

Evaluation of the Better Woodlands for Wales Grant Scheme

The BWW grant scheme in Wales aimed to bring neglected woodland back into productive management and also increase the area of woodland planted. The impacts it sought to achieve as a result were linked to: increasing rural employment; reversing biodiversity decline; mitigating climate change; and increasing the economic value of woodlands. The scheme was shown to have had small, but measurable impacts on carbon sequestration, biodiversity benefits, and maintaining rural jobs. One of the more significant outputs relates to the introduction of woodland management planning to non-commercial woodland owners.



“Probably the best ever grant scheme we could expect to see in Wales because of the “whole woodland” in context approach which really achieved better woodland creation and management where it was applied” (interviewee).

Background

The *Better Woodlands for Wales* (BWW) grant scheme ran from 2006 until the introduction of the *Glastir Woodland Creation Grant scheme* in 2010/11. BWW provided aid to land managers to achieve forest policy objectives, including the creation of new woodlands, and management of existing woodlands to secure a range of beneficial environmental and social amenity outcomes.

Objectives

This research aimed to:

- measure the impact and effectiveness of the BWW scheme on the forestry sector across Wales
- determine the extent to which BWW has achieved its stated aims and key objectives
- assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the delivery model adopted
- evaluate the extent to which BWW supported delivery of the Welsh Government’s strategic aims and aspirations for Rural Development and the fit with other Welsh Government policies
- assess any future need, and provide a clear set of recommendations to assist the Welsh Government with its forward strategy and in the planning of any future scheme.

Methods

- Carbon sequestration values draw upon the UK government’s approach to valuing carbon.
- Benefit transfer approaches (i.e. using established economic values from other studies of woodland creation and improvement) were used to assess:
 - Biodiversity benefits
 - Employment benefits
- Qualitative data from interviews with grant recipients and stakeholders was used to assess:
 - Perception of scheme impacts using a 7 point LIKERT scale
 - An exploration of unintended and unexpected effects of the scheme
 - Cost effectiveness - Value for Money (VFM).
 - An assessment of BWW successes and achievements

Findings

Qualitative data showed that grant recipients believed BWW funded operations had a positive impact on biodiversity and increasing woodland area and/or quality - major objectives of the RDP funded portion of the grant. Overall 50% of grant recipients sampled said BWW was absolutely critical to their decision to implement operations they would not have carried out otherwise; 15% said it was an important contributory factor; and 35% said BWW was not crucial. Stakeholders and Management Planners perceived the scheme represented good value for money against the original policy objectives, and in the provision of a mix of private and public benefits.

The economic estimates are ranged for sensitivity analysis. These do not offer confidence intervals in the statistical sense. The wide range of values reported partly reflects uncertainty about distinguishing the baseline ('business-as-usual') level of woodland creation from that planted as a consequence of the BWW scheme.

Carbon sequestration values show that over a 20-year time horizon an additional total net sequestration due to planting new woodland under the BWW scheme ranges from around 3,300 tCO₂ (low estimate) to 31,500 tCO₂, (high estimate), with a central estimate of about 13,300 tCO₂. Valuing the net carbon sequestration implies that the present value of the carbon sequestered ranges from £64,000 to £1.9m for 2008-2027 at 2012 prices, with a central estimate of £530,000.

Biodiversity benefits were based on three scenarios under two different woodland types (broadleaf and conifer), as a result of new planting. The estimates ranged from £10,000 to £280,000 for 2008-2011 and from £71,000 to £1.1m for 2008-2027, with central estimates of £80,000 and £550,000, respectively.

Recommendations

- Where grants are linked to the production of woodland plans, the support from Management Planners has significant additional impact raising skill levels and understanding of non-traditional woodland owners. Communication strategies should use methods and generate messages suited to specific sections of the landowning community to achieve maximum grant uptake.
- Woodland grants integrated with other land management support programmes can streamline application and payment processes, helping landowners and encouraging uptake.
- Efficient mechanisms for data capture, monitoring and assessment of grant spend and distribution are crucial to ensuring policy targets are met and sector communication achieved.

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Reports and Publications

Ambrose-Oji, B., Valatin, G., Stewart, A., Sarajevs, V., and Handey, P., 2012, Evaluation of Better Woodlands for Wales Grant Scheme. Report to Welsh Government. Forest Research, Farnham.

Available from:

<http://fcnotes/website/forestresearch.nsf/byunique/INFD-92ADEV>