

Grants and Regulations National Email Alert

20 March 2015

Woodland Capital Grants 2015 - Woodland Creation Scoring Form

The Rural Payments Agency announced on [19 March](#) that it is changing the way farmers claim their Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

For customers working with Forestry Commission England, there is no immediate change. Customers must still register on the new Rural Payments Service at www.gov.uk/rural-payments.

There is no change to current plans to open the main Countryside Stewardship application window in July.

Woodland Capital Grants 2015 - Woodland Creation Scoring Form

The woodland creation scoring form has been updated to take account of additional information on the Land Information Search (LIS). Through LIS you can now view:

- separate map layers for high/medium/lower priority areas;
- new layers for 'proximity' to priority habitat;
- further information on landscape scale working, partnerships and defined project areas: Community Forests, Nature Improvement Areas and both Demonstration Test Catchments and Making Space for Water demonstration catchments; and
- new layers for priority species and the woodland bird assemblage.

The flood risk section on the score form has also been updated to clarify which woodland design fits within each priority area. The updated score form is available from gov.uk. If you have already submitted your application we will transfer your information to the new form.

Woodland Creation Grant and Basic Payments Scheme (BPS)

Owners who are claiming BPS on their holding and who are interested in establishing new woodland will still be able to claim BPS on the land being planted under Countryside Stewardship, provided that the area concerned was used to activate SPS (Single Payment Scheme) entitlement in 2008. Maintenance payments will be available for ten years following planting to assist with the cost establishing the trees. BPS will only be available for the duration of the woodland creation agreement.

Woodland Capital Grants 2015 - Webinar

On 31st March at 10.30am-12.00pm there will be a webinar on Countryside Stewardship Woodland Capital Grants 2015. This webinar will provide an overview of the new grant scheme for those who were not able to attend an introductory event in January or February. [Register online for this webinar.](#)

Rural Development Programme (RDP)

Other RDP funding streams launched this month with funding opportunities available for forestry; these include [Countryside Productivity](#) and [Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Funding](#). These schemes are aimed at farmers, foresters and land managers. The Growth Programme also launches this month and along with [LEADER](#), which is opening for applications in summer 2015, aims to help the rural economy. More information is available on [gov.uk](#).

If you would like to receive periodic updates on the Rural Development Programme for England, please [subscribe to the RDPE newsletter](#). This covers the whole of the programme with updates on funding for agriculture as well as forestry.

You can also sign up to receive alerts as soon as information is added to the [CAP reform blog](#), and the [RDPE Network site](#) on GOV.UK.

Tree Felling and Cross Compliance

The 2015 Cross Compliance Handbook covers an extended ban on tree felling during the bird nesting season which now runs from 1st March until 31st August. The extended ban does not apply to woodlands that meet the EU definition of a forest unless the owner:

- is declaring the woodland as 'grazing land' and claiming BPS on it;
- has planted new woodland since 2008 and is claiming BPS as well as Farm Woodland payment (FWP).

The ban does apply to felling individual trees, hedgerow trees or small woods where the owner is in receipt of the Single Payment Scheme or its replacement the Basic Payment Scheme. Felling Licence regulations still apply as normal. Full guidance will be available on the FC web site shortly.

The EU definition of a forest is 0.5ha in size, minimum 20m width, comprised of trees that are (or have the potential to reach) 5m in height and a canopy cover of 20% or more.

Claims and Payments

Operations Note (ON) 29

[ON 29](#) covers the transition to the new Rural Development Programme England and has been fully updated. The note includes key information on claim dates and sets out that claims for 2014/15 must be received by 11.59pm on 31 March 2015. Late claims will not be accepted. For information on changes to claiming annual payments see below. The note also explains the requirement to have a woodland management plan to support 2015/16 claims.

Customer Registration on Rural Payments Service

All customers must now register on the new Rural Payments Service and 85% of farm businesses have successfully registered. This is required for new grant applications and to enable future payments against existing schemes. Agents will also need to register; when they are registered customers can empower them to act on their behalf in the Rural Payments Service. Further details can be found on [www.gov.uk/rural-payments](#). The registration service continues to operate.

Claiming Annual Payments

The process for claiming annual Farm Woodland payments (FWP & FWPS) and Woodland Management Grant is changing. Automated payments are going to be replaced with pre-populated claim forms. These will include a new declaration which will be sent out annually. The forms must be returned before the annual payment can be made. Those in receipt of Farm Woodland Scheme (FWS) payments will not be affected.

The changes will be staged:

1. Agreement holders will receive shortly a letter from the FC setting out the changes and providing a claim form to be signed and returned. The claim form should be returned as soon as possible. We are currently working to a final claim date of 15th May. However, the FC letter will confirm the final claim date in light of any decisions, yet to be made, in response to the European Commission's planned extension to the application deadline to 15th June. Unless or until any change to the final claim date is confirmed, agreement holders are advised to continue to assume that this will be 15th May. Agreement holders must return the necessary documents within the prescribed timescales to avoid possible penalties.
2. In autumn the same agreement holders will be contacted again and sent a pre-populated form to be signed and returned, this will ensure the payment is correct. This will, complete the 2015 claim process.
3. Changes to the EU Regulations will mean that annual payments, which until now have been paid around the first week in November, will, in future, be paid at the beginning of December.
4. In 2016 it is envisaged the annual claim will be a single stage process.

Supporting Documentation for all Future Capital Claims

From 1st April 2015 photographs must be provided with all claims for capital items. This includes EWGS as well as Countryside Stewardship woodland capital grants 2015. In addition receipted invoices for the work must be kept and shown on request, for example during inspection. Further guidance on preparing photographs for submission will be available soon on the FC website.

Payment Transfer

Legacy grants EWGS, FWPS and FWS will continue to be administered by FC. However, work is underway to transfer the payments for these grant types from FC to RPA. It is envisaged the change will happen on a single date in the coming months for all schemes and agreement holders. We will confirm the date in due course.

Some customers have already received a letter asking them to contact RPA where more than one bank account is held against their SBI, or if we have not been able to match their data with existing RPA records. In future only one sterling bank account can be nominated per SBI for all CAP payments. From the date of the change RPA will: (a) make payments, (b) send remittances to the contact associated with the bank account details and (c) manage changes to bank account details. We will give you more detail closer to when this change will take place.