

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
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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.:

The focus for Rothiemurchus as a land manager (farm, forest, hill ground, tourism) is that the overall support package promotes balanced objectives for woodland and estate management.

It is useful to have discrete forestry grants but it would also help to have some grants that cover more than just woodland, e.g. in relation to wildlife control (deer and predators)

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 is an opportunity to enhance woodland habitat through improving the complementarity between forestry and agricultural funding options. In particular this would provide benefit for woodland regeneration, ground nesting bird habitat (e.g. capercaillie) and reduction of forest fire risk as a result of reducing the height of the field layer. The ability to improve woodland management through cattle grazing is being enhanced through the use of no-fence collar technology which allows unfenced areas to be lightly grazed. We would like to see the forestry and agriculture funding options integrated to incentivise land managers to deliver responsible woodland grazing that delivers these management objectives. Woodland grazing by cattle in established woodlands could play a valuable role in capercaillie conservation.

Support for predator control for black grouse and capercaillie is appreciated, but is restrictive in the amount offered and the cost of managing the grant and much of the predator control takes place across the estate, primarily in non-woodland areas where there is least risk of disturbing capercaillie.

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.:

Scottish Forestry might target some of the support package to forest research and information sharing, or the development of markets for forest products, especially markets for species other than Sitka spruce. Current knowledge indicates that forestry plays a key part in carbon sequestration, but more importantly in providing a sustainable product that can replace petroleum-based products, or energy intensive products such as steel and concrete. Landowners can best adapt if they are given the knowledge on species and products.

We have seen how grant rules move practice away from establishment on deep peat and away from ploughing as a means of ground preparation.

We need to increase attention on the height of the field layer in areas of extensive forest and the impact this has on fire risk as temperatures rise.

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,

No

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Carbon finance schemes might be too variable and uncertain at present. Perhaps keep FGS free of natural capital and carbon finance schemes; these schemes should be complementary to product markets and grants, i.e., they should be used to tip the balance to make a project happen, ie they should be properly tested for 'additionality'.

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.:

Increase the amount of funding for sustainable forest management. Prioritise natural regeneration rather than planting where this is an achievable option.

Acknowledging that forestry staff/advisor time is expensive, simplify the scheme to reduce the administrative cost to land managers of entering into FGS contracts.

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?:

This needs to be assessed through the forest plan process.

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.

Better integration of support for woodland creation with farm support mechanisms, Clearer guidance on grant options, Flexibility within options, Intervention level, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

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.:

HGV access requirements can be out of proportion to the level of use. There could be more flexibility in the required specification for management/harvesting access infrastructure. Permit a risk assessment approach to the design of what is required, proportionate to the frequency of use, volume and supporting infrastructure, such as stop / go signs (rather than passing areas) and temporary surfaces for when the road is in use.

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.:

Such measures should apply to popular rural destinations as well as urban areas.

Local and community councils can develop core path plans that land owners can work with as evidence for grant applications rather than the land owner having to spend time soliciting support for public access infrastructure projects from community bodies.

Have some standard, legal documents that make it easier for community organisations to enter into management agreements with landowners and to apply for woodland grants on behalf of owners.

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.:

Improve funding for public access development and maintenance; current options and level of funding is too restrictive.

Sustain the level of grant support so that local contractors can be employed to deliver woodland management work, and landowners can continue to employ staff engaged in forestry work.

Much of the employment in the area is within the tourism industry and many visitors come to the area because of the quality of the woodland, but the landowner does not always benefit from the visitor spending in the local area. The 'free to access' woodland environment needs to be maintained and enhanced with support from forestry grants.

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.:

The current public consultation requirements for Long Term Forest Plans work well.

For forestry staff and advisors to work alongside community representatives, funding could be made available, similar to co-operation grants, perhaps to develop 'community environment' plans.

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.:

More information could be made available through SF Map Viewer, or IT systems & email alerts as per planning applications.

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?

Yes

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

Work alongside Scottish Enterprise/HIE to develop robust business plans and do market research?

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

Capital grants to include training courses?

Linking up with other national schemes that support training and apprenticeships?

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.:

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.:

Better understanding of the role of woodland grazing (especially cattle) in the restoration of native woodland.

Grant support for no fence cattle collars and guidance on herbivore management to maximise environmental benefits.

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?:

Herbivores can restrict regeneration at higher densities, but there is increasing evidence of biodiversity loss on Rothiemurchus due to the low level of woodland grazing, e.g. the nesting success of capercaillie. More flexibility to vary browsing impacts across the management area to ensure regeneration is happening where you want it and other areas where woodland is already established might reflect higher levels of browsing in order to generate a woodland ecosystem that closer reflects the grazing environment in which woodland species evolved.

Grazing levels should be monitored and for example if the deer population is required to be not more than say 5 per sq.km a minimum population of say 3 per sq.km should be required.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Grants need to focus on outcomes – browsing impacts, not just on tree species but also the impacts of grazing on field layers that support, for example ground nesting birds such as capercaillie and black grouse.

Fencing is still a vital tool for efficiently managing deer impacts and grant support for marking deer fences in capercaillie/black-grouse woodlands has enabled Rothiemurchus to maintain fences so that staff time can be best spent on controlling deer in other areas.

Perhaps grant could be paid in two elements: an annual maintenance grant to support the cost of deer management and an impact grant for demonstrating achievement of objectives at year 5?

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

Please add your comments here.:

Grant application process and reporting needs to be kept simple.

Woodland planning could be a gateway to entry into grant schemes, so that the work that goes into the woodland planning process becomes the foundation for a grant application, rather than having to produce a lot of new documentation to support a grant application. The same might apply to grant reporting too, where the reporting documents are all part of the forest plan review process.

Grant rates need to be more responsive to inflation and reviewed regularly if evidenced that they fall significantly short of actual costs. For example heather management with remote controlled flails in intermittent patterns to best support capercaillie is relatively new and the per hectare grant rate is much less than the true cost of carrying out this work.

Also, the 1km distance from a lek or capercaillie breeding area requirement for predator control funding is too restrictive. Crows and foxes will easily travel 2 to 3km for a meal. And, to safeguard endangered species within the forest it may be more effective to manage the population out with the forest.

About you

What is your name?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:
Rothiemurchus

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