

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.:

It is healthy that forestry should sit alongside other supported activities in the landed sector. If forestry and farming are to be more closely integrated it is right that the same platform should be used for administration and support functions.

Forestry schemes should continue to be administered as discrete packages within the overall framework.

The FGS is a fit for purpose scheme which should be developed and built upon.

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 sometimes appears to be an administrative "Chinese Wall" between SGRPID and Scottish Forestry. The updating of contract information on the RPID system should be done on a continual basis and well in advance of the May administrative deadline.

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.:

The market driven growing of short rotation spruce could be balanced by incentives to put some suitable land into long rotation crops like oak. The establishment of oak in a mixture (e.g. softwood nurse crop) would also create diversity in the age structure and leave unharvested trees for long term management. A range of rotation lengths in the forest environment would enhance biodiversity, maintain shelter and improve landscapes.

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.:

Not sure about this: I am conflicted because the influx of private capital is inflating land values and driving land use and social change. The change of use will be beneficial in the context of increasing forest area, but are these investors interested in environmental enhancement or are they gaming the grant system, claiming carbon credits, and selling these to industry as a "license to pollute"? Bluntly, it's a money making scam. Expanding our forests as carbon sinks to absorb some of the GHGs thus far spilled into the atmosphere is a public good, but the case for permitting further atmospheric pollution to take place on the basis that the landed sector will clean it up is weak and should be challenged.

On balance I am answering "no" to this question.

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.:

Existing levels of grant are adequate without being over-generous. Offering enhanced rates will simply increase the "gaming of the system" by forestry companies and investment managers.

To deliver long term public goods and well grown timber, the FGS should carry obligations to carry out certain management operations during the lifetime of the crop.

We are already used to claiming management payments during the first five years of the rotation. These payments are helpful where managers are using the funding to support woodland management activity, while less scrupulous investment managers account for the management stream as capital.

To ensure that woodlands are being well managed during their establishment years why not consider making final capital payments at years ten and twenty.

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?:

Scotland has many areas of woodland that have been poorly managed and as a consequence have fallen victim to windthrow. This is especially so in the small/ farm woodland sector where timely intervention has not taken place. How could the grant scheme incentivise intervention?

Continuing with the point made in the previous question, if part of the capital grant (or maintenance) payment is withheld until year 20, this would only be released if certain management work had been carried out. To make this work the initial contract would have to contain clauses relating to target stocking densities and species mix at key dates. Forest Scotland would have to have an increased presence on the ground carrying out audits. There would be scope for disputes and problems would be created when land parcels were transferred to new owners.

Planting mixed species should also be encouraged where appropriate: to improve resilience to pests, and also to provide nurse crops to species that can be retained in the long term (see Q3).

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, Clearer guidance on grant options, Flexibility within options, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

Planning, navigation of the grant scheme, selection of options, finding contractors, making grant claims are all obstacles to aspirant woodland managers.

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.:

Fencing is a burden in the small woodland sector. Additional funding for this item would help some schemes to become viable. High value crops should be planted in return for any additional support, and management obligations should be put in place.

Enhanced management payments might also be helpful, incentivising land owners to carry out early years intervention. There would have to be a monitoring process to ensure that the work was actually done.

To ensure that public money is being well spent there must be positive outcomes. As this sector includes individuals with little forestry expertise it would be appropriate to use mentors, or have additional woodland officers who were allowed to offer advice as well as "policing" schemes.

The piloting of an "undermanaged woods scheme" would help some small landowners to intervene in unmanaged woodlands. Provision of management advice and assistance to find contractors and routes to market for low value timber could be considered.

A "long term woods scheme" could be considered. This would encourage small landowners and farmers to plant and manage long term rotations including oak. The move away from short term crops of spruce would enhance landscapes and avoid the cycle of rapid growth, insufficient intervention, poor form, early windthrow, worthless crops. Owners could be incentivised to plant long term mixtures within the existing FGS. Again management payments and audits would be required to control the process.

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.:

Provide an incentive to owners of adjoining properties to collaborate in proposals which would make changes at a landscape scale. For example joint schemes could be fenced more economically, but co-operation is more likely to involve deer control.

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?:

Where landowners have the capability to control deer they should be incentivised to do this as an alternative to fencing. This already works on some properties. By supporting the costs of carrying out deer control, the cost of fencing is being avoided.

Small scale mixed land use?:

This is a more intractable problem, because a small number of roe deer can do immense damage, while small scale woods are also expensive to fence. A collaborative scheme to consider at a local level would be a roe deer control programme, which would be facilitated by Scottish Forestry and would employ skilled contractors to carry out regular patrols of woodland and culling of deer. Landowners would subscribe. The likelihood of damage to high value crops (e.g. oak) would continue to be high. Therefore a combination of fencing for high value and not fencing for less palatable species might be the end result.

The forest estate already employs rangers to control deer. Landowners living adjacent to the forest estate could be invited to subscribe to a control service. Pilot schemes could be set up where easy wins could be achieved using existing resources.

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