



DIRECTOR'S REPORT MARCH 2010

RESPONDING TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Harvesting & Marketing - Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

1. The volume of timber despatched to the end of February equates to 780km³. This buoyant uptake is above budget profile and reflects limited supplies from private sector woodlands and strong demand for biomass. Despite the disruption caused by the severe January weather our current forecast indicates an end of year outturn of 840km³ against a sales plan of 770km³. The additional volume delivered this year will offset the last two years' reduced volume as a result of the economic downturn. We are on profile to meet the five-year production forecast level and our thinning target volume of 180km³.
2. The fifth of our annual electronic timber sales was held in February and most lots sold with excellent demand for the larger clearfell parcels and a modest rise in log and bar prices. I am pleased to report that we will market the full published sales plan, despite difficult trading and weather conditions.

Combating Climate Change: A Role for UK Forests by Professor Read - Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

3. The first of two events we have organised to facilitate the dissemination of this report in Wales took place last week, when Professor Read presented the report to the Minister for Rural Affairs, Assembly Members and invited key officials and stakeholders in Ty Hywel. This will be followed up in May when Forest Research will present the findings to a wider group of Welsh stakeholders.

FUTUREforest – Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

4. The FUTUREforest project, addressing climate change and forestry issues across Europe, has had its second workshop in the "Developing Together" phase in France. Partner regions from across Europe discussed the ways in which policy influences forestry practice and the mechanisms used to ensure climate change adaptation measures are taken up.

Better Woodlands for Wales - Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

5. Demand for Better Woodland for Wales remains strong. To date 798 cases have been approved totalling 29,871ha, with an average scheme size of 37ha. A total of 303 ha new woodland has been created and 80% of this is native woodland. The poor weather has had an effect on approved work with a forecast out turn

National Committee

that is below budget. During 2010/11 we will be looking at encouraging the 30 remaining Forest Plans into BWW so that these schemes can be completed. Our focus will now move to addressing the challenge of creating substantial areas of new woodland as announced by the Minister for Rural Affairs on 16th March 2010.

PLANT! - Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

6. The Plant! project is progressing with 67,392 certificates issued to date. An anniversary event took place in south Wales with the Minister for the Environment Jane Davidson AM. Following the community consultation in Wrexham, Plant! is continuing to work closely with Wrexham County Borough Council and Garw Community Council to progress the design and establishment of woodland areas.

Climate Change Champion – Programme 1: Establishment and silviculture

7. My Woodlands for Learning Team is currently supporting one of WAG's Climate Change Champions. Nathan Sutcliffe (16), who lives in Dolgellau, has a particular interest in trees and is aiming to help plant 100,000. To date he has planted 4,000 whilst spreading the message of the role that trees can play in mitigating climate change. He is planning to write to all schools in Wales to encourage them to plant trees in their grounds. Throughout his time as a Climate Change Champion, Nathan will be keeping a diary that will feature on FC Wales' Woodlands for Learning web pages.

National Forest Estate Wind Farm Programme - Programme 3: Renewable Energy

8. As part of the new programme and governance arrangement to ensure progress through the planning, construction and commissioning phases, Derek Stephen (previously FC Wales Head of Finance) has been appointed as Programme Executive. His first task has been to strengthen the Programme Team to ensure FC Wales has the capacity to meet its contractual obligations whilst Option Holders prepare Planning Applications and resolve planning issues. The pace of the programme is picking up as Option Holders put together the comprehensive submissions required by the newly established Infrastructure Planning Commission.

WOODLANDS FOR PEOPLE

Valleys Partnership – Programme 4: Public involvement and enterprise

9. We are now playing a full and active role in the Valleys Partnership and its objective of regenerating the south Wales valleys through environmental

National Committee

improvement and tourism. My staff sit on the Partnership's core group and four of its sub-groups. We have developed better connections and communication between all the partner organisations to win support for our objectives.

Heads of the Valleys Woodland Development and Improvement Plan – Programme 4: Public involvement and enterprise

10. Work on the development of the woodland plan and spatial targeting methodology is proceeding. Group members include representatives of all the unitary authorities, Countryside Council for Wales, Networked Environment Regions, Coed Cymru, British Trust of Conservation Volunteers and Groundwork. The spatial framework has identified the top thirty existing and potential new woodland sites that have the potential to deliver multiple environmental, social and economic benefits. Completion is expected by April 2010 and a summer launch event planned. The Heads of the Valleys Advisory Group with Commissioner Judith Webb will be visiting Newlands and the National Forest shortly, to learn how similar regional woodland strategies have been taken forward.

Sgwd yr Eira - Programme 5: Recreation and access

11. FC Wales has been working in partnership with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Countryside Council for Wales on proactive management of the Waterfalls area at Sgwd yr Eira. A proposed concordat between FC Wales and an affiliated group representing the activity providers has received a positive response. We have already agreed a Code of Conduct for the education and outward bound centres in the area.

Eryri Outdoor Centre of Excellence - Programme 5: Recreation and access

12. My staff are working collaboratively to secure a total of £1.4m to expand its recreation services in Coed y Brenin Forest Park. The bid for Environment 4 Growth money held by Visit Wales will create an Outdoor Centre of Excellence in southern Snowdonia, improving and linking the geographical region's recreation provision. At a single project level the aim is to improve the economic and environmental sustainability of facilities. The project relies on match funding from several sources including the Nuclear Decommissioning Fund.

Nant yr Arian Visitor Centre - Programme 5: Recreation and access

13. The visitor centre café has been managed under a tenancy for ten years and ends in May. We have made a decision to take the café back in-house. This is to ensure we can retender the business opportunity after making adjustments to the layout and management of the site. We will have better knowledge of the value of the business and will have the time to run a fully compliant and functional procurement process. An additional complication for this decision has been an

application from SSA D wind farm developers for additional access for abnormal loads past the visitor centre.

Heads of the Valleys Urban Trees – Programme 7: Urban woodlands and trees

14. FC Wales is working in the Heads of the Valleys (HoV) area on raising the profile of the multiple benefits of urban trees. My staff organised a meeting of key partners from all the local authorities, Countryside Council for Wales, Environment Agency Wales and HoV, to discuss the potential benefits of urban trees and the barriers to their use. There is a real opportunity with the re-development of thirteen of the areas' town centres in the coming years, to pioneer how we use and promote urban trees in Wales, building on the good work and ideas that have been developed by London's Tree Design and Action Group.

IMPROVING ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Better Woodlands for Wales - Programme 9: Restoration and management of native woodlands and open habitats

15. Since the start of Better Woodlands for Wales (BWW) a total of £1.7 million of grant aid (nearly 40% of total grant spend) has been spent on native and PAWS (plantation on ancient woodland sites) woodland covering a total of nearly 6,000ha. BWW grant aid of £43k is being used to restore nearly 60ha of National Trust woodland adjacent to the Menai Straits in North Wales.

Deer Strategy for Wales – Programme 10: Site-based biodiversity, heritage and landscape

16. My Policy and Programme Development Team have formed a partnership with the Countryside Council for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government and The Deer Initiative to develop A Deer Strategy and Action Plan for Wales. The strategy will provide the coordinated approach required to deliver the vision that Wales benefits from its wild deer population. The Strategy will be developed with stakeholder input and is expected to be published in December 2010.

Wales Red Squirrel Conservation Plan – Programme 10: Site-based biodiversity, heritage and landscape

17. FC Wales continues to engage in the delivery of the Wales Red Squirrel Conservation Plan at both a national and local level. We have commissioned Forest Research to develop a landscape assessment of the mid Wales focal area by April 2010 to guide the targeting of resources for greatest benefit in conserving red squirrel.

National Committee

Wales Biodiversity Partnership – Programme 10: Site-based biodiversity, heritage and landscape

18. The work of the Wales Biodiversity Partnership Ecosystem Groups is progressing with action plans for the strategic guidance and support for work on Biodiversity Action Plan habitats and species in Wales. FC Wales chairs the Woodland Ecosystem Group whose members include Countryside Council for Wales, a range of NGOs, industry representatives and species experts.

BUSINESS MEASURES

Performance and Business Measures

19. The next quarterly report will be given in April. There is no change from the last report to the National Committee.

E-recruitment – Business measure 2: Staff diversity

20. Welsh translations have now been uploaded, tested and are currently being refined. The system is on target to be implemented by the end of March.

Diversity: Equality Impact Assessment - Business measure 3: Staff training needs identified and delivered

21. We will be focussing on further improving the quality and completion of Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA). This will be done by ensuring staff know when an EqIA should be completed; ensuring staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to confidently conduct an assessment; and questioning at board level whether an EqIA has been completed when asked to approve a policy or activity.

Media training – Business measure 3: Staff training needs identified and delivered

22. The management board and other senior managers have now received this training. The next level of management training will be completed by July.

Bilingual Skills Strategy – Business measure 5: Welsh language competence

23. An analysis has been completed of the current level of Welsh language speakers in FCW along with the long-term projected skill levels for all posts. The draft skills strategy will be shared with the management board this month.

Trefor Owen
Director FCW
March 2010