

Forestry and Woodland in Wales

Research Briefing

July 2021



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1. Introduction

Woodlands account for **14.9%** of the Welsh land area. They provide a range of potential benefits and **ecosystem services**, including producing timber, boosting tourism, supporting biodiversity, enhancing air quality, creating jobs, removing carbon from the atmosphere, and improving both physical and mental health.

This research briefing examines the current state of Welsh woodlands, who owns and manages them and how they are changing. It provides an overview of the ecosystem services that woodlands provide and sets out their potential economic, social and environmental value. It concludes by outlining the Welsh Government's funding of woodlands and its policies aimed at guiding the future of forestry and woodlands in Wales.

2. Welsh woodlands

Spatial extent

Woodland, as defined in **National Forest Inventory** (NFI) statistics, is land beneath tree stands with at least **20%** canopy cover (or with the potential to achieve that), and covering an area greater than 0.5 hectares (ha). This definition includes felled areas awaiting restocking and clearings less than 0.5 ha in area.

There were **309,000 ha** of woodland in Wales as of March 2020 (14.9% of the total land area). This compares with 10.1% in England, 18.8% in Scotland, and 8.6% in Northern Ireland. The European average is 46% (or 39.8% in the European Union).

Much of Wales's woodlands are found on agricultural land. In 2019, there were **109,000 ha** of farm woodland in Wales, or just over a third of the total woodland area.

There were a further **92,700 ha** of trees which were outside defined woodlands in Wales, as of January 2016. This tree cover takes the form of hedgerows, small woods, or lone trees, and is predominantly found on agricultural land, in urban areas, or alongside roads and railways. In total, these trees and defined woodlands cover approximately 19.4% of the Welsh land area.

In terms of urban tree canopy cover, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) reported that the average (mean) in Wales was **16.3%**, or 14,097 ha in 2013. This was down from 17.0% in 2009. Public open space accounts for 53% of urban tree cover, despite covering 22% of urban land. High density housing areas, often places of high deprivation, contain 1% of Wales' urban tree cover. Between 2009 and 2013, **72%** of Welsh towns lost tree cover - a total of 539 ha of urban canopy lost across Wales - and **7,000** large trees were removed from towns and cities between 2006 and 2013.

Character and type

Trees are classified as conifers (softwood), or broadleaves (hardwood). As of March 2020, the split was **152,000 ha** (49%) of conifer and 158,000 ha (51%) of broadleaf woodland in Wales.

Woodland that has been in continuous existence since 1600 is classed as '**ancient**'. The **State of Natural Resources Report for Wales** (SoNaRR), first published by NRW in 2016, reported that 94,940 ha of Welsh woodland can be described as ancient. This includes:

- 41,760 ha of ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW), where the trees and shrubs are native to the site and have not been obviously planted;
- 25,750 ha of plantations on ancient woodland sites (**PAWS**), where ancient sites have been replanted, often with non-native conifers; and
- 21,960 ha of restored ancient woodlands (RAW), which are PAWS in the process of being restored with mainly native species.

A further 5,440 ha are ancient woodland sites of unknown category.

The remaining 211,060 ha of Welsh woodland is non-ancient of which **159,055 ha** are non-native, non-ancient woodlands (where more than 50% of canopy cover is from non-native species) and 52,005 ha are native, non-ancient woodlands.

Ownership

The **Welsh Government Woodland Estate** (WGWE), managed by NRW, covers 126,000 ha, or approximately 40% of the total Welsh woodland area. The remaining woodland area is privately owned.

Forest Research statistics report that only 117,000 ha of Welsh woodlands are NRW-managed, but this figure only includes land previously managed by Forestry Commission Wales (FCW). Land managed by the other legacy bodies that formed NRW (the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and Environment Agency Wales (EAW)) is not included.

The Welsh Government owns around **two-thirds** of the conifer woodland in Wales. Almost all the broadleaf woodland is in private ownership.

Management

The sustainable management of natural resources is defined in the **Environment (Wales) Act 2016** as “using natural resources in a way, and at a rate, that maintains and enhances the resilience of ecosystems and the benefits they provide”. NRW must apply this principle in the delivery of its functions. The **UK Forestry Standard** (UKFS) sets the legal requirements for the sustainable management of woodlands. Land managers must meet the UKFS to receive grants from the Welsh Government.

The **SoNaRR 2020** showed that an estimated area of 145,000 ha was managed to the UKFS in 2019. This compares with **203,000 ha** in 2014. The SoNaRR attributed this apparent downward trend to the suspension of the Welsh Government's **Glastir Woodland Management** scheme in 2016. There is an overall upward trend since 2001, however, and the **entire WGWE** meets the UKFS. Most privately owned woodland is not assessed against these standards.

Woodland can also become certified after independent auditing against the **UK Woodland Assurance Standards** (UKWAS). This gives confidence to buyers that any products purchased come from sustainably managed woodland. As of March 2020, **47%** of Welsh woodland was UKWAS certified, including the entire WGWE. Only 29,000 ha of private sector woodland is UKWAS certified. A lack of certification does not necessarily indicate poor quality woodland; the certification process can be costly, and may only be worthwhile for commercial woodland.

Around **5%** of Welsh woodland has designated conservation status. Within this, 39% are sites designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) because of the important plant or animal species they support. The most recent assessments of woodland SACs in Wales showed that **74%** of the species or supporting habitats responsible for the SAC designation were deemed to be in “unfavourable” condition, assessed on factors such as tree health and the numbers of invasive plant species.

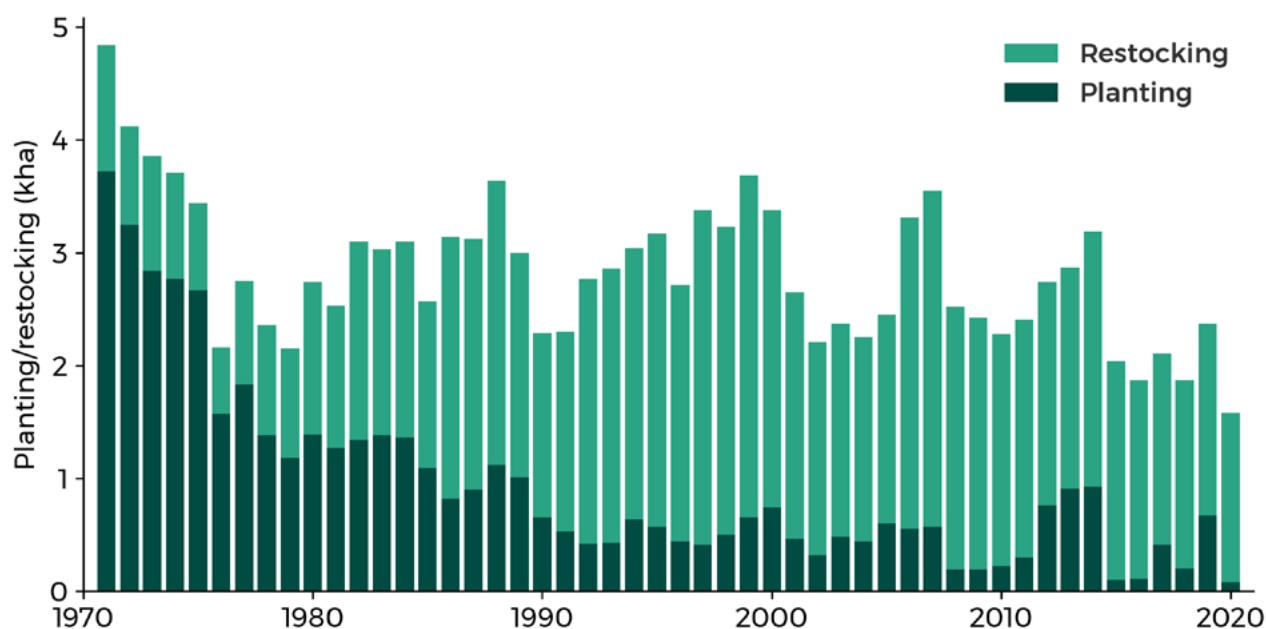
Planting and restocking

Planting refers to the creation of new woodland, either by the natural colonisation of trees on land near to existing woodland or deliberate planting. Restocking is the replacement of trees in felled woodland, including natural regeneration and deliberate replanting.

In 1905, there were only **88,000 ha** of woodland in Wales. By 1965, this had grown to 201,000 ha, and by 1998 there were 299,000 ha of woodland cover. The rate of new planting has decreased significantly in recent decades. **Planting and restocking rates from 1971 to 2020** are shown in Figure 1. The average planting rate for the period 1971 to 2020 is 950 ha per year. The **Climate Change Strategy for Wales (2010)** set a target of planting 100,000 ha of new woodland between 2010 and 2030, which translates to a rate of 5,000 ha per year. Over the last decade (2010 to 2020), however, the average planting rate fell to 430 ha per year. In the year to March 2020, just **80 ha** of new woodland were planted in Wales (40 ha of broadleaf and 40 ha of conifer). This **compares** with 200 ha of new planting in Northern Ireland, 2,330 ha in England, and 10,860 in Scotland.

Restocking rates have remained consistent across the period. The 1971 to 2020 average restocking rate was 1,880 ha per year, and the average over the last decade was also 1,880 ha per year. In the year to March 2020, 1,500 ha of woodland was restocked.

Figure 1: Welsh woodland planting and restocking from 1971-2020.



Source: [Forest Research](#)

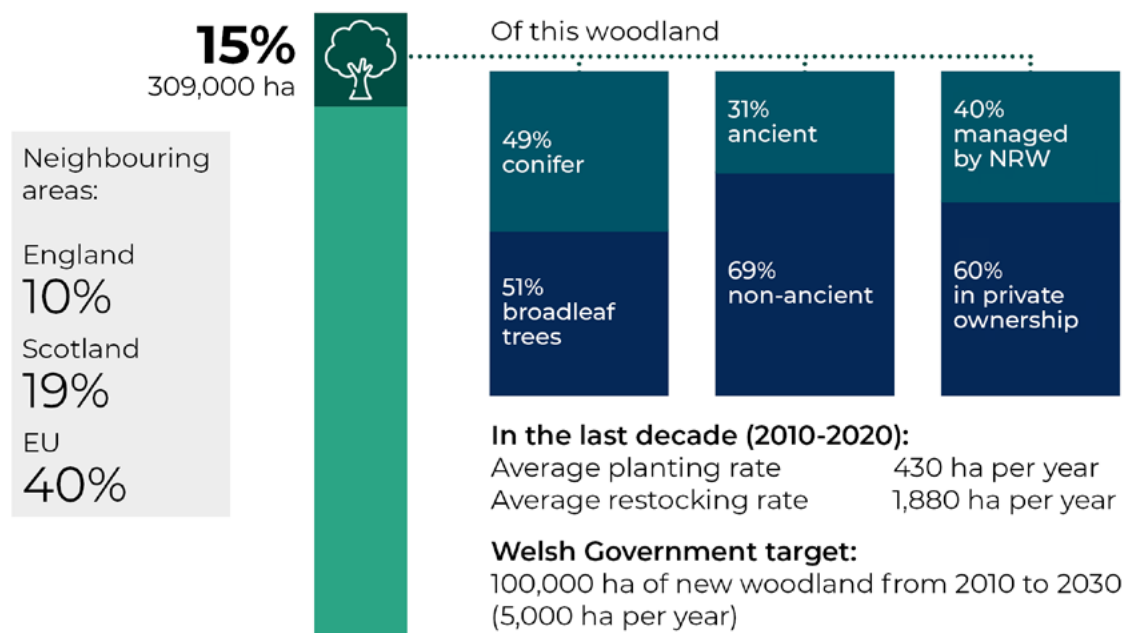
Of the woodland newly planted between 2015 and 2019, 89% was broadleaf. In the same period, restocking was more evenly split, with conifers accounting for 55% of the restocked area.

In June 2021, [the Minister for Climate Change announced](#) that Lee Waters, the Deputy Minister for Climate Change, would [lead an exercise](#) into identifying the barriers to tree planting in Wales, with the aim of setting out proposals to overcome them. Following this announcement, Anthony Geddes, Confor’s National Manager for Wales, said:

I’m pleased to see a fresh approach at Welsh Government level, which puts climate change at the heart of policy making - and positive initial signs of an understanding that forestry and wood must be a key component of tackling the impacts of climate change.

The taskforce set up to review tree planting met for the first time in June 2021, bringing together representatives from [11 different groups and organisations](#). Following the first week of meetings, the Deputy Minister [noted](#) that he was “struck by how much consensus there is” on this issue in Wales.

Figure 2: Forestry and woodland in Wales—key statistics.



Diseases

Welsh trees are under threat from **several diseases**. Currently, the most serious are:

- **ash dieback** (caused by the fungus *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, formerly called *Chalara fraxinea*); and
- **Phytophthora ramorum** (*P. Ramorum*) which primarily affects larch trees.

Ash dieback

Ash dieback disease was **first recorded in the UK** in February 2012, when a consignment of trees imported into England from the Netherlands was found to be affected, although it is now thought that the disease may have been present **before 2006**. The **first case in Wales** was found in November 2012.

Ash dieback causes bark lesions, crown dieback and leaf loss, and is usually fatal. It is most damaging to common ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), but can also affect narrow-leaved ash (*Fraxinus angustifolia*). Estimates suggest that ash dieback could kill over **95%** of the ash trees in Great Britain.

There were around **19,000 ha** of ash in Wales as of March 2019. This is 6% of Welsh woodland by area and 26% of all broadleaf standing volume. In October 2019, **more widespread** in Wales than in any of the other UK nations. Defra has produced an **interactive map** of ash dieback cases across the UK.

A **Plant Health Order** banning the movement of ash seeds, plants and trees into and within Great Britain was in place from October 2012. Since January 2020, ash trees **can be imported from the EU** and moved within Great Britain under new **Plant Health Regulations**. Trade in ash from third countries is still prohibited.

The **Wales Tree Health Steering Group** published its **ash dieback action plan** in November 2016. It states that no ash species should be planted in Wales and that alternative broadleaf species should be used. It also states that trees should not routinely be felled, but managed for public safety.

Following the publication of the ash dieback action plan, Confor provided **written evidence** to the Fifth Senedd's Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs (CCERA) Committee, noting that:

On Ash dieback, (Chalara), we believe WG has been proactive, we recognise that the ability to react to it is very limited by any organisation, public or private [...] Chalara is found in most areas of Wales now so the ability to control the disease is sadly long gone. However if we look at this as a case for how we could prevent disease in the first place we can learn lessons.

The Forestry Industry Recovery Scheme, a £1.55m capital investment scheme to help increase capacity in the forestry sector, **was open for applications between August and October 2020**. Specific support was made available for undertaking tree safety works for trees affected by Ash dieback.

Larch disease

P. ramorum was **present in all countries of the UK** by 2010, but it is most prevalent in south Wales and south-west England. The disease primarily affects larch (*Larix*) species, particularly Japanese larch (*Larix kaempferi*), and its characteristic symptoms in these species include foliage discolouration, branch dieback and bark lesions. There is no cure for *P. ramorum* infection.

The total area of larch in Wales **was estimated to be approximately 23,105 ha**, or 15% of all conifer woodland, in 2019, and more than **20%** of Wales's larch woodlands have been infected by *P. ramorum*. Larch is no longer used for restocking on the WGWE.

In 2017, **Confor said that:**

We do believe that NRW has dragged its feet on the clearance of diseased larch, whilst recognising their difficulties in the early years of the disease we continue to call for them to push forward with the disease management.

The previous Welsh Government published its updated **strategy** for managing *P. ramorum* in May 2019. It defines two Core Disease Zones and a Disease Limitation Zone, with targeted strategies in place to manage the spread of the disease. NRW also has the power to serve **Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHNs)** requiring woodland owners to fell infected larch trees. Annex C of the strategy document contains a map of all SPHNs issued in Wales as of February 2019. From 2010 to 2019, the cumulative area placed under SPHNs in Wales was **over 12,000 ha**.

In order to improve woodlands' resilience to future pests and diseases, the Welsh Government **aims** to restock areas felled due to larch disease with a more diverse mix of species. An NRW spokesperson **stated** that:

Larch disease has had a dramatic impact on our forestry in Wales. It's unfortunate to have to fell trees, but it does provide us with an opportunity to improve the forest for the future.

3. Woodland ecosystem services

Ecosystem services are the direct and indirect benefits of the natural environment to human well-being. These services are categorised in the [Woodlands for Wales](#) strategy as:

- provisioning services (such as timber production);
- regulating services (such as carbon sequestration and improving air quality);
- cultural services (such as recreation and health benefits); and
- supporting services (such as increasing biodiversity).

Forest Research used [natural capital accounting methodologies](#) developed by the Office for National Statistics and Defra to [estimate the value of Welsh woodland resources](#) in four specific areas: timber extraction, carbon sequestration, recreation and air quality. It found that the total annual value of these services provided by Welsh woodlands was just over £600 million in 2015. Table 1 shows how this is divided between the four different services.

Table 1: Annual value of services provided by Welsh woodlands in 2015.

Ecosystem service	Timber extraction	Carbon	Recreation	Air quality	Total
Value (£ million)	28.3	108	85	385	606.3

Source: [Forest Research](#)

Commercial forestry sector

The latest [Woodland for Wales indicators](#) showed that the Gross Value Added (GVA) of the forestry sector in Wales was £665 million in 2017, including £50 million from logging, £250 million from the manufacture of wood products, and £365 million from the manufacture of paper.

NRW stated that the capital valuation of the WGWE, as of March 2017, was [£777.8 million](#). This includes both timber stocks and the value of the land. The WGWE is the largest supplier of certified timber in Wales, accounting for around [60%](#) of the market share.

The forestry sector employed between **10,300 and 11,000** people in 2017, of which approximately 9,000 were employees and 2,000 were self-employed. In the same year, there were 805 individual business units in the sector. These figures do not include businesses supported by woodlands, such as those relating to recreational activities.

The percentage of available Welsh softwood that was harvested in 2017 was **97%** — just within the target annual limit of 77% to 98%. The average over the preceding decade was 90%, which is higher than the desired level of 86%. In 2017, Welsh sawmills processed 57% of Welsh saw logs, although that proportion has been decreasing since 2014. The number of active sawmills in Wales fell from 17 in 2009 to 13 in 2018.

Forecasts project softwood availability in Wales to decline from a standing volume of 2 million cubic metres in 2016 to just 1.5 million by 2041. The commercial forestry sector has **expressed significant concern** that the low planting and restocking rates will reduce the future supply of commercial timber, impacting on the long term viability of the sector in Wales.

Carbon sequestration and air quality

The amount of carbon sequestered (taken in and stored) by Welsh woodlands was estimated in 2017-18 to be **1.84 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent** (MTCO₂e) annually. The Welsh Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector as a whole is a net sink of carbon; it reduced emissions by **0.77 MTCO₂e** in 2016. Existing woodlands accounted for 67% of the emissions sink. Woodland converted into grassland led to emissions of 0.09 MTCO₂e, which is 5% of the LULUCF sector total.

The **UK Woodland Carbon Code** is a voluntary standard that provides independent verification of the carbon sequestered by woodland creation projects. In Wales there are **20** validated projects (covering 302 ha) and 50 awaiting validation (464 ha), as of March 2020. Based on current projections, these 70 projects will sequester a total of 0.319 MTCO₂e over their lifetime of up to 100 years.

One of the air pollutants that has the highest impact on human health is **small, particulate matter** less than 10 µm in size (PM₁₀). The ONS estimated that, in 2017, woodlands in the UK removed **269,000 tonnes** of air pollution, including 33,900 tonnes of PM₁₀ and 17,000 tonnes of PM_{2.5}. In Wales, pollution removal by woodland was estimated to have an ecosystem services value of **£100 million** in 2017, representing 31% of the annual value of Welsh woodlands.

NRW **reported** on three case studies from the i-Tree Eco scheme, which aimed to quantify the benefits of urban trees and calculate their value to society. In the areas studied (Bridgend, the Tawe catchment and Wrexham), urban woodland and trees removed 257 tonnes of air pollution each year. In the Wrexham case study, 60 tonnes of air pollutants were removed, with an estimated financial value to the community of £637,500 each year.

The Woodland Trust **highlighted** research into the impact of vegetation on urban air quality. It warned that avenues of street trees can exacerbate air quality problems by inhibiting the dispersion of pollutants. A **report** from the Greater London Assembly emphasised the importance of finding “the right type of green infrastructure, and the right place to put it” to reduce air pollution.

The Welsh Government’s **Woodlands for Wales strategy** also recognises the benefits of other ‘regulating services’ provided by urban woodlands such as mitigating heat, flood risk and noise pollution. Urban tree canopies intercept rainwater and their root systems provide drainage. In the Tawe catchment, a total area of 6,995 ha, trees intercept an estimated **252 million litres** of water annually. Based on local rates, this saves £334,000 in sewerage costs across the catchment.

Recreation and health

In a **2019 survey**, 77% of Welsh respondents said they had visited woodlands for recreation in the last 12 months. Walking was the most popular activity. Respondents that had a long term condition or illness said that the lack of suitable paths in woodlands had the biggest impact on their visits (27%). Of those that had not visited a woodland, 35% cited personal mobility reasons (excluding not having a car) as the main reason.

The value of the recreation service provided by Welsh woodlands was estimated to be **£85 million** in 2015. In line with ONS recommendations, this figure only includes spending on travel to woodlands. A different measure for valuing recreation, using the average amount spent on a woodland visit multiplied by the number of visits, indicates an annual value of £244 million.

The number of active community woodland groups increased from **76 in 2016 to 95 in 2019**. The area of land leased, owned or managed by community groups increased from 1,706 ha in 2016 to 5,623 ha in 2019.

The **Woodlands for Wales** strategy outlines the contribution of trees to physical and mental health. It states that:

Woodlands and trees generate important health benefits through the ecosystem services they provide and through encouraging physical activity, mental restoration and social interaction.

Biodiversity

Woodlands in Wales are home to many endangered plants and animals, such as **red squirrels** and the **spreading bellflower**.

The **State of Nature Report 2019** showed that, on average, the abundance and distribution of the UK's species has declined over recent decades. It stated that **17%** of Welsh species are at risk of extinction. A lack of woodland management was included amongst the major pressures causing the loss of wildlife.

The Welsh Government's **Section 7 interim list** of habitats of principal importance for biodiversity in Wales contains seven types of woodland habitat. Upland oak woodland is among the most extensive of all principal habitats, covering more than **30,000 ha** in 2016. Of the 542 listed species of principal importance, **210** rely wholly or partly on woodland habitats.

Ecosystem resilience determines the ability of ecosystems to cope with disturbances. In **SoNaRR 2020**, NRW assessed resilience against four criteria: diversity, extent, condition and connectivity. It found that "action is needed" to increase the resilience of existing woodland to threats or drivers of change such as air pollution, diseases and pests, inappropriate management, and climate change.

The report emphasised that woodland in Wales, and particularly ancient woodland, is home to more species that are vulnerable or under threat than any other habitat. Although the overall ecosystem resilience for Welsh woodland was assessed as medium in SoNaRR 2020, it says "this masks significant variation". While native woodland has medium to high diversity, for example, the diversity of tree and shrub species was rated as low to medium for non-native woodland. The large-scale felling of diseased larch due to *P. ramorum* infection in Wales demonstrates just one of the possible consequences of insufficient diversity.

Welsh Atlantic woodland, part of the UK's **Celtic Rainforest**, is a rare global habitat. Its condition is currently **unfavourable**. It is a particularly important habitat for **lichens** and **bryophytes** (mosses and liverworts). The **Section 7 list** of priority species contains 67 species of lichen and 52 species of bryophyte, some of which

are only found in a few locations globally. **Threats** to lichens and bryophytes include: poor woodland management; invasive species, such as Rhododendron; and atmospheric nitrogen pollution.

Figure 3: Welsh woodland ecosystem services



£665 million
GVA of the forestry
sector in Wales, 2017



11,000 people
employed in the forestry sector



In a 2019 survey, **77%** of Welsh respondents
said they **visited woodlands for recreation**
in the last 12 months



1.84 million tonnes of CO₂e
sequestered annually



210 of the 542 species of principal
importance for biodiversity in
Wales **rely on woodland habitats**

4. Policy context

Woodlands for Wales strategy

The previous Welsh Government published its updated **Woodlands for Wales** strategy in June 2018, setting out its vision for woodlands over the next 50 years. Since the previous iteration in 2009, significant changes have taken place. These include the creation of NRW and the passing of the **Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015** and **Environment (Wales) Act 2016**.

The four key areas for delivery in the updated strategy are:

- responding to climate change;
- woodlands for people;
- a competitive and integrated forest sector; and
- environmental quality.

The strategy sets out an ambition to plant at least 2,000 ha of new woodland annually from 2020 to 2030 (for the last decade - 2010 to 2020 - the average planting rate has been just 430 ha per year). The *Environment (Wales) Act 2016* required the Welsh Government to **reduce emissions by 80%** from the baseline by 2050. This target has recently been **amended** and Wales now has a net-zero emissions by 2050 target in place.

Other priorities of the strategy include:

- enhancing the resilience of woodland ecosystems;
- creating new, green infrastructure in urban areas;
- improving access to woodland and increasing woodlands close to towns and cities; and
- supporting thriving woodland-based industries.

Low carbon delivery plan

In **'Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales'**, the Welsh Government set out 100 policies and proposals to reduce carbon emissions and help it meet its statutory carbon budgets.

There are four policies and two proposals related to woodlands:

- Policy 62 – Implement the Natural Resources Policy. This includes an ambition to increase tree canopy cover and create woodlands near towns and cities;
- Policy 63 – Implement the Woodlands for Wales strategy;
- Policy 64 – Ensure that felling licences require the replanting of trees in the felled area;
- Policy 65 – Increase the size of the WGWE;
- Proposal 19 – Achieve the 2,000 ha per year planting rate, but increase that to 4,000 ha per year as rapidly as possible; and
- Proposal 20 – Identify preferred areas for tree planting. Update the woodlands opportunities map for landowners to use.

The Welsh Government is due to publish its second low carbon delivery plan in late 2021.

National Forest

The First Minister, Mark Drakeford, first raised the idea of a National Forest in his 2018 leadership manifesto. His vision for the forest, **outlined in July 2019**, is a contiguous area of woodland spanning the length and breadth of Wales, “so that you could walk continuously from one part of Wales to the other, almost, never leaving the national forest”. The aim would be to accelerate the rate of tree planting in Wales, creating new woodland as well as maintaining and restoring existing woodland sites.

In March 2020, the Welsh Government **announced its firm commitment** to create a National Forest for Wales. In his announcement, the First Minister emphasised the ecosystem services that woodlands provide:

Trees improve air quality, they remove harmful greenhouse gases from the atmosphere, they provide material for construction, they regenerate soil for food, they clean the water in our rivers and they provide a home to all the life that finds shelter in their canopy.

He outlined that the forest will be a “**collective effort**” to turn “ambitions into immediate action and a shared long-term commitment”. In this way, the National Forest initiative draws inspiration from the development of the Wales Coast Path, which was developed through collaboration between government, business and local communities.

In autumn 2020, the Welsh Government unveiled the **first 14 National Forest sites**. Together, these sites span over 43,000 ha and are managed and maintained by NRW. Many are productive forests, producing sustainable timber and supporting local communities. Others have visitor centres, cafes, and facilities for activities such as mountain biking. All of these forest sites meet both the UKFS and UKWAS standards, and are considered to be **“among the very best woodland in Wales”**.

Confor welcomed the National Forest as a **“game-changer”** for forestry, highlighting the potential of the National Forest to stimulate rural economic growth, create jobs, and provide alternative revenue streams for farmers. Confor also said:

The industry is delighted that the Welsh Government has listened to industry concerns on previous Glastir schemes [...] More forestry creation through National Forest is a real positive – and we look forward to ensuring it provides a mix of forestry designed to be self-sustaining and produce multiple benefits.

The Woodland Trust also welcomed the Government’s commitment to the National Forest, **noting** that,

Planned and delivered well, this project could connect north to south, urban to rural and people to nature.

The charity also emphasised in its **manifesto for the 2021 Welsh Parliament elections** the need to build on existing successes:

These are positive roots to build from, but we MUST do so much more to realise the full value of trees for the wellbeing of communities and businesses right across Wales.

The Welsh Government’s **2021-2026 Programme for Government** states that it will:

- “create a National Forest to extend from the North of Wales to the South”; and
- “harness the economic, cultural, and recreational potential of the National Forest as part of progress towards a sustainable timber industry”.

Other policy

The **Environment (Wales) Act 2016**, required the Welsh Government to reduce emissions by 80% of the baseline level by 2050. However, in May 2019, the CCC advised the Welsh Government to adopt a **95%** reduction target by 2050. In June 2019, the Welsh Government **accepted** this recommendation. **Revised advice**

from the CCC in December 2020 recommended that Wales should be even more ambitious, and set and pursue a net-zero by 2050 target. In February 2021 the Welsh Government laid **four sets of regulations**. These:

- amended the 2050 emissions target to net-zero (in line with the UK wide statutory target for net-zero emissions);
- increased the 2030 target to 63% (from 45%) and the 2040 target to 89% (from 67%); and,
- set the third carbon budget (2026-2030).

In January 2020 the CCC published a **report** outlining the land use changes required to meet this new target. For Wales, its ambition is for the planting of 152,000 ha of new woodland by 2050, at a rate of over 5,000 ha per year.

The Welsh Government's **Plant!** scheme pledges to plant a tree for every child born or adopted in Wales since 1 January 2008. The scheme has created around 140 ha of new woodland across 15 woods.

In recent years the Welsh Government has also **signalled its intent** for more Welsh-grown timber to be used in construction projects in Wales, to both support commercial forestry and reduce carbon emissions.

The previous Welsh Government launched its consultation on a **Clean Air Plan for Wales** in December 2019. It discussed using intelligent tree planting to improve air quality, stating that woodlands:

... are known to contribute to improving overall air quality, not just in urban areas but in the wider rural environment, but the wrong type of vegetation in the wrong place (e.g. trees placed where they will prevent pollution from effectively dispersing) can make matters worse, and in some contexts roadside hedges will be preferable to trees from an air pollution exposure standpoint.

The consultation closed in March 2020. Responses emphasised the need for action to reduce air pollution, and the Welsh Government reaffirmed its commitment to expand woodland cover in Wales. A new clean air White Paper was **published in January 2021** and the Welsh Government's **2021 to 2026 Programme for Government** commits to introducing a Clean Air Bill for Wales during the course of the Sixth Senedd..

Woodland funding

The Welsh Government's main funding mechanism for forestry has been the **Glastir** woodland scheme, funded through the Rural Development Programme for Wales 2014-2020. This is part of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The scheme offers **grants** for woodland restoration, woodland management, and woodland creation. From 2016-19, grants worth **£13.3 million** were paid to farmers and land managers across these three strands.

The **restoration** scheme assists in the restocking of woodlands issued with felling licences or SPHNs. The **management** scheme allows woodland owners to apply for funding to improve the biodiversity of their woodlands, to improve water management and carbon sequestration, or to increase public access to woodlands. The **creation** scheme provides funds for new woodland planting.

The **Glastir Monitoring and Evaluation Programme** (GMEP) assessed the success of the scheme. The **final GMEP report**, published in July 2017, said that:

the small amount of area planted within the scheme [...] does not appear to reflect the ambitious targets for expansion of woodlands set by the Welsh Government.

Now that the UK has withdrawn from the EU and the CAP, the Rural Development Programme schemes are coming to an end, including Glastir. The Welsh Government is developing a new land management scheme and the latest proposals were outlined in a **White Paper for an Agriculture (Wales) Bill**, published in December 2020. The proposed policy would reward farmers for providing 'public goods' from the land, including both social and environmental outcomes. The new scheme would provide payments to farmers who choose to deliver positive benefits from planting and managing woodland on their farms. The White Paper highlights that support must also continue to be provided for woodlands not on farms.

The Welsh Government is seeking improvement to the current regulations and processes affecting the way in which woodlands are created and managed. This includes an approval system for woodland creation plans that is "**simple, predictable and proportionate**". It also wishes to add conditions to licenses for tree felling and ensure effective deterrents are in place to prevent illegal felling.

The Welsh Government has also committed to provide **£2 million** to the **LIFE Celtic Rainforests project**, which runs from 2018-25. It aims to return ancient Welsh Atlantic woodlands to favourable conservation status.

Branching out: a new ambition for woodland policies

The Fifth Senedd's CCERA Committee published a report - **Branching out: a new ambition for woodland policies** - in July 2017 following its inquiry into woodland policy.

It highlighted the severe lack of woodland creation in Wales in recent years. This was found to be mainly due to regulatory, bureaucratic, financial and cultural barriers. It also stated that a lack of funding for woodland management may be affecting the environmental quality of native woodlands.

The report made **13 recommendations** to the Welsh Government. These aimed at enhancing the environmental, economic and social contribution of Welsh woodlands. The then Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, (the Minister) **responded** to the report in September 2017. She accepted 12 of the 13 recommendations, albeit nine only in principle, and rejected one.

One of the accepted recommendations urged the Welsh Government to review its Woodlands for Wales strategy. The **revised strategy** was published in June 2018 (see below).

5. Key sources

Legislation

- [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)
- [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#)

Welsh Government

- [Woodlands for Wales strategy](#)
- [Woodlands for Wales Indicators 2017-18](#)
- [Farming Facts and Figures, Wales 2020](#)
- [Prosperity for All: A Low Carbon Wales](#)
- [Agriculture \(Wales\) Bill White Paper](#)

Natural Resources Wales

- [State of Natural Resources Report 2016](#)
- [State of Natural Resources Report 2020](#)
- [Tree Cover in Wales' Towns and Cities](#)
- [Purpose and Role of the Welsh Government Woodland Estate](#)

Forest Research

- [Forestry Statistics 2020](#)
- [Tree cover outside woodland in Great Britain](#)
- [Valuation of Welsh Forest Resources](#)

Other

- [Branching out: a new ambition for woodland policies](#) – Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs Committee, Senedd Cymru—Welsh Parliament
- [State of Nature 2019](#) – The State of Nature partnership
- [Land Use: Policies for a Net Zero UK](#) – The Committee on Climate Change

