

Policy

Grey Squirrel (GS) policy and action plan is available here:

<https://www.forestry.gov.uk/greysquirrel>

Forest Services (FS) works closely with the Defra invasive species team and as part of the Squirrel Accord on any policy implementation or development. Within Defra we are promoting the continued need to manage the impacts of grey squirrels as part of the developing 25 year Environment Plan.

Grants

Landowners applying for Countryside Stewardship grants are required to risk assess the likely impact of GS on their objectives and where risk is high they must as part of the grant undertake GS control.

Collaborative Action

The Forestry Commission works with Natural England and other bodies as part of the Red Squirrel Northern England (RSNE) Project, a conservation project to help protect red squirrels and expand the biggest population of red squirrels left in England. The red squirrel reserves include the Public Forest Estate and GS control is carried out either by FE staff or by RSNE volunteers. The PFE makes a financial contribution the project each year.

In recent years FC has supported (cash grants) the establishment of some grey squirrel control groups with the European Squirrel Initiative and BASC (mostly in South West)

FC is part of the executive committee of the UK squirrel Accord and supports its work. We have recently provided a grant to support the Accord communications work, vital to generate further engagement with land managers.

FC is discussing with BASC the feasibility of using volunteers to shoot grey squirrels on the public forest estate. The public forest estate is open public access, so ensuring safety is a paramount consideration.

Scientific studies (Dr Emma Sheehy, Aberdeen University) have shown that Pine marten presence is correlated with a lowering of grey squirrel population levels and may be caused by pine marten disrupting the behaviour of grey squirrels. FC firmly believes that Pine marten may play a significant role in tackling forestry problems caused by grey squirrels – being a biological and sustainable control measure. But the geographical area in which this can happen will be limited by suitable habitat.

FC is a partner in work being led by the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust that is looking at the feasibility of re-introducing Pine Marten into the public forest estate in the Forest of Dean. The feasibility study is considering biological, ecological and socio-economic costs and benefits.