

Response ID ANON-VEPG-2GNY-J

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-05-15 15:17:26

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 sure

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's responses and wish to expand on the John Muir Trust's perspective to question 16.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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 sure

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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?:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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?:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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 sure

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

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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.:

We support Scottish Environment LINK's response.

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?:

We completely agree that herbivore damage from high deer populations have a significant impact on biodiversity loss and restrict regeneration.

We further argue that mitigating impacts from deer damage using fencing and individual tree protection systems are both inefficient uses of taxpayer money and deliver sub-optimal biodiversity benefits. Instead, we propose that the Forestry Grant Scheme shifts emphasis of public funding away from grants for fencing towards grants for deer population reduction and control measures which would allow natural regeneration to occur across whole landscapes.

Reducing deer population to allow for natural regeneration and colonisation is a tried and tested model in Scotland. Examples include Mar Lodge, Creag Meagaidh, Glenfeshie and Abernethy. The John Muir Trust advocates for this approach to be generalised via the Forestry Grant Scheme.

Data from Scottish Forestry demonstrates that grants for planting conifer or native broadleaf plantations – which need to be fenced off and protected from deer damage in their early years – are much more expensive forms of woodland plantation compared to natural regeneration, which would require much lower deer densities to operate at a landscape scale.

Indeed, in 2021, Natural Regeneration applications cost £443/ha and represented just over 6% of the total area of woodland funded through the Forestry Grant Scheme. Conifer applications represented 51% of total area while native broadleaf applications represented 13%. Conifer plantations were ten times more expensive per hectare than natural regeneration and broadleaf plantations were twelve times more expensive.

If all applications in 2021 were for natural regeneration, the total grant cost would have been approximately £22.6 million instead of £227 million.

Funding natural regeneration wouldn't just allow for larger areas to be wooded for the same amount of public funding. It would also create healthier environments at a landscape scale by avoiding the artificial parcelling of the land caused by fencing, instead focusing on financing the necessary deer population reduction and control.

Fencing prohibits the development of key habitats that transition between woodland and open land. It also restricts the movement of animals, including deer, which at appropriate levels help woodland regenerate. For example, their trampling provides small areas where direct contact between seeds and the soil occurs, increasing germination rates. Finally, because deer are woodland inhabitants, their welfare is improved when they have access to woods for shelter and food.

Furthermore, woodland which has naturally regenerated and colonised is more resistant to climate change. The Woodland Trust cites scientific research that demonstrates how naturally regenerated trees adapt to their local environment, surviving better than planted trees. Descendants of naturally regenerated trees carry and refine this adaptation further, making woodlands more resilient to climate change, pests and diseases. These natural landscapes are home to more diverse species, which benefits wildlife. Continuous cover forest management for naturally regenerated woodland delivers additional benefits such as improved water quality and reduced downstream flood risk.

Moreover, a Forestry Grant Scheme that shifts support towards deer management and natural regeneration would be in line with the principles of 'public money for public good' as well as the revised Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement. This Statement includes the expectation that land holders act as stewards of Scotland's land. This must include managing the land for wider public benefit. With unsustainable numbers of deer in Scotland undermining the Government's nature recovery, biodiversity and climate targets, the Forestry Grant Scheme can encourage landowners to manage the land for wider benefit by creating new grant payments for deer management reduction and natural regeneration. Payments for deer fencing, by contrast, merely push and indeed concentrate the problem elsewhere.

Finally, the grant scheme could support rural economies by increasing demand for deer stalkers, creating new supply lines for local food suppliers and markets to sell venison (high quality, low carbon meat).

According to a report commissioned by the ADMG, the number of paid FTE jobs decreased between 2006 and 2016, from 966 to 722. Meanwhile, deer populations increased from 586,000-669,000 in 2007 to 750,000-1,000,000 in 2020. Bringing deer population back to sustainable levels and maintaining that level would require more paid professional stalkers, therefore increasing paid employment in the industry.

In addition to creating more paid jobs, maintaining sustainable deer populations would provide an opportunity to open stalking to the local community. Other countries living with deer offer opportunities for the locals to actively take part in stalking. Thanks to savings from the move away from artificial, protected plantations towards more efficient natural regeneration, government could support the industry to develop training programs designed to bring in a wider section of local communities into stalking.

To ensure the grant's success, the Forestry Grant Scheme should consider requesting maximum deer densities be achieved on land covered by the grant, with regular reports for tree seedling monitoring. These densities could vary depending on the type of land covered by the grant. The intended outcome of establishing a maximum deer density would be to ensure optimal tree growth via natural regeneration and colonisation.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Because deer move across large areas, it follows that landscape-scale measures (or lack of measures) impact small scale landholdings. Deer management is most effective when measures target a population's whole range. Isolated attempts to exclude deer from smaller areas (for example via fencing) can only have a smaller impact, while displacing the issue elsewhere.

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

Please add your comments here.:

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:

John Muir 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