

NERC Innovation Placements Call 2017

Developing new farm woodland business models: South Downs, Hampshire

Placement opportunity with Forestry Commission England (flexible location with some time required visiting local sites in Hampshire)

Forestry Commission England is offering to host an exciting placement under the NERC-funded Innovation Placements Call 2017 in support of its objective to encourage woodland creation. This placement focusses on a proposed woodland creation project on the South Downs in Hampshire which aims to support local farm businesses and improve the quality of the public water supply. Well placed woodland in predominantly farmed landscape of the South Downs will help filter nutrients which would otherwise enter the chalk aquifer. Encouraging landowners to plant new woodland requires a robust understanding of the business opportunities new woodland offers and how these compare with existing land use. The project will contribute to innovative and viable business models which demonstrate the value of woodlands in supporting farm businesses and in providing services to local businesses and communities.

Forestry Commission England is the government department responsible for promoting and regulating the forest sector and for managing the 250 000 hectare Public Forest Estate. Its principal policy objectives are to protect, improve and expand England's woodland.

Researchers can expect to spend time at one of our main offices (e.g. Alice Holt near Farnham in Surrey or Silvan House in Edinburgh). Economic analysis will be a critical component of the work. Tasks are likely to involve:

- Reviewing existing evidence and data sources on existing farm business models (e.g. arable and grassland) and on those involving woodlands
- Gathering data and management information from local farm businesses in the South Downs north of Portsmouth to specify new farm business models
- Discussions with experts in woodland and farm management, including Forestry Commission staff, local land managers, Portsmouth Water and other stakeholders
- Carrying out an economic and financial analysis of existing and new business models
- Assessing whether/where targeted planting would provide a more cost-effective means than 'end of pipe' solutions for Portsmouth Water to meet water quality standards
- Developing proposals, if appropriate, for establishing 'payments for ecosystem services' mechanisms for farm woodlands on the South Downs.

The project will run for 4-6 months, starting in the summer or autumn of 2017. Candidates should have formal economics training and experience in quantitative analysis. Wider experience of social research and qualitative analysis is also desirable.

Background to the project

Woodland planting is being proposed as a way to reduce the amount of nutrients from arable and livestock farming entering the chalk aquifers of the South Downs. Targeted woodland planting on the Downs could act as a buffer between sources of nitrate pollution and the aquifers used by Portsmouth Water.

An important question whether such planting would provide a more cost-effective means (compared to 'end of pipe' solutions) for Portsmouth Water to meet water quality standards.

The addition of new woodland on local farms may provide opportunities for new farm business models. These could incorporate payments to farmers for tree planting for water quality objectives and the supply of woodfuel, or wood sourced heat, to local farms, communities and businesses.

The project will be given access to preparatory work, conducted by a NERC-funded placement in early 2017, with researched relevant literature, case studies and data sources.

Quantitative analysis will be required to assess the proposed business models. This will focus on financial costs and revenues to local farms although wider public good issues will need to be considered. Payments for ecosystem services (e.g. water quality improvements, timber and wood-fuel etc.) should form an integral part of the analysis.

Qualitative analysis will also be an essential component of the analysis; for example, to understand the motivations and perspectives of local land managers and the resulting implications for innovative business models.

Outputs from the project will include a report to Forestry Commission England setting out the key findings and recommendations, and a seminar to the Forestry Commission and other stakeholders on the outcome of the project. The Forestry Commission is also interested to explore other ways to disseminate the work and ensure it delivers maximum impact.

Application Process

Please follow the application process outlined in the Announcement of Opportunity call for innovation placements. Please indicate how you could address and add value to this project and the particular skills and experience that you could bring to this work.

A letter of support is required from Forestry Commission England. Applicants who apply for this opportunity can also apply for other placements in this call. Successful applicant(s) will be required to undergo background checks.

For queries about this call, please contact:

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