

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.:

Grant support for forestry should continue to be improved. However, it should not necessarily be a discrete scheme. An integrated package of funding would produce better results, particularly integrated with other land uses such as farming, crofting, and peatland restoration. Integration with other land uses and land management schemes will help avoid siloed management. In addition, all forestry should be multi-beneficial, fit into 30x30 protection goals, focus on nature recovery, and prioritize habitat connectivity. Furthermore, productivity should be reimagined to include the ecosystem services forests provide to society.

Given that Scotland produces as much timber as it consumes, and high timber and carbon prices are driving commercial afforestation, public funding is less necessary, and therefore, grant support for forestry should focus on improving public benefits for nature and people, and climate adaptation and resilience.

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.:

Forestry and farming should be integrated so that there is a mosaic of habitats rather than, for example, blanket afforestation of the uplands and wide-scale conversion of hill farming land.

Changes should provide both capital payments and ongoing support for both forestry and agricultural management so that they are treated more equitably and complement each other rather than contradict. For example, consideration of the appropriate level of stock grazing within native woodland must be considered in both forestry and agriculture grant schemes in order to support livestock but not to the detriment of native woodlands. If agricultural subsidies support extensive stock grazing, then any forestry funding to control deer would not be effective in securing natural regeneration, as the livestock will inhibit regeneration.

Changes should provide an income stream to farmers that want to invest in trees and woodland as part of their farming operation. This may include:

- Funding for low-density wood pasture and agroforestry activities, with the funding covering individual tree protections as well.
- Woodland creation for biodiversity on marginal land.
- Funding for very small-scale planting, including hedgerow trees, as these provide multiple benefits, including biodiversity and landscape interests, as well as shelter and shade for livestock, which will become ever more necessary as climate change continues.
- Increased support for natural colonisation and native regeneration to achieve a significant proportion of our woodland expansion aims for the future.
- Increased funding support for forest-to-bog restoration.

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 goal should be integration of woodlands into the wider mosaic of habitats so that the landscape is resilient in the face of climate change.

In the south of Scotland, the focus should be on forest management rather than forest expansion, as afforestation has changed the land use over the last century to high levels of forest cover - more than in other parts of Scotland. This will benefit nature and improve climate adaptation in resilient landscapes, as well as promote carbon sequestration. Native woodlands and diverse productive woodlands provide the best blend of these benefits.

In addition:

- Plant a range of species, in the right places. There should be no conversion of peatland or heather moorlands.
- Grow larger, older trees. Grow higher quality trees for uses that continue to sequester carbon (home and furniture construction), rather than being burned (firewood, biomass), which releases the stored carbon.
- Put a greater focus on soil health, hydrology, and water quality when considering afforestation and forest management.

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.:

Private investment through natural capital and carbon schemes should make a valuable contribution for nature, climate, and people, not just climate change. There is a significant opportunity for the FGS to combine private and governmental financing to promote more ecologically coherent woodlands. However, when the contribution to climate change is evaluated, it must include climate adaptation/resilience as well as climate mitigation. Near monocultures of non-native tree species only consider one aspect, and therefore, should not be supported, as these types of forests do not provide resilience to future risks due to climate change.

Furthermore, the grant support mechanism appears to already have sufficient flexibility to maximise the opportunities to blend private and public finance to support woodland creation. Land sale prices are already being driven by carbon prices.

In addition, private investors (especially those not traditionally engaged in forestry) must be given clear signals about what kind of forestry society wants to see – and where. Defining the program with “shoulds” for developers and investors is not going to give us the results we need, and legislation may be needed. We need to build on past approaches (Forestry and Woodland Strategies) and move towards integrated Land Use Frameworks to guide all parties and particularly such investment decisions. Using the already-established governmental frameworks provided by the Land Use Partnerships/Frameworks and opportunity mapping developed for Nature Networks that NPF4 mandates Planning Authorities to create would also support the coordination and scaling up of projects that is needed.

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.:

In general, we believe the current funding package should be improved by focusing public finance on public goods rather than subsidising businesses looking to maximise revenue through timber production.

More specifically:

- Incentivize maintenance and management of woodlands. Provide on-going payments, such as for agriculture, for activities in addition to deer management. Management funding should last for longer than five years. Enforce compliance with management requirements.
- Felling licenses should not be allowed unless the rest of the forest is being managed well, e.g., open space, native broadleaf components.
- More funding, rules, and monitoring of ongoing management of woodlands (e.g., thinning, selective felling) to achieve better quality woodlands and forests. The goal should be more akin to a natural woodland ecosystem, with continuous cover wherever practicable.
- More requirements to plant diverse forests, which are not separated into blocks of different types of trees but intermingled. No areas of monocrops.
- Don't make it mandatory to replant after harvesting.

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?:

Trees affected by pests, diseases, and abiotic factors such as drought, windthrow and wildfire (all of which are being exacerbated by climate change), provide reduced public benefits. To ensure long-term climate mitigation, biodiversity habitat, domestic timber supply, flood alleviation, and health and wellbeing, woodland creation and commercial afforestation must build in greater diversity (genetic variability, species, age, structure, and silvicultural system) for better resilience. Existing woodlands should be managed to become more resilient over time.

One suggestion is for a 'resilience supplement' that is included within all options for woodland expansion and management. This would ensure that all grant-supported forestry has greater species diversity than a maximum for any single species at 65%. An additional approach would be premium payments for riparian woodland, which are critical for climate change mitigation and resilience.

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, Intervention level, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

Regional variation

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.:

The Forestry Grant Scheme application process is onerous for small projects and can require almost as much input as for a larger scheme. Most individuals are unable to apply without the help of a professional forestry agent, yet agent costs for small schemes are disproportionately high. The introduction of a modest 'planning grant' for small schemes (say 0.25-5ha) would help to overcome this barrier.

Alternatively, an application process for small schemes could be developed whereby individuals make their own applications. This could include a one form, one guidance document application rather than separate applications for woodland creation and woodland improvement options. A reduced burden of supporting evidence and access to low-cost mapping would also be helpful.

Additionally, investment in third sector organizations to help small-scale woodland owners to better manage their woodland holdings would be helpful. Support for Forestry and Land Scotland in doing this as well would be beneficial.

The grant process should not involve more bureaucracy for planting mixed woodland than for planting monoculture.

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.:

Woodlands close to where people live are often important places for the communities to enjoy leisure, recreation, and exercise as well as being used as settings for educational activities. Since land managers have a statutory duty to respect access rights under s.3 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, we would expect a recognition of public access as an element of any plans for woodland creation or replanting projects.

Access in woodlands should be referenced in forestry grant applications by the inclusion of an accompanying access statement and/or map. This access statement/map would ensure that public access is considered strategically, addressing paths, with alternatives during forestry operations, car parks, signage, and gates (particularly self-closing gates rather than stiles in order to be as inclusive as possible).

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.:

Similar to the response to Question 9, forests and woodlands provide multiple benefits. People in rural communities rely on woodlands for mental and physical health. It would be beneficial, as a starting point, if all forestry grant plans included a basic assessment of what public access already exists, or will be affected, by production of an accompanying map of main tracks and routes, fences, gates, and stiles. An accompanying access management plan addressing what would be retained and/or enhanced and expanded would be important. This plan could provide a strategic approach to how communities can access and enjoy the woodlands safely, including car parking areas, signage, etc.

Even in forests and woodlands where there is unlikely to be high levels of use by the public, consideration of public access would identify key routes for passage. In this case, self-closing gates could be installed alongside any gates on the main tracks, as stiles are a barrier for cyclists, horse riders, dogs and many walkers.

Investing in third sector organizations to help small-scale woodland owners to better manage their woodland holdings for public access would also be beneficial.

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.:

Greater opportunities for communities include:

- More proactive consultation and engagement on forestry proposals. Those proposing should be required to demonstrate this.
- More discussion at a strategic level about what scale, cumulative impact and nature of forestry expansion and operations is acceptable is needed.
- Continue supporting community trusts to do work on FLS land converting to native woodlands.

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.:

The decision-making process is very opaque, with information on the process very poorly shared with the public. There is no equivalent of a planning application handling report shared on-line, for example. It is not clear what criteria are used to assess proposals. For example, it is not clear how issues such as afforestation, peatland restoration, and other nature recovery actions are weighed.

There seems to be limited opportunity for public engagement and community comment, with no statutory process for public comment. More proactive

consultation and engagement on forestry proposals is needed. Those proposing projects should be required to demonstrate community engagement in the project development process.

It's more important to get the right decisions than a quick one – trees live a long time! Having strategic discussions and planning about the acceptable scale and nature of forestry expansion and operation will avoid getting too bogged down with individual applications.

Make Habitat Regulations Appraisals, which are required when projects are likely to affect European sites, available online as they are currently difficult to obtain, and often require a freedom of information request.

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.:

More training within the woodland and forestry sector is needed, especially in the south of Scotland. Training in native broadleaf forest management for woodland managers at Scottish Forestry is needed.

The necessity to manage deer for environmental and community benefits means there will be a demand for skills and capacity in deer management beyond what is currently available. This demand is likely to be sustained in time because as habitats recover, conditions for deer will improve and the need for sustained deer management will increase in order to maintain biodiversity gains. The FGS could facilitate the training of stalkers. It could attach conditions to grants that favour open access to land for trained stalkers to cull and sell the venison and it could also finance the training of new deer stalkers using savings made by prioritising natural regeneration and colonisation grants over more expensive planting and fencing options.

As a complement to increased stalking by an enlarged stalking community, the FGS could also help to build long-term sustainability for hunting operations by increasing support for training in venison processing skills in small local facilities, including new deer larders. This could support shorter supply chains that end in local markets so that a greater share of national revenue from venison sales stays in local communities.

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.:

Future FGS support must address biodiversity loss in Scotland through the expansion of native woodlands using a right place first approach in which places with existing high carbon value, high conservation value, and highly productive farmland are avoided (except for the integration of agroforestry in the latter).

In addition:

- Decision-making must be based on cumulative impact.
- Need to allow for regional differences.
- Felling licenses should be conditional on other elements of landscape being managed to certain standards, including providing community access.
- Commercial forestry must provide a more diverse suite of species than they currently do in order to offer greater resilience.
- Reconsider the planting density of native woodland. Density requirements are currently too dense for native woodlands, even considering success rates.
- All land use, including forestry, should be multi-benefit, providing public good, but with participative mechanisms to help decide what mix of benefits is desired and where.

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?:

Better deer management across Scotland would result in reduced impacts on existing woodlands and would enable natural colonisation on a greater scale. One approach to ensure this would be to require a Herbivore Management Plan, which could be funded by the grant. Such a plan should outline the known deer species, densities and issues across both the applicant's ground and neighbouring ground. Plans should consider the practicalities of implementing both deer and livestock management to deliver and maintain herbivore impact levels over the long term that will achieve the nature restoration goals set for each grant-supported project.

Ongoing herbivore management payments have a part to play here, although the costs could be contained by encouraging better development of markets and processing chains for venison and other by-products of herbivore management.

Small scale mixed land use?:

A similar approach as the landscape scale, with development of Herbivore Management Plans, would be appropriate at a small scale too.

Grants for deer fencing should be used judiciously, in a supporting role to landscape-scale deer management. Payments for fencing to support woodland creation should remain available as we transition to a landscape with significantly lower browsing pressure, but it is not a sustainable solution to habitat restoration. We recommend that consideration is given to assessing the role that offset electric wires in front of stock fences could play in some situations and that this is eligible for grant support where suitable.

In addition, protection of small remnants of native woodland is important where priority for restoration is denoted by: designation as a SSSI or SAC; inclusion on the Caledonian Pinewood Inventory or the Ancient Woodland Inventory; native montane woodlands.

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

Please add your comments here.:

To many people, the term 'forestry' denotes monoculture commercial plantation approaches. A more inclusive name for this grant scheme would be helpful, such as the Woodlands and Forestry Grant Scheme.

We would also like to reiterate that given that Scotland produces as much timber as it consumes, and high timber and carbon prices are driving commercial afforestation, public funding is less necessary, and therefore, grant support for forestry should focus on improving public benefits for nature and people, and climate adaptation and resilience.

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:
Galloway and Southern Ayrshire UNESCO Biosphere

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

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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?

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

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