

Woodland Carbon Code advisory board minutes

Wednesday 13 May on Microsoft Teams

Present: Pat Snowdon, Andy Baker, Natalie Meiklejohn, Leon DeBell, Pippa Lewis, Jamie Smith (Scottish Forestry), Fiona Hay (Welsh Government), Robert South (Institute of Chartered Foresters), Andy Grundy (Soil Association), Nick Swinburn (Woodland Trust), Alex MacKinnon (Tilhill Forestry), Chris Waterfield (Forestry Commission), Steve Clarkson (Organic Farmers & Growers), Ewan Mackie (Forest Research), Joachim Halfdan Kruger (Cresco), Bruce Kennedy (Boston Consulting Group), Robert South (Institute of Chartered Foresters), Natalia Dorfman (Kita Earth), Matthew Doran (Country Land and Business Association), Peter Wilson (Wilson Applied/ UK Woodland Assurance Standard).

Apologies: Vicky West (Scottish Forestry), Breandan Mulholland (Northern Ireland Forest Service), Mark Broadmeadow (Forestry Commission), Renée Kerkvliet-Hermans (IUCN - Peatland Code), Kate Palmer (Confederation of Forest Industries - Confor), Nick Blyth (Institute of Sustainability and Environmental Professionals), Peter Coleman (Department for Energy Security and Net Zero), Craig Mackenzie (University of Edinburgh),

1. Welcome and conflict of interest

Pat Snowdon welcomed in the meeting and asked for members to declare conflict of interest. No conflict of interest were declared.

2. Outstanding actions

Pat Snowdon provided updates to outstanding actions from last meeting

Action 1: Andrew Baker to follow up with Natalia and data support.

Update: Ongoing.

Action 2: Members to continue to discuss ways to reduce cost around validation/verification.

Update: Ongoing. Robert South, Andy Grundy, Natalia Dorfman and Nick Swinburn discussed the increasing costs of validation and verification and how it is due to the high level of checks required for projects to meet accreditation standards that the WCC follow. Cost saving can only occur within groups that allow sub-sampling. The use of remote sensing to reduce survey costs may help in future.

Action 3: Pat to highlight key issues about the Woodland Water Code project with the Woodland Nature Markets Strategy Board.

Update: Ongoing (Pat).

Action 4: The Woodland Carbon Code team to invite Lauren to present on the Woodland Carbon Purchase Fund at the next meeting.

Update: Ongoing.

Action 5: The Woodland Carbon Code team to explore the possibility of setting up an in-person meeting.

Update: Ongoing (Andy). The WCC team will explore setting up an in-person meeting – with auditors to discuss previously mentioned issues.

Action 6: Clara and Pat to discuss developing a paper on carbon market integrity frameworks.

Update: Ongoing (Pat). Clara will be on maternity leave from next week, but colleagues will pick it up.

3. Updates

Statistics

Andrew Baker shared statistics on the Woodland Carbon Code

- There were few removals this year
- There are fewer registrations, but the area is greater for projects that are being registered.
- Verifications processed have trebled since last year.

Robert South noted that for the number of upcoming Yr15 verifications, we will need to ensure that auditors have capacity.

The WCC team

Two roles within the WCC are in the process of being backfilled (Communications Officer and the WCC Coordinator).

ICVCM

- WCC applied to ICVCM at the end of July 2025
- We have passed the completeness check
- A full assessment is underway, this could take a year, and the WCC is hoping for completion by the end of 2026/2027.

It is uncertain if the ICVCM will change their policy on allowing governmental schemes based on the WCC application. Our ICROA accreditation is valid until August 2026.

UK Land Carbon Registry

Andrew Baker gave an update on the new platform released in 2025. Most of the issues have been repaired and the platform should be working much better. Alex MacKinnon, Nick Swinburn and Robert South noted that there are still some issues (lack of automated emails especially within group projects), delays in invoicing and the display set up is inadequate. However, there has been a marked improvement since it's first release.

Pat Snowdon provided an update on the new contract for the UK Land Carbon Registry. Discussion into details of the contract, are still ongoing, and we cannot disclose who it is awarded to yet. The contract will be signed in September.

4. Biodiversity monitoring and measurements (FIRNS 4)

Natalie gave an update on the past outputs achieved by FIRNS and the current objectives for the next round of funding (FIRNS 4).

FIRNS previous project outputs:

- Data was collated for reference sites
- Financial modelling was conducted to determine what the units would need to be sold for taking into account the costs of biodiversity work and the validation and verification costs.

FIRNS new project outputs:

- Investigate how to bring costs down for the monitoring of biodiversity. Pilot studies will be conducted over the summer, and project developers will trial the methodology.
- Discuss with investors/buyers how much they'd be willing to pay for quantified biodiversity units.
- Integrate the proposed biodiversity calculations into the Rethink Platform.

The board suggested engaging with the private sector in regard to the use of remote sensing to see how biodiversity could be monitored.

5. WCC & CivTech Challenge

Leon DeBell presented an overview of the CivTech Challenge with the WCC.

The CivTech challenge aim was to use technology to solve WCC issues. Three companies were awarded funding.

- **Sylvera** Will use a Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS) to help estimate above ground biomass within forests. A small section of TLS data (up to ½ hectare) of woodland will be complimented with high resolution aerial lidar. Both these datasets will be used to train Sentinel 2 satellite data to produce a model to derive above ground biomass from satellite imagery. Sylvera will compare results to traditional forest mensuration. This process is not viable for trees <15 years old.
- **Cwiri** This company (UK CEH backed) will use proxy measurements to determine level of carbon sequestration within woodland and peatlands, with the aim to ensure that carbon in soil is being accounted for. Low cost probes will record environmental factors and soil cores and relate to soil carbon.
- **Rethink Codes** This is an administrative platform for project developers, auditors and the WCC. It can auto fill in documents, check documents using AI, and enable all parties to see where the project is at in the WCC process. It can use GIS data to auto-fill documents such as the carbon calculator. It will also form the platform to host remote sensing data from the other two companies.

Other monitoring projects that are not directly linked to the Civ Tech Challenge, include the European Space Agency (ESA) project, that uses TLS with a lidar dataset to provide a biomass estimate.

We are also piloting the use of drones at year 5 verification, which might replace the traditional year 5 stocking density survey. The initial study found that tree counts recorded from drone data are slightly lower than what is being recorded in person. More data needs to be collected to see if the method can be improved

Leon is working on GIS tools to help collect and share verification data from auditors on site.

6. Woodland carbon purchase fund

Defra has secured £250 million for the fund. Initially Defra looked to purchase PIUs to help improve the market and drive investment, but they are also considering whether purchasing WCUs would be more beneficial. The code team and the grants team in Forestry Commission will help Defra with planning. The fund is likely to be introduced in 2027.

The board discussed whether PIU funding would be the best purpose for the fund. They also discussed the effect could have on decisions made within the forestry industry.

7. Policy updates from countries

England, Northern Ireland - No update.

Wales – There is a change of government following the election with Plaid Cymru forming a minority government. Fiona will be meeting with new minister to discuss woodland creation as part of the carbon action plan. Plaid Cymru have mentioned agroforestry, net zero by 2040, and new woodland creation on public sites as part of their policy.

Scotland – The Scottish National Party are the largest party and will be a minority government. The new woodland creation targets are up to 18,000 hectares by 2029 – 2030.

8. Any other business

Kate Palmer raised via Robert South concerns from Confor members. They had experienced slow responses from the code team. Andrew Baker stated that the WCC need more information on what exactly is taking longer as our general inbox response times are normal.

Action 7: Leon DeBell from the Woodland Carbon Code Team to ask Rethink Carbon to give demo of their platform at the next meeting.