

DIRECTOR 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 2014 -15.

Cross Border Activities and Corporate Plan Update

Resilience: Forest Biosecurity

We will protect our woodland resource and increase its resilience to pests and diseases so that our woodland continues to deliver a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits.

2. Work to address the Tree Heath and Plant Biosecurity taskforce recommendations is continuing with new biosecurity work now underway using additional resources committed by Defra in 2014 and 2015.

3. Input to developing the scope for a second phase of the Defra plant health risk register is now complete and a new look register with additional functionality has been published. Outputs on behalf of Defra's Plant Health Risk Group continue to be a priority and Forest Research is continuing to work on Pest Risk Assessments. The Risk Group has agreed to continue to deliver this function internally between Fera and FR. Input to the contingency planning exercise is continuing and four draft pest-specific contingency plans will be submitted to the Risk Group.

4. In response to the survey of firewood importers, Defra Ministers have approved the introduction of an import notification scheme for firewood. A Regulatory Triage Assessment will determine the impact on industry and a consultation is being prepared to launch later in the year. Inspectors are continuing to visit firewood importers to raise awareness about the regulatory requirements.

5. The import checks on wood packaging associated with stone imports from China have continued to show a high rate of compliance with International Standards for Phytosanitary Measures (ISPM15). The cross-border liaison officer is now established and has arranged an enhanced protected zone monitoring programme. Additional port inspection work is underway and has resulted in over 100 interceptions of non-compliant consignments. Notable new cases include problems with residual bark on sawn oak

consignments from the USA and consignment of bark strips used to screen fencing from China.

6. The investigation into non-compliant wood packaging, connected with steel shipments from Turkey into Grangemouth, is now complete. All five companies involved complied fully with statutory plant health notices. FCS will be writing to the companies concerned to express appreciation on behalf of Scottish Ministers. Additional protected zone plots have been set up at the ports and inland at depots and pylon sites for the purpose of monitoring. To date these have not revealed the presence of any unwanted bark beetles.

7. Forest Research has concluded its trials with industry to evaluate a composting protocol for heat treatment of *P. ramorum* infected bark. A meeting is scheduled with industry to review the efficacy of the process and to allow treated material to enter the domestic horticultural market. The findings from the trials will be shared with the stakeholder groups in each Country.

8. Work is underway to introduce strengthened legislation in relation to tree pests. A new Statutory Instrument has been drafted with a commencement date of 1 October. The SI will implement EU protected zone legislation which will replace national emergency legislation in regard to plane, sweet chestnut and oak (OPM). New measures will be introduced in regard to birch and ash from third countries to address the risk from bronze birch borer and emerald ash borer. Importers have been alerted to the changes in legislation and guidance has been updated.

9. We have provided input to the GO-Science/Defra report on 'Animal and Plant Health in the UK: An Assessment of Future Science Capability', which should be published before the year end.

10. A new Great Britain and Northern Ireland Tree Health Advisory Group has been established to provide a perspective on tree health issues across the UK, and to discuss common approaches to managing new pest and disease threats. The first meeting of the new group will be on 12 December in Birmingham. The FC is represented on this group by the Head of the Specialist Advisors and Head of Plant Health.

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.

11. CFS will participate in the Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystems and their Services (MAES) in the EU forest environment workshop on 2 December. The workshop will discuss how the MAES process in the forest domain could be supported and strengthened at EU and national level. Synergies with related EU processes will also be discussed.

12. To celebrate its twenty year anniversary, the European Forest Genetic Resources Programme (EUFORGEN) has published a short film on the importance of forest genetics

and the success of EUFORGEN over that time. The FC and FR provided locations for the film which can be found [here](#).

13. We are working on the verification process for the Woodland Carbon Code, checking projects to see how they are doing and checking the rate of growth of trees. We will pilot this process in 2015 and this will allow projects to turn their 'promise to deliver' carbon units into 'real, verified' carbon units which should be more attractive to corporate buyers. The first verifications are due in 2016.

14. By 30 Sept 2014, 79 projects were validated (the initial check at planting time) and we now have over 14 project developers with at least one project validated. There are also around 40 corporate buyers so far. We are currently developing case studies from both the project developer/landowner perspective as well as from the corporate buyer perspective to help us sell the concept more widely amongst potentially interested landowners and buyers.

Standards

We will set the standards for sustainable forest management in the UK and promote it domestically and internationally.

15. The current mandate of the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) will cease in May 2015. This has been the overarching international arrangement for forests and forestry and a lengthy consultants' report was prepared on options to succeed it. We are currently working with Defra on possible UK lines to put forward as part of a common EU response.

16. The European Commission published the new EU Forest Strategy in September 2013. Ministers adopted it by way of Council Conclusions on 19 May 2014. The relevant documents can be found [here](#). We are now working with other member states and the European Commission in the Standing Forestry Committee to agree an implementation plan; we made a comprehensive submission to this end on behalf of the UK in October.

17. We have continued to engage with DECC, FCE, and FCS on issues around the sustainability criteria for biomass for both energy (The Renewables Order) and heat (the Renewable Heat Incentive). This is proving a protracted process and our principal aim is to ensure that the requirements do not adversely affect forest management and fully recognise our embedded approach through the UKFS.

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.

18. Following a series of workshops across GB and in NI, research proposals are now being developed for 2015 - 2019. The new research programmes will reflect country and stakeholder requirements, and will be highly interdisciplinary in nature. The whole research programme to deliver the Science and Innovation Strategy for Forestry in Great Britain will be delivered by FR, IFOS and through external providers.

19. A third call for research proposals under the Living with Environmental Change Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity Initiative has recently been launched. This third call specifically invites proposals for research that will inform policy and practice to address either threats to the health of oak, or threats to trees from Phytophthora.

20. Forestry Statistics 2014 and Forestry Facts & Figures 2014, providing the latest statistics on a range of forestry-related topics, were published on 25 September.

21. The quarterly statistical release Woodland Carbon Code Statistics (covering data to September 2014) was released on 9 October.

22. A report presenting the results from last winter's FC Statistics User Engagement Survey is now available [here](#). An implementation plan setting out how we plan to address the issues raised by the survey will be produced shortly.

23. Recently published items:

- NFI Report – Carbon in live woodland trees in Britain
- NFI Report – Biomass in live woodland trees in Britain
- Practice Guide – Building wildfire resilience into forest management planning
- Research Note – Horse chestnut bleeding canker
- Field Guide (app) – *Forest seedlings*
- Practice Guide – *Managing forests in acid sensitive water catchments*
- Practice Guide – *Design techniques for forest management planning*
- Plant Health Guide – *Importing wood, wood products and bark*
- Forestry Statistics – *Forestry Facts & Figures 2014*
- Plant Health Pest Alert – *Phytophthora austrocedrae*

Ways of Working

24. The Cross-Border Functions Project presented an interim report to the WPEP Board in October (see separate paper).

25. The Roadmap for the devolution of Shared Services was officially launched on 10 November through a Central Services staff meeting. This was supplemented with divisional meetings to discuss in more detail what it would mean for each team. Feedback has been positive and attention is now turning to making sure the work of the roadmap is driven at pace.

26. The work to transfer NRW staff over to NRW PCs and phones is progressing well and is on track to complete by early 2015; this will allow IS to begin the removal of the FC network equipment which NRW would like to have completed by April 2016. It would be fair to say that NRW are finding the scale of the work challenging given their limited resources. The pace of work naturally creates risks within the project and we are therefore being rigorous in maintaining our internal control processes to ensure that risks do not become transferred to FC and that there is a clear audit trail of decisions and actions. As advised previously, NRW continue to require access to key Finance systems notably SRP, E-

sales, Wildlife Management and GLOS. Interfaces between these systems and the NRW ledger are under development. A number of other smaller transitional services will come to an end in March 2015 including NRW use of the FC brand, internet and intranet services, mechanical engineering services, and a reduction in the scope of our Internal Audit service.

Governance

27. A draft Order to abolish the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee has been laid before parliament under section 11(1) of the Public Bodies Act 2011. The Order abolishes the Home Grown Timber Advisory Committee and removes the requirement under section 37(1) of the Forestry Act 1967 (c.10) for the Forestry Commissioners to continue to maintain that Committee. It also removes the requirement for the Forestry Commissioners to consult with that Committee before making regulations under section 32 of that Act.

Forest Research Activities and Corporate Plan Update

28. In order to improve FR's corporate governance and strategic capacity Shireen Chambers FICFor has been offered a nine month trial as a non-executive director of FR starting on 1 November 2014. Shireen is probably known to many of you through her role on the Independent Panel on Forestry, as a former trustee of the Macaulay Institute or as the Executive Director of the Institute of Chartered Foresters. This is a new role for the agency and this trial will allow us to explore how it will work in practice and inform the decision about whether to create the role substantively. If we decide to do so, at that point we will recruit through open and fair competition.

29. Chris Quine, Head of Centre for Ecosystems Society and Biosecurity, has been awarded an Honorary Professorship by the University of Stirling.

Corporate Plan Priority 1: Protect Our Trees and Forests

30. Scientists have been actively involved in survey of populations and monitoring of control activities. FR scientists will complete the OPM tree survey work in Royal Parks in November. FR Scientists contributed to 'Oak Processionary Moth, lessons learnt workshop' in October. The aim of this workshop was to review the 2014 survey and control programme underway in London and Berkshire, confirm and reflect on what has been achieved this season and discuss options for management of OPM 2015 onwards. Useful feedback was received from a wide variety of stakeholders.

31. Presentation and discussion on OPM research was also provided at Butterfly Conservation's headquarters at East Lulworth on 16 September.

32. Widespread survey and lab analysis has confirmed presence of the disease in Scots pine in England, and in a number of Caledonian pinewoods. Results have been communicated to FC, and incorporated in presentations on Tree Health days, and in meetings of pinewood managers. A Defra funded project on social and economic barriers

to Dothistroma disease management is close to completion, and a successful Communications workshop was held on 28 October, attracting approximately 30 stakeholders from across GB.

33. FR scientists recently secured funding from FCE and FCS for projects which will use Illumina barcoding (molecular analyses) to detect all *Phytophthora* spp. in soil samples collected from forest and woodland sites in Scotland (mainly) and England. A new NERC-CASE funded PhD student has started at NRS, working on the evolutionary epidemiology of *Phytophthora austrocedrae* and at the same time we continue to clarify the lineages involved in the widespread death of larch in western Britain.

34. We received feedback from LIFE+, the project funders, that they have accepted the proposed changes to the Observatree project resulting from a thorough review of commitments and partner requirements. Training events across the country have been held for volunteer teams. The planning meeting for Year 2 of the Observatree project has taken place and we are making good progress on deciding exactly what the Observatree surveyor volunteers will be doing. A formal launch is planned for spring 2015. Dissemination has deliberately been low key to date but has included short presentations to the FC EB on 9 September and at the APF on 18 September.

Corporate Plan Priority 2: Enhance Forest Ecosystem Resilience and Service Provision

35. FR has now published information to assist the forestry sector in promoting the recovery of acidified waters in forested catchments in the form of an FC Practice Guide on Managing forests in acid sensitive water catchments [here](#).

36. FR has also produced substantial briefings for FCE on forestry and flooding and as part of the Slowing the Flow Project in Pickering, has undertaken a topographical survey of timber floodplain bunds at Pickering to model potential storage during a range of flood events. FR is also developing a hydrological rainfall/runoff model (WinTR55 method) of Pickering Beck in order to model effect of woodland planting and other land use change/natural flood management measures.

37. FR gave a presentation on 'Woodlands for water – Planting trees to reduce flood risk and improve water quality' to the Chartered Institution of Water and Environmental Management's Natural Flood Management Conference in London on 10 September. A presentation on 'Woodlands for Water – Opportunity Mapping' was also given to Shropshire Wildlife Trust workshop on natural flood management in Colemere on 9 October.

38. A Research Note on the application of nudges to woodland creation for climate change and flood mitigation is in the publications process.

39. FR staff have been busy with the [Woodland Creation & Ecological Networks](#) (WrEN project) co-ordinating fieldwork of field assistants and volunteers in England around the National Forest area. WrEN is a partnership project between University of Stirling, FR, Natural England, Scottish Natural Heritage and the National Forest.

Corporate Plan Priority 3: Ensure our Forests adapt to Climate Change and deliver wider environmental resilience

40. FEE and FES have agreed to fund operational field trials of ~ 19 possible alternative species in England and Wales and work is now underway to select appropriate sites and agree future management plans.

41. It's been an exciting couple of months for iTree in the UK. The Group won two survey contracts and have already let tenders for the field work. Plus, through liaison with CFS, the Countries and i-Tree USA FR now have verbal commitment to develop iTree Eco UK.

Corporate Plan Priority 4: Effect Knowledge Exchange

42. James Pendlebury co-chaired the European Forest Institute's annual conference in Bilbao held from 10 -12 September and argued for more transparency in their overall management and retention of the EFI Atlantic office which has helped co-ordinate a number of our successful EU project bids.

43. A number of our scientists exchanged results and made a substantial contribution to the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) Phytophthora Working Party Conference in Argentina on 8 - 11 November.

44. The Expert Committee on Forest Science visited Alice Holt on 16 - 17 September. This Committee is highly supportive of FR and the programme for their visit went very well. The Expert Committee's business meeting covered criteria for the external review of FR due in 2017/18; analysis of UK spend on forest science; the Committee's mentoring role of FR staff; the CFS Research Plan Brief and; the GB Cross-border Services Corporate Plan. The next meeting is planned for 13 - 14 April 2015 at the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park (David Marshall Lodge) and we are likely to present information on the adaptation work we have going on there.

45. Congratulations are due to FR staff for their paper *Civil society and flood resilience: characterising flood risk volunteers and understanding motivations and benefits* which was chosen as the winner of the Campbell Adamson prize, the award for the best paper submitted to the 2014 Voluntary Sector and Volunteering Research Conference. This paper is based on work undertaken on a contract for the Environment Agency.

46. Six FR staff attended the IUFRO World Congress in Salt Lake City from 5 - 11 October to present invited papers and/or chair sessions. The event was in part co-hosted by the Society of American Foresters (SAF) and the Canadian Institute of Forestry (CIF). The congress was attended by about 2,500 delegates plus an estimated 1,000 professionals involved in the SAF/CIF event. There were approx. 12 delegates from Britain, including those from FR, and also from Aberdeen University, University of Highlands & Islands, and the new Birmingham Institute of Forestry Research (BIFoR).

47. FR Executive Board attended the unveiling of the FCE/Jerwood 'open forest' Cosmos sculpture in Alice Holt forest on 22 October based on a year's worth of data from the FR flux tower in the Alice Holt Research Forest

48. As at 29 October 2014, FR has five PhD students based at Alice Holt, five PhD students based at NRS and eight PhD students based at Universities (co-supervised by FR staff).

Corporate Plan Priority 5: Grow Our Business

49. FR have been awarded a contract from the Energy Technologies Institute to develop an understanding of the variation in biomass feedstocks that have the potential to be used at medium and large scale for heat and/or power generation. The contract, worth £375k, will be delivered by a partnership of FR and EON over this and next financial year. It will require co-ordinated efforts from across FR with Technical Services Unit having a major role in collecting, sampling, and dispatching ~700 samples from across the country to EON for analysis.

Shared Services Update

Human Resources

Pay 2014-15

50. The pay negotiations with the Unions concluded in November with the rejection of the FC's pay offer. The pay award was implemented by administrative action and will be implemented in the December payroll.

Holiday Pay & Overtime

51. The FC is reviewing the implications of the November 2014 Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) decision that voluntary overtime should be included in holiday pay. Cabinet Office has advised all Departments that there will be a cross-civil service wide approach to this issue. HR is working closely with Treasury Solicitors on the management of grievances that are being received by staff who believe they are affected by the EAT decision.

2015 Staff Survey

52. Learning and Development are about to launch the procurement of the 2015 Staff Survey. The survey itself is planned to run during September and the full report will be presented to the Executive Board in December 2015.

CS Expert Services

53. Plans are being drawn up to enrol the Forestry Commission into Civil Service Expert Services from April 2015. The service will provide support on HR policy, a new e-

recruitment system and access to Civil Service Learning. Joining the service is conditional on being cost neutral to the business.

Health and Safety

54. FE Scotland was asked to contribute views to the Scottish Government Rally Safety Review. The review was set up following the death of three spectators at the Jim Clark road rally in May 2014. The Review Group issued preliminary findings in October and the final report is due by the end of the year.

55. The Forestry Commission has a Master Agreement with the Motor Sport Association (MSA.) Rallies on the Public Forest Estate fall under this Agreement. Clubs also get specific Permission from the Forest District. The Health and Safety team has reminded all FC staff involved in managing rallies of the importance of following the guidance set out in our policy. The team will review the Master Agreement with MSA when the Scottish Government Review Panel publishes their final report.

Finance

National Resources Wales

56. NRW has been successfully moved off our main financial systems other than for some aspects of our Timber business systems. We are now in the process of designing the requirements of the enduring services we will provide from 1 March 2015 when NRW will be completely removed from FC financial systems. The enduring services will mainly involve continued use by NRW of commercial systems for timber and wildlife management.

Procurement Services update

57. Work has commenced on the revision of FC guidance following the introduction of new EU directives that have a considerable impact on procurement in both England and Scotland. The initial work will cover Central Services although the revised guidance can also be used in England. The changes will not affect Scotland until later in 2015.

58. A formal Project Board has been set up to manage the potential devolution of procurement from FAS to the Countries. This will require an analysis of current spend and contractual arrangements and arrangements are in hand to take this forward in Central Services, England and Scotland.

Jean Lindsay
Director Central Services
December 2014