

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?

Not sure

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There should be greater integration between forest, agricultural and biodiversity schemes ie all Scottish Government funded land schemes. They should be seamless for example riparian woodland or more open woodland that does not destroy the existing sward on permanent pasture with already high levels of soil carbon may be grazed as tree growth permits, bringing greater value for biodiversity and the farm business. If the grant support for forestry has to be improved and developed it should be looking at including practical options with an equal balance between farming and farm woodland/forestry interests.

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.:

See answer above -much greater integrated schemes for land managers so that farmers can take more control of the forestry and woodland management potential on their land. As noted later, the application process for woodlands up to 2ha in size should be made much simpler.

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.:

No planting on peatland and reduce the eligible minimum peat depth for new planting from 50cm to 10cm - and make sure this is properly assessed. Any land that is called muir or mire should not be planted. I have seen local grant scheme planting with cotton grasses throughout the site indicating this is a site that should not have been planted as lowland heath and bog mosaic.

2. Anyone who plants conifer species or native broadleaves and they seed onto peatland habitat must be liable for payment of seedling removal as the self seeding will dry and cause erosion and loss of carbon from the peatland habitat. This should be a condition of grant funding . Similarly, need to examine in more detail tree planting on areas where there is a mosaic of mineral and deeper peat soils.

3. We must undertake to support a much higher level of native woodland planting to create diverse woodlands which in some situations can also be managed for timber eg birch sawlogs. The focus on recent years on the creation of very large scale commercial forest areas, and although we need a home grown timber resource , much of the planting has a high %cover of Sitka spruce. This creates a much higher risk of disease and pest issues related to a monoculture . Plus there is little or no understorey and often planted with new grips cut straight downhill adding to the risk of flooding downstream. The % of broadleaves and other diverse conifer species for large scale woodland creation should be increased.

4. Tree shelters including vole guards of any plastic manufacture need to be removed and recycled before a final grant is paid. Vole guards should be compostable as difficult to remove and recycle and alternatives should be encouraged where tree guards are necessary.

5. Much more use natural regeneration as a tool to create new woodland areas which will be appropriate to site and lead to more natural woodland cover. We should be looking at long term plans as these woods can take 20 to 50 years to regenerate.

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.:

Use Woodland Carbon Code as this is a certified process.

However, riparian woodland creation for example is a higher cost activity but not necessarily achieving large net planting areas or therefore tCO2e units so support must be more targeted for this type of planting . Carbon schemes focus on C sequestration as a means of removing CO2 from the atmosphere but riparian woodland in particular deliver multiple benefits and, in the context of the climate emergency, offer great potential to help regulate river water temperatures and protect rivers from increases in water temperatures that are threatening the survival of salmon and other species. This should not be forgotten in the overall aim of increasing woodland cover. Allow the regen of riparian woods to be over many years and allow open scattered trees.

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.:

Increased support for capital costs for smaller scale woodlands. Create a simpler application process for woodlands up to about 2ha in size. Plus if integrating farming and forestry then can allow water margins to be fenced off to allow riparian areas to regenerate. I have seen old AECS water margin schemes after 20 or so years have an excellent range of native woodland cover with regenerating trees and scrub understorey.

Improve management grants for basic good forestry practice and make it eligible country wide so that small woodlands on farms can be appropriately managed at a scale to fit with the management required. Small woodlands can also be productive, it is not the reserve of commercial forestry. In addition, this could help maintain the diversity of woodland habitats and the associated plant, insect and bird species in existing woodlands. In addition, expansion of native, or old mixed woodland will have the fungal mycelium associations present which help the new trees flourish. Good management of our existing woodlands can retain C in the soils and sequester more C at the same time.

Encourage and support continuous cover forestry (CCF) to a greater degree. This was the aim of the national forestry programme some years ago, with restructuring woodlands for age class and species but overall the move seems to be to be back to clearfell regimes due to the demand for biomass. CCF is carried out by some larger estates and does have greater benefits for woodland habitats and associated species.

Support the use of willow setts cut locally for new woodland creation in the same way purchased planting stock is grant funded as this allows local species to be planted.

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?:

Diverse species planting, even for beating up. This is an absolute essential. CCF will mean a range of ages and species within a woodland which will help should a new pest affect a particular species or age group.

It is concerning that most current woodland creation is 70% Sitka spruce (SS) and should a pest come to the UK that affects SS the forestry industry will be at great risk. Approval for a woodland creation grant should be based on a maximum of 50-60% of a single species, unless where a particular native woodland NVC habitat is appropriate. This would mean raising the bar on diversity for the approval of large scale conifer based new planting

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

Are there others not listed above?:

What is intervention level ? Not explained

Make sure practical, straightforward guidance provided and integrate with farm and biodiversity schemes

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.:

As all comments above. Easier application process - for small scale woodland creation, good advice availability and right tree right place. Also support individual in field and hedgerow trees through a simpler application process as some producers may be happy to plant trees this way than fencing off specific areas.

Riparian woodlands, often small in area but costly to fence. Don't assess these and score for cost effectiveness along with the rest of the woodland applications. As noted above, these woodlands have a high public benefit and biodiversity scoring. Look to remove the 15m minimum width as currently stands for riparian woodland creation for native broadleaved woodland planting - permit funding for hand cut local willow setts and for natural regen. Integrate the forestry, biodiversity and agric schemes.

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.:

Rural communities already have access to woodlands through the existing Access Code.

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.:

Large forestry plantations could as part of grant conditions provide forest smallholdings for rural communities and individuals.

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.:

Are they not already open to all as this consultation is?

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.:

Make sure the planning documents for new schemes are in public domain, including consultations

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?:

I would need to see the statistics on how many businesses set up on back of the grants to date - please provide so we can answer this question.

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

see above

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.:

There are trainee positions but trainee does not necessarily get a full education in the broader principles of woodland management ie soils, woodland ecology, associated botany and wildlife. Plus how woodland can integrate with farming practices. Or an ability to assess the habitats where woodland is being proposed. A college course providing this background would be very beneficial - not just for trainees in forest companies and organisations, but also for farmers and other interested parties.

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.:

1. No downhill grips for any new planting, contour planting only.
2. No downhill mounding, contour mounding only.
3. More emphasis on natural regen, native and riparian woodlands
4. More emphasis on a site habitat assessment as part of the grant application process including soils, peat depths and grassland habitats and evidence presented for this. Some areas being planted may not require an EIA, but may include unimproved species diverse swards which once planted with conifers in particular, lose that plant diversity and the associated insect and bird species once the canopy closes, and a loss of soil carbon in addition, particularly where ploughing or mounding for ground preparation occurs. The loss of good acid grassland to forestry is rapidly increasing at present.

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?:

Keep culling deer and good monitoring is essential

Don't fund any planting schemes that will not reduce deer numbers to below 3-5 per sq km. This would save huge amounts on deer fencing as part of grants, which is not sustainable and not good for the environment or biodiversity.

Reducing deer numbers could help greatly with natural regeneration as a sustainable means of expanding woodland cover

Sheep and cattle can play a role in biodiversity through their grazing patterns and dung deposits for insects. Low stocking on hills in particular, in conjunction with low deer numbers, can result in the regeneration of pioneer species and open woodland without destroying the swards, resulting in an even higher benefit for biodiversity than planted schemes where stock are excluded

Small scale mixed land use?:

This is absolutely essential. A smaller holding can have a greater range of habitats on it compared with a large holding and also support small businesses. Try more of the forest farm approach on Scottish Forestry Land or where landowners wish to set up such enterprises

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

Please add your comments here.:

Riparian woodlands require more attention and funding opportunities as the higher associated costs often means they are not economic to carry out, but have a huge benefit for water quality, wildlife and in the landscape
The activity of whole farm purchase and planting needs to be looked at as this has huge implications for the remaining local population and landscape diversity, particularly. Whole farm or whole moorland planting will certainly lead to a loss in biodiversity and landscape value and the potential for any remaining public transport support and schools will go into decline.

Provide some funding for the cutting of willow whips from on or near the planting area - low cost and good source of local material. No protection needed. Some funding support will encourage this

Livestock and woodland. Low density planting with sheep grazing permitted is a winner as a habitat and for a farm business. The current sheep and tree scheme has too much focus on the tree element and spacing is too close. Move to a full silvo pastoral system. When trees are tall enough cattle can also benefit woodlands . This is where an integrated scheme of woodland, agriculture and biodiversity would be ideal.

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