



SMALL AND FARM WOODLAND OF THE YEAR AWARD 2026

Rules & Guidelines

1. This Award recognises and rewards smaller woods which have been actively managed in the last ten years, and is aimed principally at the hands-on woodland owner, including farmers.
2. The Awards rotate annually around five regions across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. On the sixth year, a Best of the Best Award may be held with regional winners invited to take part. In 2026, the Awards will be for entrants from the South East of England, defined as the counties covered by the RFS Divisions: Home Counties, Oxfordshire & Buckinghamshire, London, Southern and South Eastern.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

3. Entries are invited from farmers and woodland owners or managers from the private, public or voluntary sectors.
4. The minimum area is 0.2 hectares and the maximum is 20 hectares. Entrants should be able to demonstrate the award-winning qualities of their site within a half-day visit from our judges.
5. The woodland must be under a sole ownership and management. It would normally be one single block but exceptionally a group of neighbouring smaller units, such as farm woods, would be eligible. Entries which form a defined unit within a larger woodland block under multiple ownership are also eligible.
6. The woodland must have been actively managed in the last ten years.
7. It is expected that the day-to-day management is done by the owner or under his / her guidance. Owners may have taken professional advice, but the woodland must not currently, or for at least five years previously, have been managed by a forestry professional or professional company.

JUDGING CRITERIA

8. The judges are looking for sound, sustainable, holistic woodland management with clearly stated objectives. They will be wanting to understand how the woodland, whether new or established, integrates with farming and/or other land management objectives, including neighbouring land interests.

9. The judges will be wanting to understand why your entry merits recognition above other entrants, e.g. beyond meeting the requirements of grants received to support work undertaken. Entries should be clear about the aspects of silviculture being exemplified, interventions made and the results achieved etc.
10. Important considerations include the quality and suitability of the management, the suitability of the species, and the internal and external landscapes.
11. The woodland should have a management plan in place with evidence of what the owner has done to implement the plan.
12. Entrants should be aware of and implementing the best practices and guidelines produced by organisations such as Forestry Commission England, Natural Resources Wales, Northern Ireland Forest Service and other countryside agencies.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

13. Entry forms can be downloaded from the Royal Forestry Society website. Please refer to the eligibility and judging criteria when completing your application.
14. Entrants must submit a written statement with the accompanying form showing how their woods are managed sustainably and holistically for multiple objectives.
15. The completed entry form should be sent preferably by email to eif@rfs.org.uk or exceptionally by post to RFS Excellence in Forestry Awards, The Hay Barns, Home Farm Drive, Upton Estate, Banbury, OX15 6HU.
16. Please contact Andrea Donnelly by email eif@rfs.org.uk or phone 01295 678588 if you require clarification.
17. **The closing date for entries is noon on 30 April 2026.** An email will be sent to acknowledge that your application has been received and will be considered.

SHORTLISTING AND JUDGING

18. The RFS will appoint a panel of two judges. All entries will be assessed, and final judging will take place on site, but the judges will short-list according to the quality and composition of the entry form and written statement. It is therefore crucial that you show through your application how your wood meets the eligibility and judging criteria above, and that you provide all the information requested, to enable the judges to fully assess your entry. Entries that do not meet the eligibility criteria will not be shortlisted.
19. In making their selection, the judges will ensure that all woods are given equal opportunity, regardless of their size and composition and that each property is evaluated in its own context. The judges' decision is final.

20. Judging is expected to take place in July/August 2026. It is particularly important that the judges should meet and be accompanied during the woodland inspection by those responsible for both deciding and implementing the management policies and practices. They should be well-briefed and prepared to answer wide-ranging questions about the woodland.

21. When judging is completed, the judges prepare a comprehensive report which is published in the *Quarterly Journal of Forestry*. Individual reports on each wood are not available although the RFS is keen to disseminate learning and may contact winning entrants to develop case studies on their woods.

PUBLICITY, PRIZES AND PRESENTATION

22. Winners are asked not to publicise their awards until authorised by the RFS.

23. The Award will consist of:

- **First Prize** – a trophy (to be held for one year), cash prize of £500 and a certificate
- **Second Prize** – a certificate and cash prize of £250.

24. The Award Ceremony will take place in October 2026, venue is to be confirmed.

NOTES

25. The cash prize may be modified as the RFS sees fit.

26. No member of any judging panel and no national RFS officer may enter their own woodlands for the Award during their term of office.

27. The Society reserves the right to:

- a) suspend the competition at its own discretion
- b) decide against awarding any or all of the prizes if it feels they are not warranted

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is sponsored by Forest Stewardship Council.

