

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-05-16 15:35:32

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.:

Whilst integration between agriculture, forestry and other land supports needs to be improved: forestry needs to have a discrete scheme within the land support package.

Forestry has a longer-term horizon for income than agriculture.

The 'rule of thumb' for forestry creation and management are different from those of other land uses.

Asking administrators to be experts in all types of land use will breed inefficiencies.

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.:

Natural capital, ecosystem services and public goods provided by the holding need to be assessed and payments linked to these.

Tenant farmers need to be allowed to create woodlands on their tenanted land for their own uses (firewood, shelter, long-term income diversification, etc.) without the land being taken back in-hand. The legislation that incentivises landowners/managers to take woodland creation out of the agricultural holding must be re-examined.

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.:

First, can we please acknowledge that any amount of forestry in Scotland will not tackle the climate emergency and will not achieve net zero?

Now that we understand the scale at which we are working then we need to look to a different horizon.

Scotland could have an enormous impact on the Global fight to prevent runaway climate change: by creating the legislation that will foster growth in this sector; prove that funding is available; and, showing that woodland creation is both a viable option for delivering multiple benefits and scalable. We need to create permissive legislation that forms the parameters for additional funding schemes, sources & mechanisms. It is the knowledge, skills and legislative framework grown in Scotland could be exported to other countries to support their actions.

Public funding is insufficient to achieve the change that we need - this is true at all scales: local, national, or international. However, public support and oversight is vital to legitimise the efforts undertaken by private individuals or organisations.

The support package must be related to the 'needs' of the community. If there is a flood receptor, then woodlands that increase infiltration should be encouraged. Long-term management plans for the woodlands should become an integral part of the woodland creation application with areas of long-term retention and continuous cover forestry required for carbon sequestration attempts. Delivery of support should be focused on smaller woodlands and diverse mixes as large commercial forestry applications are generally considered economical without grants.

We should be looking to deliver biodiversity enhancement through the forestry support package. Natural processes should be encouraged wherever possible and the natural capital gains should be our focus. We can have a measurable and significant improvement to natural capital through improved legislation, support and governance of forestry - rather than a nebulous impact on global CO2 budgets.

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.:

Public funding is insufficient.

Private funders wish to invest in woodland creation, peatland restoration and a number of other beneficial land use changes for a whole host of different reasons.

The role of private funding needs to be clarified - so it has to be included in the grant support mechanism.

Would it be possible to draw up legislation that describes a broad range of parameters which could be further refined through case-studies and precedent?

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.:

Large-scale productive conifer plantations should be self-funded with oversight and planning permission from Scottish Forestry along with other statutory consultation.

A land-use strategy should be drawn up which should be used to show a range of local ecosystem service / natural capital priorities and the options available on a land holding.

18,000 ha is a modest target: we should be delivering around 25 - 30,000 ha per annum (as per 1970's and 80's average).

Farm woodlands are key to delivering landscape scale land use change. The grant for fencing needs to be looked at immediately and then re-viewed every 3 years. Long, thin woodlands might not be good for achieving the woodland creation target: but they are often the best for natural capital impact.

Land managers, farmers, foresters and landowners need to be educated on what is eligible under the existing woodland grant schemes. Sycamore and birch at commercial spacing for firewood production is a fantastic alternative to more conifer blocks yet few people know that this is an option under the existing grants.

The old model of 70% SS is outdated. We need new options under FGS - notably a 50:50 mix of conifer and NB.

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?:

Public funds should not be supporting practices that leave the woodlands at risk of damage from extreme weather events, pests and disease.

Management plans should be submitted at the time of application for land use change.

Diverse species mixes should be encouraged - with more flexibility built into the system to allow for novel approaches to be trialled.

Scottish Forestry should work alongside nurseries to constantly improve and develop best practice.

Passporting of plant materials should be improved and made transparent.

Land prep should be focused on retaining water on site. Ponds, ditches, and constructed drainage features should have enough freeboard to reduce flood peaks downstream and allow for increased infiltration. Water quality and turbidity testing should become part of the oversight on the land holding.

SEPA, RPID, NatureScot, Scottish Water and many others should be better integrated with Scottish Forestry and the objectives shared across organisations, budgets, and staff. This is a national effort, and our oversight should not be siloed.

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?:

FENCING!

The actual cost of fencing is not reflected by the current support payments. If a 1km deer fence is needed the land holder will end up £10,000 out of pocket. This one economic impact will make most potential small farm woodlands into a non-starter.

Agricultural tenancy act and other legislation has produced a situation where landowners will not undertake woodland creation on a tenant farm without taking the land back in-hand. The restrictions and incentives at play should be re-examined considering this unforeseen dis-benefit to tenant farmers.

Scottish Forestry should engage with farmers at their events. Why haven't you attended the Royal Highland Show for the past few years? Would it not be beneficial to have your woodland advisors discuss matters with real farmers at their Continuing Professional Development events?

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 grant rates. Forestry and Land Scotland are felling a 'firebreak' of larch in the South of Scotland - all of this timber should be funnelled into the fencing material supply chain to try and bring down the prices.

'Woodlands for Water' needs to be re-looked at. The mechanisms used in the original iteration meant that sites which had a mediocre impact on both flooding AND diffuse pollution were favoured over sites that would have had a good impact on either flooding OR diffuse pollution. I understand that Scottish Forestry must provide value for money - but this is a poor use of additional funding mechanisms meant to encourage small woodlands with targeted impacts.

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.:

WIAT could be extended to smaller communities. Woodland near my town does not currently qualify for a WIAT but there would be considerable interest from local woodland owners to engage with public access: if funding were available.

Better funding of community organisations would also help! It is unrealistic to expect the Forestry Grant scheme to achieve all of this on its own.

What incentives are there to urban and peri-urban landowners (public or private) to increase woodland accessibility if they are misused or vandalized? How can the legitimate - but sometimes conflicting - activities of both land managers and the public be resolved?

What additional (possibly financial) incentives could be provided to the landowner to account for the public goods and services that they are delivering to the community? Could these have a marketable value? Who would oversee them?

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.:

The greatest opportunities for community land purchase and land reform are in and around existing communities.

Landscape scale delivery of natural capital projects will have a fostering effect on rural communities as it will provide different (and potentially greater) economic opportunities than the current land use models.

Afforestation of entire land holdings should only be permissible as a last resort. Forestry and farming have become antagonists instead of focusing on the synergies provided by woodland alongside agriculture.

Creating local markets for timber products would help rural economies and diversification within the workforce.

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 engagement of the community with the forestry management at different stages in the forestry cycle. Would it be possible for a community to express a desire to purchase a woodland for the standing timber value: so that they can maintain it as a mature woodland or practise CCF?

There should be support to increase value in the timber supply chain.

'Waste' timber products should be recognised as valuable feedstock for other ventures and those that maximise value and minimise CO2 production rewarded.

NFM, diffuse pollution mitigation and other natural capital or ecosystem service provision should be maximised.

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 legislative style should have both prescriptive and proscriptive elements.

The merit of an application would be determined by how many of the established public good benefits have been achieved whilst mitigating the detrimental impacts. This scoring would require establishment of effective metrics and the results published. Case studies would flesh out and refine the reporting with exemplars used to show best practice and those that fail to meet the minimum requirements having to undertake remedial actions or risk prosecution.

Effective woodland and rural land use management will require Scottish Forestry and other organisations (especially SEPA) to be willing to take those who are in direct contravention of legislation to court. The public must feel that there is proper oversight.

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?

Yes

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

More land can be brought under forestry management.

New sources of timber for the supply-chain.

Fencing requires timber products - so this will create an industrial ecology of timber providers and users.

Creation of jobs in woodland and wildlife management.

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

More value in the timber supply chain.

Greater number of rural land management roles.

Better career prospects for forestry jobs.

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.:

Properly fund small, diverse woodlands. These have varied management requirements needing more oversight and would be suitable for trainees.

Reduce the prevalence of large blocks of single-age, homogeneous blocks of conifer as this requires less intervention and fewer people on site.

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.:

The impact of current land use on natural capital and ecosystem services must be evaluated. Then the potential for woodland creation to provide environmental benefits assessed. Scotland needs a land use strategy to inform future decision making.

Small woodlands which will not necessarily be economically viable purely on the timber value: but which provide multiple environmental benefits should be the focus of the grant scheme.

Allowing for flexible funding and use of private funding mechanisms within the grant scheme would be of benefit: provided that forestry advisors are adequately funded to help with funding applications and delivery of woodland creation. Is the Farming Advisory Service an appropriate vehicle/model for this?

Novel or experimental approaches to woodland expansion / regeneration should not be discriminated against under future grant schemes. We should be using Scotland as a test-bench for new ways to manage the land.

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?:

Deer control will not be achieved on the scale needed until there is a substantial and viable market for venison. The focus should be on venison providing the highest quality, lean meat from local sources and its consumption having a benefit on the environment.

Is it appropriate for Scottish Forestry to subsidise deer control? What are the moral implications of this when other pest /vermin control measures have been prevented by Scottish Government legislation?

For the Estates that still run on a model where deer stalking is a key part of the business: how will Scottish Forestry compensate for loss of income and jobs on those estates when they are paying nearby forestry owners to cull stags out of season?

Of course we should have an objective to manage deer populations at a scale where they do not have a severe impact on woodland species - but this will be a long-term plan. Scotland needs much greater coverage of (semi-)mature woodland before we will be able to absorb the impacts of intermittent grazing. We can look for examples in Eastern Europe on how to proceed.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Again - we need a viable market for venison.

Deer fencing will have to remain an integral part of woodland creation grants for many years to come.

On a local scale it is only once there is sufficient established woodland will the deer grazing be spread out enough for natural regeneration to take place. During this transition period we will need to continue funding deer fencing.

Some capital grants could be made available for high-seats or other structures to safely control deer populations.

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

Please add your comments here.:

Both forestry and agriculture should be funded based on public service provision.

The public purse subsidising food and fibre provision is ridiculous when there are well-established markets for those provisioning services. The public purse should be supporting other ecosystem services providing the natural capital. To effectively manage this, we need to establish metrics or indicators of performance against which the outcomes can be assessed. Scottish Forestry will not be able to do this alone - however they are an essential part of achieving this on a Scotland wide basis.

How do YOU intend to work together with your colleagues in other departments and organisations to create a working regulatory environment for rural Scotland?

About you

What is your name?

Name:

[Redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:

[Redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Individual

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

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