

Briefing

Future of the Forestry Commission Debate

Westminster Hall

1st March 2011 – 9:30am – 11am



Who are Save Our Woods

We are a grass-roots organisation formed to campaign for the removal of the Forestry clauses from the Public Bodies Bill. We are not affiliated with any political organisation or Charitable Trust. We are individuals who believe passionately that publicly owned forest land should remain in public hands in perpetuity.

The Save Our Woods team apply their knowledge of social media and internet based resource to make accurate information available quickly, to all.

By attracting industry experts, politicians and academics the Save Our Woods [web forum](#) provides an outlet for high quality, unbiased, information and debate regarding all aspects of forestry, timber markets, sustainable landscape design and legislation.

The Save Our Woods [website](#) enables us to inform the wider public, NGO's, politicians and the media with the facts about the Forestry Commission Public Forest Estate. Whilst also engaging members of the public to share their joy and passion for England's precious woodlands.

The Future of the Forestry Commission

We see the Forestry Commission as the caretakers of our Public Forest Estate. To debate the Forestry Commission you must therefore accept you are debating the future of our PFE.

It is important to us that the Forestry Commission is allowed to continue its vital work and also make full use of this opportunity to implement the following recommendations, as made by the DEFRA Working Group (following public consultation on the long-term role of the Forestry Commission Public Forest Estate in England) & other contributors to Save Our Woods:

1) Limits should be set for changes that can be made to the PFE to maintain those characteristics that enable the PFE to fulfil its long-term role as an asset for delivering government objectives. To fulfil this role the PFE should:

- remain large scale;
- be widely distributed across England;
- have a flexible and varied representative cross-section of all types of woodland in England;

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- be able to provide a significant volume of products and services, skills and expertise; and
- remain under public control and accountability.

(Source: <http://saveourwoods.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Defra-Working-Group-Paper.pdf>)

2) The PFE should use its resource of land, skills and relationships to make balanced decisions and resolve trade-offs to work out how best to deliver the key outcomes within a sustainable financial model. The key issues on which to focus are:

- biodiversity, carbon and landscape are all important and all interrelated;
- how wood production on the PFE (including softwood, hardwood and woodfuel) can best contribute to the key outcomes, particularly moving to a low-carbon economy; and
- the need for a clearer strategic framework in which to set work for encouraging access, including:
 - # the appropriate level, type and diversity of access infrastructure; and
 - # where it is best to focus work on encouraging access in liaison with other providers.

(Source: <http://saveourwoods.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Defra-Working-Group-Paper.pdf>)

3) The PFE should play an active role in accelerating woodland expansion to help fulfil government objectives for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and to deliver more of the many co-benefits of woodland.

(Source: <http://saveourwoods.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Defra-Working-Group-Paper.pdf>)

4) Local involvement in decision-making and woodland management should be increased at selected sites to promote community development where the needs and potential benefits to society are greatest.

(Source: <http://saveourwoods.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Defra-Working-Group-Paper.pdf>)

5) The PFE should continue to implement programmes nationally with the flexibility for regional and local delivery. To do this, the PFE should further develop indicators to evaluate and communicate the cumulative impact of local decisions at national level.

(Source: <http://saveourwoods.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Defra-Working-Group-Paper.pdf>)

6) It is essential given the threats by pests, diseases, climate change etc., the Forest Research wing of the FC is not subject to any cuts.

7) The re establishment of RAC's should be adopted; the UK has a natural and cultural heritage

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which means that any decisions made must be relevant on a regional basis, thus protecting and enhancing our native woodlands in line with their geological, geographical and biological attributes.

8) There is a real threat of the extinction of traditional skills and knowledge. Within future proposals the fixing of minimum salary and contractor rates, together with continuing support of practitioners involved in ALL woodland & landscape based activities is ascertained.

9) A dramatic reduction in staffing levels/funding will seriously effect the commissions ability to:

- 1) continue it's world renowned forest management & research
- 2) continue to be a world leader in sustainable forest management
- 3) continue to improve access for all in most of our PFE
- 4) continue to improve biodiversity in all of our PFE
- 5) continue with their target to restore 36,000ha of PAWS across all England by 2015
- 6) be accountable at a local level
- 7) continue to be the caretakers of OUR Public Forest Estate

The Forestry Commission MUST NOT be set up to fail

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Some Key Facts About the Forestry Commission

Size and Scale	2% of England (258, 000ha)
	18% of England's woods and forests
	1,500 different woods from 10ha to 60,000 ha
	27% Broadleaved & 73% conifer. The trend over the past few years has been for an increase in native trees and fewer conifers.
	16% of England's ancient woodland resource.
	31% of the Estate in National Parks 14% in AONB's
	Independently certified to international sustainable management standards (a world first).
Timber	60% of softwood production in England (1.4m tonnes pa)
	90% of annual softwood increment harvested.
	60% of timber sold 'standing to private sector'
Recreation	40m countryside recreation visits pa
	53% of the accessible woodland in England
Greenhouse Gas regulation	129 MtCO ₂ e (million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) stored in the trees and soil. The 48 MtCO ₂ e of carbon in the trees represents 18% of the carbon in English woodlands.
Biodiversity	67,800 ha of SSSI, 6% of all England's SSSIs, 98% of which are in target condition compared to 93% for SSSIs in general.
	29,000ha of potential lowland heathland under conifers, 50% of the total in England. 3,500ha is planned for conversion to heathland over the next 20 years, adding to the 16,800ha already on the PFE. The Habitat Action Plan target for expansion of lowland heathland by 2015 is

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	<p>6,100ha. In 2002, there was 53,213 ha of ancient woodland on the estate.</p> <p>Since then almost 1,900 ha of plantations on ancient woodland sites have been restored (to semi-natural class 1).</p> <p>The target for restoration of PAWS across all England is 36,000ha by 2015.</p>
Heritage	<p>872 Scheduled monuments 39 Registered car parks and gardens</p>
Ecosystem services	<p>Valued at £680M pa</p>
Public funding	<p>Total running cost - £70M</p> <p>Made up of sustainable forest management, 45%; priority habitats and heritage, 10%; major recreation destinations, 10%; other recreation and dedicated public access 26%; and urban community woodlands 9%.</p> <p>Central Government funding typically £15M pa</p> <p>Other funding is made up of income from timber, recreation and estate management and asset sales.</p>
Staff and Skills	<p>950 FTE staff</p>

Source: <http://saveourwoods.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Defra-Working-Group-Paper.pdf>