

FORESTS AND WOODLANDS IN ENGLAND

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Woodland Coverage and woodland types

Compared with many countries on the continent, England has a low percentage of forest and woodland cover at only 10%. This is a result of many centuries of clearance of woodland, to make way for farming, settlements and other activity. The loss of woodland was partly made good in the 20th century by the planting of forests both by the government (though the Forestry Commission) and by private owners or commercial companies in response to fiscal incentives from the government. Recent years have seen a further gradual increase in forest cover,

Woodland Ownership

Privat. About 80% of all woodlands are owned by private individuals, companies, local authorities, National Parks and non profit organisations like charities. Much of England's forestry used to be owned by large estates but over time many of these have been split up and sold which has led to a considerable fragmentation of ownership. There are still large estates but a third of the privately owned woodland is associated with farms and there is an increasing market for small parcels to be sold to private individuals who wish to own a piece of England...

National Parks. National Parks cover about 9.3% of the land area in England and many have a significant woodland component. Woodland is regarded as a vital component of the landscape and all National Parks own woodland and have active plans to significantly increase woodland cover..

State forests. The public forest estate is managed by the Forestry Commission which owns or leases over 1800 separate woodland and forest areas. This

Authorities in charge of Forests and woodlands

Forestry Commission. ([link](#)) Historically the Forestry Commission has provided grants to woodland owners, however following the last CAP negotiations funding is now limited to grants covered by the European Union, which it can offer as grants for improvement of woodland. These grants are deployed through the Countryside Stewardship Scheme (see next below) on a point-scoring basis and go towards management of woodlands, provision of essential access roads, removal of rhododendron and similar purposes.

Country Side Stewardship Scheme. This is a Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) grant scheme which will contribute around £900 million

mainly through the action of private landowners and of non-profit organisations such as the National Trust and Woodland Trust and government sponsored initiatives such as The National Forest.

Coverage. Current coverage is about 1.3million ha (approximately 10% of the total land area) and only growing slowly. In 2013 the Government set a target of reaching 12% by 2060.

Main woodland types 339,000 ha of woodlands are conifers and 965,000 ha are broadleaved.

makes comprises just under 20% of the woods and forests in England.

In 2012 the then Government proposed selling off the State Forests. This prompted a huge public outcry and the proposal was rapidly abandoned and an independent panel was appointed to report on the future of UK woodlands

Non-profit and community woods There is a strong charitable and voluntary sector which is involved with woodlands for example the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, the Wildlife Trusts and the National Forest company..

Local Authorities. Some County Councils have countryside services and own woodland primarily for recreation purposes.

Ownership. In total 215,000 ha are owned by the Public Estate and 1,090,000 ha are owned by private individuals, companies or charities.

over six years to help farmers and woodland managers look after the environment.

Woodland is one of the scheme's priorities and funding is available to:

- create new woodland
- support the preparation of management plans
- address tree health issues
- improve existing woodlands

Countryside Stewardship is competitive and applications will be scored against local priority targets to maximise environmental benefit.

LEADER Programme. A total of £138 million is available in the England between 2015 and 2020 un-

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der the scheme. LEADER is part of the RDPE and an increase in forestry productivity is one of the 6 published priorities. This can include funding towards management of private woodlands or creation of new

Challenges

Resilience in the face of pests and diseases Forestry in England is currently facing a series of natural challenges which have the potential to dramatically disrupt the industry, how it is conducted and also significantly change its contribution to wider benefits such as landscape, biodiversity and combating climate change.

A major part of the Forestry Commission's work is now being directed to addressing with an increasing number of pests and diseases which affect forests and woodlands. The incidence of pests and diseases has sharply increased in the last decade in the United Kingdom. Among the most serious impacts are those of [Phytophthora ramorum](#), [Phytophthora alni](#), and [Chalara fraxinea](#).

Whilst those fungal diseases are important at a national scale there are still long term local management problems arising from mammals such as Grey Squirrel and several species of deer. These are difficult and costly to control humanely and are increasingly dictating species choice.

Additionally there is the potential impact of climate change.

Given the lack of engagement and fragmentation of woodland ownership the UK Forestry Commission has a considerable challenge and to promoting the resilience of woodlands in the face of these problems.

Ancient woodland. Only about 2% of the original English woodland still remains. There is now active public and parliamentary campaigning to protect this residue of ancient woodland. At present, there is no formal statutory protection for ancient woodlands,

Concepts of sustainable forest management

In the UK the Government has an overall objective of achieving Sustainable Development.

This means that Sustainable forestry recognises the same wide objectives and the importance of linking the economic, environmental and social values of forests. The intent is that today's forests are still here for our children and grandchildren. However, maintaining the quality and usefulness of forests and woodlands is vital so they need to be managed to offer the same, or enhanced, benefits and opportunities as they do today.

In England forests and woodland are seen to be key drivers for a wide range of 'products and services'

woodlands. To be eligible for such funding, the woodland must be the subject of an approved management plan

though some of them fall within national parks and other protected areas and some are protected by the National Trust and other charitable or community-based organisations. The government's National Planning Policy Framework provides that ancient woodlands shall not be destroyed "unless the benefit of the proposed development outweighs the loss". This provision is not an effective protection, and there are many current threats to ancient woodlands from new highways, housing, power stations and other proposed development. A Parliamentary Group on Ancient Woodlands, chaired by Rebecca Pow MP (who attended part of the workshop at Milverton), is campaigning to change the wording of that provision, and to secure legal protection of ancient woodlands.

Bringing woodlands into management In England and Wales, many of the private woodlands are small broadleaved, under-managed, with timber of poor quality. They are under-used, and declining in biodiversity and landscape quality. One reason for this is that in the early 20th century the management of many woodlands was transferred from the landowners to the tenant farmers, many of whom were neither interested nor skilled in woodland management. In Wales, and in some parts of England, action is being taken by government agencies, local authorities or national park authorities to encourage owners of woodlands to bring them into effective management, to gain an economic return from them, and to improve their biodiversity and landscape quality. The Forum Synergies website has links to several successful initiatives to bring woodland back into management such as Coed Cymru in Wales

that deliver or contribute towards sustainability such as landscape, recreation biodiversity, carbon sequestration, soil protection, flood alleviation, hunting, timber production, and wood fuel.

However, ensuring that woodland management is sustains these wide and varied interests is difficult to measure. The UK has adopted the a Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) an independent certification standard for verifying sustainable woodland management in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately the nature of the work required to gain Certification is regarded as onerous, long winded and bureaucratic which is why many small woodland owners have not

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sought it. However, a number of larger woodland owners and timber producers do see the benefit of

meeting a recognised standard.

Links

- Forum Synergies: Report of the 1st Workshop on Sustainable Forestry Management ([link](#))
- UK Government Position of Forestry and Woodlands: Government Forestry and Woodlands Policy Statement Incorporating the Government's Response to the Independent Panel on Forestry's Final Report January 2013 ([link](#))
- UK Forestry Statistics: Forestry Statistics 2015
- The Forestry Commission ([link](#))
- The UK Government's Sustainable Development website ([link](#))
- The UK Woodland Assurance Standard ([link](#))

Contact and information

Information drafted at the occasion of the 1st Workshop on Sustainable Forestry, Milverton, UK, 17-20 March 2016

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