

English Woodland Grant Scheme Update – March 2009

2009/2010 application window extended

We have extended the application window for Woodland Improvement and Woodland Assessment grants for 2009/2010 payment until further notice. We will continue to accept applications until fully committed and then start offering 2010/11 payment

New Woodland Improvement Grants (WIG) available in 2009

In addition to WIGs offering 80% contribution to costs available for improving the condition of SSSIs and work within the four Ancient Woodland Priority Areas, these 80% WIGs will be extended to:

- Work that maintains the favourable status of SSSI's
- A fifth Ancient Woodland Priority Area
- Removal of rhododendron from ancient and native woodlands in Cornwall
- Public access provision in new priority access areas

Details on these initiatives will be available in May

New Standard Costs for WIG

The standard costs have been reviewed, with an average 20% increase to reflect cost trends. These have been introduced from the 1st March along with an excel 'WIG cost calculator' which should be used when applying in place of form EWGS 5.

Any unapproved applications currently being processed will be offered the new higher rates. Any contracts approved after 1st January 2007 can be amended to the higher rates provided work has not yet started on them.

Higher payment rates for Woodland Planning Grant (WPG)

From the 1st March, new WPG applications will be paid in 2010/11 at the following rates:

- £20/ha for the first 100 Hectares of woodland on the property
- £10/ha thereafter
- £1000 minimum payment

Applications currently in progress, or contracts approved after 1st Jan 2007 where the work has not started can either stick with pre 1.3.09 grant rates with a 2009/10 payment year or shift to the new rates with a claim year of 2010/11. If agreement holders or applicants wish to opt for the latter they should contact us.

Forest Plans that are expiring are now eligible for WPG and we are developing a process so we can approve thinning, felling and restocking proposals as part of the WPG process. This will help woodland owners comply with imminent new public body timber procurement policies (CPET) – further details will be issued in the coming months.

A new WPG template will be available in the next few weeks enabling WPG to be used for long term thinning and felling approval and to meet CPET Category B requirements. To do this applicants should apply for and receive an approved WPG contract. When the plan is completed they should submit it along with a schedule of thinning and felling and the FC will amend the WPG contract. Felling permissions can run for 10 years, Woodland Regeneration Grant for 2 years.

Woodland Management Grant

From the 1st March we are open for WMG applications with first payment in Autumn 2010. The threshold for certification requirement has been lifted to 100Ha; woodlands between 30 and 100 hectares no longer require certification to be eligible, but will need to have an approved management plan.

From now on, all WMG contracts will be offered with a 5 calendar year contract period i.e. 1st January to 31st December. Contracts must be approved by the 15th May in order to receive Autumn payment, otherwise we have to defer payment for a year. Therefore from 1st March 2009 we will be processing applications where the work should start from 1st January 2010, the contract must be signed and approved by 15th May 2010 latest and first WMG payment will be made in Autumn 2010.

Woodland Creation Grant - £2000 additional contributions

When WCG opens in May, we will be offering additional contributions of up to £2000 per hectare where applications meet national and regional priorities. Details of our supplements will be available in May.

We expect to be able to offer 2009/2010 or 2010/2011 payment for WCG applications this year, depending on applicant preferences and budgets.

Due to recent changes in EU rules, landowners will remain eligible to claim SPS on land where woodland is planted from 2008. As Farm Woodland Payment (FWP) takes account of SPS income forgone, we will have to reduce the rate of FWP, but we aim to make the reduction less than the expected SPS payment – therefore the overall annual payment should remain the same or higher than the existing FWP rates.

Woodland Regeneration Grant

We will open in May for WRG applications with 2010/2011 first payment. There are no plans for rate changes, but this year we will be seeking co-finance approval under RDPE for this grant. This will mean an increase in WRG funding and greater flexibility to adjust budgets between grants where appropriate.

And lastly, remember to get your claims in by March 31st!

Remember that you must complete your work and submit a claim form for 2008/09 approved work by the 31st March at the latest in order to ensure payment. If you don't submit a claim by then, your right to grant is lost and payment would be at the FC's absolute discretion.

If you have approved 2008/09 work, know it won't be carried out by the end of March but still wish to do it, you must submit an amendment to us by the 31st March. We hope to be able to accommodate all reasonable requests subject to the FC England grant management policy (Operations Note 7, available in the EWGS document library).

If you expect to complete part of the work by the end of March, contact your local FC office on how best to handle your claim/amendment.