esri UK

Case study

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Approved by: L. Nightingale and M. Roden for Esri UK; H. Davies for Forestry Commission Scotland; Richard Betts for SNH;

Collaborating on an invaluable new service for Scottish landowners

Forestry Commission Scotland

The Challenges

- Re-launch and improve an information search tool for Scottish landowners

The Benefits

- Rich, up-to-date land information easily accessible online to anyone
- Better quality grant applications leading to efficiency gains within public sector organisations
- Valuable new public tool delivered at minimal cost thanks to the collaboration of three organisations

The customer

This is a story about a successful collaboration between three Scottish public sector organisations working under the umbrella of Scotland's Environment Web. The project was initiated by Forestry Commission Scotland, but could not have been achieved without with the input and commitment of its partners: Scottish Natural Heritage and Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA).

The challenge

Across Scotland, a variety of grants are available to landowners to help them manage woodlands and plant new trees. However, in order to access this funding, individuals and groups have to complete formal applications, providing detailed information about their land, so that its suitability for planting can be fully assessed.

To assist landowners in this application process, Forestry Commission Scotland had previously developed a searchable database of land information. However, this application was now many years old and in urgent need of renovation. "We knew that we didn't have the resources internally to update and redevelop our Land Information Search tool by ourselves, but we were very aware that it had the potential to deliver value to Scottish land managers right across the rural sector," says Howard Davies, Geo-Information Services Delivery Manager at Forestry Commission Scotland. "We therefore approached our partners and proposed a collaborative project."

The solution

Each of the three organisations involved brought a different, complementary skill or asset to the initiative. SEPA had secured funding from the European Commission LIFE+ funding programme and created the Scotland's Environment web site to provide a 'one stop shop' for all information about the natural environment in Scotland. It therefore had the ideal launch pad for the rejuvenated data service and the necessary underlying technical infrastructure. Scottish Natural Heritage was able to provide skilled programmers to help develop the solution; and Forestry Commission Scotland had the customer knowledge and business knowledge to lead the project.

Significantly, all three organisations used the same geographic information system (GIS) technology – Esri's ArcGIS Platform – and it was this commonality that ultimately made it incredibly easy for the partners to collaborate on the creation of the new Land Information Search tool.

Now available for anyone to use on the Scotland's Environment web site (www.environment.scotland.gov.uk), the new Land Information Search service provides landowners with a fast and convenient way to access a vast amount of information about their land and neighbouring areas. Users simply enter a postcode or a place name, or zoom into the interactive map to find the area they are interested in. Next, they mark a point on the map or draw a polygon around the specific fields or areas that they want to plant or maintain. The online tool then returns a detailed report on land findings, which users can either view online or download as a pdf file.

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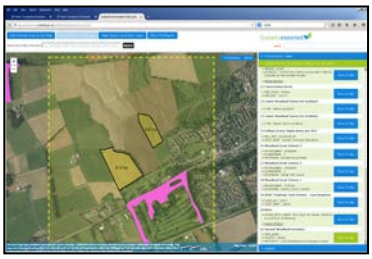
"The new Land Information Search service delivers considerable benefits for landowners and managers, making it far easier for them to maintain Scotland's beautiful and invaluable rural environment."

Howard Davies, Geo-Information Services Delivery Manager, Forestry Commission Scotland



The Land Information Search map application delivered through Esri's ArcGIS Server

Developed using ArcGIS web services, the online tool works by streaming relevant, up-to-date data directly from a wide variety of different organisations. Searches are currently performed against over 40 different data sets, ranging from recent woodland surveys and forestry boundaries to Sites of Special Scientific Interest and groundwater reports. If users click on the 'more details' button on their individually created search results reports, they are automatically directed to web sites with further information. So, for example, if an Iron Age burial mound is found near the search area, users can go directly to information about this scheduled monument on the Historic Scotland web site with just one click from their reports.

The benefits

Through their collaboration, Forestry Commission Scotland, Scottish Natural Heritage and SEPA have succeeded in delivering a highly valuable and enhanced service for landowners. It currently attracts around 4,500 users per month, a figure that is expected to peak next year when new grant applications are invited for the next round of Scotland's Rural Development Programme (SRDP).

For landowners applying for SRDP for example, the new Land Information Search tool will save them an enormous amount of time. They will be able to find a great deal of the information they need to complete their funding applications in one place and have confidence that this data is up-to-date. "The new Land Information Search service delivers considerable benefits for landowners and managers, making it far easier for them to maintain Scotland's beautiful and invaluable rural environment," Davies says.

In tandem, the government organisations that administer rural funding applications will be able to operate more efficiently. It is anticipated that the quality of applications will be higher, saving time asking landowners to submit more information or pointing out information that materially impedes the feasibility of landowners' plans. In the long term, these internal efficiency gains may translate into cost savings across multiple government organisations.

Although it was originally developed to support woodland management and tree planting, the Land Information Search tool can now add value for a wide number of different users. Farmers and moorland managers for example, will now be able to use the service to access information pertinent to their development plans.

The remarkable thing about this project is that it is delivering exceptional benefits, but was created with minimal investment through the LIFE+ programme. Together, the three partners already had all the ArcGIS technology, skills, IT infrastructure and indeed, vision to build this valuable new public service. Davies claims: "It's a great example of successful cross-government collaboration in Scotland."