

Increasing timber production from small private woodlands in England: the effectiveness of initiatives

This study explored the effectiveness of initiatives delivery interventions that aim to stimulate productive woodland management in England. Whilst it was difficult to evaluate their outcomes the amount of activity generated by woodland initiatives was high, with interventions promoted by them playing an important role in delivery national objectives relating to increasing woodland management for timber production.



'Without the work of these initiatives the delivery of woodland interventions would be much slower'

Background

In response to a recognised problem of under-management of privately owned woodlands, interventions such as regulations and incentives, to promote woodland management for timber production have been on-going for many years. This study reviewed the effectiveness of public/private sector initiatives delivering interventions aimed at furthering the use of small woodlands in England for timber production. It formed part of a wider body of work aimed at building an evidence base to assess where activities could be targeted to achieve better value for stimulating increased economic growth, particularly in rural areas.

Objectives

The study had three objectives: 1) To describe the current interventions and their delivery in England through the mechanism of woodland initiatives; 2) To evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives in stimulating productive forest management; 3) To identify strengths and weaknesses in these initiatives that may better inform future interventions and policy decisions.

Methods

This study researched the impacts of woodland initiatives through the experiences of staff in those initiatives. It had two key stages: 1) Knowledge network combined with snowball sampling to compile a list of initiatives; 2) In-depth interviews and report analysis to compile case studies of a selected sample of those initiatives.

Findings

The amount of activity generated by woodland initiatives aimed at stimulating productive woodland is high and they play an important role in increasing woodland management. Initiatives are innovative fine tuning their work to local needs and are increasingly looking to support the whole of the wood supply chain. Initiatives deliver support by engaging with woodland owners, providing advice on woodland management and on available grant aid, and by providing training. Respondents viewed the most successful outcomes as being to do with process, for example the use of partnership organisations and training events to reach owners, one to one contact to understand individual concerns and motivations, being able to offer business advice alongside practical advice on woodland management, and using local knowledge to facilitate networking between woodland owners and other parts of the supply chain.

Recommendations

The following features should be considered in any new programme of intervention working with woodland owners:

- A clear package of advisory support for woodland owners. Cumbria Woodlands' three-tiered advice package is a template that could be offered nationally.
- Development of staff capacity to offer business advice alongside woodland management advice – as in Woodfuel East.
- Collaboration with private consultants - particularly the model of Ward Forester which has the advantage of economies of scale through grouping owners.
- Training that is suited to the needs of the local forestry sector – as demonstrated by the Oxfordshire Woodland Project.
- Promoting local networking events such as the Weald Woodfair.

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Funding: DEFRA (WC0815) with support from the Forestry Commission.
Reports and Publications: Molteno, S. and Lawrence, A. (2013) Increasing timber production from small private woodlands in England: effectiveness of interventions and initiatives. Forest Research, Farnham.