



CUSTOMER CHARTER

June 2009

**An Executive Agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for
Northern Ireland**

Forest Service exists to maintain, protect and expand forests in a sustainable way and thereby increase the natural resources of Northern Ireland. We produce timber for industrial use, we encourage the use of forests by people, and we improve the environmental quality of life.

The values we hold as an organisation are important in ensuring that at all times we aim for the highest standards of professionalism, both in our operational work and our service to customers. This charter describes what we do and contains details of the standards of customer service that you can expect from us.

What we do

- *Producing timber* : We manage the forests to make sure that growing timber is of a high quality. Timber offered for sale is transported to saw-mills and processed into a range of wood products.
- *Planting and replanting of public forests* : To maintain the forests for future generations, we plant new woodlands and replant areas where we have harvested trees. We monitor the growth of the trees and protect the forests against fire and disease. Because of the demand for softwood timber such as spruce and larch, a high proportion of the trees we plant are conifers. We also plant a variety of hardwoods, both for timber production and for nature conservation and landscape enhancement. Preference is given to native species such as oak, ash and rowan.
- *Private planting* : We aim to increase the area of sustainably managed woodland by encouraging planting by organisations or individuals. The Woodland Grant Scheme provides grants towards the cost of new planting, restocking, and certain maintenance work. The Farm Woodland Premium Scheme encourages planting on farms through annual premium payments. Both are part funded by the European Commission.
- *Conservation and landscaping* : We believe in good forest design and a management plan which is in tune with the environment. We conserve and enhance the scenic landscape by carefully planning our work in the forests, especially our planting and harvesting programmes. We also conserve and improve important wildlife habitats (there are 51 nature reserves on our property) and protect other areas of special interest in the forest (for example, historic monument sites) by planning and managing our work there so that it does not create disturbance.
- *Recreation* : Forests play an important role in meeting the growing demand for outdoor recreation facilities. Most of our woodlands are open to visitors on foot. There are 9 forest parks and around 50 other popular forest recreation areas where we have provided specific facilities for visitors. These facilities include sites for camping and caravanning, cafes and public toilets. There are also 4 forest drives which allow visitors to reach remote and beautiful areas. We aim to maintain all these facilities in

a condition which is attractive to visitors but, at the same time, we have to preserve natural forest conditions. You can obtain details of recreation facilities in your area from our Forest Offices (see page 9 for details) or from our website www.forestserviceni.gov.uk.

- *Education* : We encourage schools and outdoor education centres to use forests to study many aspects of the live environment. Forests are also ideal settings for teaching a variety of outdoor skills and pursuits. In several places we provide special facilities, such as lecture rooms, educational trails and forest guides. We have created educational displays for adults and children at the main recreation areas, and we also display material at a number of agricultural and other shows.
- *Plant health* : Forests in Northern Ireland are free from many of the serious insect pests which are common in forests outside Ireland. We protect the health of our forests by enforcing EC legislation which controls actions such as the movement of wood and bark, especially imports from countries which have certain pests and diseases. We also monitor exports to make sure that these do not put at risk the health of forests in other countries.

What you can expect from us

We are committed to good customer service and train and support our staff to treat you in a fair and courteous manner in keeping with our equal opportunities policy. We aim to provide a high quality service to all our customers, and we are committed to continuous improvement in respect of processes, communication and service delivery. Our standards of service are given below. We will monitor these standards and, where appropriate, publish our performance against them in our Annual Report and Accounts each year (available from Customer Services at our Headquarters, or our website www.forestserviceni.gov.uk).

Our general commitments

- We will be respectful, efficient and helpful when we are dealing with you.
- We will treat you and all customers fairly and equally no matter what your religious belief, political opinion, race, age, marital status, gender, sexual orientation, whether or not you have a disability, or whether or not you have dependants.
- Where confidentiality is required, we will act with integrity and discretion.
- We welcome personal callers during office hours. If you make an appointment, we will see you within 10 minutes of the agreed time. If we cannot keep an appointment we will give you at least 1 day's notice and we will arrange a new time to suit you. (It may not always be possible to make an appointment in advance, for example, when we have to carry out statutory inspections).

- If you do not have an appointment, a member of staff will see you within 15 minutes of your arrival. It may be that you will have to make an appointment to return at a later time or date to see the person who can help you.
- We will give our names when we write to you or speak to you on the phone.
- We will answer phone calls promptly and we will try to give an immediate response to your enquiry. If the first person you speak to cannot deal with your enquiry in full, you will be passed to someone who can. If we have to call you back we will normally do so on the same day, but if your enquiry is likely to take us longer to deal with we will let you know when you can expect an answer.
- We aim to reply to 90% of written enquiries within 10 working days of receiving them. If we feel that we will not be able to provide a full and complete response within this timescale, we will send you an acknowledgement within three working days which will give you a target date for a full response.
- We will consult our customers regularly about our services. We will publish the results of customer surveys in our annual report and we will take them into account when we are planning future services.

Our commitments in specific areas

Environmental assessment

- Where new tree planting is likely to have a significant impact on the environment, we will make sure that an environmental impact assessment is carried out. An Environmental Impact Statement will be made available to the public during a specified consultation period. At the same time, we will consult directly with statutory and public authorities which are interested in conservation. When we have made a decision, we will publicise this and also write to all the people and organisations who have made representations. We will apply similar arrangements in respect of proposals for deforestation, forest road construction and quarrying associated with forests.

Forest recreation and education

- At the entrance to relevant Forest Parks and Drives, we will display the opening/closing times and entrance charges for daily visitors.
- We will regularly inspect and clean public areas, particularly public toilet areas. Frequency will depend on the season and numbers of visitors.
- We will protect the safety of visitors by regularly inspecting and maintaining our

facilities.

- We will monitor the performance of cafe leaseholders to make sure that they provide a high standard of service.
- We will take all reasonable steps to make sure our facilities are available to everyone, including people with particular requirements. Where possible, you should let us know in advance if you need assistance, so that appropriate arrangements can be put in place.
- If we have agreed to provide a guide for your educational visit, we will make sure that one is available to escort you.

Sales of timber

We use a variety of sales methods to secure the best value for publicly owned timber and details of these and our commitments to customer care are detailed in our Timber Customer Charter, available from Customer Services at our Headquarters or our website www.forestserviceni.gov.uk

Information

- There is general information about our various work programmes in our corporate and business plans and also in our annual report. You can obtain copies of these publications from Customer Services at our Headquarters, or by visiting our website www.forestserviceni.gov.uk Information on what we publish and make routinely available, including the documents themselves, can be located within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Publications Scheme. This is available in hard copy from the Information Management Unit, Room 507, Dundonald House, or on the Department's web site www.dardni.gov.uk
- We publish a range of information leaflets that give information on many different aspects of forestry and recreation facilities in the forests. These are normally free but occasionally we may need to make a charge for certain publications. We will advise you of this at the time of request.
- The leaflets that are currently available from our headquarters are listed at the back of this booklet. We will revise the publications from time to time, so all titles may not always be available.
- We accept responsibility for the accuracy of information held by us and will continue to comply with the obligations laid down in the Data Protection Act 1998. We abide by the obligations laid down in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations. These give you the right to see certain official information, including environmental information. If you ask for information that we hold we will usually send it to you within 20 working days. If it is likely to take longer we will tell you when you can expect to receive it. In most cases we will

provide the information free of charge but we may charge you if we have to carry out a lot of research. We will tell you how much it will cost before we carry out any work.

Improving our service

To help us improve our service, we welcome comments at all times. We will develop action plans to implement improvements identified through customer surveys and include information about these in our Business Plans. If you are pleased with our service or you would like to suggest how we could improve it, please let us know. You can call in or write to your local Forest Office, or write to the Customer Services Manager at our Headquarters.

How you can help

We would particularly welcome your co-operation and help in maintaining and improving service and standards in the following two areas.

Grant schemes

- If you intend to plant trees and you want to apply for a grant, please send us your application in good time. The tree planting season is relatively short (November to April) and we receive most of the applications during December and January. We will be able to deal with your application more quickly if you can avoid the busiest months.
- Please fill in all sections of the application form, giving all the information we ask for including relevant maps, so that we do not have to contact you for more information. If you need help filling in the form, please contact your local Forest Office.

Forest recreation

- Help us to keep recreation areas clean and tidy by taking your litter home.
- Don't let your dog foul public areas. If it does, please clean up the mess.
- Tell our local staff if you notice any damage or vandalism to facilities.

Putting things right

Our commitment on complaints

We hope that you do not have to complain about our services. However, if you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service we provide or if you feel that we have not treated you fairly, please tell us. We are committed to looking at all complaints in a

positive way and to dealing with them as quickly as possible. We will investigate every complaint fully and fairly and give you a full explanation of the outcome. If we find that we have made a mistake we will apologise and try to put things right as quickly as possible. We will acknowledge all written complaints within 3 working days of receiving them and we will send you a full reply within 15 working days. If this is not possible, we will let you know why and tell you when you can expect a reply.

How to complain

You can make a complaint about our services in person, by letter, by facsimile, by e-mail, by telephone or by text phone.

- If possible, please contact the member of staff you have been dealing with or the local office manager. If your complaint arises during a visit to any of our facilities, speak to one of our staff on site or contact the appropriate local Forest Officer. These officers, who are best placed to handle any complaint quickly, will investigate the complaint and respond direct to you.
- If you are still not satisfied after this, you can refer the matter to a senior manager who has not previously been involved in the matter. The senior manager will investigate the complaint and respond direct to you. We will give you the manager's name and address in our response to your initial complaint.
- If you are still not satisfied with our reply, you can write to our Chief Executive who will oversee a further investigation of your complaint. The Chief Executive will be assisted by a panel that includes a person independent of the Department.

At each step of the process we will endeavour, in 90% of cases, to:

- Acknowledge written complaints within 3 working days of receipt; and
- Provide a full response to 90% of both verbal and written complaints within 15 working days of receipt.

If you have received a final reply from the Chief Executive and remain unhappy, you can ask a Member of the Assembly (MLA) to refer your complaint to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. The Ombudsman provides a free service and is totally independent of the Government. He has wide legal powers that enable him to investigate complaints against Departments and their Agencies. Normally the Ombudsman will expect you to have used our complaints procedure before he will consider your case. His contact details are provided overleaf.

- In the case of dissatisfaction with our response to requests for information made under The Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, you should write to the DARD Appeals Section at the address below. If you are still dissatisfied after the internal review you can request a review by the Information Commissioner at the address below. The Information Commissioner will expect you to have first sought a response from the DARD

Appeal Section.

The Ombudsman's Office

Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
Belfast
BT1 6HN
Phone : 028 90233821
Freephone : 0800 343424
Fax : 028 90234912
e-mail: ombudsman@ni-ombudsman.org.uk
Or write to:

The Ombudsman
Freepost BEL 1478
Belfast
BT1 6BR

Website: <http://www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk>

Information Commissioner

Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
CHESHIRE
SK9 5AF

Phone: 01625 545700
Fax: 01625 545510
Email: mail@ico.gov.uk
Website: www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Appeal Section
Information Management Branch
Room 507
Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4 3SB

Phone: 028 90524199
Fax: 028 90524196
Email: dard.informationmanager@dardni.gov.uk
Website: www.dardni.gov.uk

CONTACT US AT

Headquarters (Customer Services Manager)

Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4 3SB
Phone : 028 90524480
Fax : 028 90524570
e-mail: customer.forests@forests.dardni.gov.uk
Text phone: 028 90524420
(Can only be dialled from another text phone)

Headquarters (Chief Executive)

Dundonald House
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4 3SB
Phone : 028 90524463
Fax : 028 90524570

Castlewellan

The Grange
Castlewellan Forest Park
CASTLEWELLAN
BT31 9BU
Phone :028 43772241
Fax: 028 43771762

Enniskillen

Inishkeen House
Killyhevlin
ENNISKILLEN
BT74 4EJ
Phone : 028 66343032
Fax : 028 66324753

Garvagh

District Forest Office
6 Forest Road
GARVAGH
BT51 5EF
Phone : 028 29556003
Fax : 028 29557162

Our Web address is www.forests.dardni.gov.uk

PUBLICATIONS

(in print/ PDF format)

Annual Report and Accounts

Corporate Business Plan

Woodland Grant Scheme/Farm Woodland Premium Scheme Short Rotation Coppice (2007)

Information Booklet
Information Leaflet
Application Form

Education – The Forest Classroom

Information for teachers
Booking Form
Education Programmes Key Stages 1 & 2
Sustainable Forestry Education Programme Key Stages 3 & 4
Sustainable Forestry Education Leaflet
Red Squirrels in Northern Ireland (an education resource pack produced by the Environment & Heritage Service)

Forest trail, trek guides, Eco trails

Glenarm	Coleraine Woods
Tardree	Drumkeeragh
Ballyboley	Rostrevor
Ballycastle	Donard
Ballykelly	Ballypatrick
Belvoir	Castle Archdale
Castlewellan	Drum Manor
Cookstown	Florence Court
Glenariff	Gortin Glen
Gosford	Hillsborough
Parkanaur	Tollymore
Eco trail Gosford	Eco trail Parkanaur

Posters

Birds of the Forest
Red Deer

Forest Parks and Drives

Florence Court Forest Park	Glenariff Forest Park
Gosford Forest Park	Drum Manor Forest Park
Tollymore Forest Park	Gortin Glen Forest Park
Castlewellan Forest Park	Lough Navar Forest Drive
Castlewellan Arboretum	Ballypatrick Forest Drive

Leisure

Caravanning & Camping in the Forest leaflet
Touring in the Trees booklet
Horse Riding in the forest leaflet

Miscellaneous

NI Forest Service – A History
A History of Belvoir Park Forest

Forest Service Bye Laws

Forestry Statistics 2003
Forestry Statistics 2004
Facts & Figures 2001/02

UK Public Opinion of Forestry 2003
NI Public Opinion of Forestry 2003
Public Opinion of Forestry NI 2005
Public Opinion of Forestry NI 2007- preliminary report

UK Indicators of Sustainable Forestry
UK Forestry Standard – 2nd Edition PDF

Afforestation- The DANI Statement on Environmental Policy
NI Forestry-A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth
A Guide to Importation of Wood & Wood Products into NI 2003
Forestry Reproductive Material Regulations (NI) 2002
Environmental Guidelines for Timber Harvesting
Forestry Consultants, Contractors & Suppliers
NI Native Woodlands Definitions and Guidance- booklet
Gangmasters Licensing Authority, Forestry Commission and Forest Service joint statement

Customer Charter
Timber Customer Charter

Most of these publications can be downloaded from our website
www.forestserviceni.gov.uk or obtained from the Customer Services Manager

Should accessible formats such as large type, audio cassette or a language other than English be required, please contact Customer Services at our Headquarters and appropriate arrangements will be made as soon as possible.