

The new EU funded 2014-2020 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) is open for business.

Boosted by the **£900m Countryside Stewardship** and **£141m Countryside Productivity** schemes, the EU funded RDPE is **good for woods, good for the environment and good for growth.**



Countryside Stewardship will support the forestry sector by:

For more information, visit www.forestry.gov.uk/countrysidestewardship

Countryside Stewardship Update

There is a new update on the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme on GOV.UK available [here](#). The update covers the following:

- The relationship between CS scheme elements with current ES and EWGS agreements.
- The relationship between CS and the Basic Payment Scheme.
- The main elements of the scheme (Mid-tier, Higher-tier and capital grants).
- An update on the application periods in 2015.

The 244 option descriptions have also been published on GOV.UK via the [CS Grants tool](#). This tool is a searchable directory of all the options and capital items. Hint: in the 'Land Use' filter, scroll down to select 'Woodland'.

Woodland Capital Grants 2015 Update

In February, the following Woodland Capital Grants 2015 opened for applications:

- Woodland Creation (further details below).
- Woodland Management Plan.
- Woodland Tree Health Improvement (felling of diseased larch and Rhododendron).
- Woodland Tree Health Restoration (restocking felled areas of diseased ash and larch).

A webinar on these grants was recently hosted by the Forestry Commission (FC) and a recording of this webinar can be accessed on our website at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/BEEH-9T6FF5> (under

'What's of interest' on the right hand side of the web page).

We are currently still using GLOS to issue new grants in 2015. This means we are substituting the old GLOS EWGS Terms and Conditions (T&Cs) for a Word format CS T&Cs. Therefore, please note that we can only issue postal contracts until further notice.

Woodland Creation

Please note that Woodland Creation applications are subject to an application "window". **Reminder:** Applicants must submit woodland creation applications by 30 April 2015 to allow time for a site visit to take place and subsequent changes to proposals to be made (if necessary) ahead of the final deadline of 31 May 2015.

- Applying for Woodland Creation on land subject to an ELS or HLS agreement with Natural England (NE) is possible (see Annex E of the CS update [here](#)).
- You will need to discuss with your local FC and NE contact and make an amendment to remove the parcels where woodland creation will take place. Such an amendment may require a reclaim.

One submission per applicant – further guidance

For CS an applicant can only submit one application for multi-annual options per beneficiary (Single Business Identifier) per year. For applicants that have applied or are considering applying for woodland creation and the subsequent woodland maintenance option WD1, your application (if approved) will be held on file and submitted as one application along with any other multi-annual applications. Thus it will not prejudice any other multi-annual grants you may be considering applying for.

Reminder – claiming annual payments

As mentioned in the last e-alert (20 March 2015) 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. For 15/16 payments, the claim form must be received by the FC by the 15 June 2015 deadline. We urge customers to submit their claims as early as possible.

Agreement holders will shortly receive a letter from the FC setting out these changes and a claim form that needs to be signed and returned.

Claims for Capital Works such as Woodland Creation Grant, Woodland Improvement Grant and Woodland Regeneration Grant can continue to be submitted at any time of the year and will not be affected by this change in regulations.

Clarification on agent authority forms

A new [agent authority form](#) will be required to accompany annual claims for existing schemes. Agreement holders will shortly receive a letter from the FC setting out the changes relating to claiming annual payments. From 1 October 2015 we will require all remaining capital claims for legacy EWGS (Woodland Improvement Grant, Woodland Regeneration Grant, Woodland Creation Grant, and Woodland Planning Grant) to be accompanied by new claim forms, including any instructions for amendments to those schemes.

For CS Woodland Capital Grants 2015, agents can only be granted authority via the new CS [agent authority form](#). Existing agent authority forms held in GLOS will no longer be accepted for new applications with immediate effect, this is because of required changes to the declaration signed by the woodland owner. This is a recent Rural Payments Agency (RPA) requirement and may be contrary to previous messages you have heard on this matter, for example as communicated at the recent series of CS Woodland Capital Grants 2015 events.

The new IT system for CS called 'Rural Payments' (RP) will use 'permissions' in place of separate agent authority forms. At present permissions granted in the RP system only allows agents to manage customers' personal and land details on their behalf, it does **not** apply to management of forestry agreements.

Payments transfer

In our last e-alert, we told you that in the future all forestry grant payments would be made by RPA, and some customers will have received a letter asking them to contact RPA where more than one bank account is held against their SBI.

Up to the point when this payment transfer happens, forestry grant payments will carry on being paid by the FC into bank accounts registered against existing agreements in GLOS, and bank account details for these agreements will still be managed and updated by FC.

We will let you know when we are getting closer to the payments transfer taking place, and we will then explain what this will mean for customers in practice.