

Public Opinion of Forestry 2009, England

11 June 2009

This publication contains provisional findings for the 2009 Public Opinion of Forestry survey for England. The findings present respondents' views on a range of subjects including the benefits of forestry, the role of forestry in climate change, use of wood fuel and community engagement. There were also a number of questions asked on the characteristics of visits to forest and woodland.

The survey was carried out between the 5th and 10th March 2009 as part of the GfK NOP omnibus survey in which 2,011 respondents were interviewed across the UK. The findings in this report are based on the 1,685 interviews conducted in England.

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Public Awareness and Benefits of Forestry and Woodland

- A total of 77 per cent of respondents had seen or read about UK forests, woods or trees in the 12 months prior to March 2009. The two most prevalent topics quoted were “birds and other animals in woodlands” and “tree planting”, with 48 per cent and 45 per cent of respondents having read or heard about them respectively.
- Around 98 per cent of respondents agreed there was at least one benefit of forestry worth supporting with public money. The benefits “to provide places for wildlife to live” and “to help tackle climate change” were seen as most important.
- When asked why forests and woodland are important to the public, respondents gave “they are important places for wildlife” and “they are places where people can relax and de-stress” as the most important reasons. The same two reasons were given most frequently when the emphasis was altered to ask what was important to respondents personally.

Climate Change

- In response to being asked about the impact woodland can have on climate change, over four-fifths of respondents agreed that “trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood”. Two-thirds agreed that “planting more trees can help us cope with climate change by providing shade and reducing the effects of flooding”.
- Three-quarters of respondents disagreed with the statement “no action is needed: let nature take its course” with regards to the management of climate change. Over 85 per cent of respondents agreed that “a lot more trees should be planted” and that “more information should be provided about the ways in which wood can be used to lessen our impact on the environment.”

Use of Wood Fuel

- Ten per cent of respondents reported using wood as a fuel in their home.
- Of those who reported using wood as a fuel, 42 per cent said that they were regular users but only 12 per cent said that they used wood as their main fuel. The majority of respondents collected their wood a few bags at a time (30 per cent) or gathered it themselves (42 per cent), rather than receiving it by the truckload.
- For those who did not report using wood as a fuel, over half (56 per cent) stated that it was not practical for their property.

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- Only a third of respondents agreed with the statement “Using wood for fuel makes climate change worse because it releases carbon dioxide”.

Visit Characteristics

- Just over three-quarters (77 per cent) of respondents said they had visited forests or woodlands for walks, picnics or other recreation in the last few years. Those who had visited reported the following:
 - They are more likely to have made visits to woodlands in the countryside (84 per cent), rather than in and around towns (61 per cent).
 - That they had visited forests or woodlands managed by the National Trust (34 per cent), the Forestry Commission (26 per cent) and the Woodland Trust (14 per cent). A third said they did not know who owned the forests or woodland they visited.
 - The most common activities undertaken on visits to woodlands or forests were exercise (including walking, running or mountain biking), watching nature and relaxing, with 74 per cent, 55 per cent and 53 per cent undertaking these activities respectively.
 - Around 94 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they would recommend the site they had visited most often to a friend or relative.
 - Trips taken to woodland or forests were more frequent in the summer. In the summer months of 2008, around 34 per cent of those visiting woodlands visited several times a month or several times a week. In the winter months between October 2008 and March 2009, trips were less frequent with only 17 per cent visiting at these rates.
- The main reasons respondents stated for not visiting woodlands or forests was that they are too busy or don't have enough time (38 per cent), that woods are too far away (14 per cent) and that they don't have a car (10 per cent).

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Engagement with Forest Issues

- 9 per cent of respondents said that, in the last 12 months, they had either been involved with a community based woodland group (2%), woodland voluntary work (3%), a tree planting event (2%) or been involved or consulted about plans for managing or using woodland in their area (3%).
- Around four-fifths of respondents who have children under the age of 15 agreed that “woods are good places for children to learn about the outdoors”, while 7 in 10 thought “playing in woods is good for children’s health”. Two-fifths would be unhappy if their children played alone in woods without an adult present, while 8 per cent thought woods are dangerous places that children should avoid.
- From a list of organisations respondents were asked to indicate the top three who have the most influence as a source of advice for forestry for the Government. The Forestry Commission was the most popular option with 23 per cent of the choices made while “environment organisations and trusts involved with wildlife” came second (20 per cent of choices made). Respondents also thought Scientists/ researchers (13 per cent) and landowners and farmers (12 per cent) had influence

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Background

The Forestry Commission has conducted similar biennial surveys of public attitudes to forestry and forestry- related issues since 1995. This report presents provisional findings for England from the 2009 UK Public Opinion of Forestry survey undertaken between 5th and 10th March 2009.

Final detailed results will be published in autumn 2009.

Data Collection

The 2009 survey was undertaken by the market research company Gfk NOP in their face to face UK omnibus survey. The survey was based on a representative sample of around 2,000 adults (aged 16 or over) across the UK selected from within 175 randomly selected sample points. Quotas were set for age, sex and working class within each sampling point and the results were weighted to ensure that the sample was representative of the UK. The findings in this release are for England only and are from a subset of the UK survey.

Comparisons with previous public opinion surveys should be made with caution as different market research companies have undertaken them in the past. In 2007 TNS conducted the survey, using a different survey design and a larger sample size of 4000 respondents, hence direct comparisons between the 2007 and 2009 findings must be taken with care.

Data Tables

Tables presenting the full findings from the survey are available in pdf format along with this release.

Other publications:

Findings from previous public opinion surveys are available from the Statistics pages of the Forestry Commission website: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infid-5zyl9w>

Official Statistics:

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