

Forest Service Business Plan 2021 2022



Contents

Chief Executive Foreword	3
Purpose & Status.....	5
Vision & Aims	5
Functions.....	6
Strategic Context.....	7
Operating Environment	9
Forests for Our Future	9
Maintaining plant health status of NI	10
Improving the contribution from forests to net zero carbon and economic growth.....	10
Managing Forests Sustainably & Provision of Recreational Services	11
Income Generation	12
2021/22 Key Targets	13
Organisation & Resources.....	18
Agency Offices.....	19

Chief Executive Foreword

I am pleased to present this Business Plan setting out the strategic objectives, priorities and associated targets for Forest Service in the 2021/22 business year. The Minister has agreed the priority work streams and set 8 Key Targets for the delivery of his forestry and plant health policies. The plan includes 15 supplementary measures which further support Forest Service's priority work streams that contribute to '**Sustainability for the future, DAERA's – Plan to 2050**'.

In 2021/22 Forest Service will take forward the Forests for Our Future programme, with a challenging target to plant 600 hectares of new woodland in the period. The emphasis on creating new woodlands remains a key focus of the Agency's activity this year, to provide increased ecosystem services, support the Departments Green Growth strategy and contribute to the UK government's commitment to achieve net-zero carbon target by 2050.

Managing our forests sustainably and supplying of 400,000 tonnes of timber for wood processing underlines our ongoing commitment to support employment and contribute to the local economy. The forestry sector continues to generate around £60 million per annum from timber production and sustains approximately 1,000 rural jobs.

Protecting the plant health status of NI whilst facilitating trade in plant and plant products will remain a priority area for Forest Service in the coming year. Following the end of the EU Exit transition period, work will continue in the development and implementation of Plant Health policies for the UK Internal market, intra EU trade and from 3rd countries.

Together with service delivery partners, we will continue to realise new opportunities to extend the use of forests for recreation and tourism. I'm delighted with the findings of an independent visitor survey, published in 2020, that highlights the growing importance people attach to the use of our forests. The survey indicates that the number of forest visits per year has reached 9 million, almost doubling over the period 2014 to 2019. Over the past year, dealing the Covid-19 pandemic, we have seen the high value people associate with access to the safe outdoor spaces our forests offer for their enjoyment of health and well-being benefits.

In recognition of the role that our forests have in providing high value services and outcomes for society, during the coming year I intend to strengthen Forest Service's capacity to maximise the potential of our natural capital forest assets and the benefits they provide.

John Joe O'Boyle
Chief Executive

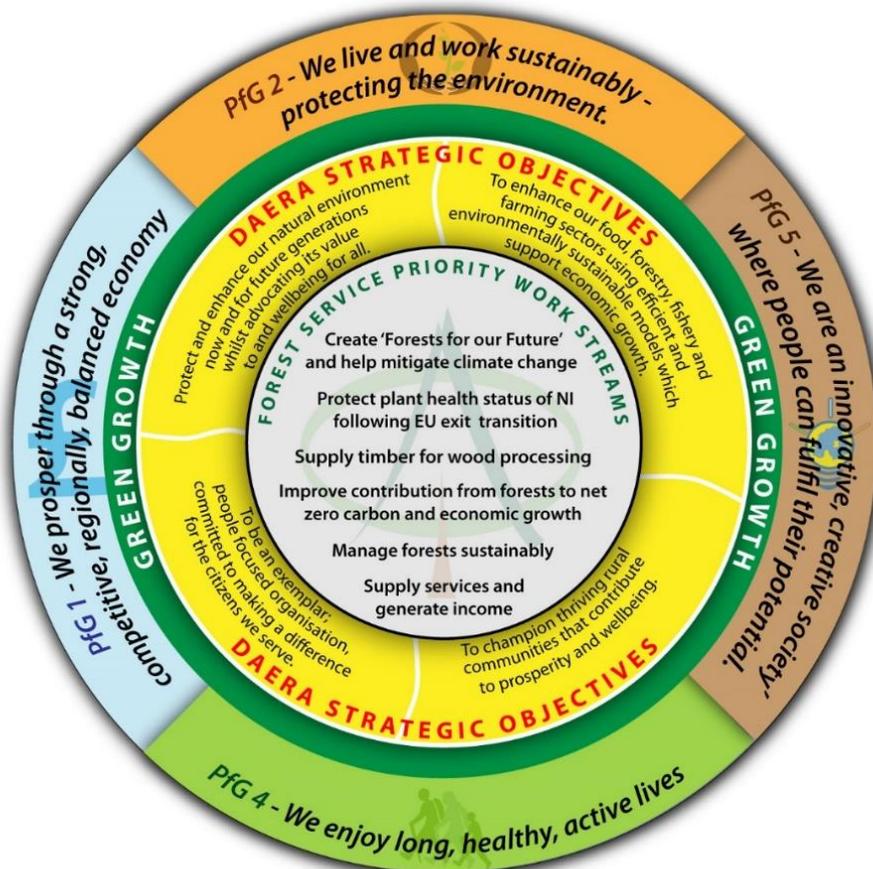


Purpose & Status

Forest Service delivers forestry and plant health functions on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). Forest Service operates as an Executive Agency since 1 April 1998 and was further classified as a Non-Financial Public Corporation from 1 April 2020. The agency is subject to the overall direction of the Minister, who determines the policy framework within which it operates, the scope of agency activities and the resources available for its work.

Vision & Aims

Forest Service's work substantially supports: the Department's vision of **'Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone'**; the Strategic Outcomes in the DAERA business plan; and contributes to the working draft Programme for Government (PfG). Forest Service work streams are aligned to the Department's strategic objectives as set out in Sustainability for the Future – DAERA's Plan to 2050¹, its vision for 'Green Growth' and its contribution to PfG Strategic Outcomes including 'We live and work sustainably – protecting the environment', for which DAERA has lead responsibility.



¹ Sustainability for the Future - "DAERA's Plan to 2050" | NICS Intranet (nigov.net)

Functions

Forest Service fulfils DAERA's legal obligations in the areas of forestry, plant health and seed potato certification.

Our Key Tasks are:



Strategic Context

The Agency Framework Document sets out the context for our work on forestry and plant health consistent with the Department's vision for 'Green Growth' and strategic outcomes set out in the DAERA Strategic Plan. Increasingly, Forest Service is working with partners to deliver services from forests that also align with their strategic objectives and provision of services. This allows us to focus on regulation, strategic planning and the technical aspects developing and managing forests.

Increasing forests in NI is interdependent on the extent of changes in land use within the agriculture sector in response to climate change awareness, including a UK 'carbon neutral' target by 2050. There is a renewed momentum behind environment-focused programmes including afforestation. Forest Service will continue to actively engage in developing policies in agricultural and environmental land use to establish the role trees have within these policies in the pathway to net carbon zero.

This year we will continue to grant aid forest expansion within both the public and private sectors through the recently reviewed Forest Expansion Scheme and the new Small Woodland Grant Scheme and encourage landowners to consider forestry as a viable land use option. Landowners will need to be supported in realising public benefits from increasing forests, for example to contribute to economic activity; flood alleviation; public access and other non-timber eco-system services. To contribute to this we will continue to advise on the creation and management of forests and financial support available to assist woodland creation. Forest Service's growing stock of timber continues to support commercial timber processing, and underpin resilience and confidence in the sector to invest for the future and share in the challenge to reach net zero carbon.

Reviewing and adapting our plant health legislative framework and putting in place risk based official controls to protect our plant health status whilst facilitating trade and economic growth continues to represent a significant work programme for the year ahead. We continue to have a common interest in plant health matters with our colleagues in the Republic of Ireland and continue to collaborate on plant health policies and legislation to support the maintenance of the single epidemiological status of the island.

It is in this context that we will:

- Protect and promote forestry, to increase the natural capital of forests to deliver a sustainable programme of forest ecosystem services;
- Strengthen our approach to forest planning so that we are better able to identify the potential for forestry as a sustainable viable option for land-use change to help mitigate the effects of changing climate and other external impacts on forestry;
- Maintain independent certification of state forests;
- Safeguard the plant health status of our land-based industries through implementation of the plant health legislative framework and risk based Official Controls.

The agency's targets for the forthcoming year reflect the need to safeguard the NI plant health status, extend the area of forest and woodland, manage and develop forests to provide sustainable services, supply 400,000 tonnes of timber to industry, and earn over £10 million from forestry resources.

To achieve this we will engage in partnership working on forestry land to supply timber to wood processors, to develop public access and improve recreational provision in support of health and well-being benefits and the tourism economy. In safeguarding plant health and the environment we will work with environmental NGOs, trade representative bodies, and the public. We will underpin the knowledge base about forestry and plant health by working with research and academic communities.

In 2021/22 Forest Service will continue to improve engagement with and safeguard its staff. It will contribute to the work of the Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) working groups to provide best practice guidance that is used for setting and improving standards of health, safety and welfare in the forest industry. New and emerging training requirements will be identified and delivered via an agency wide training. In the coming business year, Forest Service will implement a new management system with automated functionality to improve protection for employees when working alone.

Last year Forest Service generated approximately £9.5M of reserves to further protect the agency's resilience and capacity to absorb market shock and contribute to net zero carbon and in the coming year it will continue to seek out opportunities for investment, including with partners, to improve and extend the life of assets.

Operating Environment

Forests for Our Future

The 'Forests for Our Future' programme was launched in March 2020 and is aimed at helping achieve the UK's net-zero carbon target by 2050 as well as contributing to the enhancement of the landscape and biodiversity, and improving the health and well-being of those that enjoy the natural resource. Over this decade the Forests for Our Future programme aims to plant 18 million trees or 9,000 hectares of new woodland and is a foundation initiative of the Executive's Green Growth strategy which is being developed by DAERA.

Our target for afforestation in the coming year has increased significantly on last year, reflecting the encouraging interest shown in our new grant support schemes. More land becoming available for tree planting requires other sectors to reform their land use policies to contribute to net zero carbon. This is the single greatest challenge to continuing to increase woodland cover. We will continue to look for opportunities in 2021/22 where it is in the public interest to acquire lands for afforestation purposes. Through the recently established Afforestation Forum we will continue target those land areas, which are already publically owned, and will seek to repurpose them for tree planting and to extend the range of ecosystem services they provide.

Targets for the new business year have been set to provide for those private sector land holders who wish to plant trees through the next phase of the Forest Expansion Scheme. This will be augmented through re-opening the Small Woodlands Grant Scheme, aimed at including those landholders who can be encouraged to plant new native woodland on smaller sites, 0.2ha and greater.

With increasing focus on environmental issues and the recognition of tree planting as a 'simple, low cost option' to remove carbon from the atmosphere by the Committee on Climate change; Forest Service will place significant emphasis on afforestation in the upcoming year.

Maintaining plant health status of NI

Following the end of the EU Exit transition period and under the retained regulatory regime, Forest Service has continued to deliver Sanitary & Phytosanitary (SPS) controls, applying a risk based approach to regulated plants and plant products. The application of these controls are critical to maintaining the plant health status of NI, protecting our natural environment, supporting NI's rural economy and contributing to the wellbeing of society. In this business year Forest Service will collaborate with the UK Plant Health Service to manage risks and secure the operation of the UK internal market and will continue to control goods moving within the EU single market and imports to it. To manage the risk of new and emerging pest threats moving in trade, horizon scanning and the application of the NI Plant Health Risk Register will inform the design and implementation of effective and resilient control programmes. Further biosecurity protection will be achieved through the partnership approach with Defra and in collaboration with DAFM to ensure effective safeguarding measures are in place to control the higher risk plants and plant products.

Improving the contribution from forests to net zero carbon and economic growth

In keeping with elsewhere in the UK and Ireland, most of the area of NI's public forest estate occupies land of low agricultural value in the uplands. Despite this limitation, DAERA forests produce a significant amount of timber, which is processed in NI, and, as a result, generate employment, income and contribute to the wider NI economy. In more recent times however, attention has increasingly turned to the potential contribution of forestry to mitigating the effects of climate change by absorbing carbon, which can be 'locked away' in forest biomass and harvested wood products. Forest soils also contribute to forest carbon stocks and in 2021 Forest Service, in collaboration with Forest Research, commissioned an outline assessment of the greenhouse gas implications of existing forests on peat. The report indicates the greatest potential for a positive carbon balance from regenerating clearfelled forest is where the higher rates of tree growth are achieved with minimal soil disturbance. The report also indicates that the greatest potential for successful and early restoration of peatland to improve the net carbon sink is generally on the flattest peat sites that yield very poor tree growth. As outlined in the Forest Service's strategy for restoring peatland habitats, these areas typically represent the areas that are prioritised within forest management plans for restoration to peatland.

Managing Forests Sustainably & Provision of Recreational Services

A principal obligation of Forest Service is to ensure that forests are managed in a sustainable manner. As evidence of this, our sustainable forest management practices remain compliant with the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS), confirmed through an independent audit recognised by Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) (Licence Code: FSC-C084232) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) (Licence Code: PEFC/16-40-1924). Compliance with the UKWAS means, broadly, that forest management complies with all legal obligations and is committed to a rigorous planning process that pays proper attention to the needs of people and public values in the design of forests at all stages of development and management. In the delivery of the plans, forest operations comply with best practice Standards ensuring that forests are properly protected and maintained and that conservation and enhancement of biodiversity are given significant consideration. The agency encourages community participation and supports community access.

The introduction of lockdown measures during the pandemic has also saw a renewed focus on forests as an important outdoor recreational environment that is ideally suited for public enjoyment while practising social distancing. The Forest Service estate of 75,000ha consisting of productive forest and green space, is a proven attractive outdoor recreational option as evidenced in the 2019 visitor survey, which reports approximately 9M visits to forests annually. Accessibility to outdoor recreation facilities and open space continues to increase in importance, providing a 'safe' environment to exercise and contribute to the improved health and wellbeing of society. In this business year Forest Service will continue its partnership engagement to ensure targeted promotion of services from forests that best integrate with strategic provision of public services and at local council and community level.

Income Generation

In 2021/22 Forest Service will continue to support the NI wood processing industry through the supply of at least 400,000 tonnes of sustainable timber. The NI wood processing sector is a strong contributor to the local economy that adds a fivefold increase to the value of timber supplied from the forests, and underpins over 1000 rural jobs. The efficient supply of timber from our forests remains critical to ensure that local industry remains competitive in the global market. With the trading activity of Forest Service recognised by the Office of National Statistics through a Public Non-Financial Corporation classification from 1 April 2020, Forest Service have set a target to achieve at least £10M of income from the sale of the timber to industry this business year.

2021/22 Key Targets

The Minister has agreed 8 key targets in taking forward the priority work areas set for the agency in this business plan. An additional 15 supplementary measures have been identified by the agency which are important elements that contribute to the overall priority work streams.

Key Target 1

Deliver the 2021/22 Forests for Our Future programme to plant 600 hectares of new woodland



Supplementary Measure:

- 400 hectares of new woodland planted on privately owned land - **31 March 2022**

Supplementary Measure:

200 hectares of new woodland planted on available publically owned land, including DAERA's - **31 March 2022**

Supplementary Measure:

Achieve recognition under the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy Initiative for a forestry project including 1 forest and joint partner's adjacent land - **31 March 2022**

Key Target 2

Provide at least 400,000m³ of timber from well managed forests to customers



Supplementary Measure:

Produce at least 10% of timber supply from forest thinning operations - **31 March 2022**



Key Target 3

Develop a risk based inspection framework for plant and plant products moving into NI



Supplementary Measure:

Complete a pilot to test the application of a risk based inspection framework for the top 5 commodities traded into NI - **31 March 2022**



Key Target 4

Develop a draft policy framework for plant health controls to meet requirements for UK Internal market, intra EU and trade from 3rd countries



- **Supplementary Measure:**
Publish a plant health policy framework scoping document for public consultation - **30 September 2021**

- **Supplementary Measure:**
Prepare a Draft Plant Health Policy framework for public consultation - **31 March 2022**

Key Target 5

Develop a Forest Management Planning System to incorporate assessment of carbon implications and other ecosystem services associated with forests on peatland



- **Supplementary Measure:**
Improve the environmental contribution to ecosystem services from 300 hectares of bog and heath habitat
- - **March 2022**

Key Target 6

Hold independent certification that the management of DAERA forests meets sustainable Forestry Standards



- **Supplementary Measure:**
Address findings from the 2021 certification audits to ensure that DAERA forests can continue to be sustainably managed
- 31 March 2022

- **Supplementary Measure:**
Protect the DAERA Forest Estate through securing legal summaries for 17,000 hectares of first registered land on GIS and submit a further 2,000 hectares for first registration process
- 31 March 2022

- **Supplementary Measure:**
Compliment local government policies on recreation and tourism by opening new forest recreational facilities in at least 3 forests in partnership with local councils
- 31 March 2022

Key Target 7

Achieve an income of at least £11M from all sources



Supplementary Measure:

Secure sales of timber to achieve an income of at least £10M

- 31 March 2022

Key Target 8

Secure a Forest Service Employee Engagement Index of at least 60%



Supplementary Measure:

Implement a new training Service Level Agreement with the College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)

- 31 July 2021

Supplementary Measure:

Develop an Agency training plan to 22/23 - 31 August 2021

Supplementary Measure:

Develop a 2021/2022 FS recruitment plan - 31 July 2021

Organisation & Resources

Organisation and Resources The Agency has a baseline of 214 multi-disciplinary staff (full time equivalents) located at: the Agency’s headquarters in Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh; DAERA Direct offices; forest offices at Castlewellan, Co. Down and Garvagh, Co. Derry/Londonderry; and at various forest locations. In response to Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of our staff have been equipped to work from home in line with public health guidance. We will continue to support our staff in embedding new ways of working and utilising modern information and communications technology to deliver efficient and effective services, as we work through our recovery from Covid-19 impacts. The Forest Service baseline budget for 21/22 is set out below:



£900K National Expenditure
(£2.5M) EU* Income
£2.5M EU* Expenditure



£168K National Expenditure
(£504K) EU* Income
£504K EU* Expenditure



(£9.015M)



£12.255M



£1M

** Forest Service is eligible to make commitments under the NI Rural Development Programme 2014-20 until December 2023, in line with guidance issued by the European Commission.*

Agency Offices

Forest Service Headquarters
Inishkeen House
Enniskillen
BT74 4EJ
Phone: 028 6634 3165
e-mail: customer.forests@daera-ni.gov.uk

The Grange
Castlewellan Forest Park
Castlewellan
BT31 9BU
Phone: 028 4377 8664
e-mail: customer.forests@daera-ni.gov.uk

Forest Office
6 Forest Road
Garvagh forest
BT51 5EF
Phone: 028 7034 0870
e-mail: customer.forests@daera-ni.gov.uk

Staff are also based at DAERA Headquarters and various DAERA Direct offices.

Should accessible formats such as large type, audio cassette or a language other than English be required, please contact the Customer Services Manager at Forest Service Headquarters and appropriate arrangements will be made as soon as possible.