

Briefing Note

1 Actions From Last Meeting (May 2012)

Kevin May and Steve Hunt to communicate the interim solution for Management Plans to the sector as soon as possible.	Summary provided in recent E-alert. Operations note has been drafted and is due to be loaded onto the internet.
Kevin May to consider a process for approving Woodland Management Plans that are drawn up outside of the grant aiding process and to communicate this to staff and the sector as soon as possible.	Interim. Woodland management plans to be forwarded to area teams for approval. Ongoing. Within scope of management plan working group
Kevin May to draft a paper on the transitional arrangements for grant aid, especially in connection to the need for Woodland Management Plans and to make the sector aware .	Operations note has been drafted and is due to be uploaded onto the internet.
Steve Hunt to draft a paper identifying the current process for selecting cases for inspection based on risk.	In progress. Inspection based on risk will be implemented for pre and post licence inspections.
AFG Members to provide feedback on the current suite of Eforms.	Completed. Limited feedback received.
Steve Hunt to distribute the Eforms presentation and link to test site.	http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infid-8w5h77 Presentation also attached to meeting documentation
Kevin May to arrange for full grant guidance to be issued to the sector prior to the 28 th May release date for WCG, so they are best equipped to advise owners.	Completed
Andrew Smith to discuss with Mark Broadmeadow whether newly created woodlands would be eligible for future carbon funding.	Drafted a statement which communicates, as agreed with applicant, that carbon sequestration is a major objective of the scheme (to be included within the contract), to ensure future eligibility for carbon funding
Kevin May to discuss promotion of the new WCG rates with the FC comms team in order to ensure effective targeting of the grant. This would need to be	Completed

undertaken as soon as possible due to limited timescale available to make the most of the grant available.	
AFG Members to identify attendees for the RDPE stakeholder meeting (June 12 th) and encourage attendance. Interested parties to contact Mike Render.	Completed

2 Finance Update

Budget	Scheme	Grant Type	2009/10 Spend	2010/11 Spend	2011/12 Spend	2012/13 Plan	2013/14 Plan
RDPE	WGS FWS/FWPS		1,689	1,003	386	200	58
			9,279	9,941	8,537	7,816	7,203
	EWGS	WAG	38	57	57	39	104
		WPG	158	449	723	736	860
		WMG	2,005	2,242	1,902	1,748	1,660
		WIG	4,455	7,116	11,989	10,502	9,440
		WRG	-	1,031	1,502	2,365	2,640
		WCG	2,518	4,050	5,355	5,562	6,215
		FWP	1,158	1,621	1,496	1,732	2,520
		Woodfuel	-	-	-	1,000	3,000
EWGS Total		10,332	16,566	23,024	23,684	26,439	
RDPE Total			21,300	27,510	31,947	31,700	33,700
Headroom against Plan at 31/03/12			-	-	-	-	8,701
Total Commitments at 31/03/12 (gross of Fallout)			-	-	-	39,381	24,999
Overall Fallout predicted			-	-	-	20%	20%
Non RDPE	WGS/Old Schemes		1,491	323	122	17	43
	EWGS	WMG	156	231	292	406	757
		Forest School	137	126	34	6	-
		WRG	1,146	472	141	21	-
EWGS Total		1,439	829	467	433	757	
Non RDPE Total			2,930	1,152	589	450	800
Grand Total			24,230	28,662	32,536	32,151	34,500

3 Felling of larch species during the Winter

Area staff were asked during the last weeks of September to let owners and agents know that we would re-introduce a moratorium on the felling of larch during the coming winter. A revised [Operations Note 23](#) was issued on the 10th October, with immediate effect. Key points within the guidance are:

- There has been no change to the zone boundaries, which remain the same as last year. There were some isolated outbreaks of *Phytophthora* recorded outside of zone 1 in 2012, but the majority of these were associated with previously infected rhododendron sites. They were not therefore regarded as new infections and so it was decided that they did not, at this stage, warrant a re-mapping of the zone boundaries.
- The restocking of larch had previously been identified for review during the summer of 2012. Based on the new infections of larch in zone 2 it was decided that larch are clearly showing susceptibility to the disease in this climatic zone and therefore it was agreed within the I&R team that we should cease funding the planting of larch in this zone, extending the existing ban in zone 1. Agreement holders with approved contracts for planting larch in 2012-13 would be encouraged to plant an alternative species. If they wish to continue to plant larch we would continue to fund for this year only, but any trees succumbing to the disease would not be eligible for consideration under a 'force majeure' claim if they subsequently contracted the disease and had to be destroyed. There will be no funding of larch planting beyond the current season within zone 2. The situation will be reviewed again during June / July 2013.

For information concerning alternative species please see [Operations Note 24](#).

4 NE / FC delivery practice note

We have been working closely with colleagues from Natural England (NE) to agree delivery practice. This aims to identify how we can best work together as organisations, improving the customer experience, and providing field staff with guidance on the most appropriate scheme or combination of schemes for a given applicant. Some of the key elements of the practice note are:

- 1) A much closer working relationship between the two organisations, with earlier liaison, demonstrating joined up working to customers;
- 2) Sharing of 'Higher Level Scheme (HLS) 'pipeline' information to ensure that opportunities for woodland creation and management are not missed;
- 3) Encouraging joint consenting where possible (Felling licence approval and SSSI consent, HLS agreement and Felling licence);
- 4) Identifies the need to ensure that all the appropriate regulatory permissions are in place prior to any work commencing;
- 5) Emphasises the importance of compensatory planting where habitat restoration has taken place on non designated woodland sites (including new NIA areas)
- 6) Identifies the opportunity for joint schemes where appropriate;
- 7) Re-iterates the agreed joined up processing for sites where European Protected Species are an important factor;

- 8) Consolidates formal consultation and public register requirements;
- 9) Strengthens 'appropriate authority' roles of each organisation;
- 10) Confirms that all approved NE HLS schemes under the new RDPE to comply with UKFS;
- 11) Identifies criteria which will assist staff from both organisations in agreeing the most appropriate scheme for any given site.

5 Development and Change update

Defra new CAP Systems

The new CAP Programme is currently being negotiated and likely to commence in 2015. Working with other partners, the team has played an important role over the last quarter as part of the Defra Future Options Programme (FOP). This is an ambitious project seeking to deliver a common system across Defra. The programme is currently specifying requirements and developing the procurement channels and business case required for such a complex programme. It is hoped to gain the necessary approvals to proceed before the end of this calendar year. Along with Defra, RPA, and Natural England we hope to deliver a joined up system that will provide our customers with a much better service and enable us to deliver landscape schemes irrespective of the delivery body involved.

GLOS Development Programme

Development of the GLOS System is scheduled across 4 major releases this year. Release 34 was completed on 19th July with 4 changes including improvements to Inspections selection and to Admin Hub Contacts. An interim release was completed on 20th Sept bringing in further admin hub contact changes and also a function to help agents view attachments. Release 35 went live in October and included 2 significant changes covering split ownership and post approval functionality. It is envisaged that 2 further Releases will be planned for this financial year and preparations are underway to deliver the annual payments in the autumn.

Web Forms

Web Forms represent a new channel for our customers and was a requirement of the Regulations Task Force. An initial set of forms covering Grant Application, Felling Licence Application, Agent Authority and an initial form to support the Woodland Potential programme have been delivered. A soft launch took place in July with guidance and links to the website being provided. Further promotion including an eAlert in October has been provided, and plans are in hand to provide an overview at eBusiness Area workshops over coming months. Enhancements will be made to forms on an iterative basis. This service has the potential to deliver both internal and external web forms across Forest Services.

6 Dual Use

Dual use is when two parties submit claims for different schemes on the same land parcel. In general this is where one party claims Single Payment Scheme (SPS) and another party claims a Rural Development (RD) scheme, e.g. FWPS/ES; often this is in a landlord/tenant situation.

A joint project with the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), Natural England (NE) and the FC has been set up. The European Commission are testing England's assumption that two farmers have the necessary management control to be eligible to apply for different subsidy schemes on the same area of land; neither Wales nor Scotland allow this. Checks are being carried out on a sample of dual use cases this year in order to help demonstrate to the Commission that dual use should continue to be allowed. Cases have now been selected and there are some 35 FC cases to be checked. Letters have now gone out to the individual agreement holders concerned. Initially responses must go to a special team set up in the RPA's scheme management unit in Exeter. They will in turn contact FC National Office if they cannot address the issues. Individual scheme payments due for settlement will be held until the issues are addressed.

For all future cases dual use applicants must ensure that any agreements between individuals clearly state what management responsibilities each party has to demonstrate that they have sufficient management control to qualify for payment. Failure to do so may result in payments being withheld and also the possibility of a penalty being imposed where it is judged that a false declaration has been made.

7 Time to give FC's EIA Opinion.

We have been working to a time schedule of 28 days to process all stand alone EIA requests, or applications for grant or felling licences where FC is required to give its opinion under the EIA (Forestry) Regulations. We can seek an extension to the 28 days if it seems likely that we will not be able to give our opinion within this period. Normally we would only seek to extend this period where we require further information. We have recently received legal advice regarding this and it has been confirmed that the 28 day period should only apply to stand alone requests for our opinion. EIA processing as a result of handling EWGS or felling licence applications is at our own 'motion' and as such the 28 day period in which to give our opinion does not apply. The most appropriate time to give our opinion would appear to be on the completion of the consultation process, when we have all the information that we need to make a decision, available to us. We have issued instructions to area teams to this effect. Overall this is likely to reduce the time that we take to process applications slightly. It will also reduce the number of times that we need to seek an extension due to lack of information.

8 Grant payments

The Title I inspections (Annual Farm Woodland Payments and WMG – not public access) were completed before the 15th October deadline. The claims at this time would then be marked for payment and run through the automated cross checking process. We normally allow a period of some three weeks for area staff to reconcile as many cross check errors as possible before we instigate actual payment. Unfortunately, because of

the Chalara outbreak and the need to survey woodlands, woodland officers have not been able to review schemes that have failed as a result of the cross check process. This meant that there will be a reduction in the number of schemes that could be paid on time. However, we still managed to pay 7,996 separate claims, with an overall value of some £9.581 million. This was made up as follows:

	No of claims	Value (£)
FWPS legacy	4,539	5,152,849
FWS legacy	1,242	1,345,017
EWGS (FWP and WMG)	2,215	3,083,203
Total	7,996	9,581,070

The payment process was run on Wednesday 7th November. WO's and area admin hub teams will be looking to prioritise those cases where there has been a cross check error, in order to ensure that payments are made as soon as possible.