



Community Forestry: Achieving public participation

Participant Information Sheet

About the study

Over the last twenty years, community forestry has seen a renaissance. Since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 the perceived importance of social and environmental factors in forestry has increased dramatically, leading to the community forestry boom. Despite the global interest in community forestry, it has evolved with very local contexts. In England 'community forestry' often refers to management of new and existing woodland in areas of urban regeneration for public benefit (Lawrence et al, 2009).

In the early 1990's the English community forestry programme developed 12 Community Forests in peri-urban areas, of which 10 still survive. The Countryside Commission initiated the Forests, with the Forestry Commission, local authorities and several national voluntary organisations as partners. They provided support for the local partnership to write a long term forest plan, with the objective of involving, coordinating and facilitating the community to deliver the plan. Once that a community project is in place and is running well, the Forest Team can stand back, only supporting when asked and when there are difficulties. National funding was cut in 2005 and since then Community Forests have had to find alternative ways to fund and deliver the long term forest plans. During the same time period, community based grant schemes, lottery funding and EU money have been made available for community woodlands. Such subsidies have enabled community led initiatives to take up the management of local woodlands themselves.

Hence, two systems of community forestry management have developed. Community groups who are in partnership with the Community Forests have the support of a dedicated Forest Team to help deliver a strategic, long term, landscape scale plan. Whereas, community woodlands outside of a Community Forest don't receive the benefits of a broad scale and dedicated partnership (although they may have formed partnerships themselves) and operate on a smaller, regional scale. This research aims to compare the perspectives of members of community woodlands to members of projects within community forests. The research has three main objectives:

- (i) Determine the relative importance of forest functions from a member's perspective
- (ii) Compare how this fits with management objectives
- (iii) Gain a detailed understanding of the experiences and perspectives of different people involved in the project

The questionnaire and interviews which this information sheet relates to will help to evaluate the depth of public participation in the each of the distinct community forest projects, which could have implications for national forest policy.

Some questions you may have about the research project:

What will I be required to do?

The crux of the research is a questionnaire for members, users and managers of the community forest. The questionnaire focuses on the relative importance that the individual places on particular forest functions. There are also direct questions regarding their opinions of the management structure. For any willing participants, the researcher will also conduct an interview, at their convenience in an attempt to develop a deeper understanding of the particular project.

How will the questionnaire be administered?

The questionnaires are very flexible and can be sent electronically or by the post. Alternatively, we could arrange a convenient time for the researcher to come and visit to administer the questionnaires face to face and answer any possible questions.

How often will I have to take part and for how long?

There is one questionnaire and then the follow up interviews for anybody who is interested. The interviews will last for no longer than an hour, but may include some follow up questions to clarify any unclear material and to check that the participants are happy with my notes.

When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?

You may telephone or email the researcher to discuss anything which is of concern to you.

Who will be responsible for all the information when the study is over?

The University of Cumbria

Who will have access to it?

Only the research team will have access to the raw data.

Note that any comments made during the recorded interview can be wiped from the recording and omitted from the transcript if requested and participants are free to withdraw at any point.

How long will data be kept and where?

The raw data will be held for 5 years and then destroyed in line with University policy. During that time it will remain anonymised, in a locked filing cabinet.

Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?

Information obtained through the discussion will be attributable to the organisation you represent, unless clearly specified otherwise. The name of the individual(s) present will remain anonymous.

How long is the whole study likely to last?

This research is due to be completed in September 2010.

How can I find out about the results of the study?

Information regarding the outcomes from this work will be available from the researcher or through The University of Cumbria.

What if I do not wish to take part?

Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

What if I change my mind during the study?

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason for doing so. In addition participants will have certain editing rights during the recorded interview, for example if you wish to retract something you have just said, it will be wiped from the recording.

Will I need to sign any documentation?

You will be asked to sign a consent form before participating in the study.

Whom should I contact if I have any further questions?

Please contact the researcher directly (details below).

Complaints

All complaints from the participants are in the first instance to be directed to the Secretary to the Dean for Research, Research Office, University of Cumbria, Bowerham Road, Lancaster, LA1 3JD

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