

Public Opinion of Forestry 2010, Northern Ireland

17 March 2010

This publication contains summary findings for the 2010 Public Opinion of Forestry survey for Northern Ireland. The findings present views on a range of subjects including the benefits of forestry, the role of forestry in climate change, changes to woodland and community engagement with forests and woodland. Also presented are findings from a number of questions asked about visits made to forests and woodlands.

The survey was carried out between 16th and 23rd January 2010 as part of Milward Brown's face to face Ulster omnibus survey in which 1,011 respondents were interviewed across Northern Ireland. Summary findings are presented below.

The survey was commissioned by Forestry Commission (Economics and Statistics) on behalf of the Forest Service, an agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Northern Ireland.



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Public Awareness and Benefits of Forestry

- A total of 62 per cent of respondents had seen or read about Northern Ireland's forests, woodlands or trees in the 12 months prior to January 2010. The most prevalent topics recognised were "tree planting" and "birds and animals in woodlands" with 33 per cent and 29 per cent having seen or heard about them respectively.
- Around 96 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 provide places for recreation" were seen as most important with 72 per cent and 61 per cent stating these benefits.
- When asked to rate services provided by Northern Ireland forestry, the majority thought the sector was good at providing "homes for birds and other animals" and "opportunities for walking" (76 per cent and 68 per cent respectively). A smaller proportion thought the sector was good at "supporting Northern Ireland's economy in rural areas" (41 per cent), "involving local communities" (40 per cent) and "providing Northern Ireland's timber, board and paper needs" (39 per cent).

Climate Change

- In response to being asked about the impact of climate change on Northern Ireland, 38 per cent of respondents said it would have a large impact, 35 per cent said it would have a slight impact and 11% said it would have no impact.
- With regards to opinion on the impact of woodland on climate change, a high proportion agreed with the following:
 - "Trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood" (86 per cent agreed);
 - "Planting more trees can help us cope with climate change by providing shade and reducing the effects of flooding" (72 per cent agreed).
- With regards to the actions that can be taken in the forestry sector in response to climate change, well over three quarters of respondents agreed with:
 - "A lot more trees should be planted" (87 per cent agreed);
 - "More information should be provided about the ways in which wood can be used to lessen our impact on the environment" (86 per cent); and
 - "Different types of trees should be planted that will be more suited to future environments" (79 per cent).

Visiting Woodlands

- If thinking about making a visit to a woodland not previously visited, respondents were most likely to seek information from a friend/relative (44 per cent), from another Forest Service site or website (19 per cent) or from a tourist information centre (17 per cent).
- 43 per cent of respondents reported there were forests or woodland that they could get to without a car or public transport.
- 72 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 were more likely to visit woodlands in the countryside (78 per cent of those who visited) than woodlands in and around towns (62 per cent).
 - Trips to woodland or forests were more frequent in the summer. In the summer of 2009, around 45 per cent of those visiting woodlands, visited several times a week or several times a month. In the winter months between October 2009 and January 2010, trips were less frequent with 17 per cent visiting several times a week or several times a month.
 - Of those who had visited woodland in the last few years, 10 per cent tended to visit alone. The rest tended to visit with:
 - Other adults over 18 years old (77 per cent of all woodland visitors); and/or
 - Children/ young persons over 4 years and under 18 years old (38 per cent); and/or
 - Children of pre-school age i.e. less than 4 years old (11 per cent).
 - Half reported that “forest visits are generally more enjoyable” than visits to other outdoor recreation destinations (such as country parks, gardens and nature reserves). A further 35 per cent said they were “sometimes more enjoyable, sometimes less enjoyable” and 8 per cent said they were “generally less enjoyable”.
 - When offered a list of issues that could potentially reduce the enjoyment of a woodland visit, nearly half of those who had visited said there were none (47 per cent). The most common issues stated were “dog fouling” (35 per cent) and “lack of dog control” (20 per cent).
- The most commonly given reason by non-visitors for not visiting woodlands or forests was that they are “not interested in going” (37 per cent). This was followed by “personal mobility problems (difficulty in walking, unwell etc)” (16 per cent), the “woods are too far away” (16 per cent) and that they “don’t have a car” (15 per cent).

Wood Production

- When asked about wood production, 36 per cent thought Northern Ireland produces “much less wood than it uses” while 16 per cent thought it produces “much more wood than it uses”. Another 16 per cent thought Northern Ireland “produces about the same amount that it uses”.

Changes to Woodland

- Over half (53 per cent) of respondents thought that the total amount of woodland in Northern Ireland has been decreasing over the last 20 years. Only 12 per cent thought the amount had been increasing and a further 12 per cent thought it had stayed about the same.
- When asked about changes to the area of native woodland (e.g. oak and ash) over the last 20 years, 52 per cent thought the amount had decreased. Around 10 per cent thought it had stayed the same and only 7 per cent thought it had increased.
- Just over half of respondents (51 per cent) would like to have “a lot more” woodland in their area of Northern Ireland while 26 per cent would like “a little more”. 18 per cent stated that they would like “neither more nor less” while only 3 per cent said they would like less.
- Of those who said they would like more woodland, 71 per cent said they thought most new woodland should be located “close to towns and villages”. Smaller proportions thought they should be located in “mountain areas” or “less intensively managed farms such as hill pastures” (18% each).

Community Engagement

- When asked, 13 per cent of respondents said they knew that the Forest Service consults on the management of local public forests.
- Only 2 per cent of respondents reported having been consulted on the management of their local public forest in the past. A third (33 per cent) said they would like to be consulted more or at all.

Background

The Forestry Commission has conducted similar surveys of public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues since 1995. A linked survey has now been run four times in Northern Ireland since 2003. This report presents summary findings from the 2010 Northern Ireland Public Opinion of Forestry survey undertaken between 16th and 23rd January 2010.

Data Collection

The 2010 survey was carried out using the Milward Brown Ulster Omnibus Survey. This is a twice monthly face-to-face survey conducted amongst a representative sample of the Northern Ireland population. Each survey consists of a freshly drawn sample of 1,000 adults aged 16+, which is quota controlled to represent the Northern Ireland population in terms of sex, age and social class. 80 electoral wards are drawn using a stratified random sampling method to ensure that the sample is representative in terms of region.

Data Tables

Tables presenting the full findings from the survey are available in pdf format along with this release: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-5zyl9w>

Other Publications

Findings from previous public opinion surveys are available from the statistics pages of the Forestry Commission website:

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-5zyl9w>

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