

What are you earning from your woodland? A combination of Forestry Commission and Environmental Stewardship grants each year could be earning you £60 a hectare from your woodlands; or £90 a hectare if your land is organic, writes Kevin Jay of Complete Land Management (CLM).

The woodland management grant (WMG) is one of six Forestry Commission administered grants launched in 2005 under the English woodland grant scheme umbrella.

WMG provides a return of £30ha/year for five years over the whole of the woodland area in return for a basic level of management that may include activities such as ride maintenance and coppicing. The aim of the grant is to encourage sustainable woodland management and to provide conservation benefit.

As well as attracting grant money the management can benefit a shoot, improve toll rides, produce firewood and fencing material. Now that issues such as renewable energy and local produce are rising to the fore log wood is becoming a fashionable fuel.

Restrictions relating to chemical treatments are increasingly being blamed for the short life span of soft wood fencing and many contractors now prefer to use chestnut in its place.

As with all grant schemes a number of targets are used to define those woodlands that are eligible for government grants. Targets relevant to the South East include:

- sites of special scientific interest;
- ancient semi natural woodland;
- plantations on ancient woodland sites;
- other semi natural woodland;
- public access areas.

These woodland types cover the bulk of the woodland in the South East while the public access target is not a compulsory

Woodland revival?



part of the scheme. This scheme is therefore a possibility for many.

Not unlike the higher level stewardship scheme there is one tricky hoop to jump through before an application to the WMG can be made – certification. If you have more than 30ha of woodland it must be certified to the UK woodland assurance standard, a potentially costly activity. For those with woodland holdings in excess of 30ha who undertake some management but not on a commercial scale it is often not financially worth while obtaining independent certification. This is why CLM has now taken it upon itself to make certification an easier and cheaper process.



CLM has put together a group scheme through which woodlands can gain certification. As part of the CLM group scheme, costs to individual woodland managers are reduced. A proportion of the group's members are audited by a certification body each year and the costs spread across the group. Individual certification

requires annual auditing of each woodland holding and therefore proves more costly.

However the cost of joining the CLM group scheme makes a WMG application a more attractive option. In addition, once certified the products from a woodland are eligible to carry the Forest Stewardship Council's (FSC) logo, the woodland equivalent of farm and crop assurance schemes such as Leaf Marque. Timber products carrying the FSC logo are easier to market and attract a premium over those without. Certification will potentially allow access to a revenue stream for those who have planted woodland since 1990. Certified woodlands planted since 1990 can attract payments through a carbon offsetting scheme. In the current climate of sustainable resource management, woodland certification is likely to be a benchmark used by many in these newly developing markets.

Whether it be charcoal for a barbecue, wood chip for renewable energy generation, credits for an offset scheme or simply woodland management grant eligibility, having woodland certified will see your business one step ahead.

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