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Wanted – forestry experts to help woodlands of Wales bring new jobs and money

Forestry experts across Wales could be in for a share of 900,000 euro – and help to draw up a prosperous future for woodland and timber across Europe.

Robinwood – a Forestry Commission Wales European Interreg project - is helping point the way to a sustainable future through trees and timber across Italy, Germany, Spain, Poland, Slovakia and Wales.

Now the project is looking to bring in specialists in forest management, wood energy and hydrology to identify ways in which the forests of Wales can play an ever greater role in economy.

Already the industry provides more than 5,000 jobs, but the aim is to find new ways of using the woodlands – which cover 14 per cent of the country – to provide more work and additional income.

“We shall shortly be completing an audit of the state of industry in Wales, and we are preparing to go out to specialists across the country for their help in formulating plans for the future,” said Robinwood project manager Owen Thurgate.

Work programmes and timings for the sub-projects – as they are called – were thrashed out between the Welsh project leader and the Italian lead group from Liguria at a meeting in Murcia, Spain.

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“Once we have a complete picture of the state of the industry in Wales we want experts from the public and private sectors to look at how best it can be developed. They will be looking at what works, what doesn’t, whether tourism and non forestry initiatives – education, sport and recreation – are the real way forward and what can be done to increase returns from Welsh timber in a global market.

“And then we shall be sharing the valuable information we have gathered with our partners across Europe – and learning from the similar sub-projects which they are running. Our ultimate aim is to come up with a blueprint for the future of forestry, making the most of business opportunities, developing wood as a sustainable energy resource and identifying how trees can help prevent natural disasters,” Owen added.

Robinwood is also about changing political perception of the importance of forestry to rural life, and breaking down barriers between countries by getting people across Europe to work together as a team.

It is the first time Wales has been 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 – worth 1 million Euro to Wales - was set up by the Forestry Commission Wales Funding Team.

Brandenburg, Germany; Liguria, northern Italy; Murcia, southern Spain; Pomorskie, Poland, Wales and Eastern Slovakia have worked in close collaboration on the project and will continue exchanging details of their own experiences and working together on new initiatives.

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Editor’s note: 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 - hydro geological 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.