

FCTU Reaction to the Progress Report from the Independent Forestry Panel

The FCTU have had some time in which to reflect on the content of this progress report which was published in late December 2011.

Part of that reflection was to ask for views from union members within the FC and we provided a short extract that focussed upon section 2 of the Progress report.

FCTU have sought and will continue to seek on behalf of union members an expanded Public Forest Estate, publicly owned and managed by a properly resourced Forestry Commission.

Does the Progress report reflect any of these aspirations?

- The net public expenditure on the public forest estate, some £20 million this year, appears very modest and delivers benefits far in excess of this. This level of funding is small in government terms and, to the panel, appears to represent very good value for money.
- By land area, the public forest estate is only 18% of England's woods and forests. However, in terms of what this means it clearly has a far greater role than this simple statistic would suggest.
- The panel believe there is an important continuing role for a national public forest estate in England. It is right that the way in which this tremendous asset is managed and used should evolve to reflect people's aspirations and wider challenges like climate change. The managers of the public forest estate should strive to be exemplars of managing land for social, environmental and economic benefits, and inspiring other landowners to do the same.
- The public forest estate needs to be managed for the long term, and in a way that allows it to adapt and evolve. This includes being able to respond to the threat of climate change and the need to decarbonise our economy. There is already a need to address disease and shift biodiversity loss to gain. The public forest estate has to continue to be responsive to the wider context, whether this is changes in the global economy; or challenges facing local communities. Going forward, it is right that land should be able to be bought and sold in pursuit of greater benefits from the estate as a whole. What should not happen is for land to be sold to make up for a shortfall in income, as has happened in recent years, as this undermines the viability of the estate.
- But the public forest estate is more than just a large area of land owned and managed by the state. It is a wonderful asset that could, and should, deliver so much more for the nation. While the public forest estate is only 18% of our woodlands, it constitutes over one third of the woodland area in active management in England. Positive action for people, nature and the economy on the public forest estate can be achieved far more readily than in most other woodlands, if the will and ambition is there. The panel believe that greater access to capital investment, and new structures to allow individuals, community groups and local organisations far greater involvement in how their local woodlands are managed, could unlock a new and exciting future for the public forest estate.

We can determine that these statements extracted from the report do in fact reflect the ethos of the FCTU campaign to enhance the PFE, to enshrine in public ownership and to be managed by a sustainably resourced Forestry Commission.

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