

1 Introduction

The Forestry Commission, the Government's forestry department, manages the Public Forest Estate for the benefit of everyone in the country. The Forestry Commission Public Forest Estate in England is about 258,000 ha of land with over 1,500 different woods.

It covers 2% of the land surface of England, and 18% of the country's woods and forests. In England, more than 50% of the population live within 10 km of a Forestry Commission managed wood or forest. If you have an interest in England's trees, woods and forests then you should be interested in the Public Forest Estate.

This document sets out a consultation by us, the Forestry Commission, on the long-term role of the Forestry Commission Public Forest Estate in England. We call this the "Estate" or "Public Forest Estate" throughout this document.

In December 2008 together with Natural England we published the Delivery Plan for the Government's Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests (ETWF).¹ This included a commitment to carry out this Study.

The Study was announced by the Rt. Hon. Hilary Benn, MP, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in November 2008. Its purpose is: "to consider the future long-term sustainable role for the public forest estate and make recommendations about any necessary changes to improve its ability to deliver relevant priorities in ETWF and contribute to other government objectives".

Trees, woods and forests take decades to grow. The twin challenges of economic and climate insecurity demand a long-term response. The choices we make now should provide the national-level framework for decisions about the Public Forest Estate over a timescale of decades. This is the first time that we have attempted to develop this kind of long-term mandate for the Estate.

We in the Forestry Commission make decisions about how to manage the Public Forest Estate to deliver long-term public benefits – benefits such as providing sites for recreation, looking after wildlife, helping to create beautiful landscapes, growing timber, supporting businesses and jobs, helping people get involved with their local landscape, helping to prevent floods and locking up carbon. We aim to do this in a way that ensures the Public Forest Estate adds value in relation to other available mechanisms such as grants and regulation.

The Public Forest Estate is a public asset providing public services for everyone. This is why we are leading an open process that gives everyone the opportunity to take part in working out the role of a modern Public Forest Estate for the 21st century.

¹ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/INFD-7DYC7Z>

1.1 Scope of our consultation

Scope of this consultation:

This consultation asks for your opinions about the long-term role of the Public Forest Estate in England and how it is managed, how to add greater value through public ownership, and how this can be paid for.

We are not making any hard and fast recommendations in this consultation. Instead, we set out the issues that we need to consider to make balanced decisions. The responses to the consultation will form a major strand of evidence to feed into the Study. Other strands include:

- social and economic research into the environmental, social and economic costs and benefits of the Public Forest Estate;
- a household survey and questionnaire for visitors;
- expert opinion;
- experience from other countries;
- experience of the Public Forest Estate.

Geographical scope:

England. This consultation is not about individual sites.

There are publicly owned and managed forests in the other parts of Great Britain.² They are not covered by this Study. However, we will be drawing on experience from other parts of the country.

Impact Assessment:

Our Impact Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment are available at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy>.

² Northern Ireland Forest Service state forests: <http://www.forestserviceni.gov.uk/index/forests-in-northern-ireland.htm>. Scottish National Forest Estate: www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland. Welsh Assembly Government woodland estate: www.forestry.gov.uk/wales.

1.2 Basic information

This consultation is for:

- people who use the Public Forest Estate as part of their daily lives;
- people who do not use it but want to or who could benefit from it;
- people actively involved in the Public Forest Estate (e.g. community woodland groups, volunteer groups);
- diversity groups (e.g. young people, older people, people from black and minority ethnic groups, disabled people);
- business partners including timber processors and contractors, leisure business providers using the Estate, other businesses with an indirect stake (e.g. tourism businesses);
- regional government and key regional stakeholders (e.g. Government offices, local authorities, national parks);
- regional interest groups (e.g. the Wildlife Trusts, local access forums, health authorities);
- regional forums such as those for Regional Forestry Frameworks;
- national interest groups such as environmental and recreational non-governmental organisations and industry federations;
- Government departments and agencies.

Body responsible for the consultation

Forestry Commission England.

Duration

6 July 2009 to 28 September 2009.

Enquiries

This document is available to read and to download in portable document format (pdf) from this Internet page: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy>.

If you need this publication in an alternative format, for example in large print or in another language, please contact:

The Diversity Team
Forestry Commission
Silvan House
231 Corstorphine Road
Edinburgh EH12 7AT

Telephone: 0131 314 6575
email: diversity@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

If you want to ask about the content or scope of this consultation please contact:

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Policy and Programmes Group
Forestry Commission
620 Bristol Business Park
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol
BS16 1EJ

Telephone: 0117 906 6003
email: pfe.consultation@forestry.gov.uk

How to respond

Please send your answers and views to Dominic Driver (details above) by 17.00hrs, 28 September 2009.

Please complete the Information About You form in Annex 4 and include it with your answers.

We welcome your comments on any aspect of our proposals, but it would be helpful if you could focus on the questions we ask. These are also set out in Annex 5. You do not have to answer all of them. Everyday users of the Public Forest Estate and those with a general interest may wish to focus only on Question 1 to Question 11. Those with a professional or specialist interest may wish to also respond to Question 12 to Question 26. A form for you to complete is available at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy>.³

Additional ways to become involved

We have invited a wide range of national, regional and local organisations and groups to respond to the consultation; these are listed at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy>. We will also organise consultation events: a national one and one for each region. These are listed locally and at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy>. We will also include the consultation as an agenda item at a range of appropriate forums. The purpose of the events is to give people the chance to hear about the issues and discuss them with us and others. We hope that they will encourage more and a wider range of people to respond to the consultation with a deeper understanding of the issues. We have also commissioned a number of specialist organisations to help us engage certain groups of people, e.g. young people – further details at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy>.

³ You do not have to use the form for responses, but it would help us and we think it would help you to organise your replies if you do.

After the consultation

If you give us permission, we will post your answers at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-estatestudy>. We plan to do this during autumn 2009 together with a summary of responses. You can find an outline of the Study process at Annex 2.

We are required to release information to comply with the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 and Freedom of Information Act 2000. We will not allow any unwarranted breach of confidentiality, nor will we contravene our obligations under the Data Protection Act 1998. The Forestry Commission will be the Data Controller. Personal data is collected for the purpose of the analysis of the responses to the consultation in order to inform future consideration of the long-term role of the Public Forest Estate. Please note that we will not treat any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses as such a request.

A Working Group (Annex 1) will use the results of the consultation and other evidence to develop recommendations to Forestry Commission England National Committee.⁴ The National Committee will submit recommendations to Ministers who will decide the Government's response.

We plan to publish the Government's response in February 2010. Except for those who ask us not to, we will notify all those who replied and those to whom we sent this consultation when this information is available.

Compliance with the Code of Practice on Consultation

This consultation complies with the Code. We have considered the seven consultation criteria (Annex 6).

Complaints

If you have any comments or complaints about the consultation process (as opposed to comments on the issues that are the subject of the consultation) please send them to:

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Cambridge
CB1 2DU

Telephone: 01223 346025
email: richard.barker@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

⁴ <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/inf-d-6p2j62>