

West Fermanagh Forest Review 2016



Roogagh river in Carrigan forest

For the management of West Fermanagh Uplands & Lough Erne forests. This includes the Lough Erne forests of **Castle Archdale, Ely Lodge, Riversdale, Sillees, Castlecaldwell, Derrylin & Naan, Tullychurry** and **Necarne** as well as the West Fermanagh Upland forests in **Marlbank, Lough Navar, Conagher, Garrison, Big Dog, Ballintempo, Belmore, Florencecourt** and **Carrigan**.

Introduction

The Forest Service manages 75,000 hectares of public forest land and regulates 50,000 ha of private woodland cover in Northern Ireland. The West Fermanagh Forest Planning Unit includes 13,900 hectares or 19% of the total public forest estate. Management plans for forests within this area are currently under review. The census of 2011 gave the population of Fermanagh as being 61,805 of which 37,875 live within the planning area.

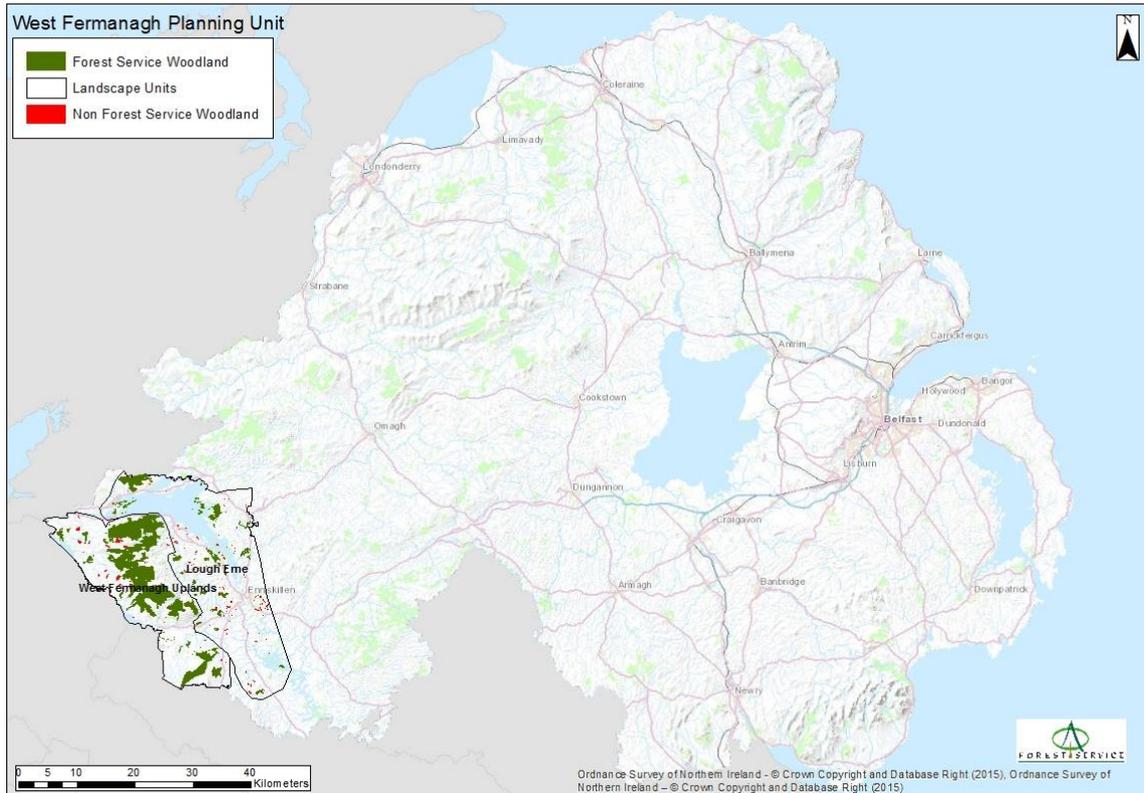
Forest policy is to manage these forests in a sustainable way and, to provide a balance of social, environmental and economic benefits for the people in Northern Ireland. We also aim to increase forest cover from 8% to 12% of land area by 2054 and we hope to achieve this primarily through the promotion of private planting.

Our powers to spend money and regulate forestry activity are set out in the Forestry Act 2010, which replaced the Forestry Act 1953 which enabled planting of most of the forests in the area. Significant changes in the 2010 Act include the provision of a public right of pedestrian access to our forest land (subject to byelaws), the regulation of tree felling in woodlands over 0.2 hectares, and the opportunity to development partnership arrangements to support any aspect of our General Duty to promote sustainable forestry or to develop forest land for a purpose other than forestry.

Other legislation that has particular relevance to forestry includes [The Forestry \(Felling of Trees\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2013](#), the Timber and Timber Products (Placing on the Market) Regulations 2013, the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006, and the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 and amendments, under which 23.1% of forest land is designated as Special Protection Areas (SPA's) or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's).

From time to time we formally review our progress towards achieving policy aims, we take stock of what has been achieved, and what more remains to be done. Although much of our considerations are based in science and tend to be discussed in very technical language, the key issues and decisions should always be capable of debate and understanding in plain English. This document sets the key issues that require decision and affect the 13,900 hectares of public forest lands that lie within the West Fermanagh Forest planning area. We hope that our neighbours, those who use public forests in the area, and those who have a more general interest in forests or are affected by forestry outputs and outcomes will contribute to our decision making process.

Our objective is to set clear directions for the short and long term development of these forests so that those who are affected by forestry activity can take account of our plans as they manage renewable energy projects and protect river basins, maintain roads, process timber, develop recreation and tourism products, and make decisions about land use.



West Fermanagh planning area showing public and private woodlands

Long term management objectives

The forests in West Fermanagh play an essential role in meeting our objectives of delivering social, environmental and commercial benefits to the people in the North of Ireland and to local communities. Our short term plans and resulting work programmes align with longer-term management objectives that look forward for many years. The following objectives underpin our shorter term plans.

To promote forest expansion: The Forest Service draft Woodland Register (2013) records Forest Service as directly managing 61,600 hectares of woodland while a further 50,000 hectares is in private ownership. Forest Service is committed to the steady expansion of our woodland in Northern Ireland and the primary vehicle for this is through private planting with the assistance of funding through the Forest Expansion Scheme and the new Environmental Farming Scheme.

In addition we may seek to expand existing public forests through the purchase of available land that is considered suitable for afforestation where it helps to consolidate or improve access to our existing plantations. Over recent years low market availability, high land prices and biodiversity considerations have restricted our opportunity to acquire suitable land for this purpose.

Forest expansion is subject to the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations which provide protection for habitats and species which are subject to special protection plans (Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans). Therefore land which may be suitable for afforestation would not be planted if it is necessary to protect the habitats themselves or the protected species that depend on that land.

To maintain productivity of existing plantations: We will continue to harvest areas as they mature and restock to ensure a continuing supply of wood to the timber industry while also seeking opportunities to enhance the environmental and social benefits that can accrue from woodland management.

We recognise the benefits of developing low impact systems in more stable areas and we plan to manage our native broadleaved woodland areas using Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) as well as a component of conifer and mixed woodlands areas in the low lying forests such as Florencecourt, Ely Lodge, Castle Archdale, Castle Caldwell, Necarne and Riversdale.

5,482 hectares or 56% of the total planted forest area of 9,832 hectares in West Fermanagh is situated on peat or peaty gley soils and over 53% of this has an elevation in excess of 150 metres. This along with the high rainfall limits the opportunity to develop shelterwood systems so we will continue to clearfell blocks of woodland as they mature or become unstable. Sitka spruce with recorded growth rates in some areas among the fastest in the world will continue to be our primary productive species in the upland areas but we will look at the opportunities to diversify to mitigate against risks associated with single species monocultures. We intend to diversify in the more sheltered lowland areas and propose to increase the broadleaved forest area from 6 to 10% in West Fermanagh Uplands and from 22 to 27% in Lough Erne Forest Landscape Units, following the eventual clearfell of existing conifer crops.

We would normally expect our more productive spruce crops to mature and be harvested when they are around fifty years old but we will retain some plantations beyond maturity where they give additional environmental or structural diversity, e.g. retaining Norway spruce crops to support red squirrel populations.

We will seek to improve the productivity of our commercial crops by using improved provenances of commercial trees and using nurse species on the poorer peat sites. We will also focus our fertiliser applications on areas where there are likely to be significant benefits to the crop.

We are aware of the destructive impact of plant diseases such as *Phytophthora ramorum*, which is affecting larch plantations throughout the province and the potential impact of *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (Chalara dieback of Ash). We will continue to monitor our woodlands for pests and diseases and take actions as required to protect the woodlands and surrounding environment. Periodic planning reviews allow us the opportunity to modify our plans in light of new information.

To conserve and enhance the environment: Forest Service is committed to maintaining compliance under the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS). This is the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) and Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) endorsed forest management standard for the UK and places an obligation on us to manage our lands in a sustainable way. We will continue to meet the environmental requirements of this standard by:

- Managing at least 15% of our forest area to meet conservation and environmental enhancement objectives.
- Liaising and working with Northern Ireland Environment Agency in relation to areas subject to statutory protection and the management of areas where environmental protection is a management objective.
- Protecting listed archaeological sites and notifying NIEA about possible sites which are not listed.
- Taking account of priority species such as red squirrels in our management of plantations.

2,756 hectares or 19.8% of the total managed area in West Fermanagh have environmental designations including Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Special Protected Areas (SPA), Areas of Special Scientific Interest, (ASSI) or National Nature Reserves, (NNRs)

In addition much of the West Fermanagh Uplands, while not directly designated, do form part of the catchment of Lough Melvin which is a SAC and requires special consideration during the planning process. The development of our plans will take account of these important designations.

To promote social use and recreation: Pedestrians have a statutory right of access to our forests for recreational purposes and we also facilitate other activities through licenses or the issue of activity permits provided that these activities are compatible with the broader commercial, recreational and environmental objectives.

We believe that there are opportunities in this area to promote forest based recreation and over the last few years we have worked closely with Fermanagh District Council to enhance the walking trails network and accesses in many of the West Fermanagh forests which form part of the UNESCO Marble Arch Caves Transnational Global Geopark. We are currently working with Fermanagh & Omagh District Council on their proposals to develop cycling projects in our forests.

During the period of the plan we will continue to work with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council, the National Trust and other potential partners to ensure that the opportunities that we provide are affordable, sustainable and integral to the provision of recreation and tourism in the local area.

To restructure the forests in line with a Long-term Forest Design Plan: When we clearfell parts of our plantations we have the opportunity to change the forest design. This may be to increase the windfirm properties of future felling coupes, to construct riparian zones along waterways, to protect or enhance existing conservation areas or to consolidate productive conifer areas. This long term vision of these forests is set down in Forest Design Plans which are held and available for view in the Forest Office (Inishkeen House). These are also subject to review at this time.

Private woodlands: Private woodlands and plantations play an important role in delivering environmental diversity, timber and fuel wood resource and enhancing the landscape in rural areas. In Northern Ireland there are over 50,000 hectares recorded as woodlands with block sizes in excess of 0.10 hectares. Private plantations in West Fermanagh cover over 5,140 hectares and these are

predominantly small plantations of broadleaves (4,000 Ha) with little over 200 hectares recorded as pure conifer. In total private woodlands cover in the order of 6% of the land area in the West Fermanagh Forest Planning area with public woodlands accounting for 12%

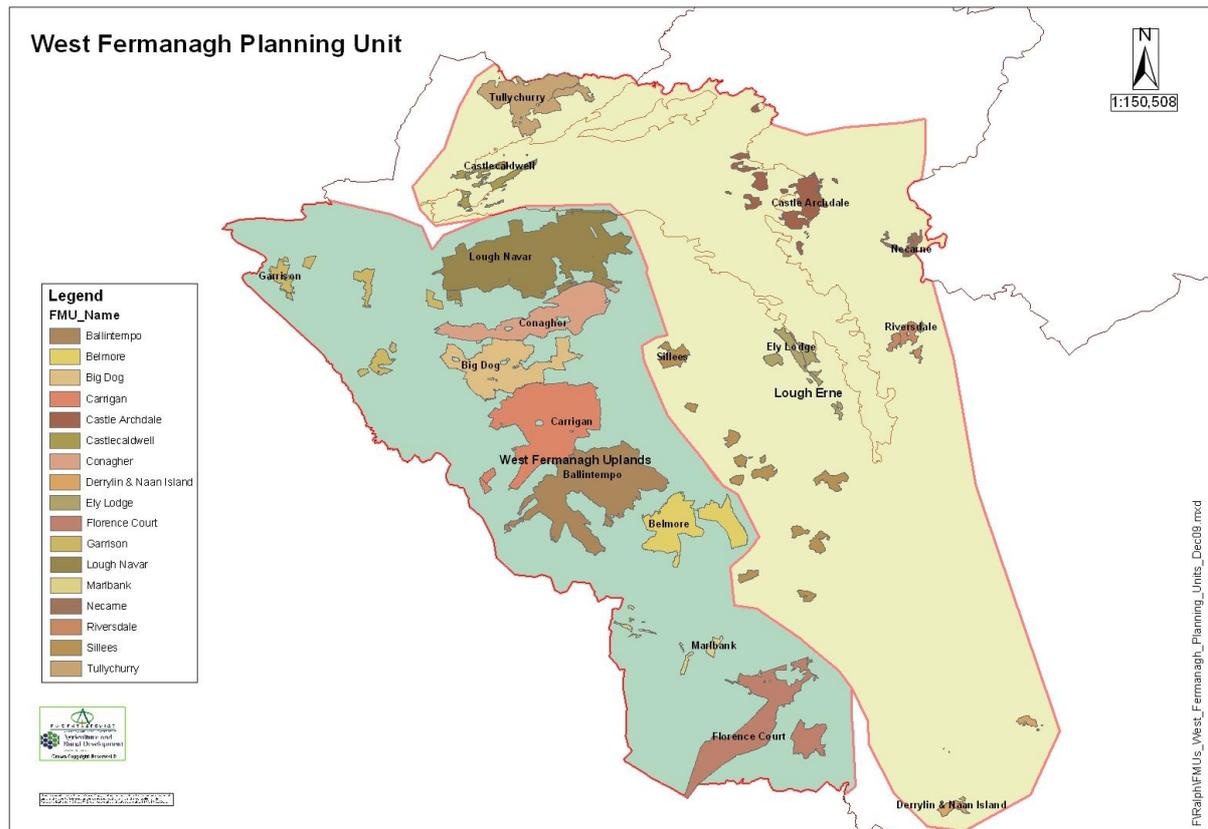
Private landowners created 72 hectares of new woodland in the West Fermanagh Planning Area under the Forestry Measures of the 2007-2013 Rural Development Program. Forest Service will continue to promote woodland expansion and will provide the assistance of funding through the Forest Expansion Scheme and the new Environmental Farming Scheme.

The [The Forestry \(Felling of Trees\) Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2013](#) enables Forest Service to regulate tree felling in plantations over 0.2 hectares and this is important in order to provide assurance that woodlands are being managed sustainably. This regulation is supported by the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 which regulates woodland clearance where the owner does not wish to reforest.

In developing our plans for the public forests we recognise the value that local private forests and plantations offer in conjunction with our woodlands. In developing our plans for the public forests we will take account of the potential positive and negative impacts that our planning decisions might have on adjacent privately owned woodlands through the consultation process.

Windfarm development: Forestry land is used for growing timber, for protection and enhancement of the environment, and for social uses. It also has strong potential for development of windfarms, subject to planning approval, grid connection, agreement on community benefits and securing financial backing. We are currently working with the Strategic Investment Board to develop plans to exploit the best opportunities for windfarm development on forestry land consistent with our forestry obligations.

FORESTS UNDER REVIEW



The West Fermanagh Planning Area includes the West Fermanagh Uplands and Lough Erne Forest Landscape Units. Grouping forests that have similar management requirements to a landscape unit within a geographical area enables us to assess and monitor sustainability at a local level.

Within these two landscape units there are a number of forests. The forest names are those traditionally used and would have been historically managed by individual forest teams. Block names identify fragmented plantations within forests.

Landscape unit	Forest Name	Area	Assoc. Blocks
West Fermanagh Uplands	Ballintempo	1,946	
	Belmore	865	
	Big Dog	1,102	
	Carrigan	1,763	Tullyrossmearan
	Conagher	1,064	
	Derrylin & Naan Island	104	
	Florencecourt	1,346	Doohatty Glebe
	Garrison	427	Gorteen, Meenacloybane, Corgary, Derrynameeo, Drumnasareen, Muckenagh
	Lough Navar	2,627	
Marlbank	98	Corrypoint wood, Marlbank wood, Rossaa, Killesher, Cladagh Glen,	

			Calkill
	TOTAL	11,238	

Landscape unit	Forest Name	Area	Associated block names
Lough Erne	Castle Archdale	517	Gay Island, Inishmakill Island, Cleenishgarve Island, Crevinishaughy Island, Davys Island, Glenross, Gubaroo point, Muckcross point
	Castlecaldwell	206	
	Ely Lodge	251	Cullen, Ballynakill, Drumberny, Roosky
	Necarne	89	Cassidy's wood, Drumsara wood, Cloughs wood
	Riversdale	143	Tullyavy
	Sillees	572	Drumhirk, Kilnamadoo, Kilmore, Portmush, Lenaghan, Coolyermer, Glencunny, Corryglass, Drumharriff, Muckinagh, Ross, Tullycarbry
	Tullychurry	833	
	TOTAL	2,716	

The two forest landscape units reviewed in this plan are different in character in terms of landscape, habitats, and the type of trees that predominate. This strongly influences how we intend to manage them over the long term.

West Fermanagh Uplands lies to the west of Lower Lough Erne. It includes the main blocks and satellite plantations of Ballintempo, Belmore, Big Dog, Carrigan, Conagher, Florencecourt, Garrison, Lough Navar, and Marlbank Forests. This covers an area of some 11,200 hectares of which 8,200 are under forest plantation and are a key component in the production of timber for the forest products industry. This area is expected to provide over 15% of the total Forest Service timber output over the next twenty years.

Besides having a high commercial value these forests contain large areas of environmentally valuable sites which we aim to protect. Most of the 3,000 hectares of open space is designated Special Areas of Conservation or Areas of Special Scientific Interest because of the significant contribution they make to a number of European Habitats Directive Annex 1 priority habitat types, –including blanket bog, upland heath, calcareous dry grasslands, molinia meadows(also known as purple moor grass and rush pasture), limestone pavements and mixed ash wood. In addition, West Fermanagh forests are included within "The UNESCO The Marble Arch Caves Transnational Global Geopark" which is international recognition of the geological and morphological status importance of the area.

Forests in The West Fermanagh Upland Forest Landscape Unit were mostly established between 1950 and 1980 as coniferous plantations on upland peat soils. There is limited opportunity to develop shelterwood systems due to exposure and soil type and some areas may require fertiliser applications to maintain growth throughout their rotation. The upland forest areas can only accommodate a limited

range of tree species, with the conifers, Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine being predominant. There is opportunity to develop native woodlands and biodiversity in riparian areas and on lower ground, particularly in forests such as Florencecourt and Marlbank.

Results from a recent survey of visits to our forests indicate that up on 180,000 visits are made to the West Fermanagh Upland forests annually with Lough Navar, Florencecourt and the Cladagh Glen walk in Marlbank being the most popular. In recent years Forest Service and Fermanagh District Council have put a significant investment in to developing recreational infrastructure in the more expansive areas of Big Dog, Conagher and Lough Navar and visitor number are now seen to be increasing.

Lough Erne Forests consists of a number of forests lying beside or close to Lower Lough Erne. They include Castle Archdale and islands, Castle Caldwell, Ely Lodge, Necarne, Riversdale, the Sillees blocks, Tullychurry, Derrylin and Naan Island. These forests cover some 2,700 hectares of which 2,200 are under forest plantation and are situated on better soils at lower elevations. This allows us to grow a wider diversity of species with longer rotations and includes a high proportion of broadleaved plantations (approximately 820 hectares).

The one exception to this is Tullychurry forest which lies into the Pettigo plateau. Over half of the managed area is open moorland which is a designated Special Protection Area (SPA) for the Golden Plover and a Special Conservation Area (SAC). There is opportunity to extend this open space by the removal of slow growing pine crops.

There is also much more opportunity in these lower altitude forests to develop native woodlands, to diversify species and to consider lower impact management systems.

The Erne forests are regularly used by local residents and tourists to the Fermanagh area. An estimated 160,000 day visitors use these forests annually. Many of these forests have car parks, formal trails and access points to Lough Erne.

KEY ISSUES

Over the following pages we will identify the key issues which we need to consider in developing our Forest Management Plans which we will then use to inform our operational plans. These issues will be considered under four general headings: Conservation & enhancement of the rural environment, Recreation and social use, Forest operations, and Estate management.

Additional information which may be useful in informing the decision making process is provided in Appendices or is available for view at the Forest Office, Inishkeen House, Killyhevlin, Enniskillen.

1. Conservation and enhancement of the rural environment

Over 1,666 hectares (12%) of Forest Service lands in West Fermanagh has such an important conservation value that it has been designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's) as well as Special Protection Areas (SPA's) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI's). An additional 1,089 hectares has single designation of ASSI. We will liaise with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency on the possibility of extending some of the existing designated areas when we have completed restoration work in adjacent areas, e.g. Correll Glen, Tullychurry. In addition many other plantations and forest components are recognised as having a special conservation value which should be protected even though they are not designated. Through the development of our Forest Plans we intend to protect and enhance these important features and we have detailed what we believe to be the more important issues in this section.

Designations

West Fermanagh Uplands: There are 1358 hectares of land designated as "Special Area of Conservation" (ASSI/SAC) primarily for the significant contribution they make to a number of European Habitats Directive Annex 1 priority habitat types, including blanket bog, upland heath, calcareous dry grasslands, molinia meadows, limestone pavements and mixed ash wood. In addition there are dysotrophic lakes and petrifying springs. These designations represent 12% of this forest landscape unit.

There are no operational proposals that might be considered a threat to their favourable condition and no work is programmed.

Lough Melvin is a designated ASSI/SAC that lies outside FS land but can be affected by forestry operations. Harvesting, restock practice and fertilisation plans within the catchment have the potential to cause damage so we will complete a Habitat Regulations Assessment in liaison with Coillte Teoranta who manage forests in ROI to ensure that our combined operations pose no risk to the environmental status of the Melvin.

There are 686 hectares of land designated as an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), predominantly heath land, in Aghatirourke, Florencecourt. This area is leased to Fermanagh District Council and has historically been important as a habitat for golden plover. In 2012 128 hectares of Florencecourt forest was declared as an ASSI because of its parkland and woodland habitats. The older Oak woodlands are particularly important for the habitat they provide for some very rare lichens.

The spread of non-native invasive species such as rhododendron, laurel, Japanese knotweed or giant hogweed can pose a significant threat especially in environmentally sensitive areas. Threats posed by invasive species will be monitored during the plan period. The intention is to control, and where possible eradicate, all invasive species, both flora and fauna.

There are three designated National Nature Reserves located at Correll Glen, Marble Arch and Rossa Wood. We will continue to seek advice from NIEA when we are carrying out operations adjacent to these reserves.

Forest Service proposals over the period of the plan pose no known threats to the ninety or so designated Built Heritage sites in the West Fermanagh charge and Forest Service staff will continue to notify NIEA of suspected archaeological sites and seek their advice on the planning of operations that may affect archaeological structures. We propose to continue working with NIEA and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council to facilitate better interpretation where this does not compromise the safety of the artefacts.

Florencecourt is listed in the Register of Parks, Gardens and Demesnes. We will work with The National Trust to ensure that future development or ongoing forest management activity does not affect its status.

Erne: There are 308 hectares of land designated as ASSI/SAC primarily for the significant contribution they make to the Annex 1 Habitats, blanket bogs and dystrophic lakes. All but 10 hectares of this is in Tullychurry forest. This represents 11% of the Lough Erne forest landscape unit. We do not propose any operations that might be considered a threat to its ecological condition.

The ASSI/SAC in Tullychurry is also designated as a SPA in order to protect the foraging and breeding sites of Golden Plover.

There are two designated National Nature Reserves in Castle Archdale and Castle Caldwell.

Forest Service will continue to work with NIEA on the protection of Built Heritage sites.

Castle Archdale, Castle Caldwell, Necarne and Ely lodge are listed in the Register of Parks, gardens and Domains. No work is envisaged that would affect their status.

All of the forests in this area are included in the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark which recognises the geological and wider natural heritage, as well as the cultural heritage of the area which is based on a geology of underlying suite of southerly dipping beds of sandstone, mudstone and limestones of the Carboniferous period.

Derrylin Wood lies within the catchment of the Swanlinbar river which is designated for the protection of the resident freshwater pearl mussel population.

Local Biodiversity Action Plans prepared within the Local Council areas recognise the important biodiversity that exists and sets out how the biodiversity can be enhanced by the development of Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans which help protect a range of habitats and species under threat. Forest Service will co-operate with the Council Biodiversity Officers to help deliver on these plans. We will also work with community and volunteer groups to develop projects that enhance the biodiversity where this is commensurate with our requirement to maintain sustainable forests.

Most of the West Fermanagh Upland forests lie within the designated Forest Service Red Squirrel Preferred forests as described in our 2010 - "*Identification of red squirrel conservation areas in Northern Ireland – a preliminary analysis*". We propose

to monitor damage from Grey squirrels and control as necessary to protect hardwood crops and the indigenous red populations and we will continue to work with the Fermanagh Red Squirrel Group and assist them in meeting our shared objectives.

Parts of Big Dog, Carrigan, Conagher, Garrison and Lough Navar lie within the Lough Melvin water catchment area. We will work closely with Coillte Teoranata to manage forest operations in these areas to minimise potential impacts on water quality within this catchment area.



Red squirrels are under threat from the greys and require protection.

Natural Reserves are undesignated areas within our forests that we manage with minimum intervention as they provide a valuable habitat for a wide range of species when left in their natural state. In our previous planning review in 2011 we identified 98 hectares of Natural Reserve. During the initial stages of this planning process we will carry out a review of existing natural reserves to ensure that they best meet our biodiversity objectives for Natural Reserves.

The **Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)**, undertaken by The Woodland Trust with support from Queens University during 2003-8, identified forested areas which had been in continuous tree cover since at least 1830 and could be classified as possible or probable ancient woodland. We have inspected these areas, and other areas which we identified in an earlier (2001) assessment of the extent of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS), to identify the presence of remnant features and to assess the threats to features characteristic of native woodland. We use this information to develop our work plans and future forest management activities in these areas. The identified sites are to be found in Castlearchdale, Ely Lodge, Marlbank, Lough Navar, Conagher, Castlecaldwell and Florencecourt. During our 2013 survey we identified 95.1 hectares of ancient woodland sites that requires work to remove existing threats to the development of the native woodland character and

we intend to deal with these over the next 10 years. One such threat, *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, has the potential to greatly affect our native woodlands and as such we will co-operate closely with our colleagues in plant health branch and across the island of Ireland & mainland UK to monitor and control its spread.

Open Habitat Restoration: A blanket bog site in Tullychurry which was planted with conifers in the 1960's and 70's has retained its ecological potential and there is potential to restore it to open habitat once we have harvested the current crop. We will also consider restoration on other sensitive sites in West Fermanagh during the period of this plan.

Water catchments We recognise the risk that some forest operations, including timber harvesting, forest drainage, pesticide application, road construction and fertiliser applications can potentially have adverse effects on water quality. In consultation with NIEA, DCAL Loughs Agency and NI Water we plan our forest operations and forest restructuring following clearfell to minimise the potential negative impacts of these forest operations. Our Forest redesign plans for all the forests which are available for view at the Forest Office in Inishkeen House include proposals to develop or enhance existing buffer zones adjacent to rivers and lakes so that surface water is filtered before it reaches the waterways. All our operations will comply with best practice as set down in the UK Forestry Standard and Guidelines, including "*Forest and Water Guidelines*"



Water buffer zone Ballintempo forest

Since the early 1980s new forest plantations have incorporated river buffer zones which were generally left unplanted. However, there are still older conifers plantations which are planted up to the river edges. When we remove these crops

we have the opportunity to reshape our forests to provide river buffers to offset the risk of future sedimentation or eutrophication of our rivers. It may be beneficial to incorporate broadleaves along the edges of some rivers and lakes to provide cooling shade and enhance the biodiversity of the watercourses. We will work with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency to see how this can be developed where there is little likelihood that natural regeneration will occur. Broadleaved buffer zones are also an effective barrier to fires which can be a serious problem in the West Fermanagh Uplands. As previously stated, we will continue to co-operate closely with Coillte on managing effects on cross-border water catchments.

Deadwood has a high conservation value and is generally present in all afforested areas. We also recognise that there is a high demand for fuelwood in Northern Ireland and that this is a limited resource. Therefore we intend to prioritise areas where can accumulate while also considering the commercial value of forest residues.

We will focus our attention on providing deadwood where the biodiversity benefits will be greatest; in riparian areas, old woodlands, hedgerows, wet woodlands. We will also ensure that our operators and contractors are aware of our requirements and the importance of the deadwood habitats. Forests will retain in excess of 20 m³ of deadwood per hectare and this will include both lying and standing trees and branchwood.



Deadwood, particularly larger standing dead, is a valuable habitat for a wide range of plants and animals (Lough Navar forest)

Extended Rotations: Retaining commercial tree crops past the age at which they would normally be harvested can enhance their environmental and aesthetic value. We have reviewed the range of sites that we are currently retaining and we are proposing some changes as crops become unstable.



Groups of mature Scots Pine in Riversdale will be retained following clearfell of adjacent conifers

Recognising that the West Fermanagh forests are home to a number of healthy populations of red squirrels we intend to retain areas of small seed trees such as Norway spruce and Scots pine beyond the normal rotation age as these are particularly favoured by our resident reds.

Invasive species: We recognise the threat that invasive species such as rhododendron and laurel pose if they get a foothold in our plantations. This is a particular problem in some of the old estate plantations in areas such as Florencecourt, Ely Lodge, Castle Archdale, Necarne and Riversdale. Removal of exotic invasives will be prioritised to ensure that the environmental threat that they pose are effectively dealt with. Over the short term higher priority will be given to the more sensitive areas e.g. Special Areas of Conservation, Areas of Special Scientific Interest, Natural Nature reserves, Ancient Woodland sites, new native woodland areas and other conservation priority areas. Work has recently been carried out to remove rhododendron from an extensive area in Florencecourt as it is a significant threat to the development of native woodland on an Ancient Woodland Site.

Diseases: *Phytophthora ramorum* has recently been found in a number of forests in Fermanagh including Castle Archdale. This is an aggressive disease closely related to potato blight and we will clearfell infected crops to reduce the risk of spread. We will continue to monitor our forests for this disease and deal quickly where we suspect infection. Larch plantations which are most susceptible to *P. ramorum*

represent only 3% of the planted area in this planning area but we do recognise that their removal would have a significant visual impact in forests such as Ely lodge. Over the last few years Ash die-back (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* previously known as *Chalara fraxineus*) which is fatal to ash trees has been identified in recently planted stock which was imported from the continent. We will continue to work with our plant health colleagues in the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and other agencies in Ireland to monitor for signs of this disease.

Environmental enhancement: We recognise the importance of working with others to develop our understanding of the forest environment and how it's biodiversity can be enhanced. We will continue to work with community project groups, Council Biodiversity Officers and other agencies to develop and facilitate environment enhancement projects on Forest Service lands.

Compliance with UKWAS Standard: The Forest Plans that we commit will comply with the standards that have been set down in Section 6 of the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS) "Conservation and Enhancement of the environment"

2. Recreation and Social Use of Forests

Introduction

In developing our own Forest Plans for this area we recognise the importance of delivering recreational opportunities for the local population as well as visitors from further afield who want to participate in a wide range of activities, many of which are best provided in the forest environment. We recognise the important role that Fermanagh District Council has played over the last five years in delivering forest recreation and amenity as part of their own remit and we will continue to work with them and their successors to develop sustainable recreational products.

During this planning review we will consult with stakeholders and recreation providers to develop plans for sustainable recreation provision.

Current facilities and permitted activities

Since 2012 the public have a statutory right of access to all our forests for recreational purposes and in West Fermanagh we have over 240 kilometers of forest road/trail which are ideal for those who wish to get out and wander through our large forest tracts. There are formal walking trails in Florencecourt, Marlbank, (Claddagh Glen), Ballintempo, Carrigan, Big Dog, Belmore, Conagher, Lough Navar, Castlecaldwell, Castle Archdale, Ely Lodge and Riversdale. The significant amount of environmental designations are viewed as a positive opportunity to further promote the recreation and tourism value of the area. We can also facilitate a wide spectrum of specialist activity opportunities through licence arrangements and issue of activity permits. It is worth considering existing and proposed facilities a little more closely so that we can consider what further opportunities should be developed.

Ballintempo: Two walks are managed under licence with Fermanagh & Omagh District Council

Belmore: One walk managed under licence by F&ODC.

Big Dog: One walk managed under licence by F&ODC.

Carrigan: One walk managed under licence by F&ODC.

Castle Archdale: The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Country Park with caravan park, WWII museum and access to the large expanse of Lower Lough Erne merges with the FS managed forest of Castle Archdale and offers visitors the opportunity to walk through wooded areas along the lake shore as well as providing families the opportunity to try out the woodland cycle trail which was completed in 2007. Fermanagh & Omagh District Council have recently carried out improvements to the trails and path network including improved signage and a focus on car parking at the old castle and country park sites. The existing small car park at the millennium wood will be closed.

Castlecaldwell: This forest, three miles from Belleek, has walks managed by Fermanagh & Omagh District Council that takes visitors through a range of forest types and offers vistas overlooking Lough Erne and the West Fermanagh scarplands of Lough Navar. Along the way visitors pass the ruins of the NIEA managed castle from which this forest gets its name.

Conagher: NIEA maintain a path through Coral Glen. Two walks are managed under licence by F&ODC.

Derrylin & Naan Island: One Jetty leading onto Naan Island managed by Waterways Ireland.

Ely Lodge: Only three miles out from Enniskillen this mature forest with larch as a dominant component provides a quiet location for walkers to enjoy the mature mixed woodlands and access to the shore of Lough Erne. Fermanagh & Omagh District Council currently manage the recreational trails.

Florencecourt: This forest park nestles around the National Trust owned stately home of Florencecourt which dates back to the 17th century. This Forest park offers a range of walks, pony trekking trails and cycle trails through oak woods and conifer plantations. This compliments the NT facilities which includes guided tours of Florencecourt House, walks through manicured gardens and an enclosed children's play area. Forest Service completed the construction of a new visitor Reception Building adjacent to the main car-park in the Summer of 2015 and under licence and lease arrangements,, National Trust manage the recreation in Florencecourt since July 2015.

Garrison:

Lough Navar: In addition to the existing forest drive and spectacular viewpoint at Magho cliffs, five local walks with signage and interpretation for walkers and educational groups are currently being managed by Fermanagh & Omagh District Council. This forest is typical of the scarpland geology of the wider area and key

features are well represented along these walks. It is recognised that there are more opportunities for development in this forest and this will be considered later.

Necarne:

Riversdale:

Sillees:

Tullychurry: Forest Service maintains a pony trekking trail within Tullychurry.

Current Activities

Pony Trekking; There are 4 waymarked pony trails, in Belmore, Tullychurry, Florencecourt, and Castle Archdale providing 15.7km of trail. Florencecourt (managed by National Trust) is well used but the trails in Belmore and Tullychurry, after having reviewed recent usage, are seldom if ever used and we propose to close them. We will continue to work with individual riders requesting access to forests provided it is safe to do so. The trail in Castle Archdale is quite popular. We are currently looking at generating a licence agreement with a third party to manage pony trekking within this forest. We also accommodate long distance riding events where they do not interfere with forest operations. Discussions are ongoing with the British Horse Society and potential operating partners on the strategic development of facilities in NI.

Cycling; We are aware that there is a growing demand for forest based mountain biking and during the period of this plan we will consult with Fermanagh & Omagh District Council about the potential for the development of sustainable routes in our forests.

Car Rallies; Motor Clubs hold rallies every year and favour the upland forests around Lough Navar, Conagher, Big Dog, Carrigan and Ballintempo. The forest roads offer a stern test for the most proficient of drivers. We will continue to facilitate organised rallies for the foreseeable future.

Shooting; Where FS own the shooting rights we will consider leasing rough shooting rights to gun clubs providing there is no conflict with other forest activities.

Fishing and boating; Lough Erne is an important tourist attraction particularly for anglers and boating enthusiasts from the UK and mainland Europe. There are a number of jetties and fishing stands available from FS forests at Castle Archdale, Castle Caldwell, Ely lodge and Naan Island. During the period of this plan we will work with Waterways Ireland, the local council and other agencies and interested parties to see how we can connect our forests with the Erne Waterway in order to develop the tourism opportunities.

Camping and caravanning; Forest Service manages a “touring in the trees” site at Florencecourt forest. Rough camping is not permitted.

Orienteering: We facilitate orienteering in a number of forests through the issue of activity permits and a number of forests have permanent courses.

Education; Forest Service has supported the Western Education and Library Board as well as a number of outdoor educational providers who have sought the use of our forests to provide outdoor activities for young people and special interest groups. Fermanagh & Omagh District Council are also very active in this area and organize field trips for a wide range of educational groups as part of their Geopark management remit.

Further opportunities for development of recreational facilities

The context for future recreational development is our Recreation and Social Use Strategy. This provides the framework for working in partnership with other organisations to realise the potential that our forests offer.

In November 2012 the NI Executive launched the Economy and Jobs Initiative to take action to support the local labour market and to boost employment. Forest Service were allocated £4,000,000 over two years (2013/14 and 2014/15) under the theme 'Supporting infrastructural Investment'. This fund was made available for strategic recreational supporting infrastructure at forest sites through consultation with local councils to develop partnerships that would deliver benefits locally.

In 2013 a range of interested parties presented their thoughts and aspirations on how recreational infrastructure for the forests in their area could be improved and this formed the basis for programmed development under the Forestry Fund. These presentations also identified opportunities that they would wish to progress beyond the Forestry Fund and these will be considered over the next five years as funding opportunities arise.

Submissions from Fermanagh District Council for enhanced facilities in Lough Navar and National Trust for improved visitor reception in Florencecourt provided Forest Service with the opportunity to improve the Lough Navar Forest Drive and build a new Visitor Reception Centre in Florencecourt Forest. It is envisaged that these projects will stimulate further sustainable development in these areas.



Florencecourt visitor reception building under construction April 2015

In 2014 Fermanagh District Council initiated a scoping study to assess the potential for mountain biking in Lough Navar forest and they are currently considering the resourcing issues associated with this project. They have already submitted plans and received approval to enhance the cycling facilities in Castle Archdale which will add value for visitors to the forest and Castle Archdale Country Park.

A number of outdoor recreation providers have expressed interest in using the forests for different and wide ranging commercial activities. The Forest Service has a consistent approach to developing operating partnerships of providing a clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities. The key principles within which any working arrangements would be developed are;

- The operating partners having the capacity to undertake management, maintenance and operational arrangements and assume responsibility for all associated costs for the operation proposed.
- The operating partners undertaking to manage the interface of the operation and other forestry and recreational activity in the respective forests.
- The operating partners assuming responsibility for Health & Safety and public liability issues associated with the operation.
- The operating partners respecting the fact that the forests will continue to be working forests and undertaking to manage any contingency arrangements arising from both the planned forestry activity and unplanned events, e.g. storm damage to plantations.

We welcome proposals that can demonstrate that they are sustainable and these can be accommodated through license agreements or lease arrangements.

3. Forest Management

The Forest Service generates some 7.0 million pounds annually from the sale of timber grown in our forests. Sustainable timber production is vital for the continued health of our timber industry which is expected to generate over 80 million pounds of added value to the NI economy annually. In addition Forest Service generates income from the sale of other forest products such as large Christmas trees and foliage, lease of agricultural land retained for biodiversity and recreational activities such as car rallying, horse riding, coarse shooting, caravanning/camping, forest park charges and other commercial events. All these incomes help to offset the overall cost of maintaining public forests.

We recognise that there are further opportunities to commercialise within the forest environment and we wish to explore these opportunities where they do not conflict with our core remit to provide sustainable forests.

In this section we will look at the major forest operations that we need to undertake over the next five years to protect the forest resource and to ensure a sustainable supply of timber as well as consider what other opportunities exist for commercial expansion.

Timber production

The coniferous forests in West Fermanagh have played a significant role in providing timber for the Irish and UK timber industries over the last ten years. Because of our climate growth rates for our predominant species, Sitka spruce, are among the highest in the world and this will continue to be our primary productive species. For the most part we clearfell the crops when they mature and we program this through our long term harvesting plans.

Clearfelling gives us an opportunity to restructure our forests not only in terms of shaping boundaries and creating open spaces but also in managing the age structure of the forest.

Many forest plantations in this planning area were originally planted in the 1950's and 1960's and reached maturity over the last fifteen years, Many of them were severely affected by storms particularly around 2000 and extensive clearfelling has been carried out since. Over 804,000 tonnes have been removed from these forests in the last ten years. Forest Service recognize the burden that this can place on the rural road network and work closely with Transport NI to help reduce the impacts of this traffic through agreeing haulage routes, putting in passing areas, improving forest accesses and ensuring that contract hauliers comply with legal weights. We will continue to work with Transport NI in this area during the initial phase of this review we will prepare a seven year harvesting plan indicating site locations, expected timber volumes and access routes for their consideration through this planning process.



Water course are particularly vulnerable during harvesting operations

Through 2015 we have reviewed our short, medium and long term felling plans for all areas which frame our proposals for consultation. When we previously reviewed our

felling plans in 2010 we projected an increase in production for the period 2015-2021 rising from around 80,000 tonnes per year to over 100,000. During this review will be actively looking for opportunities to defer some felling beyond 2021 to ensure a long term continuity of supply. This will be coupled with an increase in production from thinnings where it is practical to do so. When we have completed our review we hope to deliver a rate of timber production over the next five to seven years in the order of 100,000 tonnes per year.

Because many of our plantations in West Fermanagh are situated in upland areas with shallow rooting soils there is limited opportunity to consider alternatives to clearfelling systems. However we believe that the low lying forests such as Florencecourt, Castle Archdale, Castlecaldwell, Necarne and Riversdale with their better soils and lower elevation can be managed through successive thinning or small group felling (Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS)). We will also apply this approach to our native broadleaf areas in West Fermanagh.

Over the period 2015-2021 felling will be programmed to deliver strategic timber needs, to react to instability issues and to deliver wider plans such as the development of renewable energy. The indicative felling plan shown below was created five years ago and is now subject to review through this planning process.

Harvesting production estimates 2016-2022 (Tonnes)

Forest	Clearfell 2016-22		Thinning	
	2010 Plan Volume	2016 Plan Volume	2010 Plan Volume	2016 Plan Volume
Ballintempo	123,612	124,144		700
Belmore	57,297	49,779		1,000
Big Dog	42,708	59,604		
Carrigan	127,727	120,046		
Castle Archdale	13,481	13,836	3,000	3,040
Castle Caldwell	12,164	11,800	3,150	1,890
Conagher	86,593	73,906		
Derrylin & Naan	2,671	6,524		450
Ely Lodge	4,634	5,059	3,400	4,850
Florencecourt	32,196	32,123	2,000	5,830

Garrison	5,153	14,769		450
Lough Navar	245,551	209,383		450
Marlbank	4,990	851		
Necarne	4,057	4,053	1,050	2,600
Riversdale	1,382	2,589	1,200	2,350
Sillees	28,610	18,000		1,400
Tullychurry	24,475	21,219		1,500
Grand Total	817,301	767,685	13,800	26,510

NOTE: This is based on a comparison of the 2010 and 2016 felling plans.

Reforestation

Most clearfelled areas will be replanted shortly after harvesting. A small number of clearfell areas are over 20 hectares in size due to the specific site characteristic and these areas will be subject to forest design principles which will create smaller coupe sizes in the future. We also regenerate felled areas using natural regeneration techniques using both conifers and broadleaves depending on our objectives as set out in the Forest Design Plans. In some instances we will not restock areas in order to create open habitats, water or wind buffer zones and this will align with our forest design plans.

Fertiliser application

No fertilisers were applied during the last planning period and it is unlikely that fertiliser will be applied in these forests over the next five years. Restocked areas on peats which were planted in the period 1995-2000 can be susceptible to phosphate and potassium deficiency and some older crops may require Nitrogen or Nitrogen with potassium applications later in the growing cycle. The final decision on whether we apply fertiliser and to what application rate is based on deficiency analysis.

Fire prevention

There have been no significant forest fires in West Fermanagh since May 2011 when we witnessed some of the worst wild fires in recent memory. In that year Forest Service Annual Report and Accounts reported a loss of over 700 hectares of planted land with an associated timber valuation loss of £981,000. An additional 1096 hectares of unplanted land was also damaged at that time.

Our forests are most susceptible to fire damage during the period, March to May, when grasses are still browned off and have not yet flushed. Young conifer

plantations and open areas with molinia grasses or heather are particularly vulnerable.

Forest Service manages the risk of fire to forests through its Emergency Fire Plan, which was developed in co-operation with NI Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS). This plan is reviewed annually in liaison with NIFRS. The plan outlines protection measures which may be deployed depending on the perceived risk and value. Fire maps which identify areas of higher risk are reviewed as necessary and assist our staff and NIFRS when dealing with fire incidents.

Fire resilience is built into forest design through the creation of fire barriers such as broadleaved corridors, riparian zones and maintained forest roads which can be used to stand off approaching fires. Clearfelling and replanting gives us the opportunity to improve these fire prevention measures.

Illegal activities and encroachments

Illegal activities such as cattle and sheep trespass, unauthorised use of forest roads for vehicle rallying and dumping of waste causes damage to trees and to the forest environment and are a drain on resources which we would like to commit to more positive forest developments.

Fly tipping including commercial, agricultural and domestic dumping continues to be a problem in Fermanagh. We will continue to work with Fermanagh & Omagh District Council, NIEA, local communities and PSNI to help reduce the environmental and antisocial impacts of fly tipping. During 2014 a combined effort of F&ODC and PSNI led to a prosecution after an incident of fly tipping in Castle Archdale forest.

We have taken action to improve the security of our forests in the recent past and we will continue to work with our neighbours to secure forest areas.

Forest Service will protect the public value of the forest estate by taking appropriate actions to deal with encroachments. We will lease some forest and non-forest areas where this meets Forest Service objectives and in these instances we will seek best value through open market tendering or by valuation arranged by Land and Property Services.

Deer management

There are herds of Fallow and Sika deer and a few Red deer in the West Fermanagh forests. The management of wild deer populations within the area remains important to the welfare of the deer, maintenance of habitat biodiversity. If deer populations are not controlled they can cause significant damage to tree crops particularly broadleaf saplings and young trees. Our management will include liaison with adjoining land owners in agreeing deer herd management objectives. We have set annual deer cull targets for forests where we have identified problems.

Poaching of deer continues to be an issue. Forest Service have worked closely with the PSNI “Operation Wild Deer” initiative to reduce the risk of poaching in Fermanagh and Tyrone.

4. Estate Management

West Fermanagh forests form part of the West Forest Region and technical staff along with administrative support are officed at the Agricultural Office in Inishkeen House, Killyhevin, Enniskillen. Phone 028 6634 3165.

We retain a number of service buildings for operational purposes in this Planning area. There are buildings in Florencecourt, Lough Navar and Ballintempo. During this review we will consider our future requirements for these facilities. A forestry cottage at Ely Lodge forest will be declared surplus to requirements as it no longer is required to meet our forestry objectives in the area.

Commercial developments

It is Government policy, and a key aim of the forestry strategy, to obtain better value from the public forest estate. Forest Service will explore the potential for increasing the commercial opportunities within the forest estate, and to develop appropriate arrangements for unlocking the extra revenue streams identified. Possible enterprises could include the development of wind farms or eco-tourist facilities within forests. Third party interest has been expressed in Pony Trekking and walking trails in Castle Archdale and Kesh respectively as well as managing an area in Florencecourt for traditional woodland crafts.

Any development proposal would obviously have to meet all statutory requirements and would be bound by normal planning restrictions.

5. Linkage with wider plans, (internal and external)

When we are developing our plans we must ensure that they are compatible with wider forestry and government objectives.

Internal plans include our obligations and objectives to protect and enhance the environment; many of our forests have large tracts of designated environmentally sensitive sites and some types of recreational activity would be incompatible with conservation objectives.

We are also committed to providing commercial timber and conifer plantations which are becoming unstable or are programmed for clearfell over the next few years. These would not be suitable for the development of facilities such as cycle trails or fixed orienteering courses at this time.

Our obligations to other forest users such as people with turbary rights or holders of shooting rights may also limit the potential for some developments which may conflict with their rights.

External plans include our commitments to other government agencies and organisations. We have already developed an overarching agreement with Fermanagh District Council on the provision of services in their areas so that we can work together in a more focused way.

We are also in discussion with recreational umbrella groups so that we can set down procedures for the co-ordinated development of local projects. New proposals would have to be considered within any agreed framework.

6. Recording and Monitoring plans

In order to ensure that our forest management actions and activities deliver against our long and medium term objectives and directions we monitor economic, environmental and social aspects of this delivery. We aim to ensure that the frequency of monitoring and degree of recording is commensurate with the risks and benefits associated with monitoring activity.

Forest Service continually monitors the status and condition of woodlands through normal supervision visits to forests. In addition we input to and retain information on our Geographical Information System (FSGIS) and this is used to report on forest composition and status and to assess our performance against core objectives. At each planning review relevant information is tabulated and presented in the completed Forest Plan.

Achievement of objectives and assessment against management directions is reviewed in detail and formally recorded at the initiation of the planning review. We carry out more frequent monitoring when we require the information to inform management decisions between reviews.

7. Consultation arrangements

During the latter part of 2015 we will be preparing our outline proposals for the delivery of recreational and social delivery as well as environmental protection and enhancement and commercial forest operations. We intend to present these proposals to a wide range of stakeholders and this will be done in number of ways.

Focused consultation: We have identified a number of organisations who are likely to be affected by our future plans or who have their own plans which may be impacted by our proposals. We intend to consult directly with these groups so that we can ensure that our plans are compatible and meet our shared objectives.

Strategic consultation: We believe that working in partnerships with others is critical to the success of our Recreation and Social Use Strategy as well as delivering on our environmental protection and enhancement objectives and we see these partners including representatives from public bodies, non-government organisations, recreational activity providers and community groups. To develop strategic plans it is important that we take the opportunity to meet collectively as our interests are generally intertwining. We propose to invite a range of representatives to a focused planning consultation meeting in early 2016 where we will present our proposals and invite comment and the opportunity for written reply as well as inviting

further focused meetings. Attendees have found these strategic meetings useful as it gives them the opportunity to see other's views and helps them to better inform their own.

In drawing up the list of invitees we will consider how we can expand the range of stakeholders who attend these meetings to include groups who may not normally visit our forests. We are aware that some groups and especially young people are difficult to reach and we propose to seek their views through focused group meetings and invitation to the strategic consultation meeting. We will seek representation from groups such as Disability Action and Age Concern.

Public consultation: We intend to hold two public consultation events in Derrygonnelly and Enniskillen where we can meet the public directly and discuss our proposals. We will record the outcomes of these consultations and they will help inform our final plans. We intend to hold consultation meetings in March 2016. In **March 2016** we will be placing forest planning information on the Forest Service Web-site and this document as well as the finalised Forest Plan will be available at: www.dardni.gov.uk/index/forestry/forest-planning/forest-planning-reviews

People who live in the vicinity of or within the forest may be directly impacted by our planning proposals. We will identify those individuals who are likely to be affected by the impact of our planning proposals and we contact them directly to seek their views on the proposals.

Our planning proposals will be modified in light of information we receive during the consultation process and when the final plan is submitted in March 2016 it will report on significant outcomes from the consultation process.

8. Contact Details

If you wish to comment on any issues raised in this Planning Review or if you require more information please contact our Forest Office at the address below. If a technical forester is not available to deal with your query we will get back to you as soon as possible.

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