

# RFS

ROYAL FORESTRY SOCIETY



INSPIRING PASSION AND EXCELLENCE IN WOODLAND MANAGEMENT



## THE ROYAL FORESTRY SOCIETY **POLICIES**

INSPIRING PASSION AND EXCELLENCE IN WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

## Our policies

The RFS is an educational charity inspiring passion and excellence in woodland management. Founded in 1882, we are the largest and longest established forestry education charity supporting those actively involved in woodland management across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

We believe bringing neglected woods back into management and sharing knowledge on how to manage woods to a high standard is vital to the long term health of our woods and trees. Our policies identify what is required to ensure our woods deliver their full economic, environmental and public benefits.

### Six Key Policies:

- Woodland management
- Woodland creation
- Pests and diseases
- Grey squirrel and deer control
- Grants and regulations
- Forestry skills



### Woodland management

- The RFS is committed to promoting the benefits of responsible woodland management. Managed woodlands enhance habitat diversity and better protects trees from pests and diseases.

*Woods which produce sustainable timber, wood fuel and other products are better for nature conservation, better for people and better for the economy.*

- Woods which are under-managed will, over time, become derelict scrub devoid of natural beauty, or high forest devoid of structural complexity and habitat diversity. 42% of England's woodlands are unmanaged or under-managed. This is a serious threat to the health and sustainability of our woods. The Government wants 66% of woods in management by 2050, recognising that this will deliver big economic as well as environmental benefits. The RFS works tirelessly to contribute to meeting this goal.
- We need to be more open to the important role that non-native species play in our woods for

timber production, landscape value and economic sustainability. Conifers as well as broadleaves have an important role to play, both as a nurse for high-quality broadleaved timber, and in woodland ecology and landscape. Conifers underpin the economic health of the forestry sector, accounting for 82% of England's wood production from just 26% of the wooded land area. A well-managed mixed conifer/broadleaf woodland can have high habitat diversity and is better for the health of the wood than a pure stand of broadleaves that is unmanaged.

- We promote and encourage excellence across all types of woodland. Owners' objectives for their woods differ and in part reflect the type of woodland under management. This includes small woods, community woods, urban woods and multipurpose woods. The RFS recognises that each has an important role to play, and that owners' management objectives must be respected.

### Woodland creation

- The UK is one of the least wooded countries in Europe. 13% of UK land is woodland compared to an average of 37% in Europe. As a result the UK is the world's largest per capita importer of wood products. There is a big opportunity to increase the area of economically and environmentally sustainable woodland, at the same time creating a low-carbon route to increasing the resilience of the rural economy, and delivering more public benefits. A thriving forestry industry will reduce imports from

abroad which may not be produced sustainably and which increase the risk of introducing pests and pathogens.

- Current rates of new woodland creation in England are at an all-time low. To expand woodland cover requires a radical re-think of land-use policies which currently do not incentivise landowners to plant trees. Greater parity between agriculture and other land uses, including woodland, is a precondition.





## Pests and diseases

- Diversifying the range of tree species both native and non-native protects our woodland from over-reliance on a narrow range of species and helps support resilience. There are an ever increasing number of tree diseases threatening many of our most common woodland tree species including oak, ash, larch and pine. Climate change is placing added stress on our trees which makes them more susceptible to infection. The RFS played a leading role in the development of the ***Climate Change Accord: a call for resilient woods, forests and trees***
- Policies which strengthen biosecurity are vital to protect UK woods from disease. We will promote

policies that encourage owners to source UK-grown trees and oblige nursery owners to provide buyers with information on seed provenance that enables informed buying decisions. We support development of early disease detection systems and faster dissemination of information to woodland owners to advise them on actions they can take to detect and mitigate the impact of pests and diseases.

- The Government must support the UK's world leading, innovative research on tree pests and diseases including breeding more resilient and productive tree species.

## Grey squirrel and deer control

- The grey squirrel represents one of the greatest threats to the health of UK broadleaved woods. It is pointless to plant oak, beech, birch, sweet chestnut or sycamore without a rigorous and sustained programme of squirrel control. Bark stripping by greys will ensure these trees never replace mature trees of the same species as objects of beauty and utility in our woods. We believe the threat must be addressed through research and development of more effective control methods, raising public understanding of need to control greys in areas where trees are most vulnerable, and collaboration

between landowners to address the problem. The RFS is a signatory of the UK Squirrel Accord and a member of the Accord committee.

- UK deer populations are far above carrying capacity and, unlike other areas of Europe, has no surviving apex predators to naturally control population levels. Over browsing of ground flora damages woodland ecosystems and prevents natural regeneration of trees on which foresters increasingly depend. The RFS supports the work of the Deer Initiative.



## Grants and regulations

- There is a clear and compelling case for Government to support the wide range of public benefits unique to forestry where it is not possible to establish a market incentive. Interventions which focus on the potential value of forestry to the rural economy, coupled with environmental and social benefits, are most likely to maximise delivery of these public benefits.
- We support policies which facilitate the development of markets for UK-grown timber, wood fuel and non-timber products, including investment in the hardwood supply chain, promotion of timber in construction and the Renewable Heat Incentive.
- Brexit is an opportunity to review the regulatory regime affecting forestry to ensure it balances environmental protection with practical operational needs and allows it to deliver wider good to the English countryside and its communities. A more risk-based approach to regulation should be introduced. It should not be forgotten that woodland management, despite the improved outlook in recent years, remains a marginal activity for many landowners in lowland England. Burdening forestry with unnecessary regulation risks stopping management of woods to the detriment of the environment the regulations are designed to protect.

## Forestry skills

- Forestry employs 16,000 people in the UK with a further 24,000 employed in primary wood processing (2014). To bring more woods into management, increase woodland cover and manage the impact of tree pests and diseases, the sector will need to employ a larger number of skilled people. Many forestry organisations report evidence of skills shortages in all parts of the supply chain. Currently 53% of forestry workers are over 40 and only 11% are under 25.
- The RFS is leading the forestry sector to encourage more young people to take up careers in forestry by creating and managing a forestry careers website, attending careers fairs and providing work experience placements for students.
- Retaining a strong, free-standing Forestry Commission advisory capability is an important part the skills agenda. RFS members greatly value the well informed advice and guidance of experienced Forestry Commission England Woodland Officers. This resource is stretched so thin that it risks delivery of government policy objectives for our woods. The direction of travel should be towards more front-line support for woodland owners and less administrative and regulatory burden.

For its entire 135 years, the RFS has dedicated itself to sharing knowledge on the art and science of woodland management so that the accumulated wisdom and experience of landowners, foresters, arborists and others is transferred from one generation to another.



Discover more about the RFS at [www.rfs.org.uk](http://www.rfs.org.uk)

**The Royal Forestry Society**

The Hay Barns, Home Farm Drive, Upton Estate,  
Banbury OX15 6HU.

Tel: **01295 678588**

Fax: **01295 670798**

Email: [rfsHQ@rfs.org.uk](mailto:rfsHQ@rfs.org.uk)