

Sustaining ambition

Forest Research's Strategy

2025-29



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To be a world leader in applied forest science and a trusted provider of expertise, data, products and services.



#### Introduction

It is an exciting time for forestry and Forest Research. We are building on the success of our previous Strategy for Growth. There is a continuing focus on tree health, woodland creation and better woodland management in England, Scotland and Wales as we play our part in helping meet the UK's net zero targets. Key areas of our activity include making sure our forests remain resilient, meeting the changing needs of today's society, and tackling the threats posed by climate change.

As part of the Forestry Commission, we support its new 'Thriving for the Future' strategy and the five guiding principles of:

- Act now for the future
- Lead with science and evidence
- Partner with purpose
- Focus on customers
- Challenge the status quo

This Forest Research Strategy for Sustaining Ambition embraces all five guiding principles, particularly: leading with science and evidence, partnering with purpose, and challenging the status quo.

Our expertise is focused on trees, woods, and forests in both rural and urban settings, and their contribution to, and importance for, nature recovery. The roles forests play in the future are dependent on the science that puts

them in place or protects them. The research and practical solutions we develop and communicate are pivotal. Our work informs the improvement and delivery of the UK Government and devolved administrations' policies. Crucially, it provides an evidence base to inform and inspire change that benefits society, the economy, the environment, and the forestry sector.

The Strategy for Sustaining Ambition will shape our approach to tailored research and knowledge exchange, and will reinforce Forest Research's place as a world leader in the delivery of applied forest science.

We will monitor and report on our progress to deliver the Strategy and we will build the activities needed to achieve our goals into our core business plans.



Theme one: grow engagement

The forestry sector is our primary focus. We will conduct timely, rigorous, and independent research to give our customers the quality science, evidence, data, products, and services they need to make informed decisions, support policy development, or develop and nurture their businesses.



# Theme one: grow engagement

# We will continue to grow our relationship with our customers by:

- understanding their needs;
- providing constructive challenge, insight, and evidence based on quality applied science;
- providing authoritative advice, data, and statistics.

- understanding the challenges facing trees, woods, and forests and those responsible for them;
- informing policy by broadening and diversifying our existing networks and collaborations both nationally and internationally;
- constantly innovating, refining, developing and sharing our science, products, and services, such as Forest Research's Geostore data repository;
- enhancing our approach to knowledge exchange and impact, and increasing our digital presence;
- monitoring and responding to feedback on our impact and performance.

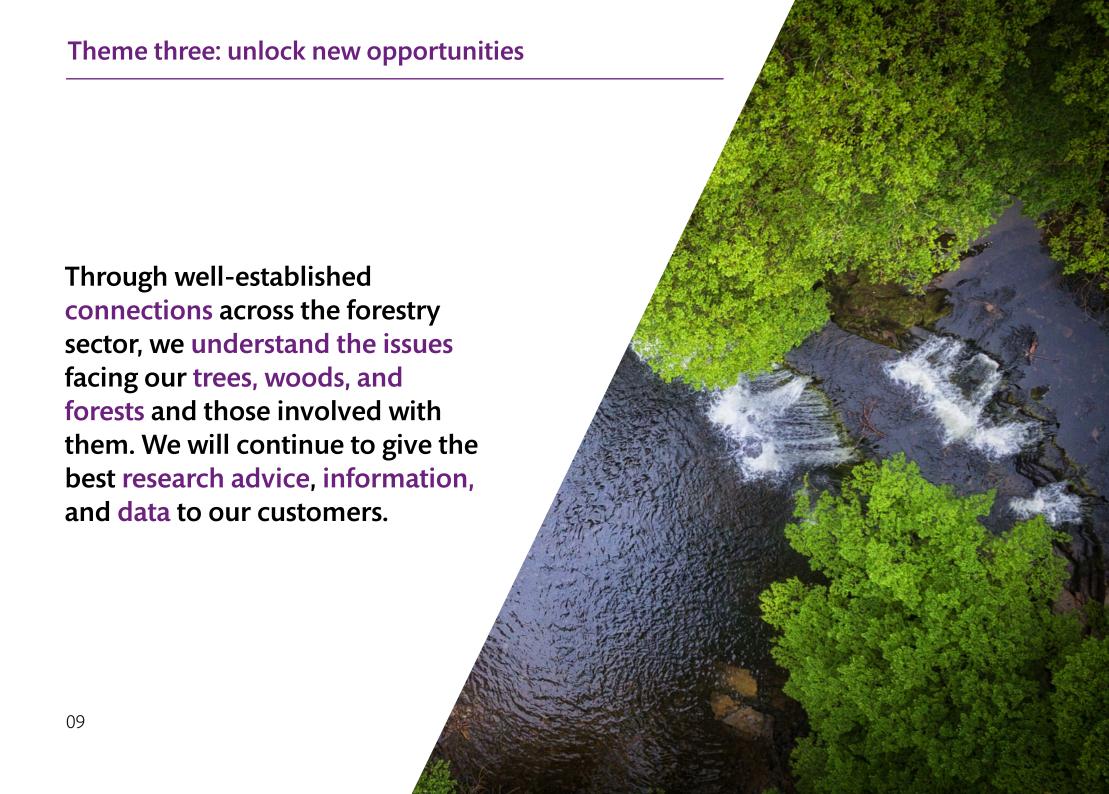


#### Theme two: build resilience

#### We will continue to develop by:

- investing in our staff, facilities, and core systems;
- providing opportunities for career development and supporting training and professional development;
- collaborating and increasing opportunities for partnership working.

- sustaining our business while making Forest Research an attractive, stimulating, and positive place to work;
- encouraging staff to develop new areas of research and to push the boundaries of forest science;
- developing a Forest Research science strategy;
- continuing to invest in new and refurbished facilities and equipment, as well as business systems and processes;
- building on areas of expertise and growing and developing our capabilities through training, staff exchanges, post-doctoral placements and secondments, and apprenticeships.



# Theme three: unlock new opportunities

#### We will enhance our business by:

- developing new and existing strategic partnerships across the UK and internationally to strengthen our capabilities and offer;
- maintaining, extending, and exploiting our unique sets of long-term data, forest trials, and experimental plots, alongside our ability to conduct long-term applied research;
- building on, and investing in, our established interdisciplinary approach across the whole forest wood supply chain so we can provide integrated solutions and remain as the trusted expert advisor to the forestry sector.

- consolidating newly acquired income streams and diversifying arrangements with key partners;
- developing and extending our approaches to knowledge-exchange and technology-transfer;
- growing and integrating our expert modelling, analysis, experimental plot network, and consultancy services to provide robust and innovative solutions;
- embracing new technologies to build on our established areas of expertise and knowledge and investigating how big-data analytics, continuous monitoring, machine learning, and artificial intelligence can be applied and used in our work;
- developing bespoke services in the arboriculture and urban-forestry sectors.

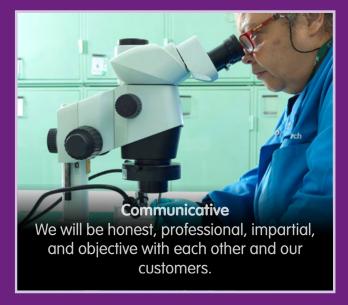


## Theme four: expand horizons

# Our creative, interdisciplinary science and data provision will offer trusted and quality-assured insight and innovation by:

- being objective, impartial, and at the forefront of forest science technology, modelling, official statistics production, data analysis, and development;
- being solution- and impact-focussed and independently quality assured through regular evaluation by Forest Research's Expert Committee on Forest Science;
- being applied, accessible, relevant, and easily understood.

- collaborating to bring together the best insights and practices;
- establishing new long-term experimental plots and monitoring networks to underpin and evidence the role of trees in nature recovery and landscape scale restoration;
- producing a 10-year strategy for our silvicultural research activities;
- growing our world-leading science in managing planted forests, tree-health research, forest inventory and carbon accounting, land-use and ecosystem services, climate mitigation and adaptation, applied social science, and economics;
- developing our expertise in forest informatics and investing in our capabilities in forest remote-sensing, decision-support systems, modelling, and production forecasting;













### What success will look like



We will continue to be recognised by the sector as a world leading partner and the cost-effective provider of choice for applied forest science and data services



We will continue to be trusted by our stakeholders for our expertise and advice



Our data, products, and services will continue to demonstrably add value to the future for trees, woods, and forests



Our science will continue to be quality assured, and our products and services innovative, user-driven, and user-tested



Our scientific credibility will be recognised nationally and internationally



We will continue to attract and retain professional staff who excel at what they do and who are committed to understanding and meeting customer needs



We will continue to value our staff and have a coherent and inclusive culture



We will consolidate and build upon the significant growth achieved in the last five years



We will operate efficiently, continue to meet the needs of the business, and adjust to meet demand

## Our unique attributes

#### Value to governments

As a GB body, Forest Research provides impartial advice to the government and devolved administrations, supported by data and skills that enable both the UK Government and the devolved administrations to fulfil their statutory obligations. We also provide emergency response capability to all three countries, and evidence and support to policymakers. We provide expert advice to manage pest and disease outbreaks and contribute extensively to the UK Forestry Standard - the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK.

#### **Recognised experts**

We are the largest single employer of forest scientists across all parts of the UK. We are internationally recognised with an established reputation for the quality, relevance, utility, uptake, and impact of our work. We have a strong track record of securing and delivering on complex and interdisciplinary projects. We have experts who advise across the breadth of forest topics from policy to practice and, as an organisation, we combine expertise to ensure all aspects of complex forestry-related issues are fully addressed. Our staff are passionate about what they do and the difference they make.

#### Value to the sector

We are highly valued by the forestry sector, from forest owners and processors to nurseries, conservation organisations, and urbanforest managers.

#### **Interdisciplinary**

We are the only provider of interdisciplinary research across the whole forest-wood supply chain, from tree breeding and ground preparation to forest management, harvesting, wood processing, forest inventory, and resource evaluation. We also work in all the diverse settings in which trees are valued.

# Collaboration and leverage

We have a long history of effective collaboration and partnership, working across disciplines within our own research programmes as well as with other institutes and universities across the world. We keep up to date with the latest scientific developments and attract additional funding for research activities.

#### Information assets

We have an unparalleled range and longevity of experimental and forestsurvey datasets and models. These underpin the evidence and policy needs of government as well as sector initiatives such as the Woodland Carbon Code. UK Forestry Standard, and tree-health strategies. Data and models are accessible through our website, as are software and decisionsupport tools, including **Ecological Site Classification** (ESC), ForestGALES, Forester, and Forest Yield.

#### **Skills development**

We support PhDs and post-doctoral research, along with both graduate and technical apprenticeships, and provide an essential training ground for specialist expertise in trees, woods, and forests. Many sector leading specialists work or have worked at or with, Forest Research – benefiting them as well as us and the wider interests of the sector and society.

# Forest trials and experimental plots

We have over 2,600 forest experiments located throughout Great Britain including, for example, the majority of forest genetic resources trials. We act as the long-term guardian of this asset which underpins much of our key science, such as yield and wind stability models. We hold our long-term data, supporting documentation, and experience of our Technical Services Unit in establishing, monitoring, and managing these sites, and we ensure maximum use and benefit from these. No other organisation has these skills or resources.

#### **Brand value**

As the UK's leading provider of applied forest science, we are valued for our independence, and the authority and impartiality of our research.