

Growing Places

The Newsletter of the **Social and Economic Research Group**

Autumn 2009



Welcome to the fourth SERG newsletter.

This autumn edition illustrates the diversity of research conducted by the group, with four articles on such different topics as: children and young people's perceptions of climate change and the role of trees, investigating potential opportunities for enhanced delivery of *public* benefits in *private* woodlands, causes of wildfires in South Wales and communicating animal disease (Lyme) risks to countryside users.

Conference 2010: Trees and forests in British society

Much forest policy in Britain, as well as the work of the Forestry Commission and other organisations, is committed to ensuring that the widest possible social benefits are gained from the management of trees, woods and forests on public as well as private land. This is a particularly challenging task since society's relationship with trees, woods and forests changes over time.

Over the past decade the Forestry Commission has funded a wide range of social research, both through Forest Research's Social and Economic Research Group (SERG), and through academic and private research partners. This conference draws on that body of research, but also invites contributions from other areas of social research to explore and consolidate current knowledge.

The event is aimed at those involved in policy development, a broad range of social researchers – including geographers, sociologists and human ecologists – economists, environment and development professionals and others with strong involvement or interest in social and economic aspects of British forestry in rural and urban contexts.

The objectives of the conference are to:

- discuss societal and economic trends shaping the management of British trees and forests in both urban and rural contexts;
- share experiences of responses to these trends and how society can successfully engage with its woodland resource;
- identify future research and policy directions needed to meet emerging challenges.

Date: 13–15 April 2010

Venue: Edinburgh Conference Centre (www.edinburgh-conference.com)

Conference website: www.forestresearch.gov.uk/treesandsociety

To find out more contact Bianca Ambrose-Oji (bianca.ambroseOji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

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Beyond the forest edge

Monitoring and evaluation for England

Along with Forest Research's Land Regeneration and Urban Greening Research Group, SERG recently hosted a workshop with Forestry Commission and Forest Enterprise England stakeholders to explore improvements to the dissemination and use of social monitoring and evaluation data, thereby strengthening the links between policy, research and forest management.

The workshop was well attended and provided a welcome opportunity for participants to share knowledge and insights. There was strong support for current programmes of social data collection and analysis, and strong consensus on the need to develop organisational structures to ensure that evidence directly influences forest policy and management decision-making.

For more information contact Jake Morris (jake.morris@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

Assessing and communicating animal disease risks for countryside users

Many people enjoy visiting the 'great outdoors' and benefit from its effects on their health and well-being. However, little is known about how best to warn users about the potential for animal-related diseases and encourage appropriate behaviour to minimise risk without causing alarm.

This project explores the possible impact of zoonotic diseases (diseases spread via animals) on the development of recreation in rural areas within a framework of risk communication. It focuses on Lyme disease, an infection caused by the bacteria *Borrelia burgdorferi* that is found in a number of wild animals and which can be transferred to humans by infected ticks. Lyme disease is an ideal case study because it is relatively well understood and appears to be increasing in the UK (nearly 2000 cases a year). Project results will be relevant to other zoonoses. The work is funded by the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme (RELU).

The research is being carried out by an interdisciplinary research team led by Forest Research with the Universities of Oxford and Surrey. There are three study sites, located in England, which represent remote upland woodland and wild land, accessible lowland woodland and farmland/heath, and peri-urban park and woodland habitats.

The project is divided into three work packages: scenario analysis, risk analysis and risk perception. It also looks at three phases: understanding the present, identifying possible futures and developing actions for possible futures.

The research will provide a greater understanding of how individuals and organisations perceive and respond to the risks of Lyme disease. Computer models will be developed to predict the seasonal abundance and spatial scale of ticks, while the evaluation of precautionary information will assist policy makers, countryside managers and users to communicate the degree of risk and encourage people to take preventative action.

For more information contact Mariella Marzano (mariella.marzano@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

Providing public benefits in private woodlands – classifying owners

Environmental conservation, the provision of recreation and amenity, and the use of biofuels to mitigate climate change are being increasingly emphasised in new policy agendas. However, these benefits are frequently delivered through the public forest estate, often at locations relatively inaccessible to major centres of population. Recent data provided by the National Inventory of Woodland and Trees reveal a concentration of privately owned woodland in densely populated areas, especially in central and southern England, where private ownership accounts for over 80% of forest cover. Furthermore, recent research suggests that woodland, whether private or public, is highly valued by local populations and often factors in their decisions on where to live and lifestyle behaviour. Thus, the Forestry Commission co-sponsored a PhD project with the Economic and Social Research Council to investigate potential opportunities for enhanced delivery of public benefits in private woodlands. The research used both qualitative and quantitative methods to classify private woodland owners in three study areas in England: the Lake District, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Cornwall.

Who are the woodland owners?

Woodland ownership is changing significantly in England with anecdotal evidence of urban wealth being used for amenity-driven purchases of land. The location, and often socially oriented objectives of many new woodland owners, may pre-dispose them to deliver certain public benefits. However, with increased diversity in private ownership, including farmers, estate owners, commercial timber producers and newer 'hobby' owners, it is important to understand the different motivations and potential support that these owner types may require in order to better deliver public benefits.



Many people visit the countryside for pleasure.

Categorising private woodland owners

The research confirmed that private woodland owners are motivated by a range of objectives and can be classified into six types:

Individualists (own 8% of sample woodland): Strong sense of ownership and privacy. Reluctant to engage with public bodies and are against public access; least likely to apply for a woodland management grant.

Multi-functional owners (37%): Motivated by multiple objectives, including amenity, conservation and financial return, alongside personal enjoyment. Pragmatic and often entrepreneurial; most likely to apply for a grant.

Private consumers (23%): Extract wood products (wood logs/poles etc.) for own use.

Conservationists (3%): Maintain woodland as a nature reserve and oppose recreational access.

Investors (18%): Financially-oriented and likely to carry out timber production or other profit-making activity.

Amenity owners (11%): Favour public access and public amenity. This group had the highest proportion of women (28.6%).

An important output of the project will be recommendations for policy, including targeting grant schemes, developing a viable woodfuel/wood product market and targeted advisory services.

To find out more contact Julie Urquhart (julie.urquhart@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).



Maintaining private woodlands.



Wood you believe it? Children and young people's perceptions of climate change and the role of trees, woods and forests

Climate change is a very real threat. Globally, deforestation has contributed to the causes of climate change and accounts for almost one-fifth of the world's carbon dioxide emissions. The reduction in deforestation in developing countries, increasing the area of forests, and the management of woodlands as a sustainable source of wood (for fuels or construction materials) can contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Raising awareness

A key policy of Forestry Commission England (FCE) is to 'improve public understanding' of the role of trees, woods and forests in dealing with climate change. Few existing surveys of public knowledge and perceptions of climate change have focused on people's understanding of the role of trees, woods or forests and the opinions of children and young people.

A research project was carried out to address this gap. The results will aid FCE to better target its climate change communication strategies. A total of 89 children, 67 parents and seven teachers took part in the project from five schools in the south-east of England with both urban and rural backgrounds.

Knowledge and perceptions

Awareness of climate change and its general causes and effects was high amongst the children and young people. While few of them realised the full contribution of deforestation to climate change, they did perceive it to be an 'environmental problem'. Preserving and expanding existing woods and forests was considered an important strategy to deal with climate change, though the children had generally negative perceptions of using wood for fuel.

The participants were concerned by climate change, but this was tempered by the perception that its main effects would be felt elsewhere in the world and by the optimistic belief that science would provide a solution.

This research suggests that there is a specific need for FCE to continue its efforts in communicating the relationship between trees, woods and forests and climate change. Broad, 'whole school' approaches such as that used by Eco-Schools¹, may be a way forward.

To find out more contact Liz O'Brien (liz.obrien@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).

¹ A sustainability and environmental award scheme for schools: see www.eco-schools.org.uk

Wildfires in Wales: social drivers and mitigation measures

Wildfires pose a problem that is most often approached from an operational perspective. Research into wildfires has largely focused on the mapping of wildfire movements and the factors that encourage or aid the ignition or growth of wildfires. However, it is also recognised that wildfires are a phenomenon caused by the interaction between people and their environment. The majority of wildfires are caused or exacerbated by human actions. This is especially true in peri-urban areas in which natural and human environments interact. In South Wales, the largest urban fringe woodland in Western Europe, this interaction contributes to perhaps the highest frequency of grass and forest fires in the UK. It is a widely understood assumption in South Wales that nearly all the fires in grass and forested areas each year are the result of human actions. This project focuses on the social causes of deliberately started fires, because, as one respondent opined of wildfires in Wales “99% are arson, the rest are deliberately lit”.

Why people light fires

Early desk research highlighted a number of potential motivations for firesetting. The developed typology includes six potential reasons for wildfire setting, some of which appear to be upheld by research to date.

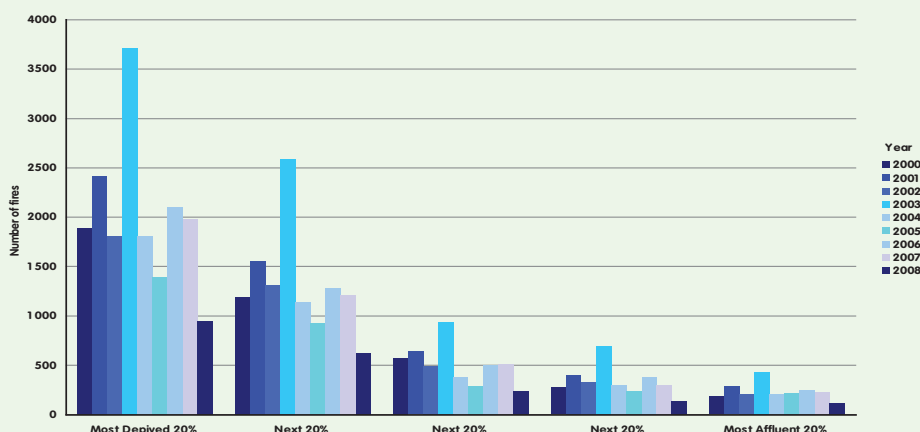
1. Wildfires lit to create excitement or relieve boredom
2. Wildfires viewed as ‘harmless fun’
3. Wildfires lit as a form of malicious vandalism
4. Wildfires lit for psychological reasons
5. Wildfires arising from uncontrolled ‘controlled burns’
6. Wildfires with an unclear motive

Research in Valleys communities

Early research has demonstrated that there is a high awareness of wildfires, but outside organisational stakeholder groups there is little hope that the situation can change and a sense of resignation that this is ‘just something that happens’ in South Wales. The general consensus is that young males are largely responsible for the majority of fires, with people suggesting, in line with literature, that there is little difference between firesetting and other forms of antisocial behaviour. Respondents most commonly suggest that boredom is the primary driver for firesetting behaviour. This will be tested in interviews with self-reported wildfire setters.

GIS analysis of data provided by South Wales Fire and Rescue Service has demonstrated that there is a link between areas of deprivation, as defined by the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD) and areas in which grass fires frequently occur (see graph). This will be tested further as the project progresses.

This project will report in January 2011. To find out more contact Matthew Jolland (matthew.jollands@forestry.gsi.gov.uk).



Grass and forest fires recorded by South Wales Fire and Rescue Service in Coed y Cymoedd Forest District 2000–2008 by WIMD ranking of LSOA*



Forest fires can quickly get out of control.

Recent SERG publications

Some of our new and recent publications are outlined below:

O'Brien, L. (2009). *Well-being, forestry and ecosystem services: A discussion paper*. Available at www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5Z5ALT

Scott, A., Carter, C., Brown, K. and White, V. (2009). 'Seeing is Not Everything': Exploring the Landscape Experiences of Different Publics. *Landscape Research* 34 (4), 397–424.

Lawrence, A., Anglezarke, B., Frost, B., Nolan, P., Owens, R. (2009). What does community forestry mean in a devolved Great Britain? *International Forestry Review* 11 (2), 281–297.

Lawrence, A. (2009). The first cuckoo in winter: British phenology recording, credibility and meaning. *Global Environmental Change* 19, 173–179.

Where to find out about us:

What we do

www.forestresearch.gov.uk/peopleandtrees

Who we are

www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/INFD-5XNATV

If you would like to receive future copies of our newsletter please email: christine.woods@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

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