

Civil Air Support Aerial Surveys Reveal Catastrophic Forestry Damage

Saturday 21 May, 2022

With an estimated clean-up bill now over £500m after some of the highest wind gusts ever recorded, Britain is still counting the cost of Storm Eunice and her predecessors in the early part of 2022.

Behind the numbers are a great many personal stories of tragedy, heroism, despair and hope; tales of those caught up in the moment and long laments of the storms' legacies.

Mercifully, in true British spirit much of the devastation was able to be repaired quickly, and makeshift solutions found to protect and preserve our vital infrastructure. Woodland owners, however, were faced with a potentially catastrophic outcome that could not easily be averted. The logistical challenges of identifying and understanding the extent of hidden damage to their assets (often concealed deeply within 3.23 million hectares of British woodland) threatened to become overwhelming.

Catastrophic windblow (as it's known in the Forestry business), has the characteristic of causing trees to fall awkwardly, disrupting water supplies, phone and power lines and preventing emergency services access. When contemplating the impact of aggressive weather systems on commercial forestry, it becomes clear that the problem must be addressed with all haste, but also with great care and professionalism. To realise some kind of yield from fallen timber, the material needs to be harvested quickly before the fibres absorb excessive moisture and then dry at an accelerated pace, becoming stained or cracked.

The first and most critical phase is to locate and map areas and boundaries of woodland damage, identify the species and volumes affected and apply to the Forestry Commission for the appropriate felling licences.

That's not all as straightforward as it sounds. Landowners and agents are accepting a potentially significant degree of risk to their safety when entering woodland to search for and survey storm damage. Senior Forest Manager John Lees of Tilhill, the UK's leading forestry, timber harvesting and landscaping company explains *"much of our woodland is inaccessible on foot, and dangerous to survey from the ground. It can often take weeks to plot the extent of a windblown forest safely and accurately, by which time the timber may have little commercial value"*.

With its focus upon safeguarding the environment and considerable experience in aerial surveying, this work is perfectly aligned with the capabilities and *raison d'être* of Civil Air Support (CAS). In recent months, aircrews have covered many hundreds of square miles, equipped with high wing aircraft that offer excellent ground visibility and high-resolution cameras able to capture detailed images of damaged woodland. Trained CAS observers have been able to deliver critical data to landowners in a matter of hours, that would otherwise have taken many weeks at great cost and risk to human safety to obtain.

The value of this support was articulated by Mike Jones, a woodland owner in Cumbria. *"The photos were brilliant, and I could easily identify all the areas where trees had blown down. I was then able to work out the best route to extract them. In addition, the photos provided a wealth of other information about the wood, picking out details that are hard to see from the ground. I'm very grateful to Civil Air Support for providing this service, and to the pilot who undertook the survey"*.

David W Brown, Civil Air Support's Deputy Operations Director said:

"As Europe's largest charitable air support organisation, CAS is ideally placed to assist in this situation. We have aircraft located throughout the UK and can undertake survey and photographic activities across extensive areas that are well beyond the capabilities of most Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. Our imagery can support a rapid and detailed assessment of damage, informing both remedial and longer-term actions. It is also able to reduce the workload and costs of owners and regulators alike, often covering multiple woodlands and large geographic areas in a single flight".

It's important to underline that CAS is a charity. All its members are volunteers and all flights are private. As a result of this, and crews providing their time, skills and aircraft completely free of charge, CAS can offer these services in support of local communities at no cost to the organisations involved.

If you have an interest in woodland or forestry, have been affected by recent storm damage and believe

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ENDS

About Civil Air Support (CAS) <https://www.civilairsupport.com/>

Charity registered in England and Wales (1113079) and Scotland (SCO42026)

Civil Air Support is the largest charitable air support organisation in Europe with around 200 members, together with a fleet of privately-owned aircraft. All Civil Air Support members are volunteers, and all flights are private. The primary mission of Civil Air Support is to provide voluntary air support to safeguard communities and the environment. Civil Air Support will only operate when the alternative is no air support at all. Civil Air Support assistance sorties are provided free of charge.

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