It lies within the Lake District National Park. The Forestry Commission's holding extends to 445 hectares, most of which is part of Whitbarrow National Nature Reserve (NNR).

The northern part of Whitbarrow (253 ha.) was acquired in 1955 on a 999 year lease from Mr M. Argles. The southern part, Farrer's Allotment (115 ha.), was originally acquired in 1958 as a 999 year lease. The lease was converted to freehold in 2002, together with the purchase of an additional 77 ha of freehold land.

Survey

Whitbarrow comprises a diverse and complex association of limestone pavement, scree and cliff, calcareous grassland, dry heath and woodland. The dominant woodland type is northern calcareous hazel-ash; there are also strong elements of yew woodland, juniper scrub and small-leaved lime. The limestone pavements rank among the best in the country for the diversity of their flora and their population of rare and uncommon species.

In addition to being part of Whitbarrow NNR, the site is protected by a Limestone Pavement Order (LPO), is part of Whitbarrow Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and is a candidate Special Area of Conservation (cSAC). Approximately 270 ha of the site is thought to be Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland (ASNW).

Whitbarrow lies between 15 and 200 metres above sea level, on the dip slope of a limestone scar. It generally has an easterly aspect. The underlying rock is limestone, which is exposed as limestone pavement and scars over approximately 100 hectares of the site. The soil, where present, is calcareous and includes rendzina, brown earth, some localised gley and pockets of loess.

At the time of the original acquisition, tree cover was fairly sparse and was composed of some locally native species together with remnant pockets of pine, larch, beech and sycamore plantations, dating from 1919. During the period 1958 to 1976 much of the existing woodland was under planted with Red cedar and beech; the areas of more open grassland were planted with Corsican pine. More recently, from 1996 onwards, much work has been undertaken to remove these non-native plantations. This in a bid to safeguard and restore the semi-natural limestone habitats.

Access to the southern part of Whitbarrow is fairly good, the gateway at Johnscales being only 1.5km away from the A590(T). From here, nearly 1 km of forest road links with an extensive network of rough tracks. Access to the northern end of the woodland is more restricted. Being, either, along a rough track across the site, or from a narrow public road, through Flodder Hall Farm and onto a steep, narrow and rough limestone track.

The wider Whitbarrow massif is a popular walking area; much of which, including the FC's Farrer's Allotment, is now designated open access land, under the CROW Act. The whole area is well served with public footpaths, permissive paths and a host of other paths and tracks. Legal public access to the FC's leasehold land is currently only along public footpaths.

Appraisal

Whitbarrow is of major importance for its geological and biological features. It is vital that these features are protected and, where appropriate enhanced. High priority should be given to the removal of remaining conifer and beech plantations and the restoration of these areas as semi-natural habitat.

The removal of conifer and beech is well suited to small scale working by local contractors. They are often able to add value to the timber by undertaking some timber processing on site. For example: peeling and pointing of fence stakes, sawing boards and charcoal production.

Though much of the semi-natural woodland can be managed through minimal intervention, some structural diversity and open space should be maintained. This can be achieved through cutting further areas of hazel coppice and widened ride / path corridors.

Cattle are now grazing the calcareous grassland and dry heath on Farrer's Allotment and Horse Pasture under an agreement with a local grazier. Some improvement in grassland condition has already been observed.

The extensive network of paths and tracks should be kept clear of obstructions and public rights of way clearly marked and easy to follow. The feasibility of securing a right to roam over the FC's leasehold area should be investigated with our lessor.

Delivery of the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan

Whitbarrow falls within the Morecambe Bay Limestone management zone of the North West England Forest District Strategic Plan (2005 – 2009). As with all woods in the zone conservation is the prime objective of management at Whitbarrow due to its outstanding conservation interest (SAC, SSSI, NNR, Limestone pavement order).

Detailed below are the objectives of the zone, which are grouped by the main themes within "A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests" and how the implementation of the revised Whitbarrow FDP will deliver against these themes.

Working Woodlands

Small scale operations and commitment to coppicing some woods for conservation benefit provide potential for development of specialised contractors.

Coppice coupes will be offered to charcoal burners through direct contact and through the North West Coppice Association. The thinning of broadleaf woodland will yield timber and fuel wood.

Once exotics have been removed native woodland will be managed on a continuous cover basis.

Initial removal of exotic tree species is very nearly complete. Future work will include some removal of exotic tree species regeneration.

Communities and Places

Maintain quiet, appropriate low key access on foot and lead occasional visits by interested groups. Do not provide additional recreational facilities so as to avoid compromising conservation interest. Provide simple on-site interpretation of management operations.

There are no plans to provide additional recreational facilities and the existing network of rights of way and permissive paths will be maintained as necessary. There continues to be a high level of interest in the management of Whitbarrow from a wide range of groups. Guided walks and tours will be provided on request. Temporary on site interpretation of operations will be provided where appropriate.

Land and Natural Environment

Manage according to the HAP's agreed with English Nature.

Whitbarrow FDP accords with the Limestone Pavement Habitat Action Plan.

Avoid forest operations which may cause damage to limestone pavements and features.

Tracked machines will not be used for harvesting and extraction routes will avoid sensitive areas. Advice from Natural England will be sought when required.

Remove all exotic conifers over the next 10 years and all exotic broadleaves over the next 20 years and restore the natural vegetation types. The only exception will be a few open grown larch and Scots pine which are an important landscape feature.

All exotic conifers will be removed by 2010 (with the exception of some Scots pine and larch feature trees which consultees have requested that we leave). There are areas at Whitbarrow which are dominated by beech and include a low density of ash. To avoid damaging the nature conservation and amenity value these areas will be converted slowly through thinning favouring the ash. Cattle grazing will continue to be used to maintain Farrers Allotment and Horse Pasture in favourable condition.

Re-establish natural vegetation by natural regeneration where possible. Supplementary planting of native species such as yew and juniper will be carried out where is no seed supply using local stock.

Maintain deer cull at a level where the ground flora and natural regeneration can proliferate.

Small areas of Juniper, grown from local seed, have been planted on Farrers Allotment. Natural regeneration of other species is encouraging and Whitbarrow will remain a priority area for deer control. The ground vegetation and regeneration will be monitored by fixed point photography and the deer cull adjusted as necessary.

STATEMENT OF RECREATION AND COMMUNITY WHITBARROW FOREST DESIGN PLAN 2009

The wider Whitbarrow and Witherslack area is a justly popular venue for walkers, with the higher level paths affording stunning views over Morecambe Bay and south Lakeland. The FC's estate has several public footpaths and numerous other paths and tracks passing through. Due to the nature of the terrain within the woodland these paths and tracks are often the only practical routes available for work on the estate, including the extraction of timber. The FC should ensure that such use causes minimal disruption to the path network and that any disturbance to path surfaces is rectified promptly. The FC is committed to ensuring that all public rights of way are clearly marked and easy to follow and to ensuring that all other paths and tracks are kept free of obstructions.

Following the freehold acquisition of Farrer's Allotment and Rawson's Wood in 2002 the FC has been able to operate a policy of open access on foot. Farrer's Allotment has since been designated as open country under the CROW Act. Currently the only legal access for the public to our leasehold land is via the public right of way network, though in practice many visitors wander further afield. The feasibility of securing open access to our leasehold land should be broached with our lessor, Mr M. Argles. A successful outcome here would complete open access to the whole of Whitbarrow NNR.

The network of tracks within Whitbarrow is used occasionally by off road cyclists and local horse riders. More frequent visits by this category of visitor may compromise the biological interest of the site and may cause excessive disturbance to path surfaces. The current level of use can be tolerated, but the FC will not promote more extensive use of Whitbarrow for cycling or horse riding. Horse riding is currently controlled by an annual permit system.

Recently the whole of Whitbarrow has, by agreement, been mapped for orienteering. The FC will work in partnership with Natural England, our neighbours and event organisers to ensure that orienteering events are at a time, location and of a scale that will cause minimal disturbance to wildlife.

FC staff regularly lead guided walks / visits to Whitbarrow. To date these have mostly been in response to requests for a visit by other organisations. A number of individual volunteers support the practical management of Whitbarrow and provide invaluable assistance with monitoring butterflies. The FC should be more proactive in organising and leading guided walks / volunteer work days, with a special focus on involving local people. The FC will actively facilitate the input and participation of local and special interest groups. These actions could be undertaken in partnership with the Lake District National Park Authority (LDNPA) and Cumbria Wildlife Trust (CWT), who also manage parts of Whitbarrow NNR, with Friends of the Lake District, Butterfly Conservation and through the wider Whitbarrow NNR Management Group.

By working in partnership with Natural England, LDNPA and CWT a leaflet has been produced that describes the interesting features of Whitbarrow, the work of the four organisations and shows suggested access routes over the whole of Whitbarrow. We are also working together towards an integrated signage and on site interpretation strategy.

The promotion of Whitbarrow as a venue for more intensive recreation is felt to be inappropriate.

STATEMENT OF CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE WHITBARROW FOREST DESIGN PLAN 2009

Whitbarrow represents part of an extensive and varied series of semi-natural habitats within South Cumbria. The site comprises a diverse and complex association of calcareous and acidic grassland, woodland, limestone scars, scree and pavements. The site has geological features and habitat types that are recognised as internationally important. It also supports significant populations of nationally rare and uncommon plants and has a notable invertebrate fauna.

It is the Forestry Commission's intention to:

- Protect the limestone pavements and maintain and enhance their botanical interest.
- Enhance the species richness of the important calcareous grassland community and expand its cover onto areas where it would have been present prior to afforestation.
- To increase the cover of yew woodland and juniper scrub.
- Restore species richness of the semi-natural woodland communities.
- Maintain and enhance other habitats of local and national importance.
- Maintain the populations of other rare and nationally scarce species in a favourable condition. In particular, we will work in partnership with Butterfly Conservation to maintain and enhance habitat condition and habitat connectivity for the benefit of fritillary butterflies.

A more comprehensive description of the site, its features and the FC's intentions can be found in "Whitbarrow SSSI & NNR Management plan". A copy is held at our Grizedale and Dunsop Bridge offices.

In addition to grazing of open habitat of calcareous grassland and limestone heath communities there is an extensive area of woodland grazing adjacent to Horse Pasture. It is hoped that light, extensive cattle grazing will help maintain a mosaic of woodland, scrub, wide rides and glades that requires little additional management input. If successful this scheme should provide long term benefit for a variety of butterfly species. The Wakebarrow butterfly monitoring transect passes through the cattle enclosure.

There is only a little evidence and knowledge of archaeological / built cultural features within Whitbarrow.

A small stone building, with a slate roof, indicates the presence of an old farmstead near to Barney Crag, just off the track from Flodder Hall. The roof of this building is starting to crumble and, if funding can be found should be repaired to make weather tight.

On Farrer's Allotment there is a small, dry-stone built, enclosure. The purpose of this structure is not entirely clear, though it could have been related to the management of the flocks of sheep that used to be grazed here.

Also on Farrer's Allotment, adjacent to the new log building, is the site of what is thought to have been a dewpond. One local source can remember this site being used as a cock-fighting arena many years ago. The circular depression is approximately 20 metres across and recent probing has revealed a floor section of limestone cobbles set into a lime mortar. It is intended to remove all the turf that is currently covering this depression so that the full extent of the stone work is revealed. If feasible, it is hoped that the site can be restored to use, as a functioning dewpond.

Forestry Commission
NORTH WEST ENGLAND

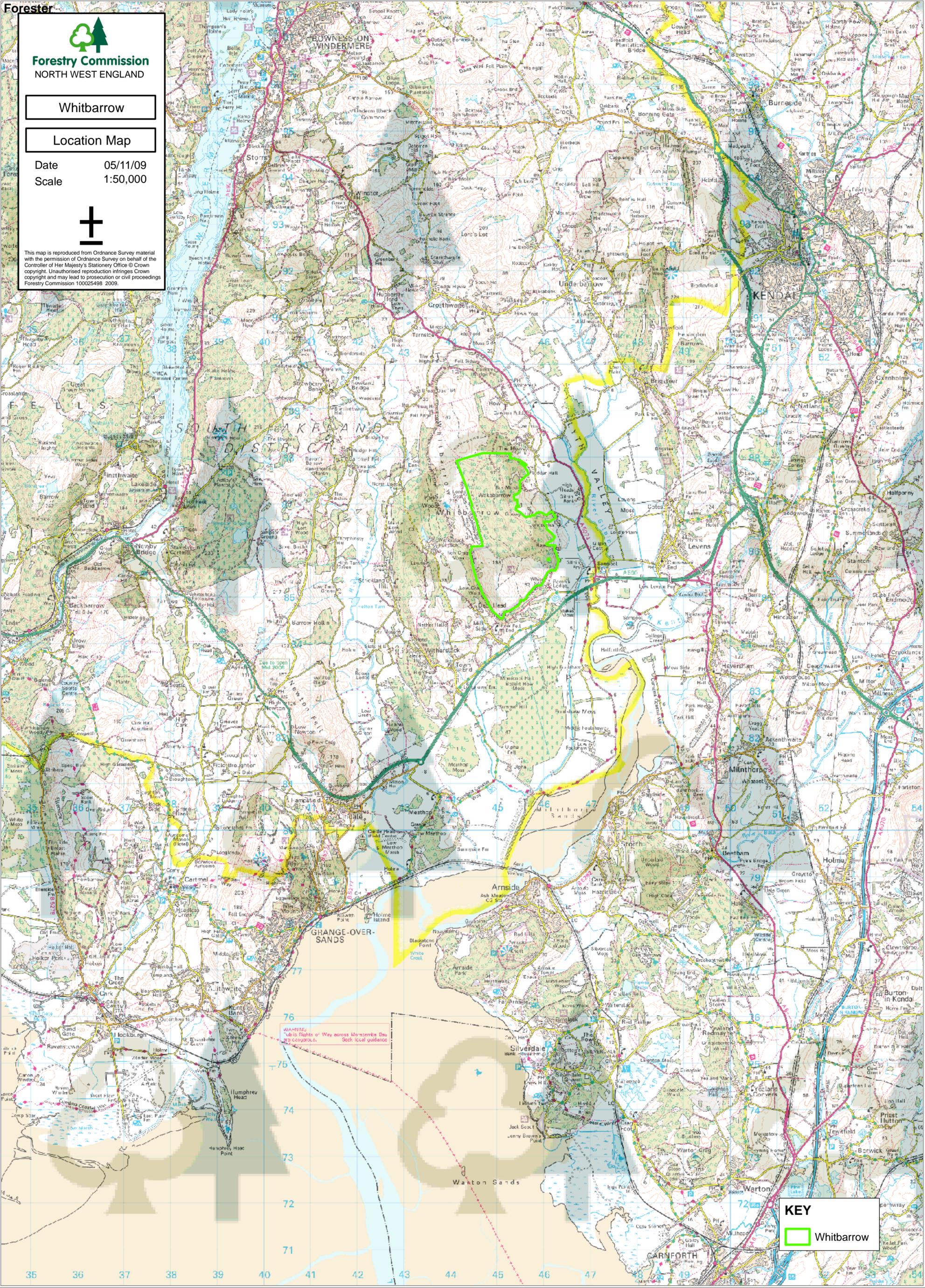
Whitbarrow

Location Map

Date 05/11/09
Scale 1:50,000



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WARNING Public Rights of Way across Meresdale Div and Conyngsalls. Seek local guidance

KEY

 Whitbarrow

35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54

Forester



Forestry Commission
NORTH WEST ENGLAND

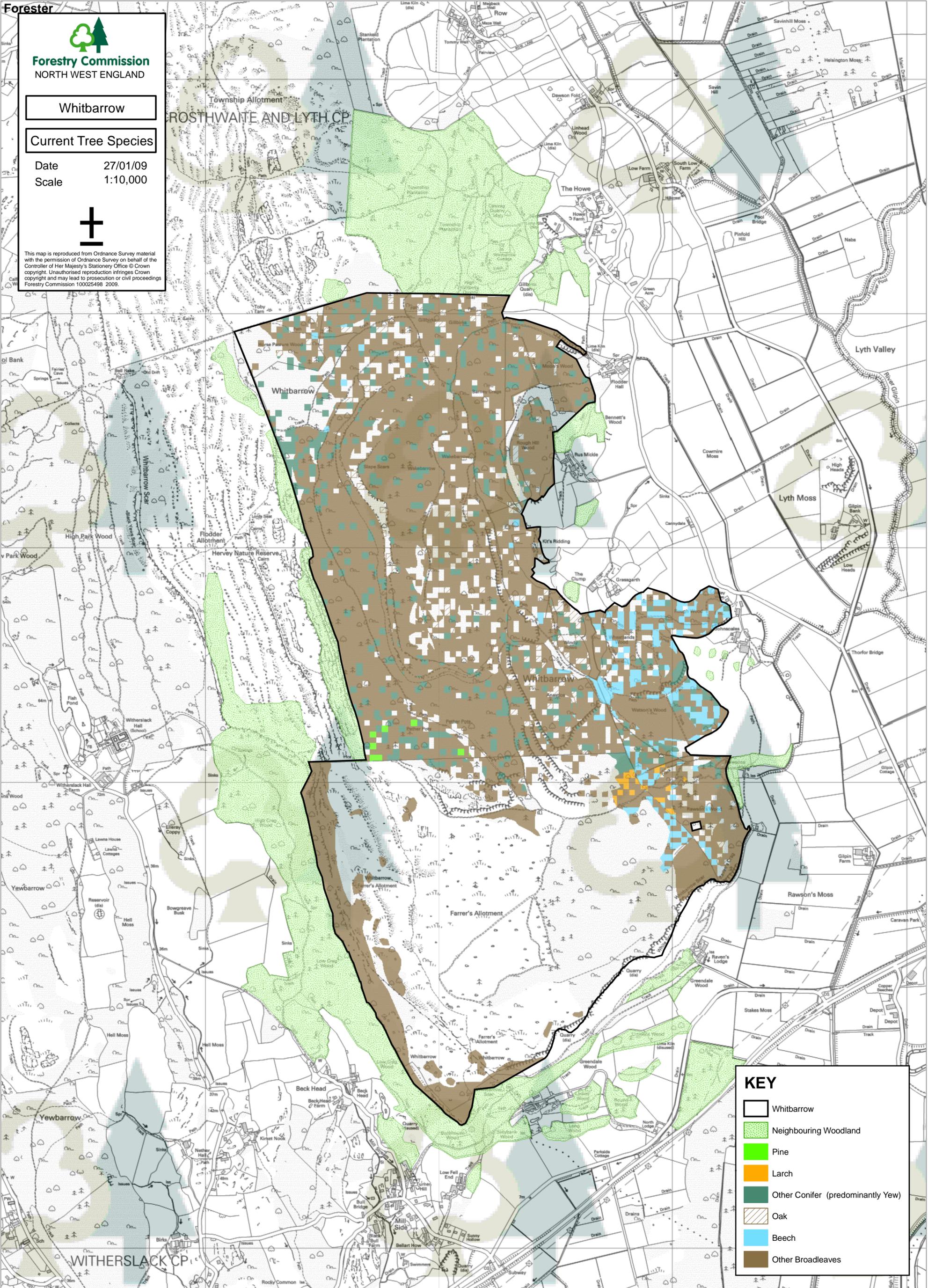
Whitbarrow

Current Tree Species

Date 27/01/09
Scale 1:10,000



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KEY

-  Whitbarrow
-  Neighbouring Woodland
-  Pine
-  Larch
-  Other Conifer (predominantly Yew)
-  Oak
-  Beech
-  Other Broadleaves

Forester



Forestry Commission
NORTH WEST ENGLAND

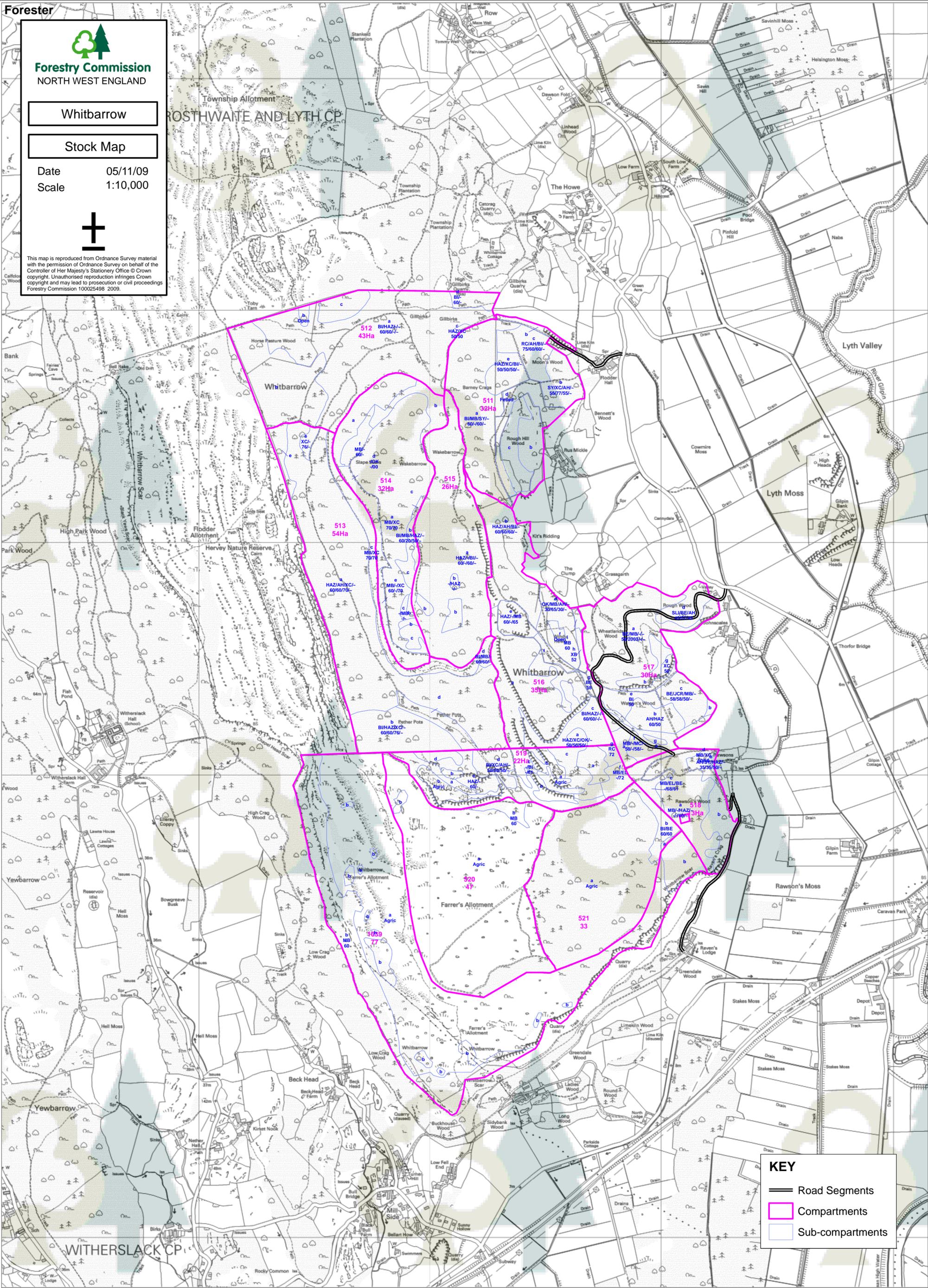
Whitbarrow

Stock Map

Date 05/11/09
Scale 1:10,000



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KEY

-  Road Segments
-  Compartments
-  Sub-compartments