

Prospectus 2006 – *West Midlands* *Conservancy*

The Forestry Commission (England) opened its second Grant Prospectus to applications and grant offers under the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) in April 2006. This regional Prospectus provides an overview of the grant budgets that will be available in the West Midlands in financial year 2007/08. This Prospectus also gives details of special transition arrangements for certain grant applications (under the 2005 Prospectus) due for payment in 2006/07.

EWGS is part of the devolved and targeted approach that was announced in the Government's Rural Strategy, published in 2004. Our regional approach to supporting England's woodlands is described in Annex 1.

***Growing our Future* – The Forestry Framework for the West Midlands**

Growing our Future – The Forestry Framework for the West Midlands

The West Midlands published their Forestry Framework, *Growing our Future*, in October 2004 following a year of extensive stakeholder involvement and led by a steering group of key partners chaired by Government Office.

An Action Plan Manager was appointed in January 2005 to lead the implementation process and the first annual Delivery Plan was published in June 2005. The Delivery Plan sets out a series of priority actions drawn from *Growing our Future* under each of its eleven themes. Progress with the various actions has been monitored and reported with the help of stakeholders, the end of year report should be published in July.

The draft of the next Delivery Plan is nearing completion and moves onto a three year rolling basis (2006-09), allowing better opportunity for aligning with emerging regional business plans and strategies and facilitating more effective reporting.

Following wider consultation this will be launched at the Woodland and Forestry Forum meeting in June by which time the new combined RFF/Forum website will be nearly ready. The Forum has been a key body in taking the RFF forward, particularly through a range of expert task groups, which are making a significant contribution to implementation and its communication at all levels.

Our EWGS grants and partnership funding will help to deliver the actions developed from *Growing our Future* and the targeting of our funding to maximise public benefits will increasingly be informed by the progress of such actions, for example by Woodland Opportunities Mapping and Brownfield to Greenspace project development.

Bill Heslegrave - Conservator
West Midlands Conservancy
Forestry Commission England

Financial Context for Grant Offers

Our budget for grants in 2007/08 will be **£1.65 million**. After allowing for claims expected in 2007/08 from holders of contracts approved in earlier years, we anticipate that there will be **£970,000** available to support new business, including some rescheduled by agreement with applicants. We plan to allocate this as follows:

- **approximately £400,000** for woodland creation;
- **up to £135,000** for woodland regeneration and restocking following felling;
- **up to £110,000** for woodland accepted into EWGS contracts under the Woodland Management Grant to help secure long-term stewardship of woodlands;
- up to **£200,000** will be targeted for specific work on public access and Biodiversity Action Plan priorities to improve woodlands and their benefits to people and wildlife. A further **£80,000** will be targeted to improve the condition of woodland SSSIs in private ownership;
- up to **£50,000** will be available to support planning and assessment work in woodlands to underpin better subsequent sustainable management;

The actual funds available for payment in 2007/08 will depend on the demand for woodland management and improvement grants under the transition arrangements explained below. We estimate that our existing scheme (mainly WGS with some EWGS) commitments for 2007/08 payments will amount to **£676,000**.¹

Partnerships support

In addition to our grant budget we will make **£140,000** available for regional partnerships. The main partnerships we will be supporting this year are:

- Wyre Forest HLF project officer
- Regional woodfuel programme, across the region
- Green Infrastructure Planning project in Forest of Mercia Community Forest
- Deer management / SSSI project in the Marches area

The Conservancy will continue to provide a range of other non-grant support to the sector such as advice and staff time invested in delivery projects under the Regional Forestry Framework.

¹ Commitments are estimates at the time of publication. They vary daily because of approvals and the level of grant applications. Updated information on grant availability is provided on the FC website or by contacting the conservancy.

Table 1: Grant application deadlines and periods by EWGS grant type

GRANT TYPE²	PROSPECTUS 2005 Application deadlines (for payment in 2006/07)	PROSPECTUS 2006 Application periods^{3 4} (for payment in 2007/08)
WAG/ WPG	31 March 06	1 April 06 - 31 March 07
WRG	31 March 06	1 April 06 - 31 December 06
WIG (non-SSSI)	30 June 06	1 April 06 - 31 December 06
WIG (SSSI)	31 December 06 (but with ongoing reviews of regional budgets dependent on applications)	1 April 06 - 31 December 07 (but with ongoing reviews)
Health WIG	12pm on Wednesday 31 May 06	
WMG	31 May 06	1 April 06 - 31 December 06
WCG	(30 September 2005)	1 April 06 - 31 August 06

Details of grant offer conditions, transition arrangements and normal business rules are given in Annex 2. Regional availability of specific grants will be regularly updated on the website or by contacting the conservancy.

Regional allocations may be re-deployed in the light of actual demand (applications and uptake by existing contract holders) and taking account of our national targets and priorities for support. We therefore cannot guarantee to spend all of each allocated regional grant budget.

Contact
details for
Conservancy
Woodland
Officers

- **Shropshire and Staffordshire (excluding the Peak District National Park and National Forest):** Ludlow Area Office (01584 877544) fc.wmid.ludlow@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
- **West Midlands, Warwickshire, Forest of Mercia and Worcestershire:** Worcester Office (01905 362720) fc.wmid.cons@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
- **Herefordshire:** Coleford Office (01594 810983) fc.wmid.cons@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

² All grant type applications with the exception of WCG will be based on a first come, first served regional basis. WCG applications will be assessed through a scoring and judging round to determine the applications capable of delivering highest public benefits.

³ We will stop making offers earlier once budget limits have been reached.

⁴ We may stop making offers earlier each year if actual claims against existing agreements are higher than expected during the current financial year and/or targets have been reached. If earlier deadlines become necessary to enforce we will try and publicise these in advance.

**Application
Timetable
and Rural
Development
Regulation
2007-2013**

For all EWGS grant types under Prospectus 2006 we will operate the application deadline dates as shown in Table 1 above. We also need to take account of the end of the current Rural Development Regulation on 31 December 2006, which affects the nature of most EWGS contracts we can offer. At the time of publishing this Prospectus the final Rural Development Regulation (RDR) transition arrangements affecting ERDP schemes such as EWGS are not known. Deadlines may be subject to revision later in 2006 as EU rules prescribing the transition to RDR 2007-13 becomes clearer. We will aim to operate similar application arrangements to those relating to Environmental Stewardship. Revised rules and/or rates may apply to certain grant types for contracts signed after 31 December 2006 and further details will be published when these are known. The aim is to help both applicants and FC plan their respective work and ensure we can process applications and issue contracts in time so that work can take place and payments are made in the appropriate financial year.

**Rural
Development
Programme
– Public
Consultation**

Defra's public consultation on the new Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) priorities, including those relating to woodlands, is open for comments until 22 May 2006 and can be accessed online at:

http://www.defra.gov.uk/erdp/rdp07_13/default.htm

In the West Midlands the Forestry Commission is working with regional colleagues in Natural England, Government Office and Advantage West Midlands to produce a Regional Implementation Plan for the RDPE. It will describe the region's priorities for funding under the new RDPE from 2007 – 2013. We expect the initial version of the plan to be published by July. Consultation and work to develop detail and priorities will follow through the remainder of 2006 with the final plan being ready for January 2007.

A Regional Approach to Supporting England's Woodlands

Each region of England has its own Regional Forestry Framework outlining the opportunities for woodland management and creation in that region. To take forward the regional agenda alongside our commitment to six key national targets, which are set out in our EWGS Applicant's Pack, we are now presenting our second Prospectus for each region. We will:

- enable potential grant applicants to see how the EWGS in each region contributes to national targets;
- use EWGS to support delivery of Regional Forestry Framework action plans;
- provide continuity in the long-term sustainable management of woodland through a rate of change in our programme that is gradual and considered;
- use regional applicant feedback on our grants to inform the future development of EWGS;
- increase the range of advice and support we provide alongside Natural England.

Our allocation of grant budgets to the regions for 2007/08 continues to be based on existing agreements and historic trends and they are part of the overall national grant management strategy.

We retain a remit to deliver overarching national targets such as the England Rural Development Plan woodland creation target of 30,000 hectares by 2007.

Each Regional Prospectus represents our best forecast of grant availability but we cannot guarantee to spend all of each allocated regional grant budget. We may decide to move funds between regions in order to ensure delivery of national targets, optimise uptake of the total grants budget, and maximise overall public benefits.

Our partnerships budget is used to initiate, and buy influence in, a diverse range of national and regional partnership initiatives that help to take forward England Forestry Strategy and Regional Forestry Frameworks. In each region we aim to focus investment in market and business development, capacity building and delivery partnerships that can access new sources of funding for the woodlands and forestry sector. Our proposals for this funding are managed through our business planning process on an annual basis.

**Normal Grant
Offer Conditions**

We have to ensure that our existing commitments, as well as any new contract commitments we agree for a financial year do not exceed our budget. So we will not normally enter into new contracts for payment after 31 March in the preceding financial year. This means, for example, 31 March 2007 would be the latest approval date for a contract with a first claim year of 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008. We may also stop making offers earlier each year if actual claims against existing agreements are higher than expected, or once targets and/or budget limits have been reached during the current financial year. Our plan for EWGS operation in future involves ensuring that only one Grant Prospectus is open at any time for applications.

**Transition
Arrangements
for Prospectus
2005**

For 2006 we recognise that this strategy could have consequences for some of our potential grant customers as EWGS is still a relatively new scheme and some grant components have only been available since November 2005. To help ensure continuity of work and planning we will operate an extended application period for woodland management and improvement grants under Prospectus 2005 as outlined in Table 1.

**Applications and
Contracts –
Business Rules**

Only completed applications accompanied by an acceptable map received in FC Conservancy offices by the date shown will be considered for grant contracts. EWGS contracts offered under Prospectus 2005 will have a first payment year of 2006/07. EWGS contracts offered under Prospectus 2006 will have a first payment year of 2007/08. All grant types are subject to national cash limits and are awarded on a first come-first served basis in each region. Where higher than expected claims against existing agreements (such as rescheduling of old schemes) or a shortfall in targets is identified, we may transfer funding between regions in order to respond to its national priorities. Each grant component of EWGS is subject to clear eligibility and application rules. Please speak to your local Forestry Commission contact about your proposals.