

Shaping a holistic perception of forestry from a young age



We need to promote a positive perception of commercial forestry to young people, says

Stefanie Kaiser

Changing attitudes is the rather vague title of one of Confor's current business campaigns (see p18). Its objective is to influence the perception people have of the forestry and timber sector in our country. People with a positive attitude will be open to hear the important messages we want them to understand, or will be more likely to consider forestry as positive sector to work for.

From experience I can say that most of my perceptions were shaped in childhood. Perceptions make me feel a certain way when I see a productive sitka forest, a mixed broadleaved riparian forest or a harvester clearing a block. In the case of forestry, my perceptions of what is 'nice' and what is 'negative' were initially shaped by things like a) the forests that surrounded me b) TV images of bulldozers in Brazil clearfelling the rainforest or c) the storybooks and Grimm tales I loved to read - they taught me about 'idyllic landscapes' (farms with apple orchards and some oak trees with birds) and more frightening ones (little red riding hood enters the dark wood where the big, bad wolf lives).

Working with secondary schools to raise awareness of forestry as a career option is something that requires ongoing attention. However, in parallel, it is important to make sure that from a young age, forestry and wood become part of a person's concept of a sustainable and positive landscape and economy.

Children of primary school age, for example, are not yet burdened by a lot of the pre-conceived ideas that influence the judgement of adults or even older teenagers. Organisations like the Woodland Trust are excellent at shaping concepts such as 'sus-



tainability', 'nature' or 'good land use' in children's minds. However, the messages kids are exposed to are often one-sided, sometimes downplaying the 'distressing' reality of trees being used to make timber. When these children grow up, they are likely to have an unrealistic expectation of what forestry is and should be, and therefore might be reluctant to accept our sector as the sustainable industry it is.

No matter whether we aim to promote forestry as a career choice to teenagers or whether we want the general public to accept forestry as a positive land use - shaping a positive attitude early is something our sector might have neglected so far.

A drawing of a forest by Olivia (5) who sees a woodland as a place for people and animals (even sheep!) but also acknowledges that trees are felled for timber.



Spread the forestry message

What can you do yourself to help create a balanced perception of forestry in the future generation?

- If you have a school kid yourself, talk to them about sustainable land use and forestry, teach them how the environment, the economy and people are interlinked. Take them and their friends out on countryside trips regularly and show them examples.
- Talk to your child's teacher about forestry
- Ask your child to do a presentation on forests and their uses as part of their science or sustainability curriculum.
- Talk to the school about activities you can organise – take the kids to your forest or show them how wood is used. A lot of schools welcome such initiative.
- Get your very young kids to draw forestry scenes, including the productive aspect such as Olivia's drawing on p42.



Ewen Weatherspoon Photography

The power of children's books

How comes that my two-year old daughter's books are full of lovely meadows and cute animals, showing a world far from reality. But then, on the other hand, in her "on the farm" books the romantic idea of farming includes combine harvesters slowly making their way through large-scale wheat monoculture! The image on the right is an example of how openly

the farming sector talks about its productive elements, which are far from idyllic in this case!

Farming is a more traditional land use sector than forestry in our country, but what can we learn from it?



There are some initiatives that are trying to change this. In Switzerland, for example, the forestry region of Toggenburg has recently published a children's book that aims to awaken interest in forestry and timber. In the storybook, two squirrels accompany a log from tree to finished house.



Providing role models for children

by **Elizabeth Barron-Majerik**

I want to ensure that every school pupil in Scotland (and beyond) has at least some awareness of the wide range of careers open to them in forestry. Whilst they might not all decide to study or work in forestry or arboriculture, it is important that we are doing all we can to promote it to the public, as all benefit from growth in this sector. To do this, we need ambassadors, and the folk best placed to do that are those that love working in it! Specifically, we need enthusiastic individuals, working in forestry, who are happy (with help!) to talk to teachers, school pupils, the public, or even just anyone who will listen, about what working in forestry is like, what it involves, what it doesn't involve, and how to get started.

Why is it important for the forestry sector to put younger children in touch with forestry?

Although I knew I wanted to study Plants at University, no one at school suggested Forestry as an option. Whether it was because I was female, or because they just didn't think of it. I don't want my children, or any others to not have access to this fascinating subject and range of associated careers, just because no one thought to mention it! And of course, it is just more

fun to be in the forest than in the classroom.

How do you show younger people a holistic image of forestry, including the productive side?

We ran LOTS of activities during our school events! There was tree planting, STEM activities, we looked at the animals you would find in the forest, tree ID, use of the harvesting simulator, knot tying and much more. My favourite quote at the end was from a P3 who asked; "I want to live here!" I hope he keeps that enthusiasm, and to that end we need more ambassadors.

How did the kids respond to the mentioning of felling trees?

I think they just saw it as a natural part of the process required to make the products that we had talked about in the other sessions. The great thing about forestry is that there is something in it for everyone. Some kids preferred the machinery, some the tree ID, some even liked the knots best!

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School visits to APF, see p41