**Felling Operations Frequently Asked Questions**

**Phytophthora ramorum**

**What is *Phytophthora ramorum*?**

*Phytophthora ramorum* (larch disease) is an algae-like organism called a water mould. It causes extensive damage and death to more than 150 species of plants and trees, which were widely planted historically for the timber market.

As of 2021, over 4000 sites have been investigated and 14,400ha of larch found affected by this pathogen, on both private and public land.

This [short video](https://youtu.be/wqnCdiYMCn8?t=226) explains more.

**Is larch disease dangerous to humans, dogs and wildlife?**

No, larch disease only affects trees and plants.

**Tackling larch disease**

**Do you have to cut them down? Isn’t there a way to treat the disease?**

Cutting down trees (or ‘felling’) stops the spread of the disease. If the infected trees are not cut down, the disease can potentially infect other species in the locality, and we would not have any control in the spread of the disease.

Destroying the tree is the best way to slow the spread of the disease. To date there has been no effective method developed for treating the disease.

**Working near communities**

**Will you have to close access to the forest during felling?**

We understand how much people value their local woodland and closing an entire woodland is always a last resort. The health and well-being benefits associated to being out in the woods have been well documented and is a part of the [Welsh Government’s Woodland for Wales Strategy](https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-06/woodlands-for-wales-strategy_0.pdf).

During forest operations, we will endeavour to keep as many trails, footpaths and forest roads open to the public as possible. However, this is not always possible and there are times when areas of the woodland must be closed to ensure the safety of forest users and our forest operators.

The areas closed can often feel a little excessive to the public, but there is good reason for this. There are safety issues associated with [mechanised harvesting machinery](https://ukfisa.com/Safety/Safety-Bulletins/chain-shot-speed-of-a-bullet-1) which can result in injury or even death for machine operators and bystanders.

Please obey signage associated with harvesting activities as it is there for you own safety.

**At what time will work take place during the day, and how many days in the week?**

This depends on the site and how close it is to local communities. Generally, work will take place during normal working hours (no use of saws/machinery between 7:00pm and 8:00am; no haulage between 6:00pm and 6:00am). If the site is not close to local communities, hours can be extended. Bank Holiday and weekend working must be approved, and if the site was close to a local community, approval would not be given.

**I’m worried about the level of noise there is going to be during the work, what are you going to do to alleviate this?**

All sites are assessed for how close they are to local communities before operating hours are agreed. Purchasers/contractors must follow certain rules, such as start and finish times for working with machinery and moving timber around to ensure as little disturbance as possible to local communities.

**Protecting wildlife during felling operations**

**How do you safeguard wildlife during felling?**

Felling areas of woodland (called ‘coupes’) takes two years to plan before the work is carried out. This allows us to ensure that there is enough time to undertake all ecological surveys required for the coupe, including survey of birds, bats, badgers, fauna, flora and other [European protected species](https://naturalresources.wales/permits-and-permissions/species-licensing/european-protected-species-licensing/information-on-european-protected-species-licensing/?lang=en).

All felling is conducted in accordance with the [UK Forestry Standard](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-forestry-standard), which outlines best practice when dealing with a number of these species. NRW also has its own internal conservation policies to further protect and minimise any disturbance to species found within its woodlands.

**Why is felling taking place during bird nesting season?**

Sometimes, in order to comply with the Statutory Plant Health Notice and due to the urgency to remove such large areas of larch, it is necessary for operations to continue during bird nesting season (February-August).

Where this is the case, extensive surveys are conducted in the woodland to identify potential nesting birds. An exclusion zone is then placed around any nests identified, and our forestry operators will work around these areas until the birds have fledged the nest.

[Read more about felling during bird nesting season.](https://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/guidance-and-advice/business-sectors/forestry/protecting-wild-birds-during-forestry-operations/?lang=en)

**Future management of our woodlands**

**Why do you leave logs and brash lying around? The woodland looks messy after felling has taken place.**

The removal of the side branches and the tops of the trees (‘lop and top’) is part of the harvesting process. These are left on site for machines to drive on, ensuring as little ground damage as possible. The lop and top left behind also helps nutrient recycling on the site, ensuring fertility of the soil.

Standing trees are left for several reasons. They may be a different species of tree not affected by larch disease. They may be home to certain animal species, such as bats. Standing trees can also be deadwood, which can be home to a variety of specialised species not found in live wood.

**What happens to all the wood?**

The timber is sold and can still be processed and used despite the disease. The trees will be transported to mills to be processed into wood-based products. Depending on how long the disease has been present in the wood determines what it can be used for. If there is significant decay it may only be appropriate for chip or biofuel. Other uses include wood products for building materials, pallets and fencing. All infected larch must be processed in licenced mills.

**Will you plant new trees?**

NRW operates sustainable woodland management and is certified by [UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS)](https://naturalresources.wales/guidance-and-advice/business-sectors/forestry/forest-and-woodland-certification/?lang=en). After felling has taken place, a decision will be made as to whether a woodland can sufficiently regenerate naturally, or whether re-planting will need to take place. Some woodlands have a good seed source and our knowledge of the woodland tells us that it will regenerate itself fairly quickly. In other areas, perhaps where we have had to clear fell large areas, we send teams in to plant new, young trees using a diverse range of species making the woodland more resilient for the future.

How the land will be used in future, will be set out in government policy and our [Forest Resource Plans (FRPs)](https://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/about-us/what-we-do/welsh-government-woodland-estate/forest-resource-plans/?lang=en). The FRP is developed in consultation with local communities.

When this happens depends on the site and its objectives laid out in the FRP. It may make sense to leave some areas for a few years to see what natural regeneration occurs before committing to buying trees for a whole site. Other areas may have steep slope where it makes sense to plant straight after harvesting, when there are less weeds present on site.