

10 MARCH 2025**THE FORESTRY ACT. ACHIEVING BALANCE BETWEEN NATURE RECOVERY AND TIMBER PRODUCTION – DEFINING “ADEQUATE RESERVES OF GROWING TREES”****Issue**

1. The Forestry Act sets out the duties of the Forestry Commission which include “promoting the establishment and maintenance.....of adequate reserves of growing trees”. The definition of “adequate reserves of growing trees” has not been agreed. Setting a definition would provide the organisation with a long term strategic objective and enable us to make a case for resources required to deliver it. It would balance our statement on compliance with the ‘enhanced biodiversity duty’ published in 2024.

Recommendations

2. Prior to coming to the Commissioners, the FCEB are invited to:
 - Note the information set out in the Annexes .
 - Agree that FC defines and publishes what is meant by ‘adequate reserves of growing trees’ in the Forestry Act.
 - Select, or modify, one of the three options set out in the paper that would frame the definition of an ‘adequate reserve of growing trees’ to be put forward as a recommendation to the Commissioners
 - Considers the four questions set out below.

Background

3. The Forestry Commission’s primary function is set out in sections 1-4 of the 1967 Forestry Act (as amended):
 - (3) *The [appropriate forestry authority’s] general duty....includes that of promoting the establishment and maintenance.....of adequate reserves of growing trees.*
 - (3A) *In discharging their functions under the Forestry Acts 1967 to 1979 the [appropriate forestry authority] shall, so far as may be consistent with the proper discharge of those functions, endeavour to achieve a reasonable balance between—*
 - (a) *the development of afforestation, the management of forests and the production and supply of timber, and*

(b) *the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty and the conservation of flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest.]*

4. In July 2024 we published our statement on how we comply with enhanced biodiversity duty (Annex 1). This duty was introduced in the Environment Act 2021 and requires all public authorities in England to consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity, taking account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
5. In contrast, we have not defined what we regard as ‘adequate reserves of growing trees’ and do not have a policy statement that sets out actions we are taking on the ‘development of afforestation, the management of forests and the production and supply of timber’.
6. Data shows that whilst the area of broadleaf woodland has increased in England, the area of conifer woodland has declined and that the availability of softwood timber is forecast to decline. In contrast current policy as set out in the Environment Improvement Plan (currently under review), Net Zero Strategy, and Timber in Construction Roadmap launched in March 2025, is to increase domestic supply of timber and to use more timber in construction.
7. To facilitate a discussion on whether a definition of ‘adequate reserves of growing trees’ is required, what our level of ambition should be and which option set out in Annex 1 is most appropriate, you are invited to consider these questions:

Question 1) – To what extent should FC demonstrate leadership in increasing long term softwood availability through incentives and regulations? This could include FS regulating Forestry England and other landowners more closely via existing open habitat policy and insisting on compensatory planting where applicable in habitat restoration projects.

Question 2) – Do you want to include statutory tree planting targets, net zero and nature recovery ambitions in our definition of ‘adequate reserve of growing trees’?

Question 3) – To what extent should FC demonstrate leadership in maintaining or increasing long term softwood availability through the land it manages, in synchrony with meeting habitat restoration and nature recovery goals?

Question 4) – Should our focus be on protecting and expanding the area of land managed by Forestry England in general or should it be on protecting and expanding the area of forest cover managed by Forestry England, focusing on diversity of woodland type, woodland resilience and the delivery of a range of social, economic and environmental benefits, including timber production. Should

the nation's forest show case best practice land management across a range of habitats, including heath and peat, or focus on trees, woods and forests alone?

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