

Call for Views

The current and future management of forest resources in England

Submission to Independent Panel on Forestry

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Submitted by Edward Wilson¹

Question 1 – What do forests and woods mean to you?

- Breathing space for recreation, escape from the city, engagement with nature
- Sustaining rural enterprise and rural communities
- Community – a sense of collective ownership and shared values, across the nation and across generations.
- Conservation of natural heritage
- Human health – mental and physical well-being, climate change mitigation, air quality enhancement, maintenance of hydrologic systems and natural processes

Question 2 – What is your vision for the future of England's forests and woods?

- **Expansion of woodland cover** – I see a need for targets for the 21st century, as were effectively applied in the 20th century. The review panel could come forward with concrete objectives for the nature and extent of forests. Not just standing still, but expanding, aspirational, taking long-term view. England has among the lowest levels of forest cover in Europe. Aiming towards a forest cover of somewhere around 25 %, effectively doubling the current forest cover, would enable the UK to move more strategically towards self-sufficiency in timber production. Even this, however, is a long way short of the EU average forest cover which is somewhere over 30%. To achieve this aim we would need to engage private, public and charitable sectors in a common purpose, and provide the mechanisms for making it a reality.
- **Greater diversity in terms of species and forest stand structures.** Research is now demonstrating that the safest option is a diversity of species, closely matched to site conditions. In addition, a range of silvicultural systems offers the best insurance for the development and protection of the forest resource in the face of uncertain natural disturbances (especially wind) and climate change, as well as meeting the needs of future potential markets for higher value forest products.
- Specifically, a **greater role for Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF)** systems, which brings wide social, environmental, ecological and economic advantages over conventional systems for managing multi-purpose forests
- **Woodlands that are managed for the promotion of human health**, in addition to the wide range of other values. This is an area that needs considerable support, research and investment, when considering the demographics of an ageing but active population. Also, the provision of recreation facilities and educational resources for all age groups, especially the young. People who engage in nature

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exercise and experiences when young are more likely to enjoy this sort of activity as they age. Therefore, a diversity of services is required to embrace the interests of all age groups ... this is an area of key development into the future.

- **Greater emphasis on native species**, with support from silviculture research and genetics research.
- **Greater engagement with the private sector to stimulate management on private forest land.** Vast areas of woodland in England are under-managed or not managed at all. We need to find appropriate partnership models to encourage more private land owners to engage in active management and enhancement of their woodland estates. Provision of advisory services and a more focused **Forestry Extension Service** would be one way of ensuring that a larger proportion of the national forest estate was being managed for a fuller range of outputs and services. At the moment, the Forestry Commission is responsible for the majority of timber produced in England; more needs to be done to encourage the private sector to become more engaged in commercial and sustainable forest management activities (especially where state funding was provided for woodland establishment).
- **A thriving rural and forest-based enterprise/business sector.** By promoting value-added silviculture, it should be possible to develop a stronger forest industry, including sawmills and production facilities.
- **An emphasis on high quality forest management and high quality outputs.** The long term viability of forestry depends on our ability to sustain high quality products and outputs from the forest. Simply focusing on volume and standardized models of management, as in the past, will no longer be satisfactory. We need to embrace new ways of thinking to ensure that in the future we are promoting as many high quality outputs as possible. There is no reason, for example, that the UK should be as successful as Germany, Scandinavia or France in producing and processing timber-based products and engineering solutions. A bedrock for such success is the forest itself, which needs to be managed with a view to maximizing long-term potential.
- **Management systems that are acknowledged as being world class**, exemplars of sustainability, and also of ingenuity and enterprise. Leading in terms of international standards of sustainable management of forests.
- **A distinction between traditional forests and new bioenergy/short-rotation forestry systems.** I think it is important not to divert investment from traditional forestry to these new models. We must look at the bioenergy and SRF industries as additional, not detracting from the investment and development of the existing forest resource.

Question 3 – What do you feel to be the benefits of forests and woods to:

- a) You personally;
 - Employment, healthy activity, enjoyment of nature and enhancement of the landscape in which I live.
- b) Society as a whole;
 - Human health, recreation, homegrown timber (with reduced reliance on imports), nature conservation
- c) The natural environment; and

- Forests are central to many of our natural systems, including habitat conservation, hydrological cycles, soil conservation, air quality and climate mitigation.
- d) The economy?
- Forests contribute to the rural economy in a significant way, boosting employment in conservation, recreation and economic/production sectors.

Question 4 – We would like to hear about your suggestions of practical solutions and good practice which can be replicated more widely.

- **The current model appears unsustainable.** I am less convinced that the state should be directly responsible for managing the PFE in England. The Forestry Commission appears to be under constant pressure to save costs and downscale its operations. This is highly detrimental when silvicultural activities like thinning are essential for the maintenance of stand quality and future timber quality. There has been a historic decline in the area of woodland planted and regenerated, making it necessary to think again about how we pump-prime or provide appropriate incentives to stimulate the forestry sector. The key problem is that there appears to be constant cutbacks in funding that mean essential forest management activities get sidelined.
- **The PFE as a “national charitable trust”.** To achieve many of the outcomes I have suggested in my vision for the future, it appears the main constraint is the continuance of funding/regulations from central government. To get around this, I would be interested in seeing the PFE set up as a separate charitable/enterprise organization, similar to British Waterways. This would free the forest to raise direct capital investment and also to engage more directly in partnerships with businesses, public authorities and charities. A “National Forest Management Board” with a strong business and environmental drive could offer a **third way of maintaining the forest in public ownership but free from the constraints of being a branch of government.**
- **Greater local democracy and input to decision making.** I believe we could instill greater sense of ownership and engagement if we had a more localist agenda to management of the forest resource. The Regional Advisory Committees of the Forestry Commission have been important over the years in providing input, advice and counsel. I would like to propose that this model is further developed with even more local input, perhaps to the forest level, where citizens can engage actively in supporting the management of the forest estate.
- **New Funding models, less state reliance.** Another option would be for all funds generated by the FC to be re-invested into some trust fund, similar to the model in Ontario, which could be used to support the continuing management and regeneration of the forest. Forestry is a long-term endeavour and if we are to enhance the size of the forest and the quality of the forest, then there needs to be a continuity of funding and commitment. **Moving to longer-term model for funding forestry activities is key, in my view, to realizing the potential of the national forest estate.**
- There are some excellent examples of the type of silviculture I see as meeting the multi-purpose forestry agenda, most evident in the use of Continuous Cover

Silvicultural Systems, and the trial areas set up by the Forestry Commission in Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Thetford, Forest of Dean, New Forest and in Devon.

- **Throughout the Lake District there are excellent examples of mature forest stands that are capable of producing high value timber and a range of other environmental benefits.** The forests at Thirlmere, managed by United Utilities around the reservoir that supplies water for Manchester, and the Forestry Commission's woodlands around Bassenthwaite Lake, are brilliant examples of multi-purpose forests that are now generating a sustained supply of high quality timbers, some going forward to the export market (especially the Douglas fir stocks). This is the sort of forestry I think we should be applying more widely and working towards on a UK-wide basis.

Question 5 – What do you see as the priorities and challenges for policy about England's forests and woods?

- **Quality** – the PFE should stand for the best standards in management and care of forest resources in England. This requires excellence in science, application and delivery of programmes. Quality in terms of outputs is also vital, whether it be high value timber or a range of social, ecological or environmental services.
- **Expertise** – maintaining skills, energy and enthusiasm of the dedicated and specialist staff, including support for forestry education at all levels from FE to HE and ongoing professional development.
- **Research** – needs to be maintained to support the wide range of social, environmental, economic and technical issues associated with managing a multi-purpose forest resource.
- **Silviculture and genetics** – we need a renewed emphasis on sound silvicultural systems and understanding of both native and non-native tree genetics. This is necessary to combat the threats of climate change and ensure a high quality forestry sector into the future.
- **Human Health** – we need to integrate forest management with wider societal debates around health and well-being. Ultimately society is about maximising opportunities for people to live long, positive, active and engaged lives. Forestry has the potential to contribute hugely to the national well-being. We need to develop cross-sectoral links and effect attitude changes; forestry may well be a key feature of this long-term vision for our country.
- **Enterprise** - developing the forestry enterprise sector. Forests provide a multitude of outputs and opportunities for enterprise. These encompass the traditional timber-based industries and a host of non-timber outputs, whether it be wind power, recreational services, etc. The PFE has an important role in contributing to a low carbon economy.
- **Local and community engagement.** Recognising that the forest is owned by the people for the people is one of the most important outcomes of the public debate and controversy in early 2011. I believe that this highlights the *need for greater involvement of the community at the local level* in the management of the forest estate. Building on the Regional Advisory Committee model, I would suggest there is an opportunity, or even obligation, to seek a new approach where more people have an input to how the public forest is managed.