

Ministerial Foreword - Forestry in Scotland is a sector that we can be justly proud of.

1 - Introduction and Rationale for Providing Grant Support for Forestry

1. Do you agree that grant support for forestry should continue to be improved and developed as a discrete scheme within the overall package of land support?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

As expressed in your introduction, grant support can help cover the significant costs of establishing new woodland. Woodland creation in Scotland is needed to address and reverse centuries of forest loss.

2. Are there any changes that would allow for better complementarity between the forestry and agriculture funding options?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There appear to be frequent instances of woodland creation schemes being aborted or reduced because of resistance related to the anticipated loss of agricultural subsidy if woodland creation proceeds. Agriculture is very important but well balanced land use indicates that much of the unimproved hill ground currently used for low density sheep farming would be better used as forest land. The agricultural support mechanisms need to be adjusted so that they do not obstruct this desirable land use change.

2 - Forests Delivering for Scotland's Climate Change Plan

3. How can the support package for forestry evolve to help tackle the climate emergency, to achieve net zero, and to ensure that our woodlands and forests are resilient to the future climate?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Whilst it is important to have clear objectives for woodland creation, many modern woodland creation schemes are now multi-objective with timber production often combining with various environmental objectives. Mixed forests of conifers and broadleaves can be particularly useful in achieving these multiple benefits. The current FGS options are overly prescriptive and tend to 'shoehorn' planting plans into very tight categories. A more flexible approach is needed that accepts and encourages diversity of species and structure.

Thought also needs to be given to the encouragement of 'montane' woodland above the current economic planting altitude. Although growth rates at altitude are slower, there are significant potential gains in terms of biodiversity and carbon sequestration and there is a large area available in our mountains.

In terms of woodland management, many existing woodlands especially in the 'environmental' category become moribund due to lack of herbivore control. This leads to an absence of natural regeneration and, eventually, potential loss of the woodland itself. There needs to be encouragement for herbivore control and securing natural regeneration as the most cost effective, long term way of maintaining and expanding woodland cover. This is often the way woodland management is practiced in continental Europe and we should learn from these examples. e.g.
<https://www.forstwirtschaft-in-deutschland.de/en/german-forestry/products/hunting/>

4. Private investment through natural capital and carbon schemes can make a valuable contribution to climate change. Do you agree that the grant support mechanism should have more flexibility to maximise the opportunities to blend private and public finance to support woodland creation,

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Woodland creation is, by definition, based on persuading existing owners and managers to try something different. The current carbon market is still developing and uncertain. Clearly defined grant support to get woodland creation started can give owners confidence and reduce the sense of risk. Currently, the process of approval is stretched by the need to pay for numerous surveys etc. and it can take up to 2 years to get schemes approved. Grants should be flexible and allow for schemes to be 'topped up' by private finance related to carbon.

5. How could the current funding package be improved to stimulate woodland expansion and better management across a wide range of woodland types, including native and productive woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The current approach is too polarised with schools of 'environmental' and 'productive' forestry. Scottish forestry is often restricted by unnecessary concerns about native and non-native species. e.g. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-tayside-central-50600816> In terms of carbon sequestration, it doesn't matter! In terms of climate resilience, we actually need to diversify with introduced species from further south and outside Great Britain. Funding should be designed to encourage all types of new woodland including novel mixtures of native and non native species. If we are to address a changing climate, we must recognise the need for trees species to migrate and therefore accept a different future forest structure.

Once forestry thinking escapes from the straightjacket of defining forests as 'native' or 'non-native' a whole range of new possibilities emerge - in particular the many variations of Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) which rely more heavily on shade bearing species developing as an under-storey e.g. beech, maple and fir which can become components of the new forests for the future. CCF forestry avoids many of the adverse impacts of even aged plantations that then have to be clear felled and started again.

6. Do you agree that it should be a requirement of grant support that woodlands are managed to ensure that they become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and pests and disease?

Yes

How can the grant scheme support this?:

One simple way to improve pest resilience is to avoid relying on single species planting schemes. The future grant scheme should be constructed to encourage species diversity from the outset even where softwood production is the primary objective. Sitka spruce can be planted in mixture with various other species but aspen is a particularly good mix. The grant structure can encourage this.

It should also be a requirement of grant support that woodlands are managed. There should be an expectation of ongoing herbivore control, thinning etc. to meet defined objectives. Some form of ongoing financial support linked to woodland condition should be considered.

Climate resilience is another reason why a more open attitude to 'non- native' species should be encouraged. Left to their own devices, tree species will gradually migrate over time in response to climate changes. In a warming world, we must allow and bring species from more southern climes to be planted in Scotland.

3 - Integrating Woodlands on Farms and Crofts

7. Which of the following measures would help reduce the barriers for crofters and farmers wanting to include woodland as part of their farming business? Please select all that apply.

Are there others not listed above?:

Forest education - Too many farmers regard conversion of hill land to forestry as a sign of failure. In some older people this is 'baked in' and won't change quickly. However, the next generation of farmers need to be more enlightened and see themselves as 'farmer/ foresters' as are found in countries like Sweden. This can be assisted by ensuring that some forestry education is a basic part of all agricultural courses so that the next generation of farmers are more aware of the benefits forests can bring to farming and have enough confidence that they can plant and harvest trees for themselves. (Obviously, there are some who are able to do this -but not enough.)

8. Establishing small woodlands can have higher costs. What specific mechanisms would better support small scale woodlands and woodland ownership?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

A sliding scale of grant support for certain items (e.g. fencing) might help to offset the higher costs of small scale woodland creation.

4 - Forests Delivering for People and Communities

9. How can forestry grants better support an increase in easily accessible, sustainably managed woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

It would be worth exploring potential links with Council Development Plans. These determine the likely location of future housing development and often include aspirations to plant new woodlands around or close to the housing areas. Land values in peri urban areas can be very high. Developers can be encouraged (or required) to provide areas of new woodland as part of their development proposals. This can be done by identifying proposed woodland areas as part of future housing allocations thus ensuring the land is available. A 'peri-urban' grant could help support the developer to plant the identified areas.

10. How can grant support for forestry better enable rural communities to realise greater benefits from woodland to support community wealth building?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

One of the key benefits of new woodlands should be enhanced access for adjoining rural communities. New footpaths, cyclepaths and bridleways can often share the routes of proposed forest access roads and can be laid out at the start of woodland creation. This will be of a general benefit to the local population and increase local acceptance of the new woodland. It can also help to foster tourism and the local economy. (The woodlands around the Tweed Valley are an good example of a major tourist cycling activity which was probably not anticipated when the forests were first planted.)

11. How can the forest regulatory and grant processes evolve to provide greater opportunities for communities to be involved in the development of forestry proposals?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

It is important for communities to have input to forestry proposals. The process can be difficult however if it becomes a focus for opposition to change. It is common for people to feel threatened by proposed land use change but later to accept and even value it. The consultation process should take account of local opinion but there may need to be a negotiation between the land owner interest and the 3rd party community interest. There is a parallel between woodland creation applications and the planning system and Scottish Forestry needs to be ready to take on the role of the 'planning officer' and have the confidence to arbitrate.

12. How can the forestry regulatory and grant processes evolve to ensure that there is greater transparency about proposals and the decisions that have been made on them?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

As with my answer to Q11 above, a closer adherence to the way planning decisions are handled will help e.g. placing more application details and correspondence on public web portals.

Scottish Forestry staff need to be trained and resourced to carry out these roles.

13. Forestry grants have been used to stimulate rural forestry businesses by providing support with capital costs. Do you agree that this has been an effective measure to stimulate rural business?

Not sure

a. How could this approach be used to support further forestry businesses?:

I don't know enough about this.

b. How could this approach be used to support further skills development?:

See above.

14. How could the FGS processes and rules be developed to encourage more companies and organisations to provide training positions within the forestry sector?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

I don't know the answer to this but agree that more training positions will help local businesses engage.

5 - Forests Delivering for Biodiversity and the Environment

15. The primary purpose of FGS is to encourage forestry expansion and sustainable forest management, of which a key benefit is the realisation of environmental benefits. How can future grant support better help to address biodiversity loss in Scotland including the regeneration and expansion of native woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

As mentioned in previous answers, it is not helpful to view forest expansion through the 'native' v 'non native' perspective. Future forests need to be more diverse and include new species from the south and abroad including beech, sycamore and other maples, firs etc. This is not a biodiversity loss and the presence of these 'exotic' species in 'native' woodlands is NOT a threat!

The best way to ensure future biodiversity and resilience is to establish new forests by natural regeneration - and accept the mixed species results that will occur. Except in very special and limited circumstances, an 'original natives only' policy should be rejected. The real value of the existing remnant native woodlands is as a reservoir of all kinds of dependent and associated woodland species that should be encouraged to expand into newly created woodlands that may adjoin. (I do accept that in some circumstances, a few invading species like rhododendron can take over and need to be controlled.)

16. Herbivore browsing and damage can have a significant impact on biodiversity loss and restrict regeneration. How could forestry grant support mechanisms evolve to ensure effective management of deer populations at:

Landscape scale?:

I suggest that the future forest policy be modelled closely on the way deer are successfully managed in European countries such as Germany where the right of sporting interests to shoot deer is accompanied by responsibilities to achieve a prescribed level of cull - with fines and/ or loss of permission for those that do not comply. Herbivore control is a huge issue for any serious attempt to address forest loss and restoration in Scotland (because that loss is caused by the repeated failure of generations of previous forests to regenerate after forest loss.) Relying on miles of deer fencing now is not the answer.

Regional deer control strategies are needed across the country and NatureScot needs to be much more assertive in setting and enforcing cull levels such that natural regeneration can succeed.

Small scale mixed land use?:

As above but perhaps a more tolerant attitude to fencing may be appropriate?

If you wish to make any other relevant comments, please do so in the text box below.

Please add your comments here.:

It might be influential in framing the public consciousness if some reasoned estimates of potential carbon capture were made available based on various levels of land use change in Scotland. Too often the climate debate seems to focus on adopting electric vehicles and various forms of power generation. Politicians never seem to talk about land use change! There is insufficient appreciation of the role and scale forests and peatlands can have in absorbing atmospheric CO2. Can this be explained more effectively with some figures rather than generalities?

About you

What is your name?

Name:

[Redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:

[Redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Individual

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

[Redacted]

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

We may share your response internally with other Scottish Forestry policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Forestry to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

I consent