MEDIA RELEASE: 28/11/21

Scrub removal at Pembrey to improve dunes for biodiversity

Scrub provides a splash of greenery in our sandy spaces, but too much scrub smothers the sand dunes and has a devastating effect on the specialist plants and invertebrates which live there. This winter Natural Resources Wales will be removing non-native, invasive plant species from areas of dune at Pembrey to help wildlife thrive.

The coast around Pembrey is home to 20% of all the plants in Wales and features a large sand dune system. Sand dunes are listed as the habitat type most at risk of biodiversity loss in Europe.

The Dynamic Dunescapes project, funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and delivered in Wales by Natural Resources Wales (NRW), is working at Pembrey with Carmarthenshire County Council's Outdoor Recreation Service to improve the condition of these dunes for wildlife.

Some non-native plant species, like the dense scrub plant sea buckthorn, are invasive and they are growing quickly in this dune system – spreading further across large areas of dune each year. Many of the dunes' rare and specialist wildlife needs bare sand or low grassland habitat to survive and gets lost under or outcompeted by scrub. If scrub growth is not controlled, it will cause species like lizards, orchids and dune pansies to suffer and disappear from our sand dunes.

Scrub removal in specifically chosen locations will help to restore the habitat types that these species need, and this work will play a part in ensuring the dunes at Pembrey have a healthy, biodiverse future. Improving the ecological condition here will increase this coastal landscape's resilience to other threats, such as extreme weather events and changing conditions brought on by climate change in the future.

The first phase of this work is to take place in Pembrey Country Park around Car Park 8 and the second will take place on the foredunes in front of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate which is managed by NRW. It is scheduled to begin in the last week of November and will last for two weeks. There will be a temporary closure of Factory Road outside the Country Park for one week – reopening on 5th December.

Ruth Harding, Senior Environment Officer at Natural Resources Wales, said:

> *"Sea Buckthorn control is important to improve the dune grassland habitats at Pembrey. Carmarthenshire County Council and Natural Resources Wales have carried out this type of habitat management over a number of years which has resulted in restoring the area to a dune grassland rich with different species of plants. You can best enjoy this during the summer months within the Pembrey Burrows and Saltings Local Nature Reserve. As part of Dynamic Dunescapes, we are now continuing this work, which will result in an overall increase in dune grassland habitat."*

Carmarthenshire County Council's Cabinet Member responsible for leisure, Cllr Peter Hughes Griffiths said:

> *"Whilst scrub is a valuable habitat it does need management to maintain it in good condition for wildlife. Cutting back the scrub will ensure it does not spread into areas where is not wanted and or where it can destroy other habitat."*

Dynamic Dunescapes is not the only project working to restore Pembrey's important sand dunes. The EU LIFE-funded Sands of LIFE project, managed by (NRW), has also been undertaking sand dune management to improve conditions for wildlife in recent years. The two projects work closely to build on and support each other's work.

- Ends -

For comment and media opportunities, contact:

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- Media -

Images: Single-use only

A range of images and a video are available for download from this Google Drive folder, including:
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1WZY9VsTCWfi3o5YkQAEBHpoVivFjWJeg?usp=sharing

Dune pansies at Pembrey – one of the beautiful species to benefit from this dune restoration scrub removal work at Pembrey. Credit: Ruth Harding

Areas of dense Sea Buckthorn growth visible at Pembrey Country Park. Credit: Ruth Harding

Restored dune grassland after sea buckthorn and scrub has been removed in previous work

Orchids flourishing in restored dune grassland at Pembrey Country Park Credit Paul Aubrey

- Additional Notes for Editors –

About Dynamic Dunescapes

[Dynamic Dunescapes] is a partnership project restoring sand dunes across England and Wales for the benefit of wildlife, people and communities, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the EU LIFE Programme. Project partners are Natural England, Plantlife, National Trust, Natural Resources Wales, Cornwall Wildlife Trust, Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust and Cumbria Wildlife Trust.

The coastal dunes of England and Wales are internationally important habitats for wildlife, listed as one of the most threatened environments in Europe for biodiversity loss. These dunes are a sanctuary to rare species like the fen orchid, natterjack toad and sand lizard. But, dune management messaging supporting dune stabilisation over many decades has meant that dunes have become overgrown with vegetation. We now realise that this is putting protected wildlife at risk. Healthy sand dunes need to be free to move and be dynamic. Many species need areas of open sand to thrive, so this project will bring life back to the dunes by creating areas of open sand. Other specialised creatures need us to improve the dune slacks, as these often water-filled dips behind the dunes are important habitats for amphibians and birds. Invasive species will also be removed from the dunes and dune grasslands, to improve conditions for rare native plants to flourish. We will work with skilled local and national experts, and involve schools and local groups, volunteers and visitors of all ages and abilities to help rejuvenate our dunes.

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