

Public Opinion of Forestry 2023: Northern Ireland

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The research agency of the
Forestry Commission

Forest Research is the research agency of the Forestry Commission and is the leading UK organisation engaged in forestry and tree related research.

The agency aims to support and enhance forestry and its role in sustainable development by providing innovative, high quality scientific research, technical support and consultancy services.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Key findings	6
Forestry in the media	7
Benefits of forestry	10
Climate change.....	13
Changes to woodland	16
Consultation on Forest Service forests	21
Woodland recreation	23
Annex	29

Introduction

Forest Research (and previously the Forestry Commission) has conducted surveys of public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues since 1995.

Information has been collected for Northern Ireland, on behalf of the Forest Service, through UK-wide surveys since 2003 and in separate Northern Ireland surveys (of around 1,000 adults) carried out in 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014, 2019 and 2023.

This publication presents results from the Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2023: Northern Ireland on:

- Forestry in the media;
- Benefits of forestry;
- Climate change;
- Changes to woodland;
- Consultation on Forest Service forests; and
- Woodland recreation.

A copy of the questionnaire used in this survey, giving complete wording of questions and response options, is provided in the Annex at the end of this report.

Reports providing results from previous surveys are available on Forest Research's [Public Opinion of Forestry Surveys homepage](#). Reports from surveys run across the UK as a whole, in Scotland and in Wales, are also available.

Comparisons with earlier years (from Northern Ireland surveys run in 2010, 2014 and 2019) are included where possible. Results for Northern Ireland from UK-wide surveys are not included, given the small sample sizes involved.

Results from the 2023 survey are published for the first time in this release. Results for earlier years have not been revised from those previously released. For further details, see the Revisions section of the Annex.

All surveys run until 2019 were conducted using face-to-face interviewing. The restrictions in place across the UK in early 2021 as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to a change in methodology for the three surveys conducted that year; in Scotland the 2021 survey was changed to use telephone interviews, whilst the surveys across the UK and Wales were changed to use an online methodology. In 2023, the Scotland and Northern Ireland surveys changed to an online methodology, in line with the other countries.

As the data are obtained from a sample survey, there is a range of uncertainty (confidence interval) associated with any results produced. This means that small differences between results could reflect differences in the samples that have been selected, rather than genuine differences within the population. When comparing across surveys for questions asked to all respondents, for example, a difference of more than $\pm 6.5\%$ suggests there is a significant difference between results from the 2019 and the 2023 surveys. Any differences highlighted in the text are statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level unless otherwise stated.

For further details, see the Data Sources and Methodology and the Quality sections of the Annex.

Key findings

- More than three-quarters (77%) of adults had seen, heard or read about Northern Ireland's forests and woodlands in the media in the last 12 months.
- Ninety-seven percent of respondents believed that there was at least one benefit of forestry worth supporting with public money.
- Eighty-five percent agreed or strongly agreed that "trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood".
- Ninety percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "a lot more trees should be planted".
- Eighty-five percent of respondents would like to see more woodland in their part of Northern Ireland.
- Seventy percent of respondents thought that preventing the spread of disease was an acceptable reason for cutting down trees.
- Thirty-two percent of respondents were aware that the Forest Service consults on the management of Forest Service forests and 76% would, in principle, like to be consulted in future.
- Almost three-quarters (74%) of respondents who indicated they would like to be consulted on the management of their local forest would like to be asked about protecting the environment.
- Eighty-three percent of respondents had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years.
- Eighty-five percent of respondents who had visited woodlands considered the outdoors to be good for relaxing and unwinding and 77% considered it good for spending time with family and friends.

Forestry in the media

Respondents were asked whether they had seen, heard or read about Northern Ireland's forests and woodlands in the media (television, radio, internet, social media, etc.) in the last 12 months. Most respondents (77%) recalled seeing, hearing or reading about at least one topic in 2023 (Table 1), a statistically significant increase from the 61% who recalled at least one topic in 2019.

The proportion of respondents who recalled seeing, hearing or reading about "tree planting" represents a significant increase from the 2019 figure (from 26% to 44%). A significant increase was also found for "forests and woodlands as places to visit" (from 31% in 2019 to 38% in 2023) and "protection of ancient woodland" (from 17% in 2019 to 24% in 2023).

Table 1: Proportion of respondents who had seen, heard or read about forests and woodlands in the last 12 months, Northern Ireland, 2010 to 2023

Topic	2010	2014	2019	2023
Tree planting	33	24	26	44
Forests and woodlands as places to visit	21	21	31	38
Walking, running, cycling, mountain biking or horse riding	[x]	27	34	35
Birds and other animals in forests and woodlands	29	21	25	29
The role of forests and woodlands in helping to reduce the impacts of climate change	22	15	21	27
Protection of ancient woodland	[x]	14	17	24
Forests and woodlands for the use of local people and communities	13	12	21	24
Wood for fuel/firewood	13	10	18	21
Flowers and other plants in forests and woodlands	16	12	14	20
Removal of woodland or trees due to development or other land uses	[x]	[x]	17	20
Tree pests and diseases	7	27	19	20
Public right of pedestrian access to forests	15	14	19	19
New native woodland	10	6	9	12
Labelling to show that wood products are produced from sustainable sources	11	6	12	12
At least one topic	62	61	61	77

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2010 (1,011), 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).
2. Question referred specifically to Northern Ireland's forests and woodlands.
3. [x]: data not available (response option not included in that year's survey).
4. Changes to the wording of these options may have resulted in inconsistencies over time.
5. Respondents could select more than one topic.
6. Excludes other responses and options included in earlier years only.

Benefits of forestry

Respondents were asked to select, from a list of possible public benefits, good reasons to support forestry in Northern Ireland with public money.

Table 2 shows that, in 2023, 97% of respondents believed there was at least one benefit from forestry worth supporting with public money.

As in previous years, the most popular reason to support forestry in Northern Ireland with public money was “to provide places for wildlife to live” with 63% of respondents in 2023 selecting this as a benefit. “To combat climate change” (57%) and “To provide places for relaxation and stress relief” (51%) were also seen as important reasons to support forestry with public money. Despite support for at least one benefit remaining high (97%), there was a statistically significant fall in support between 2019 and 2023 for several of the reasons listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Proportion of respondents and reasons to support forestry with public money, Northern Ireland, 2010 to 2023

Reason	2010	2014	2019	2023
To provide places for wildlife to live	72	62	70	63
To combat climate change	47	37	53	57
To provide places for relaxation and stress relief	51	40	56	51
To provide places for recreation (such as walking, running, cycling and horse riding)	61	44	58	49
To improve the countryside landscape	56	39	52	48
To help rural tourism	46	41	51	39
To provide better access to forests and woodlands	38	30	45	39
To provide places for families to play	48	55	56	38
To provide renewable energy	40	36	42	37
To support the economy in rural areas	44	37	44	36
To provide places for learning	45	33	41	32
To make us more self-sufficient in timber and wood products	30	27	30	29
To provide timber	32	30	34	26
To provide farm diversification as an alternative land use	[x]	[x]	29	25
At least one reason	96	96	97	97

Footnote:

1. Figures are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2010 (1,011), 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).
2. [x]: data not available (response option not included in that year's survey).

3. Changes to the wording of these options may have resulted in inconsistencies over time.
4. Respondents could select more than one reason.
5. Excludes other responses (not included in 2023 survey response options).

Climate change

Since 2007, respondents have been asked to indicate their level of agreement with two sets of statements related to woodlands and climate change.

Woodlands' impact on climate change

Respondents were asked about their level of agreement with a set of statements regarding the ways in which forests and woodlands in Northern Ireland can impact climate change.

Table 3 shows that the highest level of agreement in 2023, where respondents selected "strongly agree" or "agree", was with the following statement:

- "Trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood" (85% agreed).

The lowest levels of agreement in 2023 were with the following statements:

- "Using wood for fuel makes climate change worse because it releases carbon dioxide" (50% agreed);
- "Using wood for building is better for climate change than using materials such as concrete and steel" (56% agreed); and
- "Using wood for fuel is better for climate change than using fuels such as coal and gas" (56%).

Table 3: Proportion of respondents and the impact of forests and woodlands on climate change, Northern Ireland, 2010 to 2023

Impact	2010	2014	2019	2023
Trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood	86	82	82	85
Northern Ireland could offset all its greenhouse gas emissions by planting more trees	55	62	62	62
Cutting down forests and woodlands makes climate change worse, even if they are replanted	49	53	48	61
Using wood for fuel is better for climate change than using fuels such as coal and gas	55	55	61	56
Using wood for building is better for climate change than using materials such as concrete and steel	45	43	48	56
Using wood for fuel makes climate change worse because it releases carbon dioxide	25	40	45	50

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2010 (1,011), 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).

Forest management in response to climate change

Respondents were presented with a set of statements regarding the way in which forests and woodlands in Northern Ireland should be managed in response to the threat of climate change.

Table 4 shows that the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that:

- “A lot more trees should be planted” (90% in 2023);
- “More information should be provided about the ways in which wood can be used to lessen our impact on the environment” (87%); and that

- “Different types of trees should be planted that will be more suited to future climates” (85%).

Table 4: Proportion of respondents and management of forests in response to climate change, Northern Ireland, 2010 to 2023

Management strategy	2010	2014	2019	2023
A lot more trees should be planted	87	91	90	90
More information should be provided about the ways in which forests and woodlands can lessen our impact on the environment	86	86	93	87
Different types of trees should be planted that will be more suited to future climates	79	84	86	85

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2010 (1,011), 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).

Changes to woodland

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding changes to woodland area; with respondents indicating if they desired more or less woodland, the preferred location of new woodland and the acceptable reasons for cutting down trees.

Desire for change in woodland area

Respondents were asked whether or not they would like to see more woodland in their part of Northern Ireland. Most respondents in 2023 (85%) said they would like to see more woodland in their part of Northern Ireland, a further 10% reported that they would like to see “neither more nor less” and 3% said they would like to see less (Table 5).

Table 5: Proportion of respondents and desire for change in woodland area, Northern Ireland, 2010 to 2023

Level of support	2010	2014	2019	2023
More (net)	77	79	82	85
A lot more	51	43	47	51
A little more	26	36	36	34
Neither more nor less	18	16	14	10
Less (net)	3	3	1	3
A little less	2	2	0	2
A lot less	1	1	0	1
Don't know	3	2	3	1

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2010 (1,011), 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).

Location of new woodland

Respondents who indicated that they would like to see more woodland in their part of Northern Ireland were then asked where they thought any new woodlands should be created.

In 2023, 65% of respondents who would like to see more woodland in their part of Northern Ireland thought that new woodlands should be created “next to rivers and lakes” and 59% thought they should be created “next to existing forests and woodlands”. “In mountain areas” was also reported by over one half (57%) of respondents.

Table 6: Proportion of respondents and preferred location of new woodland, Northern Ireland, 2010 to 2023

Location	2010	2014	2019	2023
Next to rivers and lakes	[x]	[x]	60	65
Next to existing forests and woodland	[x]	[x]	60	59
In mountain areas	18	42	54	57
Close to towns and villages	71	62	54	49
On less intensively farmed land (e.g., pasture)	18	25	32	27
On intensively farmed land	6	12	12	18
Other answers	3	3	2	1
Don't know	3	[x]	3	4

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents who would like more woodland. Weighted totals: 2010 (775), 2014 (787), 2019 (823), 2023 (899).
2. Respondents could select more than one location.
3. [x]: data not available (response option not included in that year's survey).

Acceptable reasons for cutting down trees

Since 2014, respondents have been asked their views on acceptable reasons for cutting down trees.

Table 7 shows that most respondents in 2023 thought that preventing the spread of disease was an acceptable reason for cutting down trees (70%). Around one half (48%) of respondents thought that providing timber (with the area being replanted afterwards) and 35% thought that restoring priority habitats were acceptable reasons for cutting down trees. Each of the other options were considered

acceptable by fewer than one quarter of respondents. Few respondents (5%) thought that none of the reasons listed were acceptable for cutting down trees.

Table 7: Proportion of respondents and acceptable reasons for cutting down trees, Northern Ireland, 2014 to 2023

Reason	2014	2019	2023
To prevent the spread of tree disease	73	71	70
To provide timber, with area replanted after	46	42	48
To restore priority habitats	[x]	33	35
To create space to build wind farms	10	17	23
To use the land for agriculture	16	19	19
To create space for development	14	15	18
For tourism initiatives	7	11	13
For larger scale recreation projects	8	13	12
Other answers	2	1	0
None of the options listed	7	9	5

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).
2. Respondents could select more than one reason.
3. [x]: data not available (response option not included in that year's survey).

Consultation on Forest Service forests

The survey asked respondents a number of questions about the management of Forest Service forests.

Around one third of respondents (32%) indicated they were aware that the Forest Service consults about forest management and around three quarters (76%) of respondents indicated they would, in principle, like to be consulted in the future (Table 8).

Table 8: Proportion of respondents and their knowledge and potential engagement with Forest Service management, Northern Ireland, 2010 to 2023

Engagement	2010	2014	2019	2023
Aware that Forest Service consults	13	15	23	32
In principle, I would like to be consulted	33	24	49	76

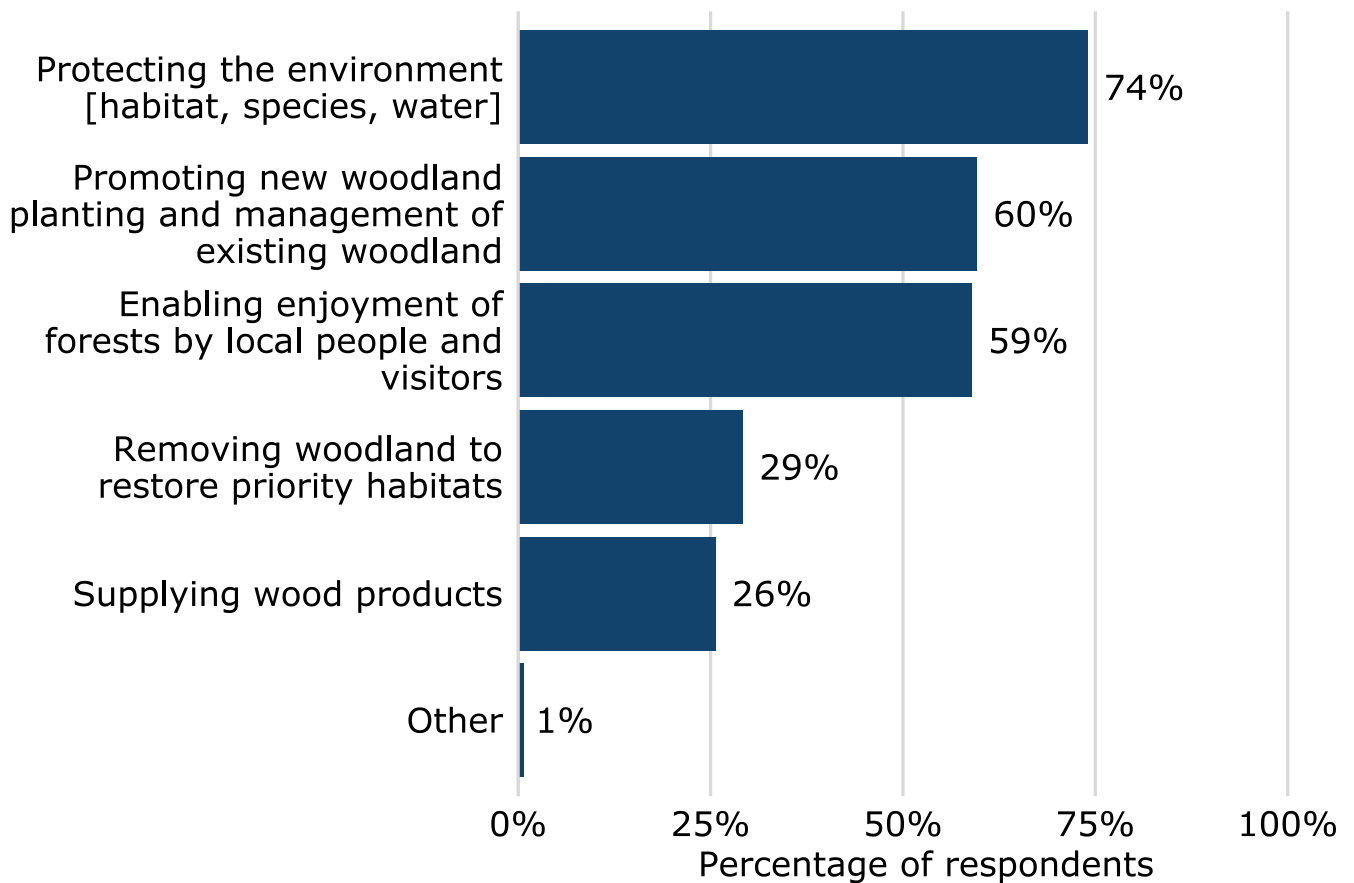
Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2010 (1,011), 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).
2. Changes to the wording of this question since the 2019 survey (to ask "in principle") may have resulted in some inconsistency with earlier years.

If respondents indicated they would, in principle, like to engage with the Forest Service about the management of their local forest they were asked which issues they would like to be consulted about (Figure 1). Most respondents indicated they would like to be consulted about protecting the environment (74%). "Promoting new woodland planting and management of existing woodland" (60%) and

“enabling enjoyment of forests by local people and visitors” (59%) were also chosen as topics of discussion by the majority of respondents.

Figure 1: Proportion of respondents and woodland-related issues they would like to be consulted about, Northern Ireland, 2023



Footnote:

1. Results are based on respondents who, in principle, wanted to be consulted about forest management. Weighted total: 806.
2. Respondents could select more than one topic.

Woodland recreation

The survey asked respondents a number of questions about their woodland visit habits. This included whether the respondent had visited woodland in the last few years for recreation, frequency of visits, benefits to health and wellbeing and reasons for not visiting.

Proportion visiting woodland

As in previous years, respondents to the 2023 survey were asked whether they had visited forests or woodlands in Northern Ireland for walks, picnics or other recreation in the last few years.

In 2023, 83% of respondents said they had visited forests or woodlands in the last few years for walks, picnics or other recreation (Table 9). This is a significant increase from the levels reported in 2014 and earlier surveys.

Table 9: Proportion of respondents who reported visiting woodland in last few years, Northern Ireland, 2005 to 2023

Year	Percentage of respondents
2005	67
2007	62
2010	72
2014	75
2019	78
2023	83

Footnote:

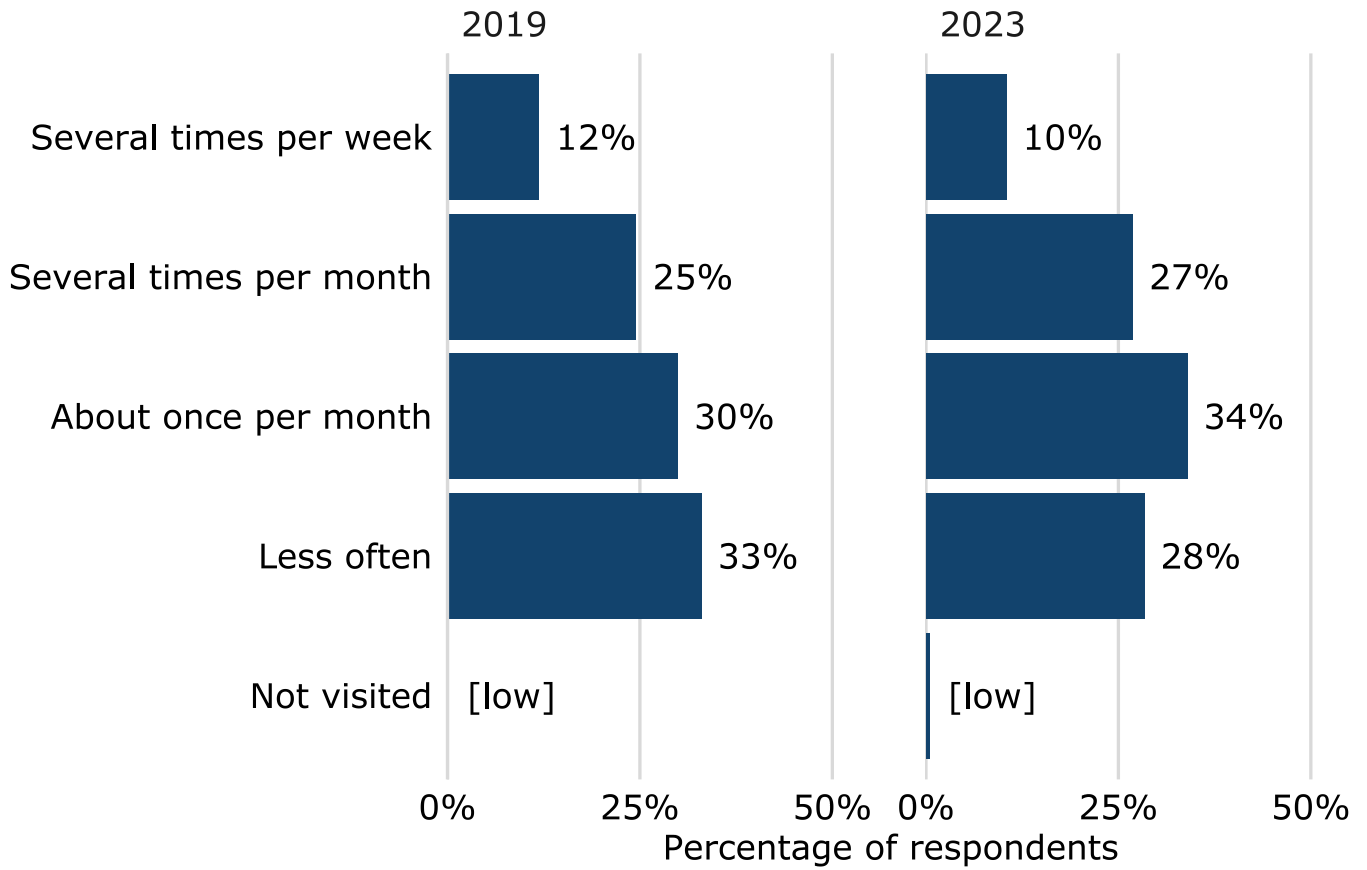
1. Results are based on all respondents. Weighted totals: 2005 (1,004), 2007 (1,021), 2010 (1,011), 2014 (994), 2019 (1,000), 2023 (1,057).

Frequency of woodland visits

Respondents who stated that they had visited forests and woodland (in Northern Ireland) for walks, picnics and other recreation in the last few years were then asked how often they had visited in the last year. This question differed from the 2014 and earlier surveys, where respondents had been asked separately about visits in summer and in winter, so results from 2019 onwards are not comparable with earlier years.

71% of respondents who had visited woodland in the last few years reported that they had visited at least once a month in the last year (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents and frequency of woodland visits last year, Northern Ireland, 2019 to 2023



Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents who had visited woodland in the last few years. Weighted total: 874.
2. [low]: less than 0.5%.

Benefits of visiting woodlands

Respondents who had visited woodlands were asked about the aspects of their health and well-being that benefited from visiting forests and woodlands. All

respondents who had visited woodland (100%) said that they benefited from at least one aspect.

Looking at the individual aspects (Table 10):

- Eighty-five percent (85%) considered visits to woodlands and the outdoors to be good for relaxing and unwinding;
- Over three-quarters (77%) reported that visits to woodlands and the outdoors provided an opportunity to spend time with family and friends; and
- Sixty-eight (68%) said that physical exercise was a benefit.

Table 10: Proportion of respondents and reported health benefits from visiting woodlands, Northern Ireland, 2014 to 2023

Health benefit	2014	2019	2023
It's a good place for me to relax and unwind from the stress of everyday life	70	82	85
It's a good place for me to spend time with family and friends	63	81	77
It's a good place for me to do some physical exercise	65	74	68
All of these	34	58	41
At least one benefit	100	99	100

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents who had visited woodland in the last few years.
Weighted total: 2014 (748), 2019 (780), 2023 (874).
2. Respondents could select more than one benefit.

Reasons for not visiting forest or woodland

Respondents who had not visited woodland in the last few years were asked to state their main reason for not visiting woodland.

Table 11 shows that the most commonly cited reasons for not visiting woodland in the last few years were “I’m too busy/not enough time” (14%) and “Not interested in going” (12%).

Table 11: Proportion of respondents and the main reasons for not visiting woodland in last few years, Northern Ireland, 2014 to 2023

Reason	2014	2019	2023
I'm too busy/not enough time	13	23	14
Not interested in going	33	30	12
Personal mobility reasons	12	17	11
Lack of information about forests/woodlands to visit	1	2	11
Prefer other areas of countryside	4	3	10
Forests/woodlands are too far away	7	3	9
Don't have a car	19	10	9
Lack of suitable public transport	4	2	6
Cost of visiting	1	0	5
Lack of facilities (play and picnic areas, toilets, etc.)	[x]	0	3
Paths are badly maintained	0	1	3
Concerns about antisocial behaviour	[x]	[x]	2
Concerns that forests and woodlands are not safe	1	1	1
Other answers	4	8	4

Footnote:

1. Results are based on all respondents who had not visited woodland in the last few years. Weighted totals: 2014 (246), 2019 (220), 2023 (183).
2. [x]: data not available (response option not included in that year's survey).

Annex

Introduction

This annex provides background information on the statistics presented in this release. It covers the data sources and methodology used to produce the statistics, information on quality measures and on any revisions to historic data and links to further information.

Glossary

Confidence interval

An estimated range of values that is likely to include an unknown population parameter (i.e., a fixed value for the population as a whole). The confidence interval around an estimate is derived from the sample data, and is used to indicate the reliability of the estimate.

Clustering

A sampling technique where the entire population is divided into groups, or clusters, and a random sample of these clusters are selected. All (or a selection of) observations in the selected clusters are included in the sample. Cluster sampling is often used when a random sample would produce a list of subjects so widely scattered that surveying them would prove to be far too expensive.

Forest

In the United Kingdom, there is no formal definition of “forest”; the term is often used for large woodland areas (especially conifers).

Forest Service (FS)

An executive agency of the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs responsible for forestry matters in Northern Ireland.

Proportion

A weighted percentage.

Quota sampling

A method of sampling where interviewers are each given a fixed number of subjects of specified type to interview.

Statistical significance

A statistical assessment of whether observations reflect an actual pattern rather than just chance.

Stratification

A sampling technique where the entire population is divided into groups, or strata, and a random sample is selected within each group. Stratified sampling is often used to ensure that sufficient numbers from each group are included in the overall sample, particularly where results are required for each group.

United Kingdom (UK)

Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

Weighting

A set of factors assigned to survey responses to ensure that the resulting weighted results are representative of the population as a whole.

Woodland

Land under stands of trees with a canopy cover of at least 20%, or having the potential to achieve this, including integral open space, and including felled areas that are awaiting restocking.

Methodology

Background

Forest Research (and previously the Forestry Commission) has conducted surveys of public attitudes to forestry and forestry-related issues since 1995.

Information has been collected for Northern Ireland through UK-wide surveys since 2003 and in separate Northern Ireland surveys (around 1,000 adults) carried out in 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014, 2019 and 2023.

Table A1 shows a summary of the previous surveys and presents the approximate number of adults interviewed for each country (rounded to the nearest hundred).

Table A1: Approximate number of adults sampled for the Public Opinion of Forestry surveys, UK, 2001 to 2023

Year	UK ¹	England ²	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland ³
2001	2,000	[x]	1,000	1,000	[x]
2003	4,000	3,400	1,000	1,000	[x]
2005	4,000	3,400	1,000	1,000	1,000
2007	4,000	3,300	1,000	1,000	1,000
2009	2,000	1,700	1,000	1,000	[x]
2010	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]	1,000
2011	2,000	1,700	1,000	1,000	[x]
2013	2,000	1,700	1,000	1,000	[x]
2014	[x]	[x]	[x]	[x]	1,000
2015	2,000	1,500	1,000	1,000	[x]
2017	2,000	1,800	1,000	1,000	[x]
2019	2,200	1,800	1,000	[x]	1,000
2021	5,100	4,300	1,000	1,000	[x]
2023	11,100	9,300	1,000	1,000	1,000

Footnote:

1. 2001 and 2005 surveys shown in the "UK" column covered Great Britain only (i.e., excluding Northern Ireland).
2. Results for England are derived from UK surveys.
3. Sample sizes shown for Northern Ireland relate to surveys run solely in Northern Ireland. UK-wide surveys have also included some respondents from Northern Ireland.
4. [x]: data not available (no survey that year).

Survey Design

The results presented in this report are taken from a survey carried out by Survation from 7 to 24 March 2023. The survey was based on a representative sample of 1,057 adults (aged 16 or over) in Northern Ireland. More details of the sample method are given below.

The 2005, 2007 and 2010 surveys were obtained from the Millward Brown Ulster Omnibus Survey; the 2014 survey was obtained from the Ipsos MORI Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey; the 2019 survey was obtained from the Cognisense Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey; and the 2023 survey was obtained from Survation. These surveys employed different survey designs so comparisons should be taken with care.

Methodology

2023 survey

The survey was conducted via an online panel, with differential response rates from different demographic groups taken in account. Survation is an MRS (Market Research Society) company partner and member of the British Polling Council; data collection was digital and fieldwork was conducted according to MRS standards.

Survey sampling

Data were weighted to the profile of all residents aged 16+ in Northern Ireland. Data were weighted by age, gender, parliamentary constituency and local government district to minimise bias and ensure the sample was representative. Targets for the weighted data were derived from the Office for National Statistics.

Questionnaire

A copy of the 2023 questionnaire is provided at the end of this release. This covers the questions requested by Forest Service. In addition, a small number of additional questions are included as standard in the omnibus surveys run by Market Research companies (e.g., gender, age, region) and the answers to some of these questions are used in analysing the results from the survey.

Most questions are retained from one survey to the next, to enable comparisons over time. However, changes are sometimes made to reflect changing circumstances or priorities, or to improve the wording of questions. The 2023 questionnaire is unchanged from 2019.

Quality

Results from the Survation survey are weighted to population profiles to ensure an accurate representation of the Northern Ireland population. Weighting is applied on the basis of age, gender, parliamentary constituency and local government district, using population estimates from the Office for National Statistics. Each respondent is assigned a weight which reflects the number of people that they represent in the population.

The results quoted in this report are presented as proportions, which are percentages calculated from the weighted totals of respondents.

Design effect

All results are subject to the effects of chance in sampling, so a range of uncertainty (margin of error, or confidence interval) should be associated with any result from the survey. The confidence intervals take into account the effect of clustering, weighting and stratification in the survey design (see methodology, above, for more details).

The Survation survey uses a quota sampling approach, which means that the likelihood of individuals within the population being interviewed cannot be measured. Any confidence intervals calculated are also indicative. Due to the survey design, a 'design effect' of 1.5 should be applied to confidence intervals calculated for data from this survey.

Confidence intervals are most commonly reported at the 95% level. This means that there is a 95% chance that the true population value lies within the confidence interval. The following provides a guide to interpreting the results in this report on the basis of a 95% confidence interval:

For questions asked to the whole Northern Ireland sample of 1,057, the margin of error should be no more than $\pm 4.5\%$.

For questions not asked of the whole sample and sub-groups within the sample, margin of error will increase. For example:

- By gender (male n = 543; female n = 514), the confidence intervals should be no more than $\pm 6.5\%$;
- For those who visited woodland in the last few years (n = 874), the confidence interval should be no more than $\pm 5.0\%$.

For questions asked to whole samples, differences of more than $\pm 6.5\%$ between the 2019 and 2023 surveys are statistically significant.

Further information can be found on FR's [quality of official statistics page](#).

Revisions

Results for 2023 are published for the first time in this release. All results are final.

Results for earlier years have not been revised.

[Forest Research's revisions policy](#) sets out how revisions and errors to these statistics are dealt with.

Further information

The [accompanying data set to this release](#) provides more detailed results including standard breakdowns.

Results have been independently rounded, so may not add to the totals shown.

Official Statistics

This is an Official Statistics publication. Visit the [UK Statistics Authority](#) for more information about Official Statistics.

Northern Ireland Public Opinion of Forestry Survey 2023: Questionnaire

[All.]

Q1 You may have heard about Northern Ireland's forests and woodlands in the media (including TV, radio, newspapers, internet, social media, etc.). Which, if any, of these topics have you heard about in the last 12 months (since 1 March 2022)?

(Multi answer)

- Birds and other animals in forests and woodlands
- Flowers and other plants in forests and woodlands
- Forests and woodlands as places to visit
- Forests and woodlands for the use of local people and communities
- Tree planting
- Tree pests and diseases
- Wood for fuel/firewood
- Protection of ancient woodland
- New native woodland
- Public right of pedestrian access to forests
- Labelling to show that wood products are produced from sustainable sources
- The role of forests and woodlands in helping to reduce the impacts of climate change
- Walking, running, cycling, mountain biking or horse riding
- Removal of woodland or trees due to development or other land uses

- Other (please specify)
- None of these

[All.]

Q2 In Northern Ireland public money is given to support forestry and the planting and management of all types and sizes of forests and woodlands, because it is believed to be of public benefit. From this list, please tell me which of the following you think are good reasons to support forestry in this way?

(Multi answer)

- To support the economy in rural areas
- To help rural tourism
- To provide timber
- To provide renewable energy
- To make us more self-sufficient in timber and wood products
- To provide better access to forests and woodlands
- To combat climate change
- To provide places for wildlife to live
- To provide places for recreation (such as walking, running, cycling, horse-riding)
- To provide places for relaxation and stress relief
- To provide places for families to play
- To provide places for learning
- To improve the countryside landscape
- To provide farm diversification as an alternative land use
- None of these

[All.]

Q3 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the ways in which forests and woodlands in Northern Ireland can impact on climate change?

(1 strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neither agree or disagree, 4 disagree, 5 strongly disagree)

- Trees are good because they remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and store it in wood
- Cutting down forests and woodlands makes climate change worse, even if they are replanted
- Using wood for fuel is better for climate change than using fuels such as coal and gas
- Using wood for fuel makes climate change worse because it releases carbon dioxide
- Using wood for building is better for climate change than using materials such as concrete and steel
- Northern Ireland could offset all its greenhouse gas emissions by planting more trees

[All.]

Q4 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding how Northern Ireland's forests and woodlands should be managed in response to the threat of climate change?

(1 strongly agree, 2 agree, 3 neither agree or disagree, 4 disagree, 5 strongly disagree)

- A lot more trees should be planted
- Different types of trees should be planted that will be more suited to future climates
- More information should be provided about the ways in which forests and woodlands can lessen our impact on the environment

[All.]

Q5 From this list, which of these do you think are an acceptable reason for cutting down trees?

(Multi answer)

- To provide timber – with the area being replanted afterwards
- To prevent the spread of tree disease
- To restore priority habitats
- To create space for development, e.g., housing, roads
- To create space to build wind farms
- To use the land for agriculture
- For larger scale recreation projects, e.g., mountain biking trails
- For tourism initiatives, e.g., chalets
- Other (please specify)
- None of these

[All.]

Q6 Would you like to have more or less forests and woodlands in your part of Northern Ireland?

(Single answer)

- A lot more [go to Q7]
- A little more [go to Q7]
- Neither more nor less [go to Q8]
- A little less [go to Q8]
- A lot less [go to Q8]
- Don't know [go to Q8]

[Ask if answered "A lot more" or "A little more" to Q6.]

Q7 Where do you think new forests and woodlands should be created?

(Multi answer)

- Close to towns and villages
- On intensively farmed land (e.g., pasture)
- On less intensively farmed land e.g., pasture
- In mountain areas
- Next to existing forests and woodland
- Next to rivers and lakes
- Other (please specify)
- Don't know

[All.]

Q8 In the last few years, have you visited any forests or woodlands (in Northern Ireland) for walks, picnics or other recreation?

(Single answer)

- Yes [go to Q9]
- No [go to Q11]

[Ask if answered "Yes" to Q8.]

Q9 On average how often did you visit (NI) forests and woodlands last year?

(Single answer)

- Several times per week
- Several times per month
- About once per month
- Less often
- Not visited

[Ask if answered "Yes" to Q8.]

Q10 In general, which, if any aspects of health and wellbeing do you feel benefit from visiting forests and woodlands?

(Multi answer, except 4 and 5)

- It's a good place for me to do some physical exercise
- It's a good place for me to relax and unwind from the stress of everyday life
- It's a good place for me to spend time with family and friends
- All of these [answers 4 and 5 exclusive]
- None of these [answers 4 and 5 are exclusive]

[Ask if answered "No" to Q8.]

Q11 What was the main reason that you did not visit a forest or woodland?

(Single answer)

- Not interested in going
- Don't have a car
- Lack of suitable public transport
- Other personal mobility reasons (difficulty in walking, unwell, etc.)
- Forests/woodlands are too far away
- Lack of facilities (play areas, picnic areas, toilets etc.)
- Lack of information about forests and woodlands to visit
- Prefer other areas of countryside
- Concerns that forests and woodlands are not safe
- Concerns about antisocial behaviour
- Paths are badly maintained
- Cost of visiting
- I'm too busy/not enough time

- Other (please specify)

[All.]

Q12 Did you know that Forest Service engages with people about the management of Forest Service forests?

(Single answer)

- Yes
- No

[All.]

Q13 In principle, would you welcome being asked about the management of your local Forest Service forest?

(Single answer)

- Yes [go to Q14]
- No [go to Q15]

[Ask if answered "Yes" to Q13.]

Q14 Which of these issues would you like to be asked about?

(Multi answer)

- Enabling enjoyment of forests by local people and visitors
- Protecting the environment [habitat, species, water]
- Promoting new woodland planting and management of existing woodland
- Supplying wood products
- Removing woodland to restore priority habitats
- Other (please specify)

[All.]

Q15a Do you consider yourself to have any of the following disabilities or health problems?

(Multi answer)

- Mobility disability
- Visual impairment
- Hearing impairment
- Mental health problem
- Physical disability
- Other
- None of the above

[Ask all with a disability.]

Q15b Does your disability affect your use of woodlands/forests or other greenspaces?

(Single answer)

- Yes
- No

[Ask if answered "Yes" to Q15b.]

Q15c If so, in which of the following ways does your disability affect your use of woodlands/forests or greenspaces?

(Multi answer)

- Lack of public transport to the woodland/forest or other green space
- Lack of suitable paths around the woodland/forest or other green space
- Lack of accessible facilities, e.g., toilets, cafe, visitor centre, etc.
- Lack of suitable activities at the woodland/forest or other green space
- Lack of information to help inform a visit to the woodland/forest or other green space

- Lack of information at the woodland/forest or other green space
- Lack of information in a suitable format for your disability
- Attitude of staff at the woodland/forest or other green space
- Attitude of other visitors at the woodland/forest or other green space.

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