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Forests for the future – which way now for sustainable woodlands ?

Forestry experts are going to be helping shape the future for the woodlands of Wales over the next 20 years or so – helped by their European neighbours – through a series of cross-border EU funded projects.

Robinwood, the ground-breaking project which aims to show how best forestry practices can help provide jobs and new income across rural Europe is set to commission a team of specialists to find solutions to the problems facing the industry.

The Forestry Commission Wales European Interreg IIIc project's team will be made up of experts in commercial, social and conservation disciplines in Wales who will be working with colleagues in Robinwood's partner regions.

They are charged with finding answers to the challenges facing forestry identified in a Robinwood survey commissioned earlier this year – encouraging new management of private woods, improving the rural economy through forests, identifying how trees can help prevent flooding and soil erosion and the use of wood energy

“The funding for these projects gives us a real opportunity to work outside the box, to see what our partners in Europe are doing with their forests, and come up with new

ways of making the forests of Wales work for the people of Wales,” said Robinwood manager Paul Finch.

“Certainly our initial research has shown that forestry could be doing more to help the rural infrastructure, both through increasing incomes and in less tangible social and wildlife benefits.

“Now we are looking for a team of specialists who can take these challenges on board and find innovative new ways of making our woodlands make an even greater contribution to Wales,” he said.

Included in the European wide research project is maximising the value of wood products, identifying opportunities for growing the wood fuel market, transport costs and carbon tax issues.

The project will also look at the use of trees, coppice and wood as part of a soft engineering solution to river bank stabilisation and slowing down water movement to help reduce flooding and erosion.

Anyone interested in tendering to join the Robinwood project should contact: Paul Finch, Robinwood – Tel: 08456 040845 – e-mail: paul.finch@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

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Editor’s notes: Robinwood has given Wales its first opportunity to be a partner in one of the European Interreg 111c RFO (Regional Framework Operation) projects aimed at bringing partner countries together, fostering cross border work between academics, private business and the public sector. The Welsh part of the three and a half year project is worth 1 million Euros to Wales. The Welsh strand of the work pulls together information on how forests in at least three of

the countries are looked after now, and how best methods can be used and developed across all six regions.