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Showing the way forward for forestry in Europe – Wales states its case

A blueprint for the future of forestry across Europe has been presented to the European Union's all powerful Agriculture and Rural Affairs department by an international delegation from Wales.

Robinwood, the Forestry Commission Wales European project which aims to give rural Europe a new future, played a key role in drawing up recommendations for the sector in the it's final five-nation report.

And a team from Aberystwyth presented the findings to Daniele Bianchi, senior member of Commissioner Mariann Fischer Boel's seven strong cabinet with responsibility for forestry at an international conference in Genoa.

"We took the opportunity of explaining the vital role that forestry has in helping with rural regeneration, based on the work completed by our three year project," said delegation leader Paul Finch.

Project partners – Wales, Italy, Germany, Slovakia and Spain – studied key issues on forest management, wood energy and hydrology, identifying measures that can help Europe's forests play an even greater role in the rural economy.

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The Robinwood team points to the need for a holistic approach incorporating the multiple benefits of forestry – timber production and the wood chain, recreation, wood fuel, flood mitigation and climate change.

“Co-ordination and co-operation across all the various sectors is essential to ensure maximum benefits from sustainable forestry,” Mr Finch told the European Commission’s forestry specialist.

Better links should be created at EU/state/regional and local levels, both top down and bottom up.

More financial help should be made available to private woodland owners, new markets for woodland products developed and better evaluation and monitoring systems put in place.

On **wood fuel** the Robinwood Final Report calls for strategic plans to be drawn up by regional governments, to identify all the potential available woodfuel.

Public/private participation is needed to maximise the efficiency of wood supply chains which should take into account supply and demand, land characteristics, infrastructures, economic and financial issues.

The report also recognises that **hydrogeological** issues should always be considered as an integrated part of forest management and land use issues.

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Trees and woodlands can play a key role in river and land slide prevention, and wood can be used as a 'soft engineering' method in maintenance and restoration as part of integrated and multifunctional forest management.

Forest management systems should pay particular attention to the effects on soils, reducing their impact using new technologies and best practices.

A full copy of the final report is available on the Robinwood web-site: www.robinwood.it or by contacting Robinwood, Wales: Kim Burnham – Tel: 08456 040845, e-mail – kim.burnham@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

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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.