

Public Opinion of Forestry 2009, Scotland

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This publication contains provisional findings for the 2009 Public Opinion of Forestry survey for Scotland. 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, health 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 the 6th and 12th March 2009 as part of MRUK's Scottish in-home omnibus survey in which 1,040 respondents were interviewed across Scotland. Summary findings are presented below.

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Public Awareness and Benefits of Forestry and Woodland

- When respondents were asked whether they had seen or read about Scottish forests, woods or trees in the 12 months prior to March 2009, 44 per cent said they had. The two topics most commonly identified were “tree planting” and “birds and other animals in woodlands”, with 18 and 16 per cent of respondents having read or heard about them respectively.
- Around 79 per cent of respondents agreed there was at least one benefit of forestry worth supporting with public money, with the benefits “to provide places for wildlife to live” and “to help tackle climate change” seen as most important.

Climate Change

- In response to being asked about the impact Scottish forests and woodlands can have on climate change, around four-fifths of respondents agreed that “trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood”. In addition, approaching two-thirds agreed that “planting more trees can help us cope with climate change by providing shade and reducing the effects of flooding”.
- In response to being asked how Scottish forests and woodlands should be managed in response to the threat of climate change, 71 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement “there is nothing that anyone could do that would make any difference”. Around four-fifths 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

- Five per cent of respondents reported using wood as a fuel in their home.
- Of those who reported using wood as a fuel, 85 per cent said that they were regular users but only 32 per cent said they used wood as their main fuel.
- When asked for reasons for not using wood as a fuel, nearly half of respondents (48 per cent) stated that it was not practical for their property and a further 26 per cent stated they were happy with the existing system they have.

Visit Characteristics and Health

- When asked how often they would like to visit woodland and the outdoors in the next 12 months, 23 per cent of respondents said they would like to visit several times a month or several times a week. A quarter (25 per cent) reported that they do not want to visit in the next 12 months.
- Around 57 per cent of respondents said they had visited forests or woodlands for walks, picnics or other recreation in the last few years. Those that had visited reported the following:
 - They are more likely to have visited woodlands in the countryside (73 per cent), rather than in and around towns (55 per cent).
 - Nearly half (47 per cent) reported that they felt healthier when spending time outdoors in woodlands. They were also asked if they benefited from the following aspects of health when visiting woodlands:
 - Physical health: through increased exercise and physical activity;
 - Mental health: through relaxation, stress relief and improved mood;
 - Social health and wellbeing: through meeting other people / spending time with people and /or talking with family or friends

Over half said they benefited from all three when visiting woodlands.

- Trips taken to woodland were more frequent in the summer. In the summer months of 2008, 39 per cent of those visiting woodland 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 24 per cent visiting at these rates.
- The main reason respondents stated for not visiting woodlands or forests was that they are not interested in going (65 per cent).

Community Engagement

- 7 per cent of respondents said they or their family had been involved, in the last 12 months, in either a school visit (3 per cent), a guided walk or talk (2 per cent), an event at a woodland visitor centre (3 per cent) or another learning event (1 per cent).
- When asked about the level of woodland in their part of Scotland, nearly half of respondents (47 per cent) thought that there should be neither more nor less. Over a third (37 per cent) thought there should be more woodland.
- Of those who thought there should be more woodland in their part of Scotland, the majority (79 per cent) thought they should be created in urban and industrial areas. Creating new woodlands in upland areas was the second most popular choice with 37 per cent agreeing this was a suitable location.
- Of those who thought there should be more woodland, 82 per cent thought that a mix of tree species was an important characteristic of woodland.

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 from the 2009 Scotland Public Opinion of Forestry survey undertaken between 6th and 12th March 2009.

Final detailed results will be published in autumn 2009.

Data Collection

The 2009 survey was undertaken by the market research company MRUK on their face to face Scottish in-home omnibus survey. The survey was based on a representative sample of 1,040 adults across Scotland covering 52 constituencies selected to be representative of geographic location and preference. Quotas set for age, sex and socio-economic group within each sampling point ensured that the sample was representative of Scotland. Data are weighted to match the 2001 census results.

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 Scottish survey, using a different survey design, 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/infd-5zyl9w>

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