

EWGS and RDPE Transition to the Countryside Stewardship Scheme

1 Purpose

This operations note explains how Forestry Commission England intends to handle English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) business during the transition from the current programme (2007-2013) to the new Countryside Stewardship (CS) programme (2014-2020).

2 Context

The following arrangements take into account the rules of the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) from 1st January 2016.

The following arrangements also take into account and are constantly subject to budget availability.

3 Key Dates - EWGS

- EWGS is now closed for any new applications.
- **31 March 2015:** All current EWGS grant applications must be approved (at APR status) by 31 March 2015. To do this you must return your signed contract in plenty of time. We cannot be held responsible for postal delays (if returning by post) or IT/phone failures if signing electronically.
- **1 April 2015:** All first claims for any EWGS scheme must be supported by an approved management plan. This does not apply for any EWGS plant health WIG or plant health WRG schemes.
- **30 September 2015:**
 - Woodfuel WIG – all claims must be received by this date.
 - Farm Woodland Premium – all Woodland Creation Grant claims must be received by this date if you wish to claim the subsequent FWP payments.
 - WIG non-fundable items must be claimed by this date.
- **1 January 2016:** Any claim for an existing EWGS scheme must be supported by an approved management plan.

4 EWGS Grant Types

Woodland Management Grant (WMG)

Now closed to new business.

FC approved Management Plans will be required to support first claims from the 1st April 2015 and any claim from the 1st January 2016.

Woodland Improvement Grants (WIGs)

Now closed to new business.

Work in Progress

The only work in progress now allowed is to change the status of any DCT contracts to APR by 31st March 2015 providing a signed contract has been returned in time.

Amendments to general WIGs

- The only amendments allowed are to reduce the value of a WIG e.g. if you want to reduce the length of a fence already in your agreement.

Amendments to Woodfuel WIGs

- The only amendments allowed are to reduce the value of a WWIG and/or to move the claim year from 14/15 in to 15/16. **Please note all Woodfuel WIGs must be claimed by 30th September 2015.**

Approved WIGs with Non-Fundable Items payable in 15/16 and beyond

- We are aware that there are a number of WIGs that have been approved before the criteria for a non-fundable item under the new programme had been decided. If your WIG contains one or more of these items (see Appendix 1) and they are likely to be claimed **after** 30 September 2015 then we will be writing to you shortly in order to outline what options will be available.

FC approved Management Plans will be required to support first claims from 1st April 2015 and any claim from 1st January 2016. Note this does not apply to any tree health related WIGs (or tree health related WRG).

Woodland Regeneration Grant (WRG)

Now closed to new business.

Work in Progress

The only work in progress now allowed is to change the status of any draft contracts (DCT status) to approved (APR status) by 31st March 2015 providing a signed contract has been returned in time.

Amendments:

- We cannot amend any WRG contracts where
 - the amount of grant increases
 - where there is a change to the contract work details (species planted or location) or
 - where there is a change to the claim year.
- Amendments to restocking of tree health affected areas will result in those requests being treated as new Tree Health Woodland Restoration applications. Support for restocking in the new Countryside Stewardship scheme is limited to restoring those areas where diseased larch or ash has been felled. More information on Woodland Tree Health within Countryside Stewardship can be found in the guidance on woodland grants, at: <http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-woodland-capital-grants-2015>

FC approved Management Plans will be required to support first claims from the 1st April 2015 and any claim from the 1st January 2016. Note: This does not apply to any tree health related WRG (or tree health related WIGs).

Woodland Creation Grant (WCG) and Farm Woodland Payments (FWP)

WCG

- Now closed to new business;
- **It is important that applicants notify us promptly if they intend to abandon, or wish to amend the claim year of, approved schemes.** This will allow us to make maximum use of the funds available;
- On 17 February we opened for applications for Countryside Stewardship capital grants including woodland creation. More details can be found in the guidance on woodland grants, at: <http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-woodland-capital-grants-2015>

Application forms, maps and woodland creation plans must be sent to the Forestry Commission by 30 April 2015. This is the latest possible date, as the Forestry Commission needs time to visit the site and, if necessary, suggest changes to the application.

Final applications must be submitted by 31 May 2015. The Forestry Commission will let applicants know whether or not they've been successful from July 2015 onwards

FWP

Applicants are reminded that in order to receive farm woodland payments we need to receive your claim for 1st instalment of woodland creation grant by 30 September 2015.

Woodland Planning Grant (WPG)

- Now closed to new business;
- On 17 February we opened for applications for Countryside Stewardship capital grants including support for woodland management plans. More details can be found in the guidance on woodland grants, at: <http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-woodland-capital-grants-2015>

Management Plan Requirement

- All funding for existing woodlands under the next Rural Development Programme for England will be dependent on having in place a Forestry Commission approved management plan;
- FC approved management plans will be required to support **first** claims for WMG, WRG and WIG after 1 April 2015;
- FC approved management plans will be required to support **any** claims for WMG, WRG and WIG from 1 January 2016.

The only exception to this is for tree health related WIGs (*Phytophthora* or *Chalara* felling) or WRG (after larch felling under an SPHN). Under these two scenarios no management plan is required.

2013-14 year claims

- We are now closed for any 13/14 claims.

2014-15 year claims

- We **must** receive your claim by the 31 March 2015. We can no longer accept late claims.
- Email claims: we will accept up to 11.59pm on the 31 March 2015.

- If you are submitting your signed EWGS contract or your 14/15 claim by post we recommend you either check with the office that it has been received or preferably use registered post as we cannot be held responsible for lost or late postal delivery.
- If you are submitting your claim electronically please do not leave it until 11.59pm on the 31st March as, again, we cannot be held responsible for any IT/GLOS failure or broadband/phone failure.
- If submitting in person, please phone your local area office to check the time they will be closing.

2015-16 year claims

- **All customers** must now register on the new Rural Payments Service. This is required for new grant applications and to enable future payments against existing schemes. Agents will also need to register; when they are registered customers can empower them to act on their behalf in the Rural Payments Service. Further details can be found on www.gov.uk/rural-payments. The registration service continues to operate.
- **Claiming Annual Payments**
 - 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. The forms must be returned before the annual payment can be made. Those in receipt of Farm Woodland Scheme (FWS) payments will not be affected.
 - The changes will be staged:
 1. Agreement holders will receive shortly a letter from the FC setting out the changes and providing a claim form to be signed and returned. The claim form should be returned as soon as possible. We are currently working to a final claim date of 15th May. However, the FC letter will confirm the final claim date in light of any decisions, yet to be made, in response to the European Commission's planned extension to the application deadline to 15th June. Unless or until any change to the final claim date is confirmed, agreement holders are advised to continue to assume that this will be 15th May. Agreement holders must return the necessary documents within the prescribed timescales to avoid possible penalties.
 2. In autumn the same agreement holders will be contacted again and sent a pre-populated form to be signed and returned, this will ensure the payment is correct. This will, complete the 2015 claim process.
 3. Changes to the EU Regulations will mean that annual payments, which until now have been paid around the first week in November, will, in future, be paid at the beginning of December.

4. In 2016 it is envisaged the annual claim will be a single stage process.

- **Supporting Documentation for all Future Capital Claims**

From 1st April 2015 photographs must be provided with all claims for capital items. This includes EWGS as well as Countryside Stewardship woodland capital grants 2015. In addition receipted invoices for the work must be kept and shown on request, for example during inspection. Further guidance on preparing photographs for submission will be available soon on the FC website.

- **Payment Transfer**

Legacy grants EWGS, FWPS and FWS will continue to be administered by FC. However, work is underway to transfer the payments for these grant types from FC to RPA. It is envisaged the change will happen on a single date in the coming months for all schemes and agreement holders. We will confirm the date in due course.

Some customers have already received a letter asking them to contact RPA where more than one bank account is held against their SBI, or if we have not been able to match their data with existing RPA records. In future only one sterling bank account can be nominated per SBI for all CAP payments. From the date of the change RPA will: (a) make payments, (b) send remittances to the contact associated with the bank account details and (c) manage changes to bank account details. We will give you more detail closer to when this change will take place.

Amendments

- Any requests to amend currently approved contracts to a different claim year will result in the amendment being considered under the new application rules outlined above;

- It is imperative that if you are considering amending your claim year then you contact us as soon as possible so we can outline the implications and whether or not it will be acceptable.

5 Transition Table EWGS – all grant types are closed for new applications

Grant type	Current contracts	Claims from 01/01/2014	Comments
EWGS -WAG	Continue to term	Claims will be processed using existing timescales and procedures	Closed
EWGS -WPG	Continue to term*	Claims will be processed using existing timescales and procedures	Closed to new applications. Applications for Countryside Stewardship Woodland Planning grants now open under the Woodland Capital Grants 2015 scheme – see section 6 below. New management plan templates now available
EWGS -WMG	Continue to term	Contracts approved by 15/05/2014 continue to term	Closed
EWGS -WIG (plant health related only)	Continue to term*	Claims will be processed using existing timescales and procedures	Applications now closed. Claims beyond 30 September 2015 will need to be eligible items (Appendix1) See “Management Plan Requirements” section above for rules on management plan requirements for EWGS 15/16 claims. Applications for Tree Health Woodland Improvement grants now open under the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Capital Grants 2015 scheme – see section 6 below.
EWGS -WIG Wood-fuel	Claims required by 30/09/2015*	Continue until 30/09/2015	Claims required by end of September 2015

Grant type	Current contracts	Claims from 01/01/2014	Comments
EWGS –WRG (plant health related only)	Continue to term*	Claims will be processed using existing timescales and procedures	Applications now closed. Applications for Tree Health Restoration grants now open under the Countryside Stewardship Woodland Capital Grants 2015 scheme – see section 6 below. See “Management Plan Requirements” section above for rules on management plan requirements for 15/16 EWGS claims.
EWGS -WCG	Continue to term*	1 st WCG claims required before 30/09/2015 to be eligible for FWP Second and subsequent claims okay	Applications now closed. Applications for Countryside Stewardship Woodland Creation grants now open under the Woodland Capital Grants 2015 scheme – see section 6 below.
FWP	Continue to term*	1 st WCG claims required before 30/09/2015 to be eligible for FWP Second and subsequent claims okay	FWP will be unavailable if first claim for WCG is not received by 30/09/2015
FWS/ FWPS legacy	Continue to term	Claims will be processed using existing timescales and procedures	Successions handled as normal
WGS	Continue to term	Claims will be processed using existing timescales and procedures	Scheme unaffected by RDPE transition
Dedication	Continue to term	Claims will be processed using existing timescales and procedures	Scheme unaffected by RDPE transition

* All draft contracts must be at approved status by 31 March 2015.

6 Transition Table Countryside Stewardship – Woodland Capital Grants 2015

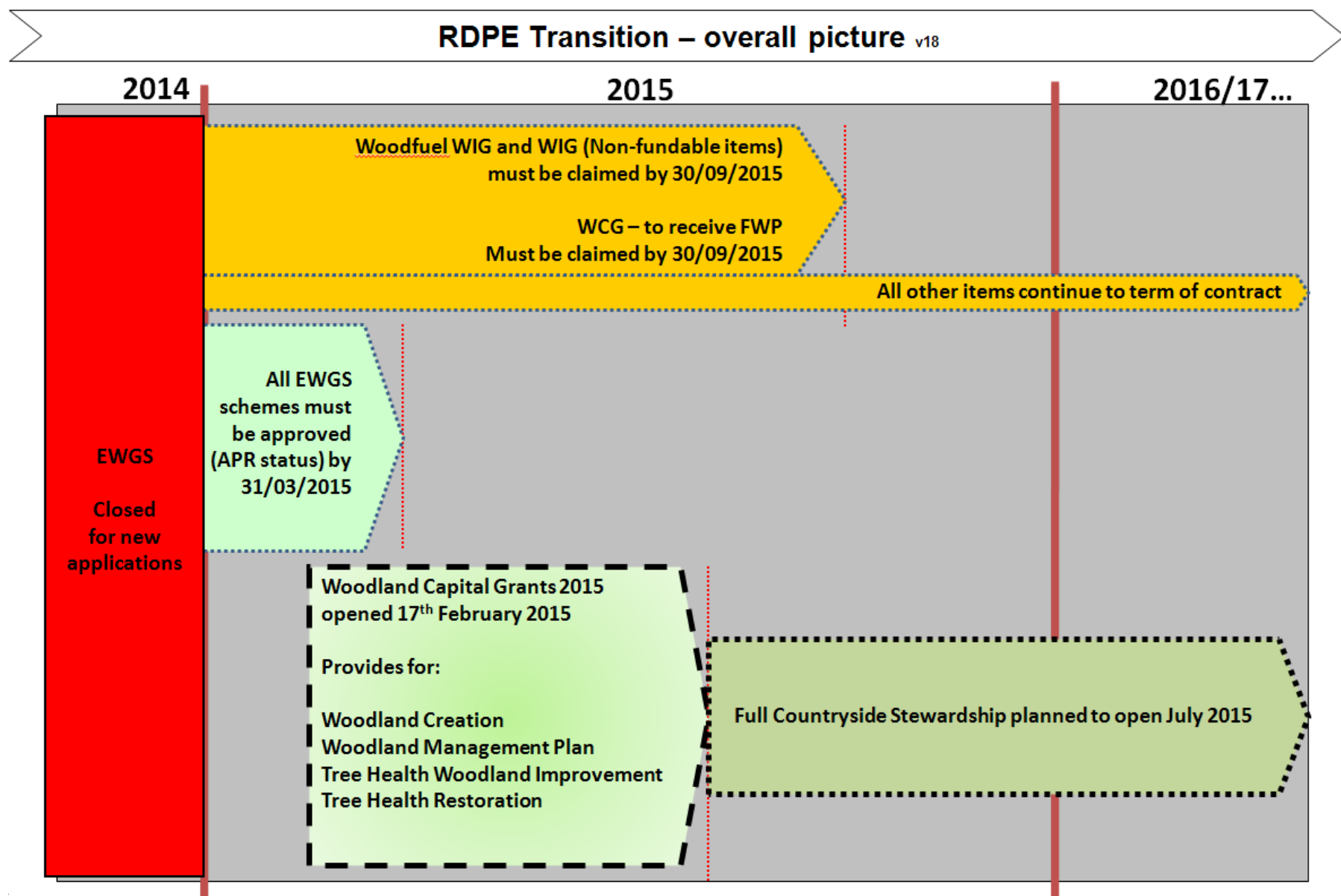
The following grants are currently available under the Woodland Capital Grants Scheme 2015:

Grant type	Application window	Details
Woodland Creation	February 17 to April 30, 2015	To create new woodlands
Woodland Management Plan	February 17 to June 30 2015*	To produce woodland management plans
Tree Health Restoration	February 17 to June 30 2015*	To help with restocking areas of larch and ash felled due to <i>Phytophthora species</i> and <i>Chalara</i>
Tree Health Improvement	February 17 to June 30 2015*	To help with non-economic felling of <i>Phytophthora</i> infected young larch and removal of infected Rhododendron

* Note: Application windows for these grants will remain open all year but they will transfer to the full Countryside Stewardship scheme as soon as it is open, currently scheduled for July 2015.

More details can be found in the guidance on woodland grants, at: <http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/countryside-stewardship-woodland-capital-grants-2015>

The chart below provides a timeline for RDPE transition and is correct as of March 2015.



7 Sources of further advice

The [Grants and Regulations website](#) contains all the information you need to apply for grant support. Alternatively, you can request this information from your local [Forestry Commission office](#).

You can subscribe to email notifications of significant grant, regulatory and tree health updates by contacting us at: grnationalteam@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

8 Versions

Version 1 issued 14 November 2012

Version 2 issued 9 August 2013

Version 3 issued 14 December 2013

Version 4 issued 10 January 2014

Version 5 issued 10 March 2014

Version 6 issued 20 March 2014

Version 7 issued 5 June 2014

Version 8 issued 7 August 2014

Version 9 issued 2 October 2014

Version 10 issued 16 March 2015

Version 11 issued 20 March 2015

Appendix 1 – 15/16 Non-Fundable WIG Standard Costs

The list below shows those standard costs currently available within EWGS that will **not** be fundable under the new programme rules. Such items will need to be claimed before the 30th September 2015 to receive payment.

Standard Cost Code	Activity	Units
A18	Safety inspection	hourly rate
L1	Forest Craftsperson	per day
L2	Forestry Agent	per hour
L3	Tree surgery, 2 + chipper	per day
L4	Tractor & chipper/flail with 1 man	per day
L5	JCB hire & mini excavator	hour
L6	360 excavator	hour

e.wgs

**English Woodland Grant
Scheme**



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs

The scheme is supported with European Union and Defra funding