

## A decision framework for public involvement in forest design planning

The principles of sustainability have been adopted at both European Commission and national levels as the basis for forestry policies, including the principle of public participation in decision making. The UK Forestry Standard outlines 'increased awareness and participation and community involvement' as a requirement for Sustainable Forest Management. This is reflected in policy documents, such as the National Forest Strategies for each of the three countries of Great Britain. At the close of the 1990s, research was underway to interpret these principles in the context of operational forest management. The work explored what the forest manager was required to do in terms of public involvement and specified a range of tools that could be used to facilitate and encourage this involvement.



### Background

Increasingly, forest managers are faced with demands from the public and expectations from policy makers to involve stakeholders in forestry decision making. This research was based on co-operation between the Social and Economic Research Group (SERG) and the United States Forest Service. Mark Twery, a silviculturist with experience in public participation, spent three months in Scotland working on this project with SERG. During an initial scoping exercise with Borders and Lowlands Forest Districts in June 2000, several obstacles to increasing public involvement in forest planning were recognised, including a lack of skills and a lack of guidance. In response, this project was devised to develop specific management guidance.

### Objectives

This research aimed to provide guidance for forest managers on how to involve the public in the forest planning process. Guidance on forest design planning in 2001 had considerable useful detail on many aspects of the planning process, but lacked specificity in public involvement. Additional guidance was needed to answer the following questions:

1. How do we identify who should be involved (stakeholder analysis)?

2. When should each group of stakeholders be involved?
3. What methods can be used for their involvement?
4. What resources will be needed to meet the needs of public involvement?

### Methods

The project proceeded as follows:

- a literature review was undertaken
- 'key players' in senior management of Forest Enterprise were consulted
- Forestry Commission district staff were interviewed
- a decision framework was developed
- the framework was tested and refined
- a report was compiled and presented

In effect, this was a piece of action research, focusing more on the improvement of forestry practice than upon investigative research.

## Findings

The main project output was the decision framework for public involvement, to address the four questions identified. The toolbox publication was designed to be used by Forestry Commission district staff to help them identify for themselves whom to involve, which tools would be most appropriate, at what point in the process to use the tools and what resources would be needed.

The three elements of the public involvement framework were:

1. a preliminary assessment system
2. a revised Forest Design Plan flow chart
3. tool sheets

The preliminary assessment system included methods for stakeholder analysis, and planning by what method to include each of the identified stakeholder groups. The revised flow chart integrated public involvement into the forest design planning process. The tool sheets presented a range of methods, such as 'Planning for Real', for involving stakeholders and included an assessment of resource requirements, and strengths and weaknesses for each method.

## Recommendations

The report recommended that the decision framework should be used as part of the formal guidance and training provided to district staff by Forest Enterprise. It was subsequently integrated into a course on 'Involving Communities in Forestry' offered by Forestry Training Services. It also formed the basis for a published 'toolbox' of public involvement methods (Hislop *et al.*, 2004). The publication was expanded to include tool sheets on 50 different public involvement methods, including focus groups, citizen's juries, internet surveys, newsletters and public meetings.

### Partners

Max Hislop, Forest Research; Mark Twery, United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service

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### Reports and publications

Forestry Commission (2004). *The UK Forestry Standard*. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh, 75 pp.

Hislop, M., Twery, M. and Vihemaki, H. (2004). *Involving People in Forestry: a Toolbox for Public Involvement in Forest and Woodland Planning*. Forestry Commission, Edinburgh.