

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 Galloway Fisheries Trust (GFT) is a charitable organisation which was formed in 1988, by a number of neighbouring District Salmon Fishery Boards in Dumfries and Galloway. The aim of the GFT is to undertake research, provide advice and complete practical works to protect and enhance aquatic biodiversity, particularly fish species, living in the freshwaters and river catchments across Dumfries and Galloway. The only river catchment that we do not work on is the Nith. For further information on GFT see www.gallowayfisheriestrust.org

Historical conifer afforestation of the Galloway uplands has caused many water quality issues particularly acidification which has severely impacted on fish populations in many river headwaters. There is an opportunity to address these problems through the on-going improvement of forest design practice. A key measures needs to be to stop planting and undertaking ground preparation on deep peats.

The threat of increasing water temperatures driven by climate change is now well known. It is a significant threat in Southern Scotland where many waters are peat stained and thus absorbing a lot of heat. GFT recorded 29 degrees in the main River Bladnoch in 2021. We need to establish riparian deciduous woodlands to create shade and cool waters and quickly.

Many commercial woodlands have not benefitted biodiversity and instead damaged it. With better designed forests we should be able to improve biodiversity and have commercial crops.

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.:

The Forestry Grant Scheme does not seem to be effective at creating large scale riparian native woodlands even though the numerous benefits of these woodlands is well known and can often fit well into agricultural holdings.

Stock watering options can often be expensive to implement effective schemes and these costs need to be covered in grants.

Effective buffer zones should be available always for water courses for both farming and forestry holdings. These buffer zones should to include low density planting of native trees always. We do not see this in many commercial forests and buffer zones are usually left open with no deciduous tree planting occurring.

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.:

While, new conifer planting schemes do not allow tree planting on deep peats, replanting schemes still allow the planting of commercial crops on many areas of deep peats. This needs to stop. It is well known that many water quality issues, including acidification, originates from damaged deep peats due to heavy drainage for forestry. Also planting these areas releases a lot of carbon. There is a need to stop any replanting of conifer crops on deep peats. Any areas of deep peats within forestry application areas should need to be restored – funding is available for this from Peatland Action.

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 you answer in the text box.:

It needs to be easy to incorporate private finance models into grant schemes.

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.:

More flexibility and less drive for commercial large scale projects. The biodiversity benefits need to be recognised more within schemes. The % of native / deciduous tree planting required for overall schemes needs to be increased. There is a need to look more closely at existing forestry schemes in their second or third rotation as many of these continue to have very high % of Sitka only and are very different to new proposals.

Deer management / meeting fencing costs etc need to be adequate to cover the true cost of these measures.

More of a look at landscape scale for forestry schemes especially riparian areas to achieve enough scale to have ecological benefits.

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?:

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, Knowing where to get reliable advice, 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.:

There needs to be a greater value attached to the wider benefits that help to address climate change impacts and biodiversity loss, from riparian woodlands. It needs to be about so much more than just commercial benefits.

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.:

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.:

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.:

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.:

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?:

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

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.:

As it is recognised that riparian woodlands are required to help increase the climate resilience of water courses and to help increase overall biodiversity, there is an opportunity for Fisheries Trusts to provide expert advice and understanding to those designing and delivering forestry schemes.

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.:

Most of the Galloway acidification problems originate from heavily drained afforested deep peats. The replanting of trees on deep peats should be stopped which will improve water quality and carbon storage in the long term.

In many areas of Galloway where second or third rotation of Sitka is present, we find the opened up riparian areas are simply filling up with dense thickets of Sitka regen. It is really bad in many areas, especially it appears on the poorer soils. There is no question that this is a problem for native vegetation, water quality, bank stability and the establishment of hardwood riparian trees. The forestry interests are telling us it is really costly to remove them and they have limited budgets for it so not many areas are being cleared. Could these costs be covered by Forestry grants in the future?

There is definitely an issue regarding how close to plant riparian trees. Forestry interests are concerned about being too close to waters and often plant their 'riparian trees' too far away to have any meaningful benefits to the watercourse. Guidance needs to be provided to ensure riparian trees are planted close to waters.

While we are seeing new planting schemes looking into opportunities to be more environmentally aware and include riparian planting etc, it is important to ensure that similar consideration is given when replanting already afforested areas. I understand that the enhanced new grants to support riparian planting are for new plantings and not to improve existing forests? This would be a concern to areas like Galloway and Argyll where huge areas are already under existing plantation.

Also when looking at riparian planting in afforested areas, it is likely that deer issues will be enhanced due to the surrounding mature crops. We see a lot of deciduous tree planting failing in these areas and some forestry interests seem to have limited interest on how well or not these trees do compared to the commercial Sitka crop. A forester told me recently that they will beat up the Sitka crop up to 3 times but that the deciduous trees they plant will not be beaten up at all - some large areas will fail especially if it is a dry spring. It is important that grant providers ensure high establishment rates of any native trees planted around commercial species particularly in riparian areas. Maybe this is more a regulatory issue?

There is a wonderful opportunity for riparian planting to ensure water courses improve their resilience to increasing water temperatures driven by climate change. Again these riparian plantings can play an important role in improving biodiversity.

Riparian woodlands need to also be large enough to maximise their environmental benefits and long term sustainability. Well-designed riparian woodlands should be incorporated into the large commercial schemes including the replanting schemes and not only the new planting schemes.

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?:

At landscape scale areas where herbivore pressure is high fencing is required. Herbivore pressure is mainly from browsing by deer but also extensive livestock grazing. Fencing is one of the most significant costs incurred and currently the grant rates don't reflect the prescribed 80-85% intervention rate against current actual costs of £17.00-£23.00 depending on deer fence specification. This is particularly true in remote areas where transport costs are high and access difficult. Fencing costs are becoming prohibitively costly to make large schemes viable.

Where fencing is deemed necessary uplift for equivalent costs of deer fencing should be met through FGS.

Where it is viable to manage deer and herbivore pressure without fencing, FGS support should include support for reducing deer numbers in line with Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and Scottish government's Strategic Deer Management Group recommendations. Meeting recommendations to significantly reduce deer densities (to a maximum of 2/ha) will negate the need for deer fencing in areas assessed for regeneration. Stock control should be a mandatory co-measure and incorporated through support through AECS.

Small scale mixed land use?:

As above and in particular to ensure complementarity between AECS and FGS such that support to reduce deer and stock pressures on woodlands are aligned and balanced in terms of value for money, including for provision of fencing costs or other forms of long-term tree and woodland understory protection where needed.

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

Please add your comments here.:

Well prepared and thought through wider catchment scale woodlands should include considerations for water quality, environmental and climate adaptation benefits explicitly addressing issues where relevant such as;

- water quality
- flood mitigation through Natural Flood Management
- diffuse pollution (SEPA Priority Catchments)
- moderation of water flow down catchments
- erosion control
- reduction of water temperatures for cold, clean water to benefit salmonid spawning and survival
- Overall improvement to the riparian habitat to benefit biodiversity.
- Attention to the Wild Salmon Strategy Implementation Plan Actions 1.8 and 1.9

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:

Galloway Fisheries Trust

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