

## Public benefits from private forests and woodland in England: classifying private woodland owners -

Woodland ownership is changing significantly in England. Environmental conservation and enhancement, the provision of recreation and amenity, and the use of biofuels to mitigate climate change are being increasingly emphasised in new policy agendas. However, relatively little is known about private woodland owners and their willingness and ability to deliver public benefits. A postal survey of 600 private woodland owners was conducted and in-depth interviews were undertaken with 30 owners to assess their willingness and ability to deliver public goods. The research was conducted as part of a three-year PhD programme, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and sponsored by the Forestry Commission. The research suggests that there are six types of private woodland owner, each with differing motivations for ownership and objectives for management. Different owner types are likely to be influenced by distinct policy mechanisms, such as grant incentives, market mechanisms and advisory services.



*"I feel that woodland is becoming more important in light of climate change and using fossil fuels. It has never been financially viable, but as long as there is help through grant aid I feel there will always be farmers and landowners willing to look at retaining and planting new woods."*

Estate woodland owner  
with 40 ha of ancient semi-natural  
woodland in the Lake District

### Background

There is a high concentration of privately owned woodland in densely populated areas, especially in central and southern England, where private ownership accounts for over 80% of forest cover. In these areas, the benefit from 'public good' investment might be high. The delivery of public benefits from private woodland is likely to be influenced by the values of private woodland owners and their response to measures promoted under the devolved forestry strategies. This research used both qualitative and quantitative methods to classify private woodland owners in three study areas in England: the Lake District, the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Cornwall, representing a broad range of woodland and owner types.

### Objectives

This research aimed to generate a typology of private woodland owners in England with respect to their willingness and ability to deliver public benefits in their woodland.

### Methods

- Exploratory interviews with 20 woodland owners.
- Asking 10 woodland owners in each study area to sort a set of qualitative statements (derived from the exploratory interviews) onto a ranked grid.
- Self-completion postal questionnaire survey sent to 600 woodland owners.

## Findings

The research proposes six private woodland owner types:

- **Individualists:** Small (3–10 ha) woodlands, owned for less than five years. Most likely found in the High Weald or the Lake District. Ownership motivations included privacy, personal enjoyment, scenery and wildlife. Unlikely to apply for state grant.
- **Multi-functional owners:** Small woodlands, but some large woodlands (over 51 ha). Either new owners or long-term owners (30+ years). Most likely found in the Weald or Cornwall. Motivated by multiple objectives, including amenity, conservation and financial return, alongside personal enjoyment. Pragmatic and often entrepreneurial. Likely to apply for grants.
- **Private consumers:** Small woodlands, owned for less than 10 years. Most likely found in the Weald. Manage woodlands for wildlife and extract wood products (wood logs/poles etc.) for own use. Gain personal enjoyment from woodlands but not likely to apply for grants.
- **Conservationists:** Small woodlands, owned for less than 5 years. Most likely found in Cornwall. Main motivation to conserve woodland for wildlife, resulting in personal enjoyment. Least motivated by financial return and unlikely to encourage public access due to risk of disturbance to wildlife. Fairly likely to apply for grant for environmental enhancement.
- **Investors:** Very large woodlands owned for 6–10 years or over 30 years. Most likely found in the Lake District. Financially-oriented and likely to carry out timber production or other profit-making activity. Likely to apply for a grant.
- **Amenity owners:** Small or very large woodlands owned for 6–10 years or over 30 years. Likely to be found in all study areas. Favoured public access and amenity and likely to apply for access grants.

## Recommendations

- Incentive schemes should target woodlands with high ‘public good’ value (e.g. near an urban centre or with high aesthetic value) and owners willing to provide public benefits (e.g. by using social marketing techniques).
- Supply chains for wood fuel and other wood products should be developed to enable private owners to access markets.
- Woodland owner cooperatives and joint partnerships (including between public and private owners) should be facilitated for certification and sharing equipment costs.
- Entrepreneurship and diversification in private woodlands should be supported.
- Forestry Commission publications and online resources should be tailored for specific owner types.
- Woodland officers should be trained to tailor their support and extension services for different private woodland owner types.
- Online forums for owners to share information and ideas should be supported.

### Reports and publications

Urquhart, J. (2009). *Public benefits from private forests and woodland in England: Investigating the opportunities for public good enhancement*, Unpublished PhD thesis.

Urquhart, J., Courtney, P. and Slee, B. (2009). Private ownership and public good provision in English woodlands, *Small-scale Forestry*, in press.

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