

How to Manage your Woodland

An Introductory Guide



English
Woodlands
Forestry Ltd

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Introduction

The active management of woodlands will contribute towards delivery of a wide range of benefits including biodiversity, flood mitigation, water quality, carbon capture, landscape value and timber production.

Woodland management frequently requires the removal of some trees. The felling of trees (and their ultimate restocking with new ones) is a critical part of management as it contributes to the species and structural diversity that is so important to our woodland health and wildlife. Felling of trees also unlocks important opportunities for timber and wood-fuel production which, in turn, reduces our dependency on imported goods.

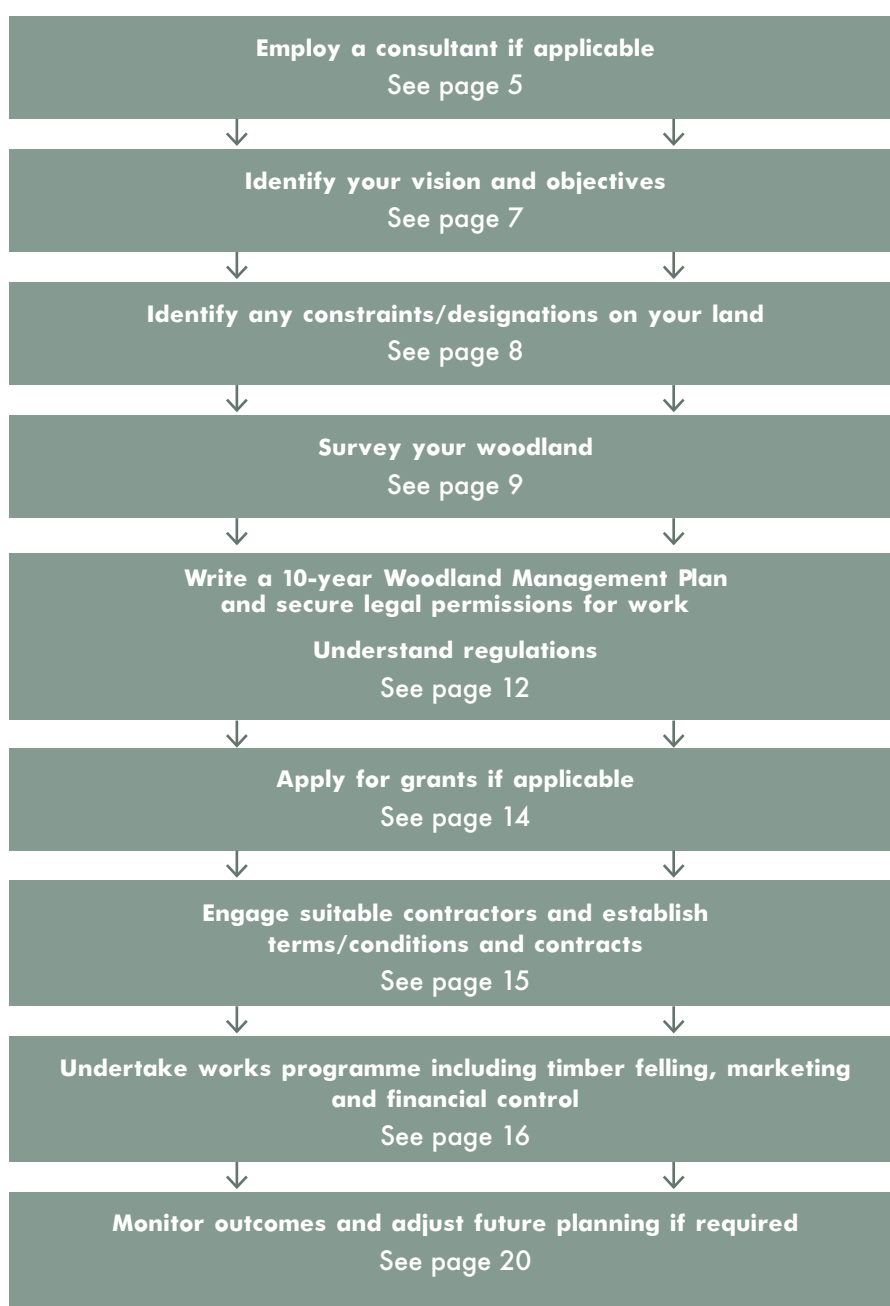
For many landowners, understanding how to go about managing their woodland (particularly tree felling and timber marketing) can be a daunting prospect. This brief guide is intended to help people through the journey of realising a woodland management project – how to begin, who to engage, what regulations may apply and how to make sure your objectives are met.



1. Realising your vision – concept to reality

The ultimate successful delivery of your woodland management project is dependent on a series of developments and actions.

Below is a suggested sequence of activity to help break down the processes. The following pages provide more detail on each aspect as specified.





2. Employ a consultant or go it alone?

Good long-term woodland management requires expertise and planning. Its success and sustainability rely on doing the right amount of work using appropriate people and machinery.

Depending on your objectives, achieving this might require knowledge of multiple factors including ecology, tree health, climate change, safety, regulations, timber markets etc. Some people are able to undertake all of this without the employment of professional help and larger land-owners or farmers may also have access to in-house machinery and staff. Local forestry consultants or agents are available to help with any part of woodland management and woodland creation from planning to delivery. They are frequently also able to advise about broader estate management including ecological restoration.

This document demonstrates some of the processes that are required in woodland management. At each stage it is worth considering the value a consultant may provide either as a project manager or for stand-alone work such as writing a plan or ecological surveys.

If you are serious about your woodland, using a consultant is likely to be an investment worth making. Most good consultants will work with you to accommodate your needs whilst acknowledging any areas you are confident to undertake independently.

N.B. As a landowner you have legal duties for the health and safety of what happens on your land. It is therefore your responsibility to check the competency of any consultants and contractors.

See page 19 for more detail

Local forestry consultants or agents are available to help with any part of woodland management and woodland creation from planning to delivery.





Typically, a consultant will offer the following services as standard:

- Advice on all aspects of woodland management
- Expert woodland and ecological/wildlife surveys
- Tree safety advice/reports
- Writing Woodland Management Plans and Woodland Creation Plans
- Applying for Felling Licences or other permissions
- Liaising with any statutory consultees or stakeholders
- Applying for and managing grant support
- Sourcing reliable, quality, legally-compliant contractors
- Organising and supervising works
- Timber marking and measuring
- Overseeing timber sales and marketing





3. Identify your vision and objectives

It might be harder than you anticipate to identify a vision for your woodland. It is worth spending some time getting to know your woods through different seasons. This will enable you to better understand the ecology and natural processes that are at play throughout the year.

Below are some key objectives that you might wish to consider – many of which can be achieved simultaneously.

- Biodiversity enhancements
- Private and public recreational opportunities
- Timber/wood product value and revenue
- Climate change resilience
- Natural capital benefits
- Landscape value
- Increase in capital value of the land
- Supporting local communities

Talking to professionals, neighbours and other woodland owners will also alert you to opportunities you may not have considered.





4. Identify any constraints/ designations on your land

Some land and trees are subject to legal constraints – or may be located within protected areas. It is worth understanding this early in your thinking as it may affect what you are legally permitted to do or the timings of operations.

See section on regulations - page 13

Whilst these designations can sometimes seem restrictive they generally mean that you have something of special interest associated with your land. Understanding the reasons for any designation, and working with the appropriate bodies, can help to restore and enhance important features.

Agents and advisers - including those from the relevant statutory body - can help you to understand the designations and any specific management needs.

You can check your land online using Natural England's map service Magic:

magic.defra.gov.uk

This displays most of the main designations, habitat types and public access routes etc. For instance you can also use the map to determine if your woodland is designated as ancient or not (use the habitat/woodland layers).

The following is a list of the principal designations that you could find in your woodland and which may affect what you are legally permitted to do. The competent authority for each designation is also specified.

- Sites of Special Scientific Interest/ Special areas of Conservation/Special Protection Areas**
(Natural England)
- Scheduled Ancient Monuments/Registered Parks and Gardens/other heritage features**
(Historic England)
- Tree Preservation Orders and Conservation Areas**
(Local Planning Authority)
- National Landscapes**
(relevant National Landscapes Authority)
- National Parks**
(relevant National Park Authority)
- Ancient Semi-Natural Woodland/Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites**
(ASNW/PAWS – Forestry Commission)





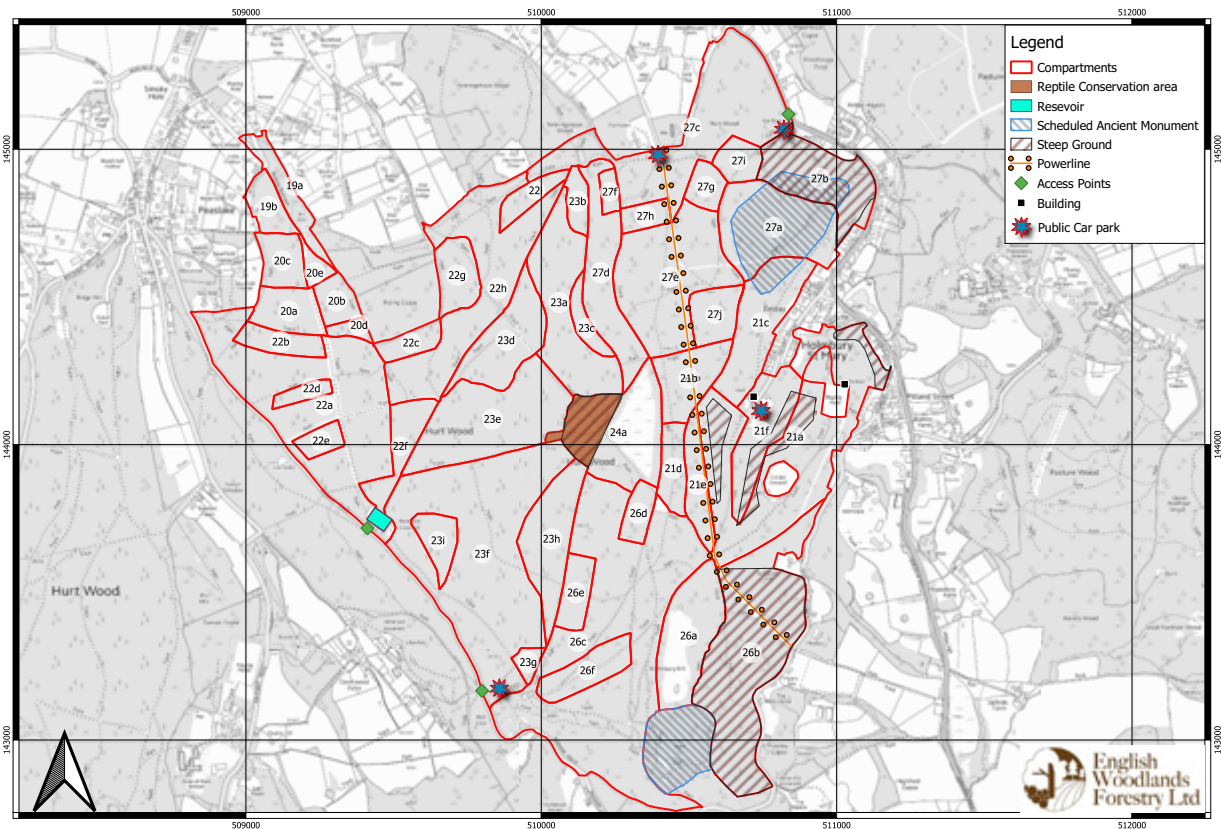
5. Survey your woodland

You might already have good knowledge of your woodland but thorough surveys are likely to reveal additional features, risks or opportunities. Surveys are the backbone to all woodland planning as they provide you with the baseline from which management activity can be prescribed, prioritised and monitored.

This section includes a summary of what should be captured in a survey. Levels of detail will depend on your objectives and complexity of the site.

Results of surveys would be used to populate a Woodland Management Plan which is the next part of the process. If you don't feel that you have enough knowledge to complete the survey yourself it is worth employing a professional to help you.

A good survey of a woodland is likely to have two components: desk-based and site-based. Together they enable you to gather information at a landscape as well as at an individual woodland scale.





Desk-based surveys

Capture any information you may personally know about the history of the woodland and its management. Additionally use online tools to check the following:

- Designations **See section 4**
- Soilscape to ascertain the local geology **www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes**
This will influence the species and ecology that are likely to thrive in your woodland
- Online mapping (e.g. Google maps/Ordnance Survey etc) to picture the woodland in relation to broader landscape and topography
–e.g. its connection to other habitats or proximity to urban centres
- TPO maps from local authority to see if any Tree Preservation Orders/Conservation areas apply
- Biodiversity data from local record centres. Additional information can be found from the Woodland Wildlife Toolkit **woodlandwildlifetoolkit.sylva.org.uk** and the National Biodiversity Network Atlas **nbnatlas.org**
- Satellite imagery to note additional features or to help suggest compartmentalisation of the woodland into suitable management units
- Historic maps **maps.nls.uk/projects/api**



Site-based surveys

Site surveys rely at the very least on good knowledge of tree/shrub species and associated risks or opportunities (e.g. ecological features, timber potential, tree safety issues and tree health/pests and diseases). A survey will typically aim to capture the following as a minimum:

- Broad types of woodland and principal tree species/age classes
- History of management if this can be determined or is known
- Woodland compartments - on the basis of anticipated management units
- Notable mappable features (rides/access/water bodies/veteran trees/invasive species/archaeology/flora and fauna/hazards etc)
- Soil surveys - especially if tree planting or restocking is likely to take place
- Threats - such as deer pressure/squirrel damage/tree health issues/littering etc
- Basic mensuration of any trees to be felled for timber
(Either as a visual appraisal or through the use of measuring equipment. This can help to ensure you fell the right amount of timber to be environmentally sustainable and to meet your objectives)
- Potential or actual extraction routes and loading bays for timber uplift or access
- Recommended activity to improve woodland



6. Write a Woodland Management Plan

Once you have a good understanding of your woodland and your vision it is advised to write a management plan.

If produced on a standard Forestry Commission template these plans can be grant aided and their approval by the Forestry Commission will ensure that your planned activity is in accordance with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS).

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-uk-forestry-standard

They will also provide you with the necessary permissions to undertake the work proposed (e.g. felling licences/SSSI consent etc). At the time of writing (2024) an approved plan is also an eligibility requirement for further government grants. **See section 8**

The plan template and guidance are located on www.gov.uk/guidance/create-a-woodland-management-plan

The plan will detail the long-term vision for the woodland and list the activities anticipated over a 10-year period in order to achieve that vision. It will include results of the surveys detailed in section 5 and will summarise:

- Vision for the woodland, its place in the landscape and any known history of management
- Full list of designations within the woodland (see section 4)
- Full survey of the woodland including compartments, species distribution, biodiversity information and other notable features
- Strategy of operations required to achieve objectives
- Hazards, constraints, threats and opportunities – and action appropriate to address them (e.g. evidence and strategies for deer impacts, notes on access and infrastructure, tree health issues, notable wildlife or features to be preserved, implications of climate change etc)
- A suite of maps clearly indicating any features and the location of planned activity
- A plan of operations including details of any timber harvesting and restocking intentions (this provides the felling licence permissions associated with the management plan)

The Woodland Management Plan is intended to be a working document to help owners and contractors ensure the scale and timing of operational activity is appropriate and sustainable. None of the work detailed in the plan is obligatory so can be subject to alteration if circumstances or objectives change.



7. Regulations

Much land-based management activity in the UK is subject to regulation. In the case of woodland this is generally in place to protect environmental resources or features. A breach of the regulations may result in a fine or prosecution. Owners should be aware of the regulations below which are the most common to affect woodland management activity. Depending on the land use and proposed activities other regulations may also apply. Further details are available on the GOV.UK website in each case.

Links provided are live at time of publication (2024). Please also see section 12 on your responsibility as a land owner.

Felling licences (required for most tree felling operations) with conditions for restocking (e.g. the number and species of trees required to replace those that are felled). Licences are usually valid for 5 years – unless they are produced from a Woodland Management Plan in which case they extend to 10 years. Refer to GOV.UK to determine when a licence is required, exemptions and the process for applying. The application is made online to the Forestry Commission. It is free to obtain a licence although an agent is likely to charge if you wish for them to help you. A site visit from the Forestry Commission may be required. A licence will also specify other regulatory requirements e.g. plant passports are required for the movement of certain species.

www.gov.uk/guidance/tree-felling-licence-when-you-need-to-apply

Designated sites – see section 4 – each designation has different requirements as they are in place to protect special features or species. Work on these sites is likely to need approval from the relevant statutory body. Necessary consultations are undertaken as part of a Forestry Commission management plan approval process but additional consultations may be required for other work etc.

Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHN)

– are issued to land owners when certain tree diseases are formally identified on a site by the Forestry Commission. If you receive an SPHN it will detail your obligations which are legally binding.

www.gov.uk/guidance/fell-diseased-trees

It is likely that you will be required to fell the infected trees and that there may be restrictions on how timber or products are moved and/or processed.

Environmental Impact Assessments

- Forestry (EIAs) – projects requiring permission to verify there will be no environmental damage include: tree planting/ woodland creation, deforestation, forest roads, forest quarries.

www.gov.uk/guidance/environmental-impact-assessments-for-woodland

Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) - put in place by local planning authorities to protect specific trees or groups of trees (in some cases covering whole woodlands) in the interests of amenity. The Order requires permission to be granted for felling, pruning, uprooting, topping etc. of any tree with a TPO. Check details with your local authority.

Protected Species – it is an offence to disturb or kill protected species. Certain European Protected Species (e.g. dormice, otters, bats, great crested newts), nesting birds and other priority species such as badgers should specifically be considered during forestry operations. Mitigating action is likely to require surveys and may affect extent and timing of operational activity.

www.gov.uk/guidance/manage-and-protect-woodland-wildlife



8. Grants

There are a number of grants available to assist with woodland management and tree planting.

These are subject to change so it is best to check with your local or national grant providers. The Forestry Commission administer the national grants and other organisations such as the Woodland Trust, National Park Authorities and Royal Forestry Society sometimes have grant support available.

Grants vary in complexity and eligibility requirements. Your local Forestry Commission Woodland Officer or independent forestry consultant can offer advice. It is highly recommended you appreciate any obligations, and the associated economics, before signing a grant agreement. Typically grants are designed to help improve habitats and their natural capital benefits. They often contribute to the costs of the following but other items are available:

- Writing Woodland Management Plans
- Woodland management activity including non-economic thinning/coppicing, ride management
- Invasive species control (e.g. rhododendron removal)
- Fencing
- Infrastructure creation (e.g. tracks/loading bays/culverts etc)
- Habitat creation/tree planting
- Deer and squirrel control
- Responding to a tree health issue



9. Engage contractors and establish specifications & contracts

When you are ready to start operational activity it is very important to ensure you are using good quality, trustworthy and safe contractors. A forestry consultant would source and manage suitable contractors and associated paperwork/supervision etc.

If you choose to work with contractors directly you should determine or obtain the following:

- Confirmation they are a professional operator with appropriate licences**
(e.g. professional operator and plant passport)
- Copies of insurance documents**
- Copies of Health and Safety protocols** (including membership of recognised safety organisations such as FISA, Arb Association, CHAS)
- Copies of relevant qualifications and up-to-date training certification**
– especially with machine/chainsaw work or in the case of spraying chemicals
- Agreed quotation for work** (including VAT status of contractor and any payment terms)
- Written specification and pre-start documentation to cover:**
 - Anticipated timings of operations
 - Brief detail of what the operation covers and where (marked on a map)
 - Written confirmation that all relevant legal documentation is in place (e.g. felling licences/ plant passports). In the event of a breach of regulations both the owner and the contractor can be liable
 - Risk and method statements
 - Any necessary pre-start surveys (e.g. protected species)
 - Hazards and constraints – identified and mapped (note it is the owner's responsibility to notify a contractor of any known hazards such as water pipes/utilities etc) **See section 12**
 - Agreed approach to ground conditions and confirmation of how the site will be left and process of sign off
 - How will public access be managed during operations (e.g. do you need to close/redirect footpaths/consult with local authorities and/or use banksman etc)



10. Harvesting and timber operations

Operations that will involve harvesting and marketing of timber require particular preparation as there are specific contractual and environmental requirements associated with the work.

The list above regarding pre-start and contractor checks remains the same. However, it is critically important that the owner also understands the value of their timber and is able to realise that value through transparent and clear contract management.

As owner of the timber you should make sure you understand the following:

- The approximate standing volume of the timber you are felling
- That you have suitable infrastructure for timber extraction. Agree extraction routes, stacking areas including a check of current condition and if any improvements are required prior to operations
- Who is selecting the trees to be cut - owner/consultant or contractor.
Do the trees need marking and if so who does this and how much will it cost?
- How the contractor will maximise the opportunity to cut and market the highest quality material
- Current market prices for your timber - do you know you are getting a fair price?
- What will be done with the brash after felling and how will the ground be left?
What are the options and how will they affect ongoing management?
(Especially relevant if you need to restock the site with trees)
- How will the contractor measure/account for the amount of timber actually felled and sold?
(Outturn/roadside/standing estimates etc)
- How and when will you be paid?
- Will the contractor reinstate the tracks - who will pay for this and what does it include?
(e.g. some wear and tear should be expected but ruts should be levelled)





Above: left to right - tracks unavoidably rutted by machinery following timber extraction in wet weather; the same tracks immediately following reinstatement and then 6 months later (in winter) showing good ground flora recovery.

Some temporary damage during operations is sometimes unavoidable. Ensuring extraction routes are well mapped and remedial action is included in a specification is key to maintaining good condition of the site. Ride edges will typically recover quickly following reinstatement as shown above.

Ask your consultant how they recommend selling the timber. There are a number of options depending on the volume, the species and the product. For each method there should be a contract between the buyer and seller.

Roadside Tenders: For high-quality milling timbers - such as Oak or Douglas fir - the recommended approach is a roadside tender in which offers are sought from a range of buyers. This would require the landowner to pay for the timber to be felled/cut and presented for offer prior to receiving payment.

Standing Sales: Lump sum price for all the standing timber that is going to be felled. Provides certainty of outcome but requires more upfront work to accurately measure the volume, mark the trees and to control which trees and product are actually being cut.

Outturn: Timber is sold on weight measured by each lorry load that leaves the site. This suits both softwood and hardwood where exact quantity of timber is unknown and allows a consultant to focus on the tree selection/silvicultural prescription.

This method requires robust systems of control in administration and trust with the buyer/confidence in the consultant (for instance how up-to-date are they with the market?) In this model the business buying the wood usually resources the cutting and financing of the operation. The trees are sold standing and the price received by the owner is the net of these costs and commission. Businesses offering this service should be able to demonstrate the operational controls, the breadth of markets they sell to and then benchmark the prices offered in the market at that time. There are open sources of information about prices through forestry societies, trade associations and the Forestry Commission.



11. Tax on timber sales and woodlands

Value added tax (VAT):

As with any other business you can register woodland activity for VAT if your turnover is likely to meet the HMRC thresholds. This means that you can reclaim VAT on expenses and receive VAT on timber sales. If you choose not to register you will still have to pay VAT on invoices from rated businesses and will not receive the VAT on timber sales. Each individual's circumstances are unique and advice should be taken from your tax advisor or accountant. Bear in mind that if you do register for VAT then if you sell a part or all of the woodland property you may have to charge VAT on the sale.

Income tax:

Sales of timber are free of income tax recognising the long timescales of growing.

Inheritance tax:

If managed commercially, woodlands are excluded from an estate for inheritance tax purposes. There are a number of qualifying activities to demonstrate commerciality to verify qualification. Seek guidance from the HMRC portal and also seek tax advice from a qualified expert.

www.gov.uk/guidance/woodland-owners-tax-planning





12. Your responsibility as a land owner

As a landowner you have legal responsibility for the safety of trees on your property. The Arboricultural Association offer further guidance here:

www.trees.org.uk/Help-Advice/Help-for-Tree-Owners/Guide-to-Trees-and-the-Law

You also have legal duties under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 for activity on your land. The Forest Industry Safety Accord (FISA) publishes guidance about the duties for landowners and forestry workers. These can be found here:

ukfisa.com/Safety/Safety-Library/fisa-guidance-on-managing-health-and-safety-in-forestry

See also the National Tree Safety Group's 'Common Sense risk management of trees:'

ntsgroup.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/FCMS024.pdf

In summary the landowner must:

- Co-ordinate activities for health and safety purposes
- Provide information about hazards/ constraints on and around worksites to the Forestry Works Manager (FWM)
- Ensure the work on a particular site does not affect the health and safety of other people. This includes ensuring the FWM is competent in terms of health and safety
- Co-operate with the FWM to ensure the forestry work and access arrangements are coordinated with any other activities taking place on or around the land, and are legally compliant





13. Monitoring and plan revisions

Monitoring the outcomes of your activity is important to help refine your planning and understand progress towards your objectives. This is often overlooked. How it is achieved or undertaken can be managed by the owner or consultant.

Specific templates for monitoring and reporting may be required if activity is grant aided – check with your grant provider or agreement conditions.

It is recommended that monitoring should at least note the following which can also inform future management plans:

- Dates and details of management activity undertaken
- Before and after photos if appropriate
- Financial statements of account – including timber sales and grant claims
- Regular surveys of the woodland to check ecology, tree health, deer impacts, infrastructure (fencing/tracks/ditches) and any other notable features





Glossary of machinery

Not all woodland management requires use of mechanical machinery but larger-scale operations or felling of dangerous trees often does.

Employed inappropriately, machinery in woodland can have a detrimental effect but used correctly with skilled operators it can reduce potential damage, increase efficiency and be more cost effective than non-mechanised methods.

It is important to recognise that in many cases employing machinery can actually reduce damage to the woodland soils and ecology as repeat journeys or operations will use the same established access routes. In wet conditions there is likely to be some unavoidable rutting of tracks. These can easily be levelled and reinstated after

each operation but this must be written into any agreement or owners can be left with messy and damaged sites. Ride edges and tracks generally recover quickly after reinstatement.

(See photos on page 17)

It is always important that contractors use machinery that is appropriate to the site conditions and scale of the job and all machine operators must have the correct training, insurance and health and safety procedures. Good operators should also understand the regulations associated with their work such as what to do if protected species are noted. Always ask for documentation to verify qualifications and insurance – and ask to see examples of previous work or get references if in doubt.





Timber harvester

Harvesters are used for tree-felling operations and will cut the tree into required lengths of timber product. They can be used on level or moderately steep slopes and offer a safer environment for operators on larger-scale jobs or with diseased trees. Harvesters would only be employed on sites where sufficient timber is being cut to justify the haulage and operational costs. This will vary according to the job specification and the site. Harvesters are typically used together with forwarders.

Forwarder

Forwarders are used to transport felled logs from where they are cut (known as ‘at stump’) to a roadside stacking area or loading bay. Forwarders are available with varying load carrying capacities. The smallest are trailers towed by tractors which might carry 1-3 tonnes. Larger class machines can carry up to 25 tonnes of timber.

Tree shears

Tree shears are used for tree clearance, sensitive thinning and controlled felling of trees – particularly on track or roadside work. They are often used to fell diseased trees which are too dangerous to fell by hand with a chainsaw. Tree shears use grapple arms to secure the tree before it is cut. These hold the tree while it is placed and stacked for processing.

Mulchers

Mulchers are principally employed for clearing ground of vegetation such as small trees, understory growth, invasive rhododendron/ holly/laurel, stumps etc. They are an extremely efficient means of clearing open space and can be employed as ground preparation prior to replanting sites. (Note that mulching can create a thick mat of material which sits on top of the soil – using mulchers for ground preparation before planting can be effective but needs to be assessed as the best method for each site.)

360 diggers/excavators/rollers

Diggers are standard machinery used in land management and construction work. A rotating base and bucket head allow movement of large amounts of earth or other material. In forestry they are essential for work such as ditching, reinstatement, building tracks and loading bays. Rollers can also be required to compress stone during infrastructure creation or improvements.



Above: left to right - Timber Harvester, Forwarder, Roller.



Glossary of Terms

Forestry and woodland management is rich in specialist terminology. Below is a list of terms that may be helpful as quick reference guide.

AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, now National Landscapes.

Banksman: Person employed on site to direct machinery or people in the interests of health and safety – often required in operational areas used by the general public.

Basal area: A measure used to assess the area of any compartment that is occupied by trees – used to assess timber volumes.

Brush: Small branches and tree tops cut off during tree felling operations and either left on site or removed and chipped.

Clear felling: System of managing woodland in which all trees in a specified area are felled and replanted. This requires a felling licence.

Clinometer: Tool used in woodland mensuration to determine the height of a tree and help establish the timber volume in any one area.

Coppice: Trees and shrubs which are periodically cut to ground level (for wood products) and which regrow from the stumps.

Conifers: Trees with needles and cones (e.g. spruce, pine, larch).

ESC: Ecological Site Classification - online decision support tool from Forest Research used to assess tree species selection for future climate-change scenarios.

Felling: Operation in which trees are cut down for different objectives.

Felling licence: A licence issued by the Forestry Commission to permit trees to be felled (required by law in most cases).

FISA: Forest Industry Safety Accord.

Hand cut: Manual tree felling with a chainsaw and not with use of heavy machinery such as a harvester/tree shear.

Hardwood: The wood/timber of broadleaved trees – or the trees themselves.

Regeneration felling: Tree felling to create a gap in the tree canopy sufficiently large to allow natural regeneration or planting without clear felling. This will require a felling licence.

Relascope: A prism-based tool used to estimate the basal area of trees in any one area.

Reinstatement: A restoration of tracks etc following timber extraction or work.

Roundwood: Trunk or branch wood typically with a top diameter of 7 cm or more.

Thinning: Periodic removal of a proportion of trees in an area so that remaining trees benefit from increased light and growing space.

TPO: Tree Preservation Order – issued by local authorities to provide protection to trees or groups of trees.

Sawlog: Timber of at least 14 cm top diameter typically sawn into blanks and boards.

SAM: Scheduled Ancient Monument – designated by Historic England.

Silviculture: The care and cultivation of trees.

SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest – land designated by Natural England as ecologically notable – maybe subject to restrictions on management.

Standard: A tree with a single stem and clear trunk.

Standing sales: Sales of timber while the trees are still standing – the buyer covers the costs of getting the trees felled and removed from site.

UKFS: UK Forestry Standard – the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK – including best practice guidance and legal requirements.



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