

Ranil Jayawardena MP
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF
CC: Lord Benyon, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

22nd September 2022

Dear Secretary of State,

I hope this finds you well. **We are writing to you as a group of NGOs calling on the UK Government to publish a strategy to protect and restore England's temperate rainforests.** These globally rare habitats are a vital part of our country's biodiversity and heritage, as well as having a vital role to play in helping combat the climate crisis. However, they are under threat. Due to a combination of overgrazing, invasive species and historic deforestation, the scattered fragments that remain now cover less than 1% of Britain.¹

Recent polling commissioned by the Lost Rainforests of Britain campaign has shown that there is widespread public support for the protection and restoration of our rainforests:

- 93% of British people support the **protection** of Britain's remaining rainforest sites.
- 85% support the **expansion** of Britain's rainforest to cover more land.
- 80% support **public funding** to support those who grow rainforests on their land.
- 75% think that Britain's rainforests **add value to Britain's heritage**.²

Given this high level of public support, we urge the Government to prioritise the protection and restoration of these extraordinary habitats by developing and implementing a Rainforests Strategy for England. This Strategy should encompass:

1. Greater protection for existing temperate rainforests

We welcome the recent commitment to protect and expand temperate rainforests in the next Environmental Improvement Plan due in January 2023 and note that a number of English rainforest sites are protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).

However, we are concerned that these measures do not go nearly far enough: recent analysis has revealed that almost three-quarters of England's temperate rainforest sites are not protected by SSSI designations.³ Indeed, woodlands in general are under-represented in the SSSI series: statistics from Natural England show that only 10% of England's broadleaved woods, and 25% of England's ancient and semi-natural woodlands, are designated as SSSIs.⁴ The Government should ensure that *all* remaining temperate rainforest sites are designated as SSSIs, rather than just a representative sample.⁵

¹ The Telegraph, 2021, [Britain's lost rainforests could return in post-Brexit plans](#)

² YouGov polling, 2022

³ The Guardian, 2022, [Britain's vanishing rainforests must be protected, say campaigners](#)

⁴ Natural England, 2008, State of the Natural Environment. Chapter 3, 'Biodiversity', p.46, Table 3.1.

⁵ We would encourage the Government to accept the definition of temperate rainforest already outlined by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee in their [2018 guidance for the selection of SSSIs](#), but stand ready to help DEFRA and Natural England finesse a definition if officials believe one needs refining.

Doing so would also help the Government meet its 30x30 commitment to protect 30% of England for nature – and show leadership ahead of the crucial COP15 meeting of the UN Convention on Biological Diversity this December. The recent Nature Recovery Green Paper accepted that National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty cannot count towards the 30x30 goal in their current state – meaning that, at present, only 3% of England can be said to count towards the target (the area currently covered by SSSIs in good or recovering condition). Expanding the number of temperate rainforest habitats protected as SSSIs and in good or recovering condition would therefore help achieve this goal and become a global showcase of effective habitat restoration.

A Rainforests Strategy should also set out the Government's plans for addressing the major threats that our temperate rainforests face, from invasive species like rhododendron to overgrazing by deer and livestock. We welcome the Government's moves to give more protection to Ancient Woodland via the planning system but note that this only helps protect woods from development – not from invasive species, overgrazing or agricultural pollution.

2. Policies and funding for temperate rainforest restoration and expansion

Though temperate rainforest now covers less than 1% of the country, around 20% of Britain has a sufficiently wet and mild climate in which the habitat can flourish. We would therefore also encourage the Government to allocate additional funding to help farmers and landowners restore temperate rainforest:

- We welcome the earmarked funding within the £30m Big Nature Impact Fund, but we would be grateful for further detail as to how much of this £30m will specifically be used to protect and restore England's temperate rainforest, and when the Fund will launch.
- We look forward to the further roll-out of the Landscape Recovery scheme and urge the Government to allocate a third of ELM funding to Landscape Recovery projects from 2024, until it is clear how funding needs to be prioritised in order to meet nature and climate goals – including for temperate rainforest restoration.
- We ask that the currently restrictive rules on funding for the natural regeneration of trees in the English Woodland Creation Offer (EWCO) be changed to reflect the latest science, so that natural regeneration up to 150 metres from a seed source is eligible for funding, not just 75m as the rules currently stipulate.

We urge the Government to develop and implement a Rainforests Strategy for England to help address all these points.

We would welcome any further clarification you are able provide on the above.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Shrubsole, Lost Rainforests of Britain campaign founder

LOST RAINFORESTS OF BRITAIN

Craig Bennett, Chief Executive, The Wildlife Trusts



Darren Moorcroft, Chief Executive, The Woodland Trust



Ian Dunn, CEO, Plantlife



Rosie Hails, Nature and Science director, National Trust



Katie-Jo Luxton, Global Conservation Direct, RSPB



Sir Tim Smit, Executive Chairman and co-founder, Eden Project

