



DATGANIAD I'R WASG/PRESS RELEASE

Vive la difference! Europe loves its forests, but in lots of different ways

A new report by Robinwood, the Forestry Commission Wales European project which aims to give rural Europe a new future, shows that trees and forests play an important role in the lives of millions across Europe.

Each of the project partners – Wales, Italy, Germany, Slovakia and Spain – look at their woodlands in very different ways, according to figures produced by the pan-European study.

Italians in Liguria are already making major use of their forests for wood energy. Some 44 per cent of the population in the region around Genoa who responded to the survey already use wood fuel. Meanwhile in Brandenburg, east Germany, where 37 per cent of the land is forested, 23 per cent of the population is switched on to wood fuel while in Murcia, southern Spain, the total is 19 per cent and in Wales just 11 per cent.

The Welsh enjoy walking in their woods the most – there were more positive responses to 'providing opportunities for walking' and 'protecting the environment' as key functions of forests from Wales than any other partner. Murcia scored the lowest in both categories. The Germans listed gathering mushrooms, berries and Christmas trees as one of the top attractions of their forests, and the healthy Slovaks jogging and exercise.

mf

2/ Vive la difference – Europe loves its forests

“But on one thing all the regions are agreed – woods are a great place to visit,” said Kim Burnham, project manager of Robinwood Wales, of the European Interreg 111c RFO (Regional Framework Operation) project – funded in Wales by the European Union and Welsh Assembly Government .

“The majority of respondents from all the partners said they had visited a forest ‘recently’. The forests of Europe score highly with everyone for providing peace and quiet, and for adding to the beautiful scenery that each country has to offer.”

The Murcians - more than any other region – do want more woodlands. 95 per cent of people responding to the survey say they want more trees. Around half the Welsh and Ligurians want more trees – and the eastern Slovaks are quite happy with the forests they have.

Knowledge about trees and woodlands is varied too. In Brandenburg 96 per cent had read about trees last year, while in Murcia it was 68 per cent and in Wales just 51 per cent.

And most people in Wales – 60 per cent – thought their woodlands were decreasing, while only 15 per cent knew that tree cover in the country is actually increasing. More than 40 per cent of them also thought that clear fell land should be re-planted with conifers, while the Slovaks wanted to see a mixture of conifer and broadleaf.

Best practice forest management logos – for FSC and PEFC - were recognised by 31 per cent of Germans, 16 per cent of Welsh and six per cent of Ligurians.

Brandenburgers are most likely – 68 per cent - to buy locally produced timber, while the Slovaks don't mind what timber they use – and the Murcians would rather buy imported timber.

mf

3/ Vive la difference – Europe loves its forests

“We believe that this is the first time such a wide-ranging opinion poll has ever been conducted across Europe, and the results are fascinating,” said Kim. “What it certainly proves is that, despite our differences, woodlands have a very real role to play in the lives of millions of people.

“And our hope is that, as Robinwood progresses, we will be able to share all the valuable information, knowledge and working practices from each of the regions so that we can all make best use of our own woodlands,” he added.

Full details of the survey are available on the Robinwood web-site: www.robin-wood.it or by contacting Robinwood, Wales: Kim Burnham – Tel: 08456 040845, e-mail – kim.burnham@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

ENDS

7.09.06

Contact:

Kim Burnham, Robinwood, Wales programme manager **Tel: 0845 6040845**,

Guy Pargeter, Taliesin Communications **Tel: 01970 832375**

Editor’s note:

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.

Robinwood is a cross-border European project aimed at identifying how forests, trees and timber across Europe can play a vital role in the revitalisation of rural communities through new business opportunities, flood prevention and wood fuel energy. It is hoped that it will also change political perception of the role woodlands can play in the social and economic future of rural communities and build new links between the partner countries involved.

Robinwood will promote the sustainable development of rural areas and overcome obstacles to progress by creating: a woodland chain process - territorial promotion, marketing - new techniques in forestry development - certification, policy changes, silviculture - hydrogeological improvements - models to prevent instability and reduce risks promotion of wood as a fuel source for energy - new management/technologies.

Analyses, sharing of experiences, the creation of new approaches, pilot projects, the preparation of operational and promotional plans and promotions will be used to achieve these. Direct results will be: workshops, meetings, studies, reports, master plans, promotion campaigns, events, maps, networks, partnerships, surveys and directives. Certain activities will be carried out by means of sub-projects assigned by means of open invitations to tender.