

## Response ID ANON-VEPG-2G4F-5

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry  
Submitted on 2023-05-12 08:45:36

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?

Not Answered

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

INPUT by [redacted] following email response received from this group.

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

Not Answered

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

### 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.:

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,

Not Answered

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

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.:

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?

Not Answered

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.

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.:

### 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?

Not Answered

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.:

## 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.:

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?:

Small scale mixed land use?:

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

Please add your comments here.:

RSFSS is the umbrella body for 17 volunteer groups dedicated to red squirrel conservation including grey squirrel control. These groups are spread across the region from Stranraer to Berwick and are positioned deliberately to cover the Priority Areas for Red Squirrel Conservation (PARCs, defined by Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels [SSRS, 2017]) and the FLS Red Squirrel Strongholds.

This response is from RSFSS alone, and is not the result of any discussion with SSRS staff.

The starting point for our review has been the information and guidance provided on the Rural Payments website (<https://www.ruralpayments.org/topics/all-schemes/forestry-grant-scheme/sustainable-management-of-forests/grey-squirrel-control/> [16/09/21]). We have also looked closely at the practical advice on trapping given in Controlling grey squirrels in forests and woodlands in the UK (UK Forestry Standard Technical Note [December 2019]), referred to as UKFS below.

### Eligibility

1. Currently, applications are only valid in South Scotland if the landholding concerned is within a PARC. We believe it would be advantageous to red squirrel conservation if this qualifying criterion could be relaxed in order to increase overall coverage in the landscape.
2. Local information on squirrel distribution and abundance could be used to justify FGS support for particular landholdings outside PARCs, for instance when there is evidence of a concentration of grey squirrels nearby which is therefore likely to undermine the effectiveness of control efforts by all contributors (including volunteers) on adjacent land within a PARC.
3. A simpler and more inclusive solution would be to surround all PARCs with a buffer (e.g. 10km wide) within which FGS applications would also be admissible. This would amount to extending all PARC boundaries except where they are contiguous.
4. A more radical option would be to ignore the PARCs altogether, thereby making all landholdings in South Scotland eligible for FGS support, subject to a substantial grey squirrel presence and the other criteria now in place. The cost implication of this option could be mitigated by reducing the rate of support per trap: it is set at just £50 p.a. per hectare in England.

5. The distributions of red and grey squirrels change continuously, so any adaptive adjustment of FGS eligibility requires continual scrutiny of the SSRS database. If PARCs are to be retained, there is a need for the regular revision of their boundaries (e.g. annually).
6. The total area to be trapped and the location of trapping sites (i.e. woodland land parcels [LPIDs]) are justified in FGS applications on the basis of all available evidence of grey squirrel abundance, derived from sightings and control records for the landholding concerned and similar information for the immediate neighbourhood. Experienced volunteers could certainly give informal advice to landowners on where to trap when opportunities arise. But to be comprehensive and systematic we believe that this process also requires experienced professional input, to ensure that FGS support is allocated in a cost-effective manner.

#### Take-up

7. The current distribution of FGS support is patchy within and between PARCs (<https://scottishforestry.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=0d6125cfe892439ab0e5d0b74d9acc18>).
8. Landscape scale action is advocated via cooperation between neighbouring landowners (UKFS, p2, Col2). It is important to recognise volunteer effort on land not receiving FGS support when considering the extent of control activity in a locality. Scaling up in this way may allow adjacent landowners to jointly contract a full-time trapper for the key spring and summer months (e.g. March-July).
9. Increasing the scale of action can be greatly facilitated through constructive advocacy by people with local connections and knowledge (i.e. SSRS staff and volunteers). But it is unrealistic to expect volunteers alone to provide this catalysis, even if training is provided. We believe that the continuing provision of complimentary professional support is crucial to the realisation of coordinated control over large areas in multiple ownership.

#### Implementation

10. There is a presumption that the number of traps allocated to each woodland LPID within a property is fixed, although unproductive traps can be moved to new positions within an LPID (UKFS, p15, col2). Given that individual LPIDs can be small and FGS support is for up to five years, it would increase the efficiency of control if trapping could cease in LPIDs apparently lacking grey squirrels, allowing traps to be redeployed to other LPIDs still holding them. At present, we have been given to understand that up to 10% of the traps on a landholding can be redeployed to either LPIDs or policy woodlands not identified in the FGS application. More flexibility of this sort (e.g. all traps being potentially mobile) is likely to further increase trapping success through fully exploiting the knowledge and experience of local trappers. This would require more record-keeping, but to good effect overall.
11. The advice to set single catch traps only on the ground where red squirrels or pine martens are present (UKFS, p7, col1) is problematic. We find that it is almost always better to fix traps to standing tree trunks (UKFS p8, col2 & p9, col1). This reduces the false triggering of traps by badgers, foxes and deer, reduces bycatch and mitigates the severe stress caused by close encounters with these species for trapped squirrels.
12. Traps, and feeding hoppers used when shooting squirrels (UKFS p15, col1), are recognised as potential focal points for squirrelpox virus transmission, but disinfection with a viricide is only mentioned briefly (UKFS, p5, col2; p14, col1). Detailed guidance on this and other matters are available from SSRS: Use of Virkon for disinfecting traps (Oct 2019), Standard Requirements for grey squirrel control (Feb 2022). We request that these documents are routinely provided to successful applicants for FGS funds.
13. We firmly believe that a regular regime of site visits on behalf of FGS for grey squirrel control programmes would be both encouraging and beneficial for landowners.
14. We stress that the annual submission of all trapping results (i.e. FGS and other), and their prompt upload into the SSRS database is essential if the overall impact of FGS support for grey squirrel control, alongside the action of volunteers and others, is to be monitored effectively to guide future action.

#### About you

What is your name?

Name:

[redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:

[redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Red Squirrel Forum for South Scotland (RSFSS)

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

Publish response only (without 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