

Future of the Public Forest Estate in England

28 January 2011 Last Updated on 28 January 2011 Peter Fischer

Anyone with an interest in trees and woodland will have been concerned at the reports that the government intends to sell off much of the public woodland and forest estate in England managed by the Forestry Commission. On 27 January 2011 the government announced its proposals in the form of a consultation document through which it invites the public to make its views known. The official news release by Defra about the consultation document can be read at <http://ww2.defra.gov.uk/news/2011/01/27/englands-forests/> .

Alternatively you can read it in full below at the end of this news piece.

The Forestry Commission has a web page dedicated to the consultation which can be accessed at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-pfeconsultation> .

The consultation document runs to 64 pages in pdf format and can be downloaded at [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/pdf.nsf/pdf/PFE_Consultation_WEB.pdf/\\$FILE/PFE_Consultation_WEB.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/pdf.nsf/pdf/PFE_Consultation_WEB.pdf/$FILE/PFE_Consultation_WEB.pdf)

Sixteen of these pages are for giving your views by responding to specific statements or scenarios. Alternatively the response can be made online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/pfe-englandconsultation> but you will need to refer to the guidance in the full document in order to do so. **Consultation responses have to be submitted by 21 April 2011.**

Concern at what might be proposed led quite recently to a '**Save our Forests**' petition being set up by **38 Degrees**. The number of signatories passed the **275,000** mark on the day that the government published its proposals, having more than doubled in the previous fortnight. If you continue to be concerned at the government's proposals after reading them in detail, and you have not yet signed the online petition, you can do so at <http://www.38degrees.org.uk/page/s/save-our-forests#petition> .

Obviously the more people who also manage to respond to the formal consultation document, the more the government will be made aware of the depth of feeling, concern and fears the public has for this precious segment of our national heritage.

The Defra press release was as follows:

New direction for England's public forest estate

Published on Thursday 27 January 2011 at 9:53am

England's best known historic forests will be protected for future generations under proposals announced by Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman today. The transfer of heritage forests such as the New Forest and the Forest of Dean to charitable trusts will mean walkers, riders and cyclists will still be able to enjoy them as they do at the moment.

The proposals are contained in a consultation document on the ownership and management of the 18% of England's woodland currently run by the Forestry Commission. The document lays out different approaches for different types of woodlands.

The plans make clear that these woodlands will not simply be sold off to the highest bidder. Instead they recognise that no two woodlands are the same and that no single ownership model is appropriate. The document suggests a mixed approach that would deliver benefits for users and taxpayers, and makes clear that public access and biodiversity will be protected. The government will bring forward amendments to the Public Bodies Bill to ensure the public benefits the forests provide are protected.

The key proposals in the consultation document are that:

- Heritage and community forests which provide high public benefits will be protected by inviting new or existing charitable organisations to take on ownership or management.
- There will be opportunities created for community and civil society groups to buy or lease forests.
- Commercially valuable forests will be leased to commercial operators. Leasing rather than selling will allow the lease conditions to ensure that the public benefits of these woodlands are preserved while allowing the operators to maximise their commercial potential.

These changes of ownership will allow the Forestry Commission to focus on its key roles of responding to outbreaks of tree pests and diseases, regulating felling and setting standards for sustainable forest management. The proposals would remedy the situation where the Commission is the largest commercial operator in the sector it also regulates.

The Government has already committed to taking 15% of the public forest estate out of state control over the course of this parliament, generating up to £100million of receipts. The consultation paper launched today invites views on a range of ownership and management options for the remaining 85% of the estate. This will be an open consultation and Government will listen to all responses before publishing its response in the summer.

Environment Secretary Caroline Spelman said:

“State control of forests dates back to the First World War, when needs were very different. There’s now no reason for the Government to be in the business of timber production and forest management. It’s time for the Government to step back and allow those who are most involved with England’s woodlands to play a much greater role in their future.”

“We want to move from a ‘Big Government’ approach to a ‘Big Society’ one, so that we can give different groups – individuals, businesses and civil society organisations – the opportunity to be involved in managing the natural environment. And we will make sure that public access is maintained and biodiversity protected.”

On amending the Public Bodies Bill, Mrs Spelman said:

“The government is absolutely committed to the ongoing provision and protection of the public benefits provided by the public forest estate, and the consultation shows how we intend to

achieve this. We will bring forward amendments to the Public Bodies Bill to create a strengthened framework to safeguard the natural and social capital our forests provide now and for future generations. This would apply to the powers of sale, lease and management of the public forest estate. The consultation proposes that conditions will be attached to leases so that access and other public benefits are protected.”

The public forest estate makes up 18% of all woods and forests and 2% of the total land in England. The estate delivers a wide range of important public benefits, which will be protected, such as supporting biodiversity, storing carbon, supplying timber and energy and providing access to green space for recreation and employment opportunities. The Forestry Commission has long bought and sold land but any woodland sold under the new proposals would benefit from increased protection.

Pam Warhurst, Chair of the Forestry Commission, said:

“Ministers have set out a new vision for forestry in England that will require a fundamental shift in our thinking and how we work. The proposals provide an opportunity to think about forest ownership and sustainable land management in a new way and to engage a wider cross-section of society. The consultation will allow people to have their say and we encourage everyone with an interest to give us their views.”

The Forestry Commission will continue to provide expertise on a wide range of tree-related matters, including tree health, the environmental role of woodlands, the links with climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the social and economic benefits of forestry.

Reform of the public forestry estate is expected to take place over the next decade with the Government’s overall policy approach to domestic forestry being set out in the Natural Environment White Paper in spring 2011.

Notes

1. **The consultation will run from 27 January 2011 to 21 April 2011.** Details of the consultation can be found here: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/forests/index.htm or on the Forestry Commission website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/england-pfeconsultation

2. The proposals set out in the consultation are designed to protect public and environmental benefits:

a) We will secure continuing good stewardship by requiring adherence to internationally recognised standards of sustainable forest management as part of any leasing arrangements. These standards cover in particular, woodland design, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and the well-being of local communities and forestry workers;

b) Statutory rights of way and dedications under the right to roam legislation will remain in place. Where there is currently permissive access, for example by bike and horse, we will seek to secure equivalent rights as part of any transfer to new owners and managers;

c) The Forestry Commission’s felling regime will remain in place, alongside the presumption of replanting. Any change of use will be subject to strict controls under the planning system. It

is simply wrong to suggest that our forests will be chopped down for housing development or conversion into golf courses; and

d) We will seek to agree the continuing restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) with any new owners and managers.

3. There are numerous safeguards in place which will ensure that public benefits provided by our woods and forests are protected if they pass into private ownership. These safeguards include:

- regulations governing felling and replanting;
- protection for biodiversity through the Wildlife and Countryside Act and Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- incentives to protect ancient woodland;
- guarantees for public access – the majority of the freehold areas of the public forestry estate are protected for access on foot by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act;
- protection of ancient monuments is overseen by English Heritage;
- any proposals for development would be subject to the Town and Country Planning process; and
- Biosecurity – the Plant Health Act sets out a legal framework for the control of pests and diseases of forest trees and timber.

4. The Forestry Commission has always bought and sold land to achieve operational efficiency. In last ten years, they have sold 7,800ha and acquired 5,400ha of woodland.

5. Selling 15% of the public forest estate is part of Defra's Spending Review settlement and will help to contribute to tackling the deficit. The sites that will be sold will be woodlands where Forestry Commission activity adds the least in enhanced public benefit and do not contribute significant revenue to the running of the estate.

6. Any forest or wood for which a suitable offer cannot be achieved will continue to be part of the publicly owned forest estate.

This consultation focuses on the public forest estate in England. The woodland managed by the Forestry Commission in Wales and Scotland is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Written Ministerial Statement

Public consultation on the future of the Public Forest Estate in England – The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Caroline Spelman)

I have today published a public consultation on the future of the Public Forest Estate in England. A copy of the consultation document is available through the Defra website at: www.defra.gov.uk/corporate/consult/forests/index.htm and the Forestry Commission website at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/england-pfeconsultation> and I have placed copies in the libraries of both Houses.

The Public Forest Estate in England is around 258,000 hectares of Government-owned land managed by the Forestry Commission. It represents less than one fifth of the woodlands of England, with the majority of the remainder in private and voluntary sector ownership. The estate was started at a time of national crisis after the First World War, with severe shortages of timber and a woodland resource depleted to less than 5% of the land area in Great Britain.

In line with the Government's broad policy to effect a shift from Big Government to Big Society, the consultation sets out the rationale for reducing state ownership and management of forest resources. The status quo is not an option. There is a fundamental conflict of interest in the Forestry Commission's role. It is the largest player in the commercial forestry sector, a sector it also regulates.

The Government's approach to looking at new models of ownership and management of the Public Forest Estate in England will be underpinned by a set of key principles which are designed to protect public access and other public benefits that so many enjoy. The Government's proposals, on which the consultation seeks views, are for a mixed approach which includes:

- Recognising that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to the different types of woodland and forestry;
- Inviting new or existing charitable organisations to take on ownership or management of the heritage forests in order to secure their public benefits future generations to enjoy;
- Creating opportunities for community and civil society groups to buy or lease forests that they wish to own or manage; and
- Issuing long-term leases on the large-scale commercially valuable forests. By leasing rather than selling, it will be possible to ensure that the public can continue to enjoy their benefits.

The Government is committed to the ongoing provision and protection of the public benefits provided by the public forest estate. The policy we are consulting on shows how we intend to achieve this. We will ensure that the powers in the Public Bodies Bill reflect our policy objectives, so that the powers and duties within it are strengthened to safeguard the natural and social capital our forests provide now and for future generations. This would apply to the powers of sale, lease and management of the public forest estate. The consultation proposes that conditions will be attached to leases so that access and other public benefits are protected. We will consider:

- introducing a general duty on the Government to have regard to the maintenance of public benefits when exercising the powers under the Bill;

- exempting the most iconic heritage forests from the full range of options so that for example, the Forest of Dean or the New Forest could only be transferred to a charitable organisation or remain in public ownership, in line with the policy as set out in the consultation.

The Forestry Commission will play an important role in supporting the wider forestry sector – through its regulatory, grant-giving, research and expert advisory roles – to provide a wide-range of public benefits.

The consultation relates to 85% of the Public Forest Estate. The remaining 15% is covered by the Spending Review settlement, announced in October 2010.

I am today publishing tightened criteria for those sales under the Forestry Commission's programme to deliver £100 million in gross receipts during 2011-15. During 2010, the Forestry Commission's asset disposal programme continued under criteria established by the previous administration. At the end of 2010, pending review of the sales criteria, Ministers withdrew some sites from sale. The new criteria have been amended to strengthen the protection of public benefits through the withdrawal from sale of woodlands with significant areas of unrestored plantations on ancient woodland sites.

end of press release.

Stepping stones for stag beetles

28 January 2011 Last Updated on 28 January 2011 Peter Fischer

The People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES) is mounting a campaign to create suitable habitat for the charismatic but threatened stag beetle. Its aim is to encourage people involved in managing local biodiversity, amenity gardens, urban green spaces and country parks, to provide suitable habitat in which stag beetles can breed.

As you may know, dead and decaying wood is the ideal home for stag beetles and many other insects. Stag beetles have a long life cycle - their larvae live for up to 7 years in decaying wood such as log piles and tree stumps where they feed on the rotten timber, before emerging as beetles to breed during their short spell as adults. These insects don't travel very far and so the number found in an area depends on the availability of habitat at the time that the female laid her eggs several years earlier. An adult female stag beetle lays her eggs where she emerges if there is sufficient dead wood, but otherwise she needs to find somewhere else. Our general tendency to tidy the green spaces around us can therefore threaten these vulnerable insects, as places for them to shelter are lost or become isolated, leaving fewer suitable areas for female beetles to lay their eggs.

A simple and effective way of helping stag beetles is to make sure that they have a good supply of dead wood and can travel around easily by leaving tree stumps in situ or creating 'stepping stones' by partially burying a vertical log pile. More information on stag beetles can be found on the PTES website at www.ptes.org/stagbeetles whilst easy-to-follow instructions for creating 'Stepping Stones for Stag Beetles' can be downloaded at http://www.ptes.org/files/861_stepping_stones.pdf.

Creating your own log pile can make a great community activity for young people or interested groups of adults. Burying a vertical log pile is something that anyone can do to help increase breeding sites for stag beetles; even a single log can provide shelter and food.

For anyone wanting to create a log pile explanatory fliers are available from PTES, so if you would like them to provide some printed copies, please get in touch. They can also provide photos of stag beetles if that would be helpful.

The Big Tree Plant

06 December 2010 Last Updated on 15 December 2010 The Tree Council

The Big Tree Plant is a new national tree planting campaign being delivered by civil society partners and conservation organisations working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Forestry Commission.

The campaign will be launched on the 2nd December, during National Tree Week 2010 (the [website](#) will go live on this day).

What are the aims of The Big Tree Plant?

The overall aim of The Big Tree Plant is to increase the number of trees being planted in England's towns, cities and neighbourhoods whilst supporting the building of the Big Society by encouraging citizens to take responsibility for establishing, protecting and enhancing green spaces in their local area.



The Big Tree Plant aims to improve the quality of life of those living in England's towns, cities and residential areas by making neighbourhoods more attractive, healthy places to live. Trees can make streets and public places come to life, by attracting wildlife, changing colours throughout the seasons and creating shade and shelter. They shield houses from traffic noise, can help save energy, reduce the risk of flooding and also help fight the effects of air pollution and climate change.

Who can take part?

Anyone can get involved by planting and caring for trees. The Big Tree Plant will focus on encouraging community groups and organisations to establish (or expand) projects to plant and care for trees. The Big Tree Plant will also encourage individuals to get involved, for example through volunteering at local tree planting events if they exist, or if not to set up new events.

The support of local organisations and groups will be vital to engaging communities in The Big Tree Plant and ultimately increase the number of trees planted in each area. Please help the campaign by planting more trees in your local area and getting others in your community involved.

Is there funding available?

Yes – we will provide funding for a number of projects to encourage communities to start their own groups throughout England and plant additional trees. Please see our separate briefing on The Big Tree Plant funding scheme. The website will also provide more information, including how to apply.

For more information visit the STWN [resources](#) pages

A message from the Tree Council

01 December 2010 Adam Owen

Tree Wardening – The Big Society and the new agenda for Government.

Since the election, there have been many announcements about the new Government's policies and plans. We felt that in all the 'doom and gloom' of budget cuts, we ought to look at the very positive possibilities for Tree Wardening in the future, and how the new Government's aspirations, including a manifesto commitment to a new tree planting campaign, fit into their plans for 'The Big Society'. Although there is a lot of information included in this email, we wanted to provide you with as much information as possible for when you are making the case for Tree Wardening locally.

It seems to us that Tree Wardening, which was launched 20 years ago on Sept 19th 1990 (under a Conservative administration), is in essence the embodiment of the new Government's 'Big Society' plans. Therefore, we thought we ought to provide a review of the announcements so far, and seek your help in refining the collective case for Tree Wardening so that the networks and The Tree Council can communicate it as effectively as possible to their respective audiences.

As you will see in the announcements below, there is a plan to engage more people in becoming 'community organisers' and to offer them training. As Tree Wardens are existing Organisers who already receive training, then this is a living example of what the Coalition Government wishes to see on a wider scale, and something that we should all be raising the profile of both nationally and locally. We should also be seeking national and local funding to boost/maintain the training of our network of Tree Wardens, as an example of how the Coalition Government's plans can and should work. Presenting Tree Wardens as an existing example of what is aspired to, could reinforce the profile of your local network and it's funding.

East Hampshire District Council Tree Officers have already taken the step of getting their Tree Wardens to do a presentation to their full council in September. This 10 minute slot, at the beginning of the meeting, will cover the value of the work of Tree Wardens to the Authority; a project they have undertaken locally and the 20th Anniversary of the Scheme nationally. The hope is that this will raise the profile of the Scheme amongst the Councillors, re-enforcing their local support for the Scheme

If others of you feel that it would be worthwhile raising your profile locally, we have provided below some background to the announcements of policy and some national statistics which

may be useful. We've been able to calculate these totals thanks to the Tree Wardens who have taken part in biennial surveys of their activities over the 20 years.

Please let us know how you undertake local profile raising, so that we can share best practice with the other co-ordinators

Thanks

Jon and Margaret

The Tree Council's goal is to make trees matter to everyone. It works towards

- More trees, of the right kind, in the right places
- Better care for all trees, of all ages
- Inspiring effective action for trees

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Announcements:

PM and Deputy PM's speeches at Big Society launch, 18th May

Extract

Prime Minister: The first element is about giving communities more power – so, for instance, our policy to train more community organisers, to help actually create the social action of the future.

[....]

Next, to encourage people to play a more active role in their communities.

[....]

Third, giving more power to local government. It shouldn't stay there; in my view, it should be driven down even further into communities. But step one is transferring power from the centre to the local.

[....]

I hope you see that as a positive programme from a government that really believes in the Big Society and in what you do. And the big ask, if you like, from us to you, is: what more can we do to make it possible? What steps do you need us to take? I fully recognise that in the financial situation that we're in, there are going to be difficult decisions for government and for government spending. I don't have some naive belief that the Big Society just springs up in its place. It's what can we do to help enable you to do even more of what you do. That, I think, is the agenda for today.

[Read more](#)

Queen's Speech, 25th May

Extract

Decentralisation and Localism Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to:

devolve greater powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities control over housing and planning decisions.

The main benefits of the Bill would be:

Empowering local people.

Freeing local government from central and regional control.

Giving local communities a real share in local growth.

A more efficient and more local planning system.

[Read more](#)

Coalition Programme for Government

Extracts

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

We will introduce measures to protect wildlife and promote green spaces and wildlife corridors in order to halt the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity.

We will launch a national tree planting campaign.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Government believes that it is time for a fundamental shift of power from Westminster to people. We will promote decentralisation and democratic engagement, and we will end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals.

Give communities more powers

We will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live.

We will train a new generation of community organisers and support the creation of neighbourhood groups across the UK, especially in the most deprived areas

[Read more](#)

Caroline Spelman's (Secretary of State for the Environment) speech at the Launch of the Environmental White Paper discussion paper; Kew, 26 July 2010

Extract

All too often we decide that looking after our natural environment is something to be left solely to Government.

As you will have heard by now, the new Government believes in a Big Society approach to tackling the big problems we face.

Protecting our Natural Environment lends itself perfectly to this model because of the abundance of charities and other organisations which populate this field of endeavour.

[...]

Our trees capture carbon and hold soils together, preventing flooding and helping to control our climate.

They also add immeasurably to the quality of life in our towns and cities.

In some parts of inner London, for example, each tree is calculated to be worth as much as £78,000 in terms of its benefits.

I might make the tree surgeons in Smith Square prune with a little more sensitivity next time!

That's why, this year, we'll be launching a national tree planting campaign to spread trees throughout our high streets and neighbourhoods, providing a greener environment for millions more urban citizens.

This will be a job for everyone, bringing charities, local environmental groups and businesses together to make a real and lasting difference to our urban environment – the Big Society in action.

[Read more](#)

Statistics

Over 20 years the figure national figures show:

Tree Wardens across the UK have planted 6 million trees in the 20 years since the scheme was launched

In 20 years of Tree Wardening, volunteers have dedicated an amazing total of 22 million hours to their communities' trees – worth nearly £154 million pounds at today's volunteer rate. That amounts to a really important commitment to the environment.

In the most recent survey, covering 2008/9:

People who have been volunteering for under two years were up by a third – a really encouraging sign of the many new recruits to the national Tree Warden Scheme.

What's more, there was no decline in the number of long-serving Tree Wardens – 29 per cent have been championing trees in their communities for more than 11 years.

This is a great indication of how both new and well-established local Tree Warden networks are all attracting fresh recruits while building on the skills and expertise of the long-standing volunteers.

Other findings include:

Time spent on Tree Wardening activities in 2008 (the period covered by this latest survey) was up by one per cent to an average of 257 hours a year – the equivalent of almost 37 seven-hour days. This continues the upward trend (an average of 118 hours in 1998, 213 in 2001, 243 in 2004 and 244 in 2006).

In total, this amounts to well over 2 million volunteer hours dedicated to trees across the UK – worth £14.6 million in volunteer time, all invested in the environment. This figure, calculated using the Heritage Lottery Fund volunteer labour rate of £50 a day, is a fantastic £1.5 million more than last time.

Of the time committed, about 20 per cent was invested in caring for woodlands and orchards, up three per cent on the last survey.

Almost 20 per cent of the time (45 hours) was dedicated to tree planting.

On average, Tree Wardens also devoted 14 per cent of their time (32 hours) to organising events and activities to encourage schools and others to contribute to and value their local treescape. This was four per cent more than last time.

The amount of time spent on hedge work was also significantly up – by well over three per cent – on the last survey, and indicates how seriously Tree Wardens are taking the threat to the UK's hedges and hedgerow trees and supporting The Tree Council's Hedge Tree Campaign

The Great Juniper Hunt

09 November 2010 Last Updated on 09 November 2010 Adam Owen



Plantlife are running a Juniper conservation project. As part of this, they are promoting a Juniper survey, which they want Tree Wardens and members of the public will get involved in.

This is The Great Juniper Hunt?

It will enable Plantlife to obtain records of wild Juniper across lowland England and thereby ascertain the current situation, and give a deeper insight into reasons for decline.

Juniper is a Biodiversity Action Plan species as it is gradually becoming extinct at many former sites, partly due to the general absence of suitable habitats, but also due to factors such as seed viability, population sex ratio and age structure. Juniper supports an astonishing amount of wildlife, including numerous insects and fungi that are unable to survive without it.

On the STWN resources pages there is a copy of the survey and a map of known historic juniper sites across lowland England of which many are in Surrey. There is also a promotional poster. Please do forward this information on to any people to whom this may be of interest. If you know of an outlet for any hard copies of the survey form, and areas where a poster and map could be displayed, please do let [Rachael Arden](#) at Plantlife know.

Follow the link to the [Juniper Project](#) page

Funding - The Real Hedge Fund

27 October 2010 Adam Owen

Through our Natural England Countdown 2010 Grant and The Real Hedge Fund (Stella Artois/The Tree Council) The Real Hedge Fund are able cover some of the capital costs of hedge planting or repair, including contributions to the capital costs of hedgerow planting and they will prioritize hedgerows connecting or near dormice sites. Please see [website](#)