

Forest Management Plans now available for Welsh landowners

Nick Fackrell, Senior Officer Forestry Operations for Natural Resources Wales, explains more about the benefits of long-term Forest Management Plans and why they've been introduced in Wales.

Here at Natural Resources Wales, we're encouraging landowners across the country to take up our recently piloted Forest Management Plans, which offer a wide range of benefits for woodland and landowners.

When it comes to forest and woodland management, there are a diverse range of requirements that need to be balanced in order for the land to be managed sustainably; including but not limited to, felling operations, habitat conservation and restoration work as well as considering bigger issues such as climate change which can be challenging.

Forest management plans are a practical and essential tool, that offer landowners a wide range of benefits that can help to pro-actively and strategically manage their forest and woodland operations and plan for long term sustainability and we are keen to support more foresters in Wales to embrace the benefits they can bring.

What are the benefits?

Adaptive, Multi-purpose Management and building resilience:

As part of their sustainable forest management practice, land managers frequently look to restructure woodlands seeking multiple benefits and where appropriate, realising the commercial benefits of integrated land management.

Although felling licences offer proportionate and expedient regulation to suit many UK situations - particularly where management activities are of limited scope, modest impact or infrequent occurrence – the licence does not extend to the wider context and area covered by a forest management plan and are confined to the discrete operational area within the felling boundary.

The level of assurance provided by a forest management plan will therefore extend to all the UKFS elements of sustainable forest management applicable to the Forest Management Unit which is the area of land defined within the forest management plan.

Greater degree of freedom

Forest Management Plans can offer a greater degree of freedom when it comes to felling, as your timing of restocking can be linked to your vision and management objectives and to factors you identify in your plan, such as whether your woodlands are upland and large scale.

Typically, stand-alone felling licences are usually only valid for two years for clear-felling and five years for thinning and are normally issued shortly before a felling operation begins, allowing little capacity to be able to adapt quickly in response to unforeseen circumstances such as wind-throw or disease.

A Forest management plan will provide felling permission for your proposed thinning, felling and restocking for the first five years of your plan and outline approval for the following five years. This builds increased confidence for land managers as the permissions are resilient to external changes which are out of the land managers control.

There are also tolerances available within a forest management plan that allow for reasonable adjustments that are not afforded through a standard felling licence process; for example, felling boundaries and timings of management interventions.

Improved collaboration and engagement

During the development of the pilot, the private forestry sector sought to take on key elements of the process which are currently completed on their behalf by our Forest Regulations and Forestry Permitting teams. Examples include consulting with the statutory nature conservation body, liaising with stakeholders and agreeing mitigation for designated sites. This can understandably be frustrating for land managers who are often best placed to communicate on these matters and have a better understanding of the likely operational and project level details which are being planned.

A Forest Management Plan enables land managers to take on this responsibility and appropriate, plan level detail can be agreed up front before the plan is submitted to us for approval.

Forest management plans also set proposals in a broader context, both in the area covered and over time. They also provide a clear statement of intention and allow proposals to be communicated to others. This can reduce conflict and provides stakeholders with increased confidence and reassurance.

Evidence to support independent certification

If you are seeking a Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) accreditation, a management plan is a key requirement that's used to provide evidence and will allow you to easily demonstrate your woodlands compliance with legal obligations such as managing protected habitats and obtaining felling licences.

They're also a useful way to seek and process complex information and can be used to inform key decisions if you:

- Intend to clear-fell woodland within an at risk or failing acid sensitive catchment
- Your management has the potential to affect European or UK protected sites and you need to consider mitigation or avoidance measures
- Are managing a long-term change in tree species diversity because your forest or woodland is on an area of restorable deep peat or has areas of PAWS (a plantation on an ancient woodland site)

Preventative action for Tree Health Issues

Ash dieback in Wales is a significant issue for land managers and often the felling licence process does not allow for fast interventions which sometimes are required when the symptoms of the disease are noticed. Forest Management Plans can provide a proactive way to strategically manage the disease, part of which might involve seeking felling permissions up front so that appropriate forest management interventions can take place at the relevant time.

Speaking about our Forest Management plans, Jon Travis, Head of Forestry Reform, Welsh Government said:

Document provided by Natural Resources Wales, October 2021.

“Our forests and woodlands in Wales play a vital role in our environment and communities and it’s never been more important to look after them and ensure that they are managed sustainably in order to aid Wales Green Recovery.

The Forest Management Plans offered by Natural Resources Wales, are an essential tool that allow landowners to plan their woodland management over a longer period, focusing on delivering healthy and resilient woodlands in light of future environmental changes.”

David Edwards, Wales and the Marches Regional Manager, Tilhill Forestry said:

“I welcome the introduction of Forest Management Plans in Wales as they add value to our UKWAS plans providing longer term regulatory approval of forest operations particularly on the larger and more complex properties Tilhill manage in Wales”.

If you’d like to find out more about our Forest Management plans, we’d love to hear from you. More information including details on how to apply can be found on our website: Natural Resources Wales / Forest Management Plans.

Funding can be accessed for initial advice through [Farming and Forestry Connect](#), but if you are not eligible or want to come directly to us, please get in touch fellinglicence@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk