



Summary of the review process to produce the 5th edition of the UK Forestry Standard

October 2023

Overview

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the technical standard for forestry across the UK, designed to help deliver sustainable forest management. A new (5th) edition of the UKFS has been published following a comprehensive review process.

This new edition is the basis for forestry regulation and monitoring in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and has been endorsed by all governments in the UK.

A 12-month transition period is in place to allow guidance to be updated, users to become familiar with the new edition, and draft woodland plans to be finalised. To support a smooth transition, work will continue with the sector to minimise disruption to businesses, particularly on future plant supply and the range of alternative productive species. The 5th edition will apply after 1st October 2024. After that date, updated Good Forestry Practice Requirements will be applied to existing forest plans at the time of renewal. Until then, the 4th edition (2017) should be used.

The review was carried out by the four governments of the UK to ensure the new edition remains up to date, provides an appropriate balance between the internationally recognised economic, social and environmental principles of sustainable forest management, and is applicable across the UK. The main phases of the review project are set out in Appendix A.

The UKFS has been developed specifically for forestry in the UK and is based on applying internationally agreed criteria which support the delivery of sustainable forest management. The UKFS recognises that forests have environmental, economic and social objectives, and that these must be balanced.

The new edition was overseen by a Project Board made up of senior officials from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and co-ordinated by Scottish Forestry. Its content was co-produced by the four countries, underlining that it is the four UK governments' approach to sustainable forestry.

Over 70 specialists were engaged during the review, including independent experts, leading researchers, and specialists from the four forestry authorities. Two stakeholder consultations were undertaken, and organisations with a knowledge of the different aspects of sustainable forest management were invited to join a Stakeholder Reference Group to help make sure the new edition would be balanced and appropriate across the UK (Appendix B for group members).

5th edition

The Standard's content has been updated to reflect:

- Improvements in scientific knowledge.
- Developments in international approaches.
- New or amended legislation (including devolved legislation).
- New information that forestry practice should reflect.
- Clarity on which Requirements must be met to support the delivery of sustainable forest management and sustainable woodland creation, in terms

of each country's regulatory framework and government forestry grant funding.

- Clarity on what is required to reduce time spent on resolving different users' interpretations.

The content of the final version was informed by an assessment carried out by a range of specialists, and the two stakeholder consultations. The responses from each consultation were analysed by an independent consultant, and a report produced for each. They can be accessed here: <https://consult.gov.scot/scottish-forestry/5875ee93> (1st consultation) and <https://consult.gov.scot/scottish-forestry/e8d0808b> (2nd consultation).

The second consultation asked for feedback on draft content of the new edition of the UKFS. The key conclusion from the analysis of this consultation was that there was limited consensus amongst the different stakeholder interests on how the draft content could be improved. How those findings were considered in the drafting of the final version of the Standard is described in Appendix C.

The significant changes to Requirements and Guidelines are set out in Appendix D.

Implementation

The four countries are responsible for implementing and monitoring the delivery of the Standard. For advice and information on implementing the UKFS please contact:

- In England: [Forestry Commission - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)
- In Scotland: [Scottish Forestry - Contact](#)
- In Wales: [Natural Resources Wales / Contact us](#) or [Forestry | Sub-topic | GOV.WALES](#).
- In Northern Ireland: [Forest Service Contact | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendix A: Phases of the review project

Phase	Main tasks and key decisions
Phase 1: detailed review of existing content and initial stakeholder engagement (Feb-Sept 2021).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder reference group established, and first two meetings held. Reference Group accepts their Terms of Reference as an advisory group tasked with helping to inform and communicate the UKFS review. Review of content undertaken by specialists from the four forest authorities, Forest Research and independent experts, with suggestions on potential updates. Plans for the first stakeholder consultation are developed with input from the Working Group and Reference Group, and the consultation is undertaken on outputs from the initial assessment of content and potential changes to the structure of the next edition. Independent consultant commissioned to analyse the responses and produce a report. Based on the findings of Phase 1, the scope of technical changes to the next edition of the UKFS are identified and agreed.
Phase 2: re-drafting of content and further stakeholder engagement (Oct 2021-Dec 2022).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft content produced. Plans for the second consultation are developed with input from the Working Group and Reference Group, and the consultation is undertaken on the full draft 5th edition.
Phase 3: final editing and production of next edition (Jan-Oct 2023).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An independent consultant is commissioned to analyse the responses and produce a report. Revisions are made and approved by all four countries. 5th edition of the UKFS published.

Appendix B: Membership of the UKFS Stakeholder Reference Group

- Birmingham Institute of Forest Research
- British Hydrological Society
- Chartered Institute for Archaeologists
- Chartered Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management
- Committee on Climate Change
- Confederation of Forest Industries
- Environment Links UK
- Institute of Chartered Foresters
- Landscape Institute
- National Soil Resources Institute
- Outdoor Recreation Network
- UK Woodland Assurance Standard
- Government countryside agencies (e.g. NatureScot, Natural England etc)

Appendix C: Responses to the main findings of the second stakeholder consultation analysis





Main findings	Response
No consensus on what the right balance is between prescription and flexibility in terms of Requirements and Guidelines.	Given the lack of consensus from stakeholders, the new edition will mirror the current Standard and the balance it strikes between clear instructions that owners and managers need to implement, and the flexibility required for the Standard to apply across the UK and in different settings.
No consensus on changing the current balance between the economic, environmental and social principles of sustainable forest management under the Standard.	As a government standard, and in the absence of any consensus on change, the four countries have agreed on the balance set out in the updated content. The updated Standard continues to support multi-purpose forestry through the implementation of a balance of social, economic and environmental objectives to support the principles of sustainable forest management.
Support for making the Standard shorter and more user-friendly, and for having only content relevant across the UK in the main document (with country-specific content reserved for Appendixes).	Reflecting this support, the final drafting of the Standard continued to remove introductory text that was found to be outdated or replicated elsewhere, references to country-specific examples or situations, and points of repetition (e.g. Requirements and Guidelines are now presented once rather than repeated across the document). A significant number of country-specific references and Requirements have been removed from the new edition. Those that remain are thought to be important to illustrate differences between the four countries. The application of the Standard to forestry plans and proposals is site-specific and based on both UK and country-specific Requirements.
Request to cross reference the new cross-cutting themes.	The idea of cross-cutting themes was introduced in the first consultation to signal that the principles of sustainable forest management and key themes such as biosecurity should be considered across the Standard. In other words, it was meant










Main findings	Response
	<p>to encourage readers to consider the content of the Standard collectively and not as a series of stand-alone topics, in order to deliver sustainable forest management. However, the consultation responses revealed confusion about what these cross-cutting themes were meant to be and how they should be presented. Based on this, it was felt that cross-referencing these cross-cutting themes risked introducing repetition and another dimension that the user would have to navigate. Instead, the individual cross-cutting themes have been considered, and references made more explicit within the existing structure of the text and, where appropriate, relevant Requirements.</p>
<p>Improving the accessibility of the Standard content is important.</p>	<p>The production of the final content continues to consider how the structure and content can be improved to make it more accessible. However, as a technical Standard, there is a need to retain the appropriate level of detail aimed at core professional users. A number of user surveys carried out during the review identified that the preferred format for the Standard was a downloadable pdf document which, if necessary, can be updated.</p>
<p>Greater clarity in the use of language.</p>	<p>The updated content uses the approach established in previous editions, in particular the distinction between Legal Requirements ('must'), Good Forestry Practice Requirements ('should') and Guidelines. The use of the word 'consider' has been reviewed and will continue to be used, particularly in Guidelines that may not apply in all circumstances or to every forestry plan and proposal. As with previous editions, the scope and application of the Standard will be described and reference made to the fact that whilst some aspects of forest management lend themselves to 'yes or no' compliance, most do not, and so professional expertise and judgement is required to make the most effective use of this technical standard.</p>








Main findings	Response
Clear approach to compliance monitoring and enforcement.	The implementation of the UKFS is carried out at the country rather than at the UK level and the importance of monitoring its use and compliance is recognised and undertaken at that level. The new edition will set out that the forestry authority in each country is responsible for this.
Request for a transition period between applying the current Standard and introducing the new one.	A 12 month transition period is in place. This transition period gives time to update guidance, for users to complete existing forestry plans and proposals, and to familiarise themselves with the content of the new Standard. Updated Good Practice Requirements will be applied to existing forest plans at the time of renewal. The 5 th edition will apply after 1 st October 2024.
A significant number of responses commented on the change to the single species threshold, and the peat depth threshold for woodland creation.	<p><i>Single species threshold</i></p> <p>To reflect the importance of increasing forest resilience through greater species diversity, the next edition will have a maximum threshold for a single species of 65%.</p> <p>There were a range of opinions on the issue of a single species threshold. After detailed consideration, it was agreed by the four countries that there was a clear rationale for the UKFS to ask for greater species diversity within forests.</p> <p>Evidence and current guidance identify species diversity as a key factor in increasing forest resilience. The 2017 edition encourages forest managers to consider greater diversification, and the new edition builds on this to demonstrate how seriously the four UK administrations take the issue of forest resilience and the need to mitigate the risks to UK forests from a changing climate and increasing pests and diseases.</p> <p>To reflect the consensus amongst respondents that ranges would be difficult to apply in practice, minimum areas will be kept. The remaining area of the Forest Management Unit (FMU) will include the same categories and associated minimum areas set out in the 2017 version (e.g. 10% open ground or ground managed for conservation, 10% other species and 5% native broadleaved trees</p>





Main findings	Response
	<p>and shrubs), with the final 10% of the area used to support the agreed forestry management objectives for the FMU.</p> <p><i>Peat depth threshold for woodland creation</i> Consultation responses presented a range of evidence on the peat depth threshold, which confirmed the findings of the expert assessment carried out in Phase 1 that there is no settled scientific consensus for change. Following consideration of the views and evidence presented by respondents, the next edition will retain the peat depth threshold of 50 cm used in the 2017 edition, with the caveat to use country-specific guidance where applicable. The four countries will continue to support evidence gathering on this important issue and will reflect any future change in evidence as appropriate.</p>






Appendix D: New or significantly changed Requirements and Guidelines

Wording used in the 5 th edition	
General Forestry Practice	
Legal Requirements	None
Good Practice Requirements	 In areas where deer are present, deer management measures should be developed and implemented as part of a management plan, with the aim that deer browsing does not prevent regeneration of trees or the development of resilient forests; ideally this will be in co-operation with neighbours or as part of a Deer Management Group. (Page 10)
	 Manufactured products associated with forestry should be appropriately managed when they stop having functional value to minimise their impact on the environment. (Page 11)
	 Managers should take a systematic approach to planning and implementing biosecurity measures on all their land to reduce the risk of pests and diseases being introduced or spread. (Page 11)
	 Maintain or establish a diverse composition across the forest management unit so that no more than 65% of the area is allocated to a single species. Enhance resilience and seek to mitigate the risks from climate change, pests and diseases, by selecting species appropriate to the site using Ecological Site Classification or a similar tool. In all cases, incorporate a minimum of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5% native broadleaved trees or shrubs; • 10% of other tree species; • 10% open ground, or ground managed for biodiversity as the primary objective. Notes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentages using minimums do not add up to 100%. When deciding which of the above minor components to increase, consider the opportunities for further species diversification within the landscape context and scale of the forest, as well as the site conditions. • In forests of less than 10 hectares and in native woods, the above proportions may be relaxed as long as the adjacent land provides landscape and habitat diversity. (Page 13-14)















	Wording used in the 5th edition
	  26 Forest management should not have a negative impact on flood risk to vulnerable downstream locations. (Page 14)
Guidelines	 4 When considering opportunities for woodland creation, ensure that planning, design and implementation support sustainable forest management to deliver a range of ecosystem services and benefits. (Page 17)
	 11 On suitable sites, consider the use of thinning to improve stem quality and enhance structural and species diversity. (Page 18)
	 17 In areas where mammals pose a threat, develop management plans to reduce environmental and economic damage, including by completing habitat (or herbivore) impact assessments. Collaboration at the landscape scale is most effective. (Page 19)
	 18 Identify appropriate biosecurity measures by assessing the risks as part of a Risk Assessment; as a minimum there should be simple measures taken, such as cleaning equipment and clothing and avoiding moving materials from contaminated sites to clean sites. (Page 19)
	 29 Plan operations by selecting the most appropriate method and machine for the site. (Page 21)
	 30 Ensure that risk assessments and pre-commencement planning and communication have been completed and everyone working on site understands their roles and responsibilities; ensure operations are monitored as needed. (Page 22)
	 31 Mark out buffers areas in advance of any operations taking place. (Page 22)
Biodiversity	
Legal Requirements	None

	Wording used in the 5 th edition
Good Practice Requirements	None
Guidelines	 5 Where priority species are ecologically dependent on a woodland habitat, plan felling programmes so that disturbance at sensitive times of the year is minimised. (Page 27)
	 11 If the reintroduction of a native species is being considered, guidelines from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), country guidance, long-term management plans and appropriate funding need to be in place to ensure that the positive impacts of reintroductions are maximised, while permitting early intervention when problems arise. (Page 29)
	 17 To reduce the amount of suitable habitat for specific pests and diseases, inspect the deadwood of host tree species for damage after storms or drought and remove it from site if necessary. (Page 32)
	 25 On ancient woodland sites, ensure features are protected and appropriately managed. (Page 35)
	 35 Consider the potential impacts of fencing on wildlife and minimise adverse effects. (Page 36)
Climate change	
Legal Requirements	None
Good Practice Requirements	None
Guidelines	 6 Ensure woodland creation proposals are appropriate for the site and designed to be resilient to the effects of climate change. (Page 43)
Historic Environment	
Legal Requirements	 4 It is an offence under the Protection of Military Remains Act 1986 to tamper with, damage, move or unearth any items at such sites, unless the Ministry of Defence has issued a licence authorising

	Wording used in the 5th edition
	such activity. Anyone seeking to recover a military aircraft or excavate a military aircraft crash site is required to obtain a licence from the Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, part of the Defence Business Services, Ministry of Defence. (Page 53)
Good Practice Requirements	 3 Where forest creation or substantial forest management is proposed within registered parks and gardens, the relevant Gardens Trust should be consulted as well as the statutory historic environment authority. (Page 54)
Guidelines	None
Landscape	
Legal Requirements	None
Good Practice Requirements	None
Guidelines	None
People	
Legal Requirements	 7 In Northern Ireland, anti-discrimination laws, including the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, must be complied with in the provision of facilities, goods and services. (Page 89)
Good Practice Requirements	None
Guidelines	 17 If there is evidence of unauthorised trails being built, consider assessing the risks to determine the most appropriate course of action, including engaging and working with forest users. Refer to country guidance where available. (Page 95)
Soil	
Legal Requirements	None
Good Practice Requirements	 4 New forests should not be established on soils with peat exceeding 50 cm in depth – or a depth specified in country guidance - or on sites that would compromise the hydrology of adjacent bog or wetland habitats.

	Wording used in the 5th edition
	Note: woodland creation on certain sites where deep peat soils have historically been highly modified may be considered, provided that it complies with the relevant country policy. (Page 102)
Guidelines	 Base forest management decisions on an informed knowledge of its soil types. (Page 106)
	 To minimise soil carbon loss, employ techniques for ground preparation that create the minimum amount of soil disturbance but are still adequate to ensure successful establishment. (Page 109)
Water¹	
Legal Requirements	 In Wales, all new developments where the construction area is 100 m ² or more must have sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) for surface water, designed and built in accordance with published standards, and relevant approvals obtained before construction work begins. This is relevant to any forest infrastructure construction work including roads, stacking areas and quarries. (Page 116)
	 In-stream work involving the use of plant or machinery (or other works nearby that may release sediment into watercourses) must not be carried out when fish are spawning in the affected surface water, or in the period between spawning and the subsequent emergence of juvenile fish. If in doubt about these times, contact the responsible authority or advisory body for advice. (Page 116)
	 Any plant, vehicles or equipment must not be operated in any watercourse or waterbody if there is a reasonable likelihood that there are protected species in the same or a connected watercourse. (Page 116)

¹ In order to rationalise the Water chapter, this edition does not specify all the General Binding Rules (GBRs) applicable to forestry under the Water Environment (Controlled Activities) (Scotland) Regulations 2011 (as amended). Instead, forest managers in Scotland will need to be familiar with the GBRs and so able to comply with Water Legal Requirement 2: 'In Scotland, all forestry operations must meet relevant General Binding Rules and any divergence must be licensed or registered with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).'

	Wording used in the 5 th edition
	   In Wales, nitrogen fertiliser must not be spread on land if there is a significant risk of it getting into surface water, taking into account the slope of the land, any ground cover, the proximity to surface water, weather conditions, soil type, ground conditions including if the soil is waterlogged, frozen or snow covered, and the presence of any land drains. (Page 118)
Good Practice Requirements	   Any damage caused by the operation of machinery to the bed and banks of a waterbody should be repaired, including re-establishing vegetation on any areas of bare earth on the banks resulting from the operation, by using green engineering techniques. (Page 116)
	   The buffer widths in Table 9.2 should be observed. (Page 120)
	   Where felling is planned, and there are potential risks to water quality, activities should be phased to reduce those risks. (Page 120)
Guidelines	  Consider opportunities for woodland creation to reduce nutrient or pesticide spray drift, leaching and run-off from adjacent land to watercourses and groundwater. (Page 125)