

## **SPOTLIGHT ON ENGLAND'S NATIONAL WOODS AND FORESTS**

Over the next year the Forestry Commission in England will be taking an in-depth look at the estate it manages on behalf of the public. The study will show how the estate contributes to society today and how it might sustainably serve society's long-term needs. Recommendations will be made by the Commission to Ministers on how the estate might best contribute to the Government's Strategy on Trees, Woods and Forests.

The Forestry Commission manages 250,000ha (over 600,000 acres) of land in England and provides a unique national asset delivering many benefits. These include protecting and enhancing the natural environment, providing economic opportunities and helping to improve the quality of people's lives.

Over recent years the estate has been playing a significant part in helping to regenerate former industrial land – often close to where people live. Future challenges will include ensuring that the estate is able to adapt to a changing climate.

In addition to woods and forests, the estate includes many other areas of international important habitats such as heathland and raised bogs. The estate includes 67,000ha of SSSIs (Sites of Special Scientific Interest).

Announcing the study Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Hilary Benn, said:

“Today, the woodlands managed by the Forestry Commission are a truly multi-functional resource delivering many national priorities whilst also responding to regional and local needs. With more than 100m visits a year, they provide a breadth of public benefits and opportunities from a backdrop to adventurous sports, healthy activity, and quiet recreation - to new green space for our cities. These benefits are achieved alongside nationally important conservation programmes such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest while producing over 1 million tonnes of timber to internationally recognised standards for sustainable forest management.”

“Last year we published our strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests and the time is right to consider how the public forest estate might respond to the strategy in the future including new challenges such as climate change. I have therefore asked the Forestry Commission to carry out a study of the future long-term sustainable role of the public forest estate in England and to make recommendations.”

The Commission's England National Committee will act as the governing body for the study, establishing a working group from relevant key stakeholders, including Defra. The study will be grounded in the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy *Securing the Future* and there will be a full public consultation. Forestry Commission England will make further announcements on the timescale and how people will be able to make their views known.

## Ends

## NOTES TO EDITOR

1. The study was announced by a written Ministerial Statement to Parliament on 24 November 2008. A copy of the statement can be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/index.cfm>
2. The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for forestry in England and has lead responsibility for implementing the Strategy for England’s Trees, Woods and Forests. Its mission is to protect and expand our woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment. Further information can be found at [www.forestry.gov.uk/england](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england)

The public forest estate is owned by the Secretary of State Defra and managed by the Forestry Commission as part of its statutory duties under the Forestry Act 1967 (as amended).

The public forest estate is:

- A world leader in sustainable forest management for multiple objectives.
- A significant contributor to mitigating climate change through sequestration, substitution and adaptation.
- The largest manager of land in National Parks and AONBs.
- One of the largest managers of SSSIs with 93% in favourable condition or recovering condition.
- The most extensive and popular resource for recreation in the countryside with over 100 million visits a year.
- A major provider of new greenspace around our cities and regeneration areas.
- The largest producer of timber in England.

Managing trees and woodlands requires long-term commitment and vision. The Forestry Commission has been managing and evolving the public forest estate to meet the changing

needs of the country for nearly 90 years. Within their stewardship are some of our best known landscapes such as the New Forest and the Forest of Dean.

3. The terms of reference for the study are: To consider the future long term sustainable role for the public forest estate making recommendations about any necessary changes to improve its ability to deliver relevant priorities in the Strategy for England's Trees Woods and Forests and contribute to other government objectives.
4. The Government's Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests (ETWF) was launched in June 2007. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/rddteam/forestry.htm>
5. The UK Government launched its strategy for sustainable development, Securing The Future, in conjunction with a Strategic Framework on 7 March, 2005. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/sustainable/government/publications/uk-strategy/index.htm>
6. The Forestry Commission and Natural England are working with stakeholders to produce a delivery plan for the ETWF strategy.
7. Contact: Stuart Burgess, Forestry Commission England Press Office, 01223 346027, [stuart.burgess@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:stuart.burgess@forestry.gsi.gov.uk) or Jo Fowler, 01223 346034, [jo.fowler@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:jo.fowler@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)