

CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT

Purpose

1. To advise Commissioners of developments within the FC's Central Services and the progress made to achieve the key actions and priorities as set out in the Cross Border and Forest Research Corporate Plans 2015 -16.

Cross Border Activities and Corporate Plan Update

Resilience: Climate Change and Ecosystem Services

We will protect our woodland resource and increase its resilience to the impacts of climate change so that our woodlands continue to deliver a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits.

2. There are now over 230 projects registered with the Woodland Carbon Code, of which over half (121) are validated (3rd party check at the outset). The validated projects are predicted to sequester over 2 million tonnes of carbon dioxide over their lifetime (up to 100 years). There seems to be a real market developing – over 60% of this carbon has been sold upfront to around 70 different corporate buyers looking to compensate for their unavoidable emissions, with prices ranging from £7 to £15 per tonne of carbon dioxide. That amounts to around £10 million of private sector investment in Woodland Creation. Registrations and validations have picked up again over the last six months and there are now at least 15 'project developers' who have had projects validated. The Soil Association have recently joined the ranks of validator / verifier of WCC projects, alongside Acoura (previously known as SFQC).

3. Economics for the Environment Consultancy (EFTEC) has carried out an assessment of the social and environmental benefits of the Woodland Carbon Code. The study aims to show how woodland creation projects for carbon sequestration also help to meet wider forest policy objectives. It will also assess the potential for incorporating assessment of these co-benefits into the monitoring and certification procedures under the Code. The study will be published in June 2016.

Standards

We will set the standards for sustainable forest management in the UK, within the framework of international agreements, and promote them domestically and internationally.

4. Work on the light touch review of the *UKFS and Guidelines* is continuing and we have received a number of drafts of the Guideline revisions from the specialist authors together with text from other colleagues. The next step will be to put all this together for consideration by the four-country steering group and external reference group.

5. The last meeting of the EU Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) took place on 11 March and a report was circulated to the country policy leads and Defra. The meeting discussed a general round of issues and updates and the most important topics for the UK were Biomass and renewable energy. The European Commission is undertaking a consultation on bioenergy post-2020 and the Forestry Commission worked with Decc, Defra, and the countries to contribute forestry comments to the final UK response. In addition, the SFC agreed to give its opinion in response to the consultation, and the UK will be providing the first discussion draft for the next SFC meeting in June.

Evidence

We will ensure that there is a robust evidence base available to the forestry authorities across the UK to underpin their policies, decisions and advice.

6. A team led by Prof. Ian Bateman at Exeter University has completed a major review of the economic valuation evidence on the social and environmental benefits of forestry in England, Scotland and Wales. The study has identified gaps in the evidence and priorities for future research, and has examined how natural capital e.g. woodlands generates economic value. The team has also developed a searchable Excel database of economic valuation studies, which will be updated periodically. The report will be published soon as an FC Research Report, but draft copies are available on request.

7. A meeting held on 19 May with industry, policy leads, and Forest Research agreed to the development of a National Tree Improvement Strategy for the UK. This will provide a consistent focus for tree breeding work across the UK, and act as a catalyst for greater industry engagement and funding for this area of work. The strategy will be developed over the summer.

8. The Expert Committee on Forest Science held its spring meeting in Wales. The business meeting discussed approaches to horizon scanning, feedback on the Committee's recent light touch review of the IFOS and Statistics merger with FR, a report on recent work on evaluation of ecosystem services, and the schedule for the next independent review of Forest Research science. During the meeting, the Committee visited Llyn Brianne to look at science around water quality management, and pest and disease issues, as well as a session at the Brechfa Forest Garden to consider research on emerging species. The latter is a topic where additional funds have been provided to take this work forward.

Forest Research Activities and Corporate Plan Update

9. FR has delivered 21 out of its 22 key actions for 2015-16. The remaining key action, to publish a Forestry Commission (FC) Practice Guide on "managing forest operations for soil and water protection", was only partially met because the author was unable to finalise the

comprehensive draft due to unforeseen knowledge exchange demands that arose as a result of the 2015 floods. These included involvement in site visits (e.g. SoS and HRH), briefings, talks and provision of evidence to parliamentary committees.

10. Forest Research and our Observatree citizen science volunteers won the Department for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs (Defra) 2016 Team Award in the Data Pioneer category. This was for work undertaken during the recent oriental chestnut gall wasp outbreak where innovative sourcing and analysis of data were used to drive the formal response to prevent the spread of the pest and protect thousands of trees.

11. FR has now finalised a deal with Bangor University (BU) to relocate its main office in Wales from Aberystwyth to Bangor.

12. Technical derisking and development of an implementation plan to move Forester and Geostore to cloud hosting are progressing well. Much of the funding to effect this change is agreed, and assuming it is progressed and implemented by April 2017, this marks a step change in derisking our exposure to devolving IT provision across the FC. It will also provide a platform from which FR can progress commercial sales/software as a service.

13. 'Open Defra' work is progressing well with thanks to colleagues across FCE and FR. We are on track to deliver short term targets agreed with Defra.

14. Peter Freer-Smith attended the New Generation Plantations (NGP)/IUFRO Task Force (Sustainable Planted Forests for a Greener Future) joint meeting in Brazil in March. The IUFRO Task Force on Sustainable Planted Forests for a Greener Future (which Peter co-chairs) was established in 2015 with a three-year lifespan with three objectives: to strengthen R&D on planted forests; to improve the interface with policy and NGO communities and; to establish a lasting network. These objectives are strongly complementary to those of NGP. NGP (co-ordinated by WWF) are a key partner in the Task Force and it is worth noting that the next annual meeting of the NGP task force is planned to be held in the UK in 2017 and we will supply more information on this when we have it.

FR Science Priority: Protect Our Trees and Forests

15. FR staff are leading the LWEC Phyto-threats project start-up meeting. The event will provide opportunities to meet the project's expert advisory panel and nursery participants and act as a discussion forum for methods and research activities.

16. FR provided training input to a Training School on Pine pitch canker - strategies for management in greenhouses and forests.

17. FR has been asked to be part of the newly convened Phytophthora project programme board which has been set up to agree recommendations that can be put forward to Ministers on future policy for *Phytophthora ramorum* and *P. kernoviae*.

FR Science Priority: Enhance Forest Ecosystem Resilience and Service Provision

18. FR has completed the text on the forestry, greenhouse gas and wildfire inputs to the Natural Environment Chapter of the Climate Change Risk Assessment Evidence Report.

19. ForestYIELD was launched at the Institute of Chartered Foresters annual meeting in April 2016 thanks to the efforts of FR staff. This is a PC-based yield model for forest management in Britain; it will be available as downloadable PDFs (theory book and user manual) and the models themselves at modest cost. The models extend the existing information (FC Booklet 48) to more species and longer rotations. In addition to the new ForestYIELD software, FR has developed a stand-alone research version of the M1 growth and yield model which, in addition to the added functionality described above, offers greater flexibility to specify 'non-standard' thinning regimes. This is the model which underpins the most recently published FC production forecasts.

20. FR staff attended a meeting with Heriot Watt and project partners to discuss initial results from a study of the impact of afforestation on flood flows and sediment losses at Jerah Farm in Ochils. FR also helped guide a site visit there for ICF South Scotland Region to consider the design of the new woodland planting in relation to natural flood management.

21. FR staff attended a consortium meeting for EU project DIABOLO, in Copenhagen – the project is trying to harmonise NFI data across Europe, including analysis of existing social data associated with NFIs.

FR Science Priority: Ensure Sustainable Management and Adaptation of our Forests to Climate Change

22. FR is the co-chair of the working group producing the LWEC Climate Change Impact Report Card WG on Agriculture and Forestry and the underlying 10 Technical Papers.

23. FR organised a two-day PROFOUND COST (European Co-operation in Science and Technology) meeting focusing on understanding of uncertainty in climate change forest modelling and decision-making studies.

FR Science Priority: Effect Knowledge Exchange

24. An early look at NFI second cycle data has not raised any substantive issues. Therefore, development and reporting of 'business as usual' forecasts (2018) incorporating direct measures of change remains viable.

25. FR has been working hard on improving their digital presence (Twitter, video abstracts, training videos) to promote products and services, adding tangible benefit to projects such as the launch of the digital archive. Audience and reach for our Twitter account have increased and the click-through rate of top stories is up by 40% since last year.

26. The new version of FR's decision support tools portal has served >6000 Ecological Site Classification site analyses and >6000 spatial data requests since September 2015.

27. FR staff held a research update on Tree Breeding and Forest Products at Newbattle Abbey which was attended by over 50 people.

28. FR staff attended the New Forest design plan stakeholder meeting, helping to provide Climate Change evidence and management options for supporting the design plan of the New Forest Inclosures, which has a 200 year strategic focus. Thirty five stakeholder groups attended and local FCE staff were delighted with the support FR offered.

29. At the end of April FR supported a private visit to Westonbirt Arboretum by HRH Prince Charles to, amongst other things, look at our Westonbirt 32 species trial. Subsequently, FR staff visited the Forest Research Institute of Malawi with Botanic Gardens Conservation International to advise on conservation of Mulanje cedar (*Widdringtonia whytei*), a critically endangered conifer that has excellent timber. Some further work will be funded by a recently awarded Darwin Initiative project from DFID.

30. FR attended the first meeting of Scottish Natural Heritage Deer Science Group – the group is to quality-assure the evidence base and ensuing scientific and technical advice presented to Ministers (due this Autumn) with respect to deer management, public benefits and natural heritage.

Ways of Working

31. The Central Services Change Programme (CSCP) coordinates and updates the composite timeline for establishing new Corporate Service arrangements for the Business Strategy Group (BSG) and the FC Executive Board. An update on progress is as follows:

- The following services have now been established in the countries/FR:
 - Business Sustainability
 - HR Services
 - Equality & Diversity
 - Procurement
- The project to refresh FR has now completed and the IFOS, publications and statistics services have now transferred from CFS to FR.
- Business cases for the following services are out for consultation and are expected to transition to the countries/FR during 2016:
 - Learning and Development
 - Safety, Health and Environment
 - Internal Audit
 - Forest Machine Operator Certification Centre
- The BSG has established working groups to assist the countries and FR to determine their future requirements for IT and finance services. There is currently no clear timescale for the full business cases for these areas to come to the BSG but progress is expected to continue over the summer.

32. The BSG sub-group looking at the cross-border functions that remain with CFS is making progress. The Group includes representatives from Welsh Government and DARDNI and has developed a working timeline which could see the bulk of these functions move to

the countries by 31 March 2017. However many of the functions (such as plant health and the UKFS) are either complex or have direct implications for the wider sector and careful consideration is required before any changes can be recommended.

33. We are still in active discussion with NRW to conclude their liability for additional costs. Most aspects are agreed in principle, but there remains an issue around severance and Silvan House costs. NRW preference is to agree a one-off compensation payment that would be paid to the FC this FY. The current Shared Service Cooperation Agreement with NRW will come to an end on 31 March 2017.

Shared Services

Safety, Health & Environment

34. SH&E have been working with Countries on a number of chainsaw accidents and have published two 'Learning from Experience' papers and a Case Study. This work has also been shared with FISA.

Lone Working

35. The Contract with Peoplesafe is now up and running with the primary system working as it should and users finding it very easy to use and user friendly. The second part of the system utilises a Spot Tracker device which will give a GPS location to help locate a user in the event of incident. The Spot Tracker is not intended to be a standalone device and must be used in conjunction with the Peoplesafe system.

Motor Sport

36. As a result of a fatal accident in 2014, the Scottish Government set up a Motorsport Event Safety review which resulted in 29 Recommendations. The Motor Sports Association (MSA) has worked on their Rally Future campaign to promote and further enhance safety, particularly for spectators.

37. The FC has a master agreement with MSA. We also issued Permissions to Local Clubs giving them exclusive use of the forest for events secured by MSA licence. SH&E have been working with staff who manage the Agreement and Permissions to make them aware of the work that MSA have been doing, to improve their understanding of the relationships, and how FC should manage these relationships.

Jean Lindsay
Director Central Services
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