

Science and Business News November 2005

UK Forest Industries R&D Group formed - and Technology Platform progresses

The development of a European Union Technology Platform for the forest-based industries, coupled with a desire to promote innovation for the UK forest industries, has led to the formation of a new group, the 'UK Forest Industries R&D Group'. The Confederation of Forest Industries, (ConFor), was instrumental in creating this group, which includes Forest Research.

An early action of the group is to represent the UK in finalising a 'Strategic Research Agenda' (SRA), which will inform the European Forest-Based Products Technology Platform. The SRA acknowledges the vital role that the development of innovative products and services can play in the future success of the forest-based sector. "Potential research-based innovations might include: the development of a new breed of 'green chemicals' from wood; trees that are more resistant to the stresses caused by climate change; and wood materials which could be actively used as a stabiliser to control indoor climate," noted Björn Häggglund, chairman of the Technology Platform's high level group. Further information on the Forest-Based Products Technology platform is available from <http://www.forestplatform.org/>

Progressing softwood production forecasts

Forecasting softwood timber availability from the private forestry sector is one of the major priorities of Forest Research's (FR's) Biometrics Division. Justin Gilbert leads the production forecasting work in FR's Surveys & Measurement Group, which involves close co-ordination with the Forestry Commission Operational Support Unit and Biometrics colleagues in Forest Resources Evaluation Group at Alice Holt.

"Since devolution, production forecasting has certainly become more complex," noted Justin. "FR is working with expert groups in each of the countries to ensure we take account of the production impacts of each of the national forestry policies. For example, we have needed to adjust our models so that the impacts of leaving more open space in woodland, restoring Ancient Woodland sites and introducing Continuous Cover Forestry are correctly reflected in the forecasts of timber availability between now and the end of the current century, just as we model the effects of management practices in the private sector."

"All of the production forecasts are currently very much work in progress, but by the middle of 2006, we should be in a strong position to publish information for England, Wales and Scotland, alongside information for Forest Enterprise." Over the slightly longer term, FR is finessing longer term trends in availability, for example to reflect an assessment of timber quality, based on the work on Sitka stem straightness completed by FR's Timber Properties group. Discussions are also underway to incorporate climate change impacts into the model. Hardwood forecasting and updating the woodfuel resource website are also mooted.

Continuous Cover Forestry in China

Bill Mason, Head of FR's Forest Management Division, recently spent two weeks in Liaoning Province in North Eastern China. Bill's visit, funded by Liaoning Province's Forest Administration, formed part of a project to evaluate the introduction of UK Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) technology to the management of Chinese conifer plantations and second-growth forests. The main objective of Bill's visit was to inspect a range of experimental sites in different forest types in Liaoning Province, to consider the potential role of CCF and advise on future research needs.



Foothills in eastern Liaoning, with maize, larch, Korean pine and broadleaved forests managed for silkworm cultivation (the grey/brown area on the central midslope)

Bill's invitation to China arose as a result of Kong Xiangwen's yearlong assignment to FR in 2003-4. Xiangwen, a project leader at the Liaoning Institute of Forest Management Research, was awarded a Chinese Government scholarship for his UK visit, following the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2002 between the FC and the Chinese Ministry of Forests.



Bill Mason's final lecture of the tour, with Xiangwen interpreting

Liaoning Province, with a population of 42 million, has 31.5 percent forest coverage, including some 3 million hectares of high forest. "Despite major ecological and cultural differences, China and Britain share a history of progressive deforestation over millennia, followed by recent attempts to restore forest cover through afforestation programmes," noted Bill. "In both countries, national policies are encouraging diversification of plantation forests and the expansion of native woodlands. The approaches to forest management being proposed in Liaoning are much more similar to Britain than I had anticipated - and our use of CCF is of direct relevance to their plantation management."

During his stay, Bill visited the Institute for Arid Zone Research and the Liaoning Institute of Forest Management Research, both of which are keen to develop UK training options for some of their researchers. The next contact between FR and Liaoning is likely to be in Summer 2006.

Forest Research's chemical analysis highly rated

In a recent evaluation of European chemical analysis laboratories conducted by ICP-Forests, Forest Research's Alice Holt laboratory consistently scored first or second for European ring test, measuring the accuracy of our laboratory analysis of deposition and soil solutions.

Sue Benham, of FR's Environmental and Human Sciences Division, attended the 8th ICP-forests expert panel meeting in Rovaniemi Finland in October. She said "Fifty two laboratories took part in the ring test, so coming out at the top is an excellent achievement. Both the strength of our analysis and the rigorous quality control measures we employ has put us in a strong position where we are now able to offer help and advice to other laboratories within the group."

Europe's forests are increasing, says the most detailed and comprehensive assessment of the world's forests ever undertaken

The area of Europe's forest continues to expand, by about 660,000 ha/year in 2000-2005, as does growing stock, which is increasing by nearly 340 million m³/year, according to the latest global Forest Resource Assessment (FRA) undertaken by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO). This is a co-operative effort, by hundreds of the world's specialists, to provide decision-makers, scientists and public opinion with comparable information on all aspects of forests. This work also helps to monitor a key Millennium Development Goal – that of reversing deforestation. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ENECE) plays a leading role, covering 47 countries, including Russia.

Other top line results for Europe are:

- Total forest area is just over 1 billion hectares, which is 24% of global forest area, and 44% of total land area in Europe.
- Employment in forest management and conservation in Europe is decreasing, and now stands at 761,000 people, compared to just under a million in 1990.

See the full results: <http://www.fao.org/forestry/fra2005>

Black squirrels

In case you missed the recent media attention, information on black squirrels has now been published on FR's internet site. Black squirrels are grey squirrels with high levels of the black pigment melanin in their hair, as explained at: <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-6HTK9B>

Results of Eire's BioForest Project

Jonathan Humphrey, of FR's Ecology Division, gave one of the opening addresses at a recent COFORD conference on the value of forest plantations for biodiversity. The two-day meeting, held in Port Laoish, focused particularly on results of Eire's BioForest project. This substantial, five-year project reaches completion at the end of 2005. Three inter-linked projects have built a picture of biodiversity in a spectrum of

Irish plantation forests and are helping to explain how biodiversity is affected by previous land cover, land use and current management methods.

The project was funded by the Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the National Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD), and FR has played a small role, through Jonathan's work on the Steering Group. FR hopes to be able to take forward further collaborations with University College, Cork and Trinity College, Dublin on this topic. Further details of the BIOFOREST project are available from <http://bioforest.ucc.ie>

Engineered wetland habitat systems

Kirsten Wright will start a PhD study in January, investigating best practice for the design and management of engineered wetland habitat systems on brownfield land. This work is funded by EPSRC under the Sustainable Urban Brownfield Regeneration: Integrated Management Research Consortium. Kirsten will be jointly supervised by FR's Tom Nisbet and Professor Penny Johnes of Reading University.

Plant threats: focus on global pathways

Global pathways for tree pathogens were under the spotlight again at the recent British CPC International Congress, held in Glasgow between 31 October and 2 November. In a well attended session entitled 'Non-indigenous and Invasive Pests, Diseases and Weeds', FR's Joan Webber presented a paper on the challenges of managing Phytophthora species as invasive threats. Jeff Waage (Imperial College), Phil Hume (CEH) and Martin Ward (Defra) also presented papers in this session.

Top marks for Forest Schools!

Richard Murray (New Economics Foundation) and Liz O'Brien (Social Research Group) have completed the participatory evaluation of Forest School in England, fulfilling another milestone of their work for the Forestry Commission on this topic. Twenty-four children were tracked over eight months while attending Forest School once a week or fortnight. The impacts of this regular contact with woodlands were identified as increasing confidence, improved social skills, better motivation and increased knowledge and understanding of the environment. Dissemination of the work was started at the recent Forest Education Initiative Conference held in Swindon in early November. The report is available from:

<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-6HKEMH>

ECE Forest Communicators Network in Bialowieza Forest, Poland

The United Nations ECE Forest Communicators Network aims to improve the ability of the forest and forest products sector to communicate effectively. Xanthe Christophers (Director, Communications) attended a Network conference in October, which presented success stories and lessons learned through Europe and N. America and focused on ways to raise the profile of forestry issues nationally and internationally. A higher profile encourages support (including financial) by policy makers and counters the declining image of the forestry industry across most of the member countries. This poor image means that even countries where forestry is a major economic activity are having problems recruiting the next generation of foresters.

Delegates shared information about raising the awareness of the sector with policy makers by exploiting modern communication tools. The EU Directorate General for Enterprise is focusing on updating the image of forestry and is focusing on education to achieve this. European public opinion surveys on Europeans and their forests can be found on www.mcpfe.org/publications.

Delegates agreed that bad news— such as diseases being out of control - travels easily. More positive news or gradual progress is harder to sell in to the media. Non-specialist newspaper reporters, while generally inquisitive and well educated, are always pressurised and can have a limited understanding of science. It helps then to present information to them in a 'palatable' form.

A lighter example of effective PR is the campaign to reduce littering in Latvian forests. This focused on the litter-dropping "Pigman", a character wearing a costume reminiscent of a seedy superhero. Early days yet, but the campaign seems to have taken off successfully...

Forthcoming Events

Full details of FR's events are available on FR's internet site: www.forestresearch.gov.uk/events

New Publications

Trees and woodlands: nature's health service

Liz O'Brien has recently produced this publication for Forestry Commission England. The foreword has been signed by the Chief Medical Officer for England, Sir Liam Donaldson. The publication outlines the importance of woodlands and woodland activities in helping people to adopt healthier lifestyles. The work will be disseminated at forthcoming health conferences across the country. Each Forest District and Conservancy will receive seventy copies to give out at events and seminars to publicise the 'Active Woods: Naturally Good For You' campaign. The publication is available at:

<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/infd-5zbbg5>

FCIN075 Forest Condition 2004. October 2005. S J Hendry, E J Poole, I Craig, J C Proudfoot.

FCIN076 Habitat use by red and grey squirrels: results of two recent studies and implications for management. October 2005. J Bryce, S Cartmel, C P Quine.

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