

FOREST RESEARCH IN WALES

Purpose

1. To update the National Committee on developments in The Forest Research in Wales Unit since the previous report in May 2009.

Current status

2. Development of the Forest Research (FR) in Wales Unit at Aberystwyth has continued, with excellent progress in a number of areas. Contacts with Aberystwyth University staff, particularly with those in the Institute of Biological, Environmental and Rural Sciences (IBERS), are leading to firm proposals both for research collaboration and for establishing a FR in Wales laboratory base at the Penglais campus site.
3. Along with Clive Thomas, Hugh Evans and Chris Jones contributed to the recent Ecosystem Services Science Workshop, held on 15-16 July 2009 at the Environment Centre Wales, Bangor. Although many uncertainties remain on both how to define Ecosystem Services and, particularly, to value them, it was clear that they will be key policy drivers for land use and wider environmental issues in the future. Hugh Evans had further discussions with Chris Lea (Head of WAG Technical Services Division) at the Royal Welsh Show and Ecosystem Services was highlighted as a key item for research and evidence delivery. This will be a priority item in the developing FR in Wales Business Plan.
4. There have also been planning meetings for the Research Forest / Natural Laboratory initiative which will involve FR, university sector staff (IBERS and others) and probably Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) at Bangor. More detailed proposals are being developed with Bill Mason, who is also coordinating the potential development of a research forest in Scotland. There are prospects for links to the EU Framework Programme 7 project MOTIVE (Models for Adaptive Forest Management) which will have at least one Welsh case study area and may offer opportunities for helping delivery of *Woodland for Wales* and provision of evidence on Ecosystem Services in particular. It is hoped that sites and potential funding sources for this initiative will be identified during 2009.
5. Following various meetings, more strategic interactions are being developed with Environment Agency Wales (good discussions with Kathryn Monk at various meetings and with Chris Mills and Bob Vaughan at the Royal Welsh). There are also encouraging prospects for interaction with CEH and university staff at Bangor and with staff at Swansea University.

6. Recent visits to Aberystwyth by Heads and staff from the two of the FR Centres (Human & Ecological Sciences; Forestry & Climate Change) provided valuable information exchange and prospects for further work on biodiversity and social sciences. Such visits will be encouraged in the future as part of the evolving FR in Wales Business Plan.

Forest Research in Wales Business Plan

7. James Pendlebury (CEO, FR) visited the FR in Wales Unit in July when valuable discussions were held with a number of stakeholders, including FC Wales staff (Clive Thomas and Trefor Owen in particular) and Professors Chris Thomas and Mike Wilkinson of IBERS. Valuable feedback from Clive Thomas and discussion on the draft FR in Wales Business Plan is now being incorporated into the final version. This will be available for wider scrutiny in the near future. The core items remain as outlined in the previous report, but the document will be shortened and be more focused on current and immediate future issues.

Staffing

8. There have been no new posts identified since the last report. A meeting of all FR staff based in Wales will be held in either October or November and it is hoped that staff from FC Wales and other organisations will be able to attend.

New Funding Streams

9. The new Interreg IVA project (Wales-Ireland) mentioned in the last report is, unfortunately, still in the contract negotiation stage and awaits final details from the two university partners involved in the project. New opportunities on Plant Health, especially on pine wood nematode, under the EU FP7 programme have been identified and Hugh Evans has been asked to coordinate a bid (this follows his coordination of a previous EU FP5 project on pinewood nematode). Hugh Evans has also been successful in an outline bid for a new EU COST Action on plant health and has subsequently coordinated a full proposal. The evaluation on this will be published in early September.

Risks

10. The momentum that is now developing within FR in Wales indicates that the risks of lack of funding and consequent issues in adding new staff to the Unit alluded to previously are manageable.

Recommendations

11. The National Committee is invited to note the progress made since the previous report on the Forest Research in Wales Unit.

Hugh Evans
Head of Forest Research in Wales
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