

22 March 2017

## CENTRAL SERVICES REPORT

### **Purpose**

1. To advise Commissioners of developments within the FC's Central Services and the progress made to achieve the key actions and priorities as set out in the Forestry Commission England (the Cross Border elements only) and Forest Research Corporate Plans 2016-17.

### Cross Border Activities and Corporate Plan Update

#### **Resilience: Forest Biosecurity**

We will protect our woodland resource and increase its resilience to pests and diseases so that our woodland continues to deliver a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits.

2. A submission has gone to, and been approved by, Lord Gardiner seeking approval for a package of actions in response to outbreaks of sweet chestnut blight in Devon and Wiltshire. This includes approval and signature of the Plant Health (Sweet Chestnut Blight) (England) Order 2017 to restrict movement of potential host materials within and from the infected areas to prevent risk of spread.

3. Following the introduction on 1 January of a new regulation requiring notification of firewood imports, there has been a positive response from the firewood trade. 24 companies have enrolled in the register of firewood importers, four have been inspected and two support visits have been made. Imports come mainly from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland and Ukraine. The initial figures suggest an annual import of some 56,000 tonnes of firewood, with the main species being ash and birch. The notification scheme is particularly aimed at ensuring that emerald ash borer, and other pests, do not enter the UK via this pathway.

4. A business plan is being drafted for continuing the Observatree tree health early warning project. The project uses volunteers to visit forests and woodlands to look for signs of specific pests and diseases. Several new pests have already been identified by the volunteer network, thus picking up issues which might have gone unnoticed before they start to pose a real problem. The Observatree partnership is fully committed to ensuring that the network continues, and the business plan has identified a number of

areas where a second phase can improve the way the network operates while reducing the cost of delivery.

### **Resilience: Climate Change and Economics**

We will protect our woodland resource and increase its resilience to the impacts of climate change so that our woodlands continue to deliver a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits.

5. We have published a major review by the University of Exeter, and an accompanying short research note, called "*Valuing the social and environmental contribution of woodlands and trees in England, Scotland and Wales*". The report assesses the economic evidence on the value of the social and environmental outputs of woodlands, identifies strengths and gaps in the evidence base and sets out future priorities for research. It also brings together different (but related) economic concepts – including natural capital – to explain how woodlands contribute to the economy through what it calls the natural factory. This shows that woodlands have a more far-reaching and fundamental impact on the economy than is often recognised. The report can be downloaded [here](#).

### **Evidence**

We will ensure that there is a robust evidence base available to the forestry sector across the UK to underpin its policies and operational decisions.

6. Work on the development of a National Tree Improvement Strategy has continued throughout the winter and the strategy and action plan are scheduled for launching at a Future Trees Trust event in May. The aim of the strategy is to have much greater engagement with, and leadership from, the wider sector in tree improvement, and the CFS role has been to facilitate the process.

7. Discussions are underway on a new cross border collaboration working group to explore how governance and management of research commissioning will continue post-devolution of CFS functions. This subject will also be discussed at the next Research Strategy Management Board meeting on 6 April.

8. The following publications have been published in the last six months:

- FC Research Note and Research Report: Valuing the social and economic benefits of trees and woodlands in England, Scotland and Wales
- FC Research Report: Delivery of ecosystem services by urban forests

### **Standards and International**

We will set the standards for sustainable forest management in the UK, within the framework of international agreements, and promote them domestically and internationally.

9. The UKFS Steering Group (composed of the 4 countries and CFS) met in late November and discussed the changes for phase 2 (Guidelines) of the UK Forestry Standard. The changes were put to the external Reference Group in February who suggested several modifications. Working jointly with the Publications Team (now part of FR) the document texts will be passed to an external contractor for design and editing as an E-Publication. We have also agreed to record a number of issues that have arisen during the revision for subsequent consideration beyond the scope of the revision project and we shall have a final meeting of the 4 country group to consider these once the revision is in place.

10. The New Generation Plantations Platform (NGP) initiative, facilitated by WWF-International, was launched in Edinburgh in 2007 and the FC has been an active member since then. It aims to promote the highest standards of design and management of planted forests and involves several governments as well as many of the major international forestry and timber companies. For the 10 year anniversary, NGP is to return to the UK for meetings, hosted and facilitated by CFS, at Chatham House (to link with the annual Illegal Logging Seminar) and in Edinburgh. This will be a high profile international event taking place from 20 – 25 June 2017.

## Forest Research Activities and Corporate Plan Update

11. FR's Chief Scientist Peter Freer-Smith appeared, alongside Director England Ian Gambles, in front of the Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs Committee on 6 December 2016 and the Committee's interview of them is available for view on the associated UK Parliamentary TV channel.

### FR Science Priority: Protect Our Trees and Forests

12. FR supported FC England and Animal & Plant Health Agency colleagues in dealing with the current Devon outbreak of sweet chestnut blight, caused by the fungus *Cryphonectria parasitica*.

13. FR's Tree Health team helped identify the causal agent(s) affecting particularly Noble fir in Wales, following the initial (re)discovery of a stand of affected trees in the Corris area. The primary disease-causing organism has now been confirmed as the fungus *Neonectria neomacrospora* which, from historical records held at Alice Holt, appears to have been present on the same site since at least 1990. There is also evidence to show that this canker disease has been present in GB since before 1961, when its presence in GB was described in print. In December, FR revisited some Noble fir which had been identified as being in poor condition during this year's helicopter survey of *Phytophthora ramorum*, but which had subsequently tested negative (in the field) for the presence of *Phytophthora*. The majority of these Noble firs, growing at a range of locations across Wales, are now confirmed as being infected with *Neonectria neomacrospora*.

14. FR is involved in discussions about the establishment (restoration) of an upland arboretum and woodland research area in the vicinity of the Arch at Cwmystwyth, Ceredigion. This multi-partner project involving FR, the Welsh Government, NRW, Coed Cymru and Tir Coed would be led by Aberystwyth University, with initial funding sought under the Welsh Government's Rural Community Development Fund (RCDF). If funded, this work would support FR's existing research into alternative species and woodland resilience.

15. *Genome sequence and genetic diversity of European ash trees*, of which FR staff is one of 30 authors, has been accepted for publication in Nature.

16. FR staff and the IUFRO (International Union of Forest Research Organisations) Working Party 'Social Dimensions of Tree Health' have had their panel accepted for the IUFRO conference in Freiburg in September 2017.

### FR Science Priority: Enhance Forest Ecosystem Resilience and Service Provision

17. A new Forestry Commission Research Note *The implications of upland conifer management for breeding birds* has been published.

18. FR staff and the PESFOR COST action (Payment for Ecosystem Services (Forests for Water)) have had their proposal for a session entitled *Forests and Water Payments for Ecosystem Services* accepted for the IUFRO conference in Freiburg in September 2017.

19. A [SIMWOOD paper](#) which FR contributed to has been published in Climate Research.

20. FR staff completed and submitted (with help from a number of collaborators including BTO researchers) a report to Sustainable Forestry (ex Scottish Forestry Alliance) on the biodiversity status of 11 SFA woodlands in Scotland.

21. FR has published a Soil Texture Classification [tool](#) which enables classification of soil according to its particle size distribution i.e. clay, sand and silt fractions. By entering the percentage of clay and sand fractions into the tool, the soil's textural class is given according to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the United Kingdom's Soil Survey of England and Wales (UK SSEW) classification schemes.

22. FR has commenced work on a contract with the Northern Ireland Forest Service (NIFS), *Opportunity Mapping for Woodland Planting to Reduce Flood Risk for Northern Ireland*.

23. FR staff spent a week working in Ae with the FE planning team showing them how to define water catchments and investigating the usability of existing FORESTER reporting tools to incorporate hydrology and flood risk planning into the preparation of land management plans.

24. FR authored a journal article *Forest ecosystem service delivery under future climate scenarios and adaptation management options: a case study in central Scotland* which was published in Scottish Forestry in December 2016.

25. FR staff attended and presented at a Scottish Government workshop (organised by James Hutton Institute) on *Extreme weather and resilience of Scotland's Rural Industries*.

### FR Science Priority: Ensure Sustainable Management and Adaptation of our Forests to Climate Change

26. On 18 January FR staff presented to, and participated in, an EC technical workshop on the development of forestry accounting rules for post-2020 climate agreements. FR staff will join a follow-up EC technical workshop on forestry accounting rules shortly.

27. A viewpoint article *Blowing in the Wind* was published in the insurance industry magazine *Insurance Day* on 30 November 2016. It was written jointly by Castel Underwriting Agencies and FR. The article describes how ForestGALES can be used to establish a more accurate base for underwriting wind risks in the forest sector.

### FR Science Priority: Publish Official Statistics and Effect Knowledge Exchange

28. FR's tree health advisory service staff have been heavily involved in Knowledge Exchange activities including three talks at Tree Health Seminars in Wales, presentations to the EU PONTE (Pest Organisms Threatening Europe) project in Madrid, and the Parliamentary Reception for the Observatree Project chaired by Sir Harry Studholme.

29. FR staff attended a two day event at Bedgebury as part of the Arboreta Advisory Committee programme, covering development of a future strategy for safe and quarantine-compliant seed collections along with an update on current pathogen problems.

30. A complete and up-to-date list of all FC Official Statistics releases that have been pre-announced for the next 12 months is available [here](#).

31. The following Official Statistics were released in January:

- 19 January - Woodland Carbon Code Statistics: Data to December 2016
- 26 January - European Forest Accounts: UK 2014 data

32. FR's statistics team have issued the 2016 timber industry surveys. A news release to publicise the surveys and encourage response has been issued to trade press.

33. IFOS also worked with FES on developing the ArcGISOnline map app in support of the new [Community Asset Transfer legislation](#).

## FR Business Priority: Grow Our Business

34. BBSRC (Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council) are clear that the Tree Health and Plant Biosecurity programme, administered by LWEC, will not be continued but those interested in such work will be encouraged to seek ongoing BBSRC funding through responsive mode applications.

35. FR has now been asked by the Welsh Government to quote, as a single tender action, to deliver the study *Welsh Forest Services Valuation*, to be completed by 31 March.

## Ways of Working

36. Progress on the timeline for establishing new Corporate Service arrangements for the countries and FR is as follows:

- By the end of this financial year (31 March 2017) the following services will have been established in the countries/FR:
  - Business Sustainability
  - HR Services
  - Equality & Diversity
  - Procurement
  - Safety, Health & Environment
  - Learning and Development
  - Forest Machine Operator Certification Centre
  - Internal Audit (being outsourced).
- Consultation with the trade unions is currently underway for new IT, finance and HR arrangements for FC England. Proposals for new IT and finance arrangements in Scotland are expected to go to consultation in the first two months of FY 2017/18, with proposals for FR following later in the Summer. A separate FC-wide consultation is also underway on new arrangements for the Job Evaluation and Grading Service.

37. The high-level plans and detailed technical solutions that are required to complete the remaining work to establish new corporate services are still expected to be in place in FCE and FCS by April-May 2017; with FR's requirements and plans being finalised later in the Summer.

38. Progress with determining a future ownership and operating model for FR through the Forestry Governance Project Board is ongoing and covered in a separate report to this meeting.

## Natural Resources Wales

39. The current Shared Service Cooperation Agreement with Natural Resources Wales is still on course to end on 31 March 2017. An update on this is also covered by a

separate report to this meeting. We have engaged the Welsh Government on their liability for the Wales share of severance and Silvan House costs and are in active dialogue regarding a final package to bring this arrangement to a satisfactory close.

## Shared Services

### **Silvan House**

40. SEPA successfully completed their move into the building during December.

### **Staff Survey**

41. The Staff Survey is due to run in October 2017.

### **Hosted eSales Service**

42. Two local sales were successfully trialled in England on the new Hosted eSales service and feedback from both Customers and FC staff was very positive. The integration between SRP and the new service that involves an automated and secure connection has been completed and this was used to create the first major sale in England. Therefore, Phase 1 of the development on Tender sales has been successfully completed.

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Director Central Services  
March 2017