

# The UK Forestry Standard

The governments' approach  
to sustainable forestry



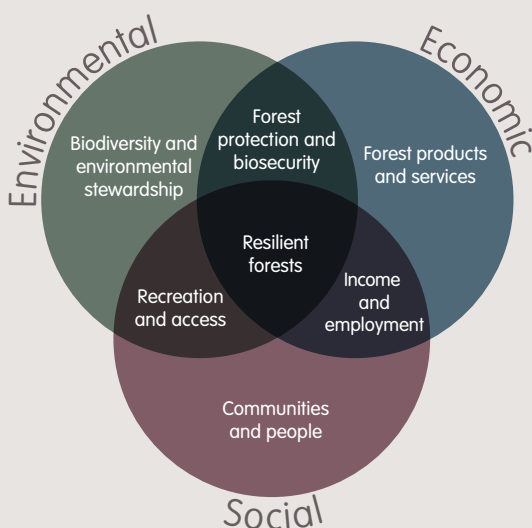
# 1. Introduction

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the technical standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. It sets out the approach of the four governments of the UK, and defines the requirements and provides guidance for foresters on how to practise sustainable forest management in the UK. In this way, it provides a basis for operating grant schemes and official controls and support for regulatory processes. It also provides the foundation for a number of voluntary certification and quality assurance schemes used in the UK, and for assessing compliance with environmental management standards.

## Purpose of the UKFS

The UKFS is based on sustainable forest management criteria agreed internationally, implemented in a way that is appropriate to the UK. It is intended to be used by professional foresters such as forest owners, managers and practitioners, regulators and advisers. It will also be of interest to other land managers and stakeholders.

Sustainable forest management is the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way and at a rate that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity and vitality, and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions at local, national and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems. Central to sustainable forest management in the UK is the concept of achieving a balanced set of objectives (see Box 1.1). It is vital that all parties involved in applying the UKFS understand the importance of achieving a balance of objectives. The landowner, forest manager and interested stakeholders all have a role in determining the most appropriate balance of objectives for the local circumstances.



### Box 1.1 Balanced objectives

Sustainable forest management involves ensuring that the production of all forest and woodland benefits is maintained over the long term. This is achieved when the environmental, economic and social functions of forests interact in support of each other, as illustrated in the diagram on the left. The precise point of balance between environmental, economic and social functions will vary in individual forests in response to management objectives and local circumstances. The concept of balanced objectives is central to the approach of the UKFS.

This edition of the UKFS builds on previous editions, reflecting changes in legislation across the four countries of the UK, new international agreements and advances in scientific understanding. It also takes account of the progress of devolution and a changed relationship with the European Union.

It has been endorsed by the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as their technical standard for sustainable forest management in the UK. The main bodies responsible for the regulation and monitoring of the UKFS (the 'forestry authorities') are the Forestry Commission, Scottish Forestry, Natural Resources Wales and the Northern Ireland Forest Service. However, while the UKFS underpins the implementation of devolved forestry policies, strategies, grant schemes and regulatory frameworks across the UK, it does not include detailed country-specific information on all these matters. This information should be sought from forestry authorities and other relevant bodies in each country (see section 1.3).

The UKFS is also the key reference document on forestry practice for the independent UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UKWAS), which is a certification standard adopted by the two global forest certification schemes – the Forest Stewardship Council and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification – for certifying responsible forest management in the UK. It can be used for assessing compliance as part of an environmental management system such as ISO 14001. The UKFS also underpins the Woodland Carbon Code, a government-backed quality assurance standard for woodland creation projects in the UK. Projects under the Code are required to comply with the UKFS, and this is checked by validation bodies.

## Overview

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### Scope and application

The UKFS has been developed specifically as a technical standard for forestry in the UK and applies to all forests in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Forests are defined as land that is predominantly covered in trees, with a canopy cover of at least 20%, whether in large tracts or smaller areas. Although the minimum area of land classified as forest is defined internationally as 0.5 hectares, for the purposes of the UKFS it is defined in terms of national inventories and/or woodland creation scheme rules. In each country, legislation or grant conditions will determine the minimum area of land classed as a forest. These areas might be in rural or urban areas and be known by a variety of terms such as forests, woods, copses, spinneys or shelterbelts, and they include wooded areas on farms and in parks.

Within the UKFS, the term 'forest' is used to indicate all types and sizes of forest and woodland. References to 'forest and woodland' or to 'woodland' are made only where needed for clarity or to reflect commonly used terms (e.g. woodland creation, native woodland, riparian woodland).

The UKFS covers all UK forest types and management systems, including coppice with standards, short rotation coppice and short rotation forestry (whether managed as part of a

forest or as an agricultural stand-alone regime). It does not extend to the management of individual trees (arboriculture), orchards, ornamental trees and garden trees, tree nurseries or Christmas trees.

The UKFS applies to the wide range of activities, scales of operation and situations that characterise forestry in the UK, and applies to the entire forest environment, including trees, open areas and water bodies such as rivers, lakes and ponds. It covers the process of woodland creation and the planning and management of existing forests, including in relation to the wider landscape.

Forest management requires long-term planning but management objectives need to be flexible enough to respond to changing scenarios, in particular those linked to biodiversity, tree pests and diseases and climate change. Changes and improvements may require timescales longer than the tenure of an individual manager or even a single forest rotation, which is why the UKFS emphasises the importance of forest planning. How the UKFS is used will therefore vary according to the circumstances of the site, particularly the size of the forest, the scale of operation, the objectives of the landowner and changing climatic conditions. Some aspects of forest management lend themselves to 'yes or no' compliance, but most do not, and so professional expertise and judgement are required to make the most effective use of this technical standard.

### Structure of this edition

At the heart of the UKFS are two categories of Requirements:

- **Legal Requirements (LR)** are the statutory requirements relevant to legislation in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland that have the most direct bearing on the management of forests. Adhering to these Legal Requirements supports legal compliance, while contravening them could lead directly to prosecution. The term 'must' is used to describe the actions needed to implement a legal requirement.
- **Good Practice Requirements (GPR)** are important forestry practices that help deliver sustainable forest management. The term 'should' is used to describe the actions needed to implement a Good Practice Requirement, indicating that although they are not a legal requirement, appropriate action will usually be necessary in order to deliver sustainable forest management.

The UKFS Guidelines (**GL**) set out how the Requirements can be met. They provide information and guidance based on research and experience and are intended to help with developing proposals and planning management operations and activities to ensure that UK forests are sustainably managed. The term 'consider' is used to indicate that forest managers and regulatory authorities will need to consider whether Guidelines are applicable and should be implemented in any given scenario. For relevant Guidelines that stipulate 'consider', in order to comply with the UKFS, forest managers may need to show the workings behind their proposals when applying to their forestry authority for grants and permissions.

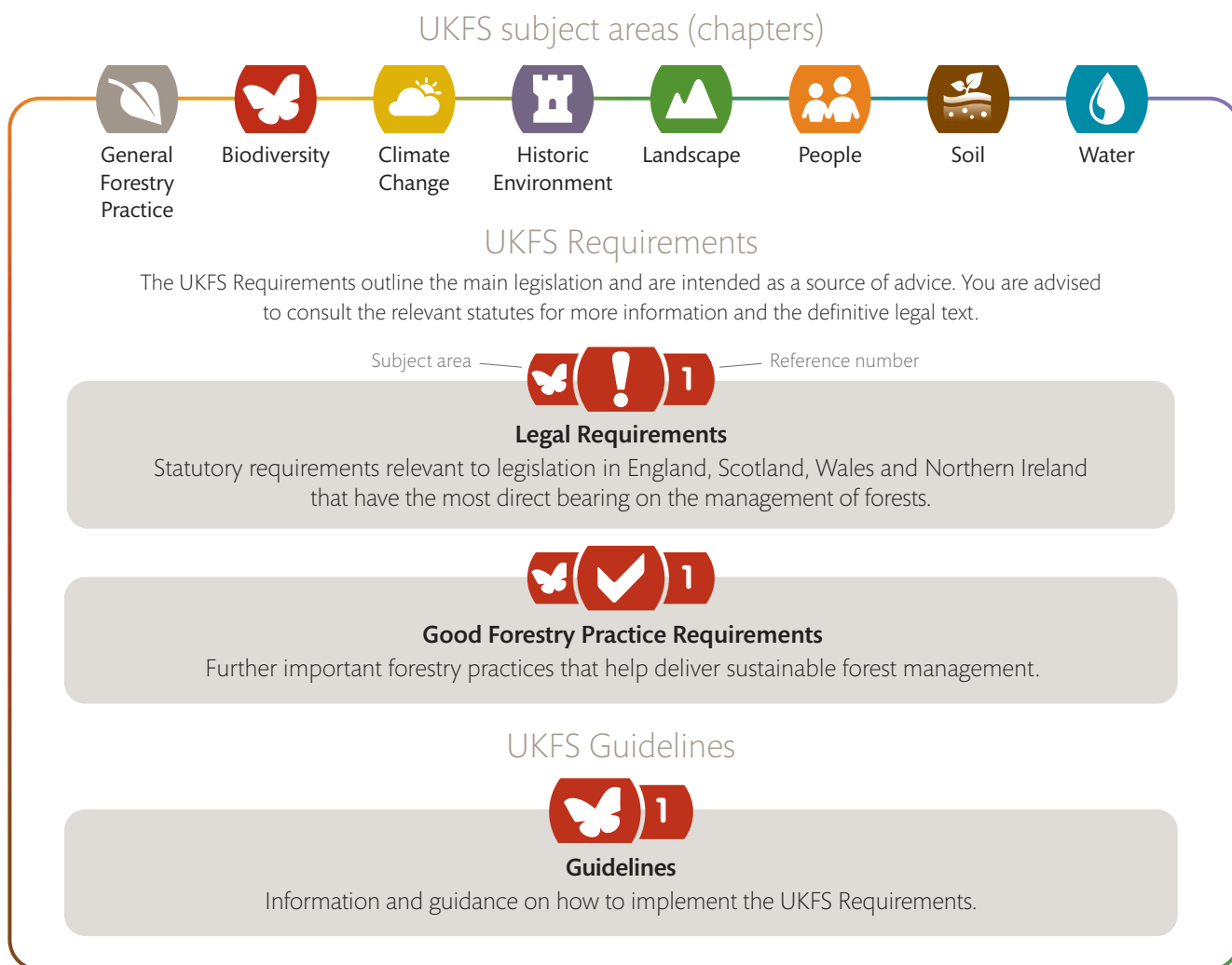
Some UKFS Requirements and Guidelines are expressed as maximum or minimum proportions of the forest. In these cases, the area in question is the forest management unit (FMU): the area subject to a forest management plan or proposal. The FMU is selected by the owner and/or manager and will be determined by the nature of the forest, the proposed operations and the management objectives.

In line with previous editions of the UKFS, the Requirements and Guidelines are grouped under eight interdependent subject areas. These illustrate the breadth of issues that are integral to sustainable forest management and that must be considered in combination (Figure 1.1).

## Implementing the UKFS

Forest owners, managers and contractors are responsible for ensuring that forest operations and activities are delivered in accordance with the UKFS, and this is a prerequisite for the approval of forest plans, felling and replanting operations, woodland creation proposals and forestry grants.

Figure 1.1 The relationship between UKFS Requirements and Guidelines.



Country mechanisms are in place to address situations where the requirements of the UKFS have not been met.

Forestry authorities are responsible for determining how the UKFS is implemented and monitored in their respective countries. Monitoring activities include:

- Assessing and approving forest management plans and woodland creation proposals.
- Ensuring that forestry grant requirements have been met.
- Issuing felling approval and dealing with illegal felling.
- Preventing the entry and spread of non-endemic pests and diseases of trees.
- Controlling and regulating trade in forest reproductive material (seeds, plants or cuttings).

### Country policies, strategies and regulations relevant to sustainable forest management

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The UKFS sits alongside – but does not replace – the forestry policies, strategies and regulations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland to deliver UK-wide and devolved country commitments to sustainable forest management. Country forestry policies and strategies give statements of intent for sustainable forest management in that country, and statutory regulations provide each country's framework for delivering these intentions. By contrast, the UKFS is the technical standard of sustainable forest management agreed by all four governments.

Forests in the UK are legally protected by a range of Acts and although these differ across the devolved nations, they share the same principles of:

- controlling tree felling;
- carefully considering the environmental impacts of woodland creation, deforestation and the construction of forest roads and quarries;
- balancing the production of timber with other benefits to society, the economy and the environment;
- respecting local, national or international conservation designations that may apply to a site;
- adhering to a general presumption that forest land should not be converted to other uses, to avoid deforestation;
- conducting forest operations in a way that minimises any significant negative impacts on the environment;
- managing and controlling plant health and biosecurity.

The following boxes summarise each country's key forestry policies and strategies. The information in these boxes is not a substitute for checking full country policies and strategies in detail: it is provided as summary information only. References to legislation are made when they directly apply to a Legal Requirement, otherwise, given the changing nature of legislation and devolved responsibilities, this edition of the UKFS does not contain a comprehensive list of all relevant legislation.

### Box 1.2 Forestry in England

The Forestry Commission is a non-ministerial department with a remit to increase the value of woodlands to society and the environment in England. It is responsible for the regulation of forestry in England and provides incentives and guidance to those creating and managing woodlands.

The England Trees Action Plan 2021–2024 sets out what actions will be taken to expand and improve woodland cover in England and the contribution woodlands make to the economy and society. The plan also sets out a long-term vision for trees, woodlands and forests in England.

The UKFS is monitored through compliance with existing grant and regulatory approvals. Where non-compliance is identified and corrective actions are not undertaken, then escalation is through regulatory mechanisms, including enforcement or where funding can be reclaimed.

Further advice and information on the application of the UKFS in England, forest regulations, news, guidance and support is available [here](#).



### Box 1.3 Forestry in Scotland

Scottish Forestry is Scotland's forestry authority and the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulation. Details of forestry policies in Scotland can be found [here](#).

Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029 presents a 50-year vision and 10-year framework for action, articulating Scotland's ambition to have more forests and woodlands and for them to deliver more economic, social and environmental benefits to the people of Scotland. Scotland's Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022 to 2025 sets out the actions that the Scottish Government and its partners will undertake over the next three years to deliver the Strategy.

The UKFS is monitored via compliance with existing grant and regulatory approvals. Where non-compliance is identified and breaches have occurred, corrective actions are identified via a Compliance Procedure. If corrective actions are not undertaken, then escalation is through regulatory mechanisms where funding can be reclaimed or permissions can be suspended or revoked.

For advice and information on implementing the UKFS in Scotland, forestry regulation and grant support mechanisms, contact [Scottish Forestry](#).



### Box 1.4 Forestry in Wales

Welsh Government is responsible for forestry policy in Wales, encompassing the management of existing woodlands and new woodland creation, and for grant programmes that support delivery of its forestry policies and strategies. Natural Resources Wales (NRW) is the competent forest authority in Wales, with various duties delegated by Welsh Government.

Welsh Government's [Woodlands for Wales strategy](#) (2018) is a 50-year strategy for woodlands and trees in Wales. It outlines Welsh Government's vision for trees, woodlands and forests and is built around four strategic themes: responding to climate change, woodlands for people, a competitive and integrated forest sector, and environmental quality.

The UKFS is monitored via compliance with existing grant and regulatory approvals. Where non-compliance is identified and breaches have occurred, corrective actions are identified by the relevant authority. If corrective actions are not undertaken, then escalation is through regulatory mechanisms where funding can be reclaimed or permissions can be suspended or revoked.

For advice and information on implementing the UKFS in Wales, forestry regulation, and grant support mechanisms, see [Natural Resources Wales](#) or [gov.wales](#).



### Box 1.5 Forestry in Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) is responsible for setting and implementing environmental and land management policy. Forest Service delivers the Department's policy and legislative responsibilities in relation to forestry and plant health, including the management of public forests, and regulates the sector in conjunction with its grant schemes and by issuing felling licences.

Forest Policy is outlined in Northern Ireland Forestry: A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth. Delivery against this strategy supports overarching and cross-cutting DAERA strategies including those for green growth, peatland and the environment.

The UKFS is monitored via compliance with existing grant and regulatory approvals. Where non-compliance is identified and breaches have occurred, corrective actions are identified by the relevant authority. If corrective actions are not undertaken, then escalation is through regulatory mechanisms where funding can be reclaimed or permissions can be suspended or revoked.

For advice and information on implementing the UKFS in Northern Ireland, forestry regulation, and grant support mechanisms contact [DAERA](#).

