The Environmental Land Management Scheme: A Position Statement from the Forestry Sector

Introduction

This paper has been prepared by a **cross sector** group brought together by the Institute of Chartered Foresters and includes Confor, the Royal Forestry Society and the Woodland Trust. Together, these organisations represent professional forest managers, woodland owners, forestry businesses, timber users and people with a passion for trees, woodlands and forests. The paper outlines **the collective view** of the forestry sector regarding the introduction of a new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) and **seeks further engagement with Defra** in relation to its development.

The **forestry sector is in a unique position** in relation to both the UK's target of 'net zero' greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 and the successful implementation of HM Government's 25 Year Environment Plan. This paper describes the very significant contribution which the sector can make to the **delivery of public goods**, what success might look like, and the sector specific issues that need to be **considered at this point**. It also highlights barriers which if inadvertently introduced could result in negative unintended consequences. Furthermore, we recognise that financial support mechanisms such as ELMS are only one part of realising aspirations and, as a delivery vehicle, needs underpinning by the appropriate policy, regulation and targeting.

The Potential of Forestry to Deliver Government's 25 Year Environment Plan Goals

Trees, woodlands and forestry are in a powerful and unrivalled position by which to deliver many of the outcomes measured by the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan Indicator Framework.

THE GOAL	WHAT FORESTRY CAN DO
Clean air	Trees and woodlands filter particulates, remove pollutants and reduce harmful emissions. For example, ammonia emissions from indoor poultry units can be significantly lowered by appropriately designed woodland.
Clean and plentiful water	By filtering chemicals and sediment, trees help to provide a clean source of water for drinking, irrigation and commercial use. Woodlands regulate run-off from land, so supporting water supply by enabling more dependable storage and extraction.
Thriving plants and wildlife	Trees and woodlands enable a wide variety of plants and animals to thrive in a relatively extensively managed environment. Low chemical inputs and a mosaic of habitats provide for a rich biodiversity.
A reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought	The role of woodlands in natural flood management has been shown to have significant benefits. They can also reduce wildfire risk by lowering ground temperatures and encouraging more fire-resistant vegetation.
Using resources from nature more sustainably and efficiently	Forestry, compared to other land uses, is a resource efficient sector that has low inputs yet produces a product that is sustainable and can be used to replace many other materials with higher impacts.
Enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment	Well-designed treescapes and woodlands can enhance England's countryside whilst providing places for people to exercise. Learning outside the classroom programmes have shown how trees can help people engage with their natural environment, with multiple benefits.

What Success Might Look Like: Forestry and ELMS Working Together

A successful Environmental Land Management Scheme could support the forestry sector to provide significant and meaningful outcomes.

Increased Woodland Creation

In recent months a number of reports have called for enhanced levels of woodland creation in the UK and provided compelling evidence for both the need and potential. For example, the Committee on Climate Change calls for 50,000ha per year (High Biomass Scenario[1]) whilst the RSA/RAE[2] calls for 57,000ha per year. The forest industries trade association, Confor, in a review[3] of existing targets and reports, has called for 40,000ha per year. This includes productive woodland, new native woodland and woodlands close to where people live and work.

Whilst other issues are involved, the current agricultural support mechanisms militate against the planting of trees, as evidenced by current woodland creation levels in England. Land availability, a current constraining factor, is likely to increase after the UK exits the EU and landowners are seeking opportunities for other beneficial enterprises. In many parts of England, forestry has a key role to play in this situation.

More Woodland Being Managed

England has just over 1.3million ha of woodland[4]. Approximately 59% of this is managed in a recognised way[5]. The remaining 41%, which is largely broadleaf and in smaller woodlands situated on farms and on land owned by other 'non-professional' owners, is probably in declining condition[6] and represents a lost opportunity in terms of sustainable timber production, job creation, biodiversity, landscape impact and recreational resource.

Addressing Climate Change

As recognised by the Committee on Climate Change[7], transformational land use change is required if the UK is to achieve its greenhouse gas emissions targets. By sequestering carbon as they produce timber, forests provide a source of low embedded carbon substitutes for materials such as concrete and steel. At the end of their lifecycle, this material can in turn be utilised to produce low carbon energy.

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[1] The Committee on Climate Change. Biomass in a low carbon economy (2018)
[2] Royal Society & Royal Academy of Engineering. Greenhouse gas removal (2018)
[3] http://www.confor.org.uk/media/247403/woodland-carbon-targets-for-the-uk-april-2019.pdf
[4] Forest Research. Forestry Statistics 2018
[5] Forestry Commission. Corporate Plan Performance Indicators 2018
[6] Wildlife and Countryside Link. Position Statement (2009)
[7] The Committee on Climate Change. Land use: Reducing emissions and preparing for climate change (2018).

Forest soils also lock up significant quantities of carbon, and the shading effect of trees reduces ambient temperatures. The severity and impact of natural phenomena which are predicted to increase as a result of climate change, such as flooding and wildfire, can also be reduced by appropriately sited and managed forests. Sustainable forest management, as a sector, is unique in being able to deliver these climate change mitigation benefits whilst continuing to provide raw materials and public goods for industry and society.

Securing Plant Health

Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of invasive tree pests and diseases entering the UK[8]. The forestry sector is at the forefront of both dealing with the effects of these incidents and working to reduce their likelihood and impact in the future. Buying in plants from abroad, the use of imported timber and increased travel opportunities all provide routes for the introduction of new threats. The industry, working to long term targets and with the security of stable support mechanisms and policy, can foster the growth of a domestic nursery sector and timber products industry, substituting imports and reducing plant health vectors.

Thriving Rural Communities

An active forest industry can support regeneration and investment in rural areas. It provides three times the economic output of farming, spends double in the local economy and a comparable number of jobs to agriculture[9]. Taking into account the enhanced opportunities for tourism and recreation enterprises, in comparison to farming, employment in forestry increases still further. These opportunities encourage young people to stay in rural areas, halting the increase in an aging population and attendant public service provision. Disruptive events such as flooding and wildfire are reduced and resilience increases.

[8] Spencer, J. (2018). Quarterly Journal of Forestry 112(1), 53-61. Forest Resilience in British Forests, Woods and Plantations - the ecological components. Spencer, J. (2018).

[9] SAC Consulting. Eskdalemuir: A Comparison of forestry and hill farming; productivity and economic impact (2014)

Ensuring Success – Designing a Scheme that Works for Government and Industry

To achieve this success, the sector is keen to engage with Defra to address the following issues

ISSUE	WHAT NEEDS TO BE CONSIDERED
Advice	There is a clear need to retain and grow the existing woodland advisory capacity. Its loss or diminution would result in reduced compliance with regulatory standards and delivery of 25 Year Environment Plan Outcome Indicators. The sector is in a strong position to bring learning from across the UK and to participate in the development of advisory services within ELMS.
Annualisation	The annualisation of payments and removal of capital grants would need careful consideration if woodland creation targets are to be achieved. Supporting the sector to test and trial this approach will provide resource to explore this issue fully.
Carbon Markets	Care is required to consider how market-based carbon schemes, the Woodland Carbon Fund and the newly announced Woodland Carbon Guarantee scheme will complement and interact with ELMS to ensure that additionality is retained and that unintended consequences don't reduce the opportunity to harness these interventions.
Flexibility	Forests are dynamic entities which react to natural and man-made influences in not always entirely predictable ways. Unlike agriculture, where inputs and outputs are measured on an annual basis, they operate on very long-term lifecycles (50+ years). Recognising that inputs may need to adjust to reflect emerging threats and opportunities will support enterprise and innovation.
Land Management Plans	The adoption of unified Land Management Plans (LMPs) raises issues such as the comparative roles of specialist advisors within the process, their fit with market-based standards such as the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS) and how existing woodland management plans are to be incorporated into LMPs during the transition phase.
Land Use Integration	Woodlands are often one of several enterprises on a land holding. Integrating land uses so that the overall benefit is optimised requires a scheme to recognise the inter-dependence of two or more enterprises, leading to increased economic resilience and productivity.
Productivity Measures	There are numerous excellent examples of how forestry has harnessed productivity measures to yield growth, efficiency and innovation. This learning should be taken advantage of when developing the new productivity measures during the transition period to ELMS.
Regulatory Permission	The current support mechanism provides both sign off for financial support and the required regulatory permissions, in one process. To reduce

	bureaucracy and increase take up, it is important that this principal is retained within ELMS.
Small Woodlands	Scheme proposals need proofing to ensure the engagement of small woodland owners with ELMS. This will be of particular importance given the aspiration to increase the number of landowners engaging with the new scheme.
UKFS	The United Kingdom Forest Standard (UKFS) is a government standard which has been widely adopted and supported by the sector since its introduction in 1998. The UKFS is periodically updated and provides a baseline for the industry whilst raising the bar for other land uses. It provides the framework for sustainable forest management and could do the same for ELMS, mitigating the need to develop additional standards.

Our Organisations

The **Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF)** is the Royal Chartered body for foresters and arboriculturists in the UK. ICF regulates standards of entry to the profession; doing so by the provision of services and support to its members; guidance to professionals in other sectors; information to the general public; and educational advice and training to students and tree professionals seeking to develop their careers in the forestry and arboriculture industry. ICF works to foster a greater public awareness and understanding of the tree professions in order to serve a variety of commercial, recreational, environmental and scientific interests.

Confor (Confederation of Forest Industries) is the membership organisation for the sustainable forestry and wood-using industry. Confor represents the whole forestry and wood 'supply chain' and focuses on the strategic issues that are vital to the success and sustainable future of the sector. These include helping build the market for wood and forest products, creating a supportive policy environment, and helping members to become more competitive and successful.

The **Royal Forestry Society (RFS)** is an education charity, established in 1882, dedicated to promoting the wise management of woods and trees across England, Wales and Northern Ireland through education, knowledge sharing, and skills development. Its 3,500 members represent a broad community with a common interest in the science and art of woodland management.

The **Woodland Trust** is the UK's largest woodland conversation charity – working since 1972 to create, protect and restore our precious woodland for the benefit of the environment, wildlife and people. We achieve this through planting millions of trees each year, campaigning to protect woods under threat and restoring precious ancient woodland. We are highly respected in our sector, and an influential voice in Government. We own over 1,000 woods across the UK – all of which are free to use. To date, we have planted over 41 million trees. And by 2025 we aim to plant a tree for every person in the UK.