

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-02-22 12:32:29

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 funding has the potential to help realise all of the aspirations that we currently have for forests in Scotland but I don't believe it is currently delivering on several fronts.

2. Are there any changes that would allow for better complementarity between the forestry and agriculture funding options?

Not sure

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

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.:

As an ecologist, I'd say the main thing preventing our native forests from being able to adapt in the face of climate change is their inability to develop themselves. Almost all grant-funded schemes I've seen are very restrictive and don't allow a forest (I'm particularly referring to native forest here) to evolve. Fences; planting of an entire area rather than helping provide nature with the tools for recovery; and a lack of willingness to address the causes of poor forest cover & health, rather than addressing the symptoms, are all stopping Scotland's forests from truly getting better in an ecological sense.

The support package, when it comes to native forest creation, needs to be driven by ecological principles rather than commercial forestry principles. For example, a forester sees that we need more woodland so they plant trees and if the ground is unsuitable at current then they make it suitable by fencing and mounding. An ecological approach would see that we need more woodland so conditions are made suitable for woodland to establish naturally (enrichment planting, deer control, looking at more than just trees). Through a simplistic approach to native forest "creation" we are currently seeing native tree plantations all over Scotland where the rest of the ecosystem (other than the trees once they're past the stage of being browsed by deer) is largely ignored.

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.:

Why not? The only issue is that those private finance sources need to be made aware of what is truly good for ecosystems if they are funding native woodland "creation". Planting trees in serried ranks at a blanket density across a site where the planters quite often have little understanding of native tree ecology (the number of times I've seen alder planted on bog is ridiculous) is not going to produce good results for nature. Facilitating natural forest expansion from the nuclei of diversity that we still have left is the most effective way of ensuring that any new woodland is achieving the maximum diversity whilst also limiting negative impacts associated with unsympathetic reforestation techniques.

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.:

For native woodlands, a far, far, far greater understanding of what is already there is required to make an informed decision about what is appropriate. Many people would be surprised at just how many trees are actually present within many Scottish landscapes; one survey I carried out recently found 795 rowans with 630 of these being seedlings or saplings. 60% of rowans found showed high browsing levels that were inhibiting woodland expansion. The trees are there! The funding package needs to focus more on facilitation of expansion rather than imposing these native tree plantations on landscapes. More focus on deer control, alongside education as to why this is a far more beneficial approach, would be a great improvement and a huge step in the right direction for forest recovery in Scotland.

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?:

Facilitate native forests to change and adapt. It needs to be understood that our native tree plantations are not addressing the fact that current approaches are limited by area and species selection (as well as the low genetic variation of nursery-grown trees). At current they are all stuck where they are with no chance of migration due to the fact they can't regenerate and composition can't change on a given parcel of ground as other species can't colonise ground that may now be more suitable given the current climate. With this comes a lack of ability for all the other associated species to migrate; lichens, invertebrates, bryophytes, birds, mammals, amphibians, fungi, flowers... Everything is stuck in ecological stasis, and putting up a fence that works just long enough for some trees to get away does not allow ecosystem recovery 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, Flexibility within options, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

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.:

Landscape-scale deer control. If all large landowners were to keep deer at much lower levels, closer to levels at which forest regeneration can take place, then it would be far easier for smaller landholdings or smaller parcels of land to establish forest without all the associated costs of fencing, sourcing trees, planting trees, maintaining fencing, machinery costs, ground prep. Woodland would simply establish where allowed to do so. Further support may be necessary for deer control on smaller parcels of land which may require a better network of people with deer control qualifications and for farmers/crofters to have access to these people.

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.:

Not really my area of expertise.

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.:

Further education as to the potential for woodland to benefit the community and how they can go about achieving this.

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.:

More enforced engagement, and potentially the provision of a community advisor to help a community reap the benefits that can be reaped with the additional knowledge that may not be present within a given community.

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.:

Not my area of expertise.

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?:

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.:

Not my area of expertise.

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.:

More flexibility and more money funnelled towards existing woodland management. Currently it's very easy to find a dishevelled, dying native woodland right next to a recently erected fence with a native tree plantation within it. We haven't lost native tree plantations; we've lost functioning forest ecosystems and we are continuing to do so whilst money designated for native woodlands is ploughed into native tree plantations. A shift in policy away from establishing "new native woodlands" towards facilitating natural expansion of existing forest fragments would be hugely beneficial for biodiversity. This also means shifting away from focusing on the symptoms (lack of forest cover, lack of seed source, species-poor ground flora, loss of niches) to focusing on the cause (hyperherbivory by deer and, to a lesser extent, livestock).

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?:

Integration with deer management policy to help/encourage landowners/managers to achieve goals such as deer densities that permit native forest regeneration (and thereby ecosystem function, as peatlands, grasslands, montane and many other vegetation communities are also being impacted by high deer numbers). If it was possible to introduce an element of education then this could also help land managers realise the issues and why sticking up fences & planting trees is not going to address the cause. When I've had the opportunity to take land managers out and show them their own ground, they'll have often said something along the lines of "there's no trees regenerating so we need to plant" or "there aren't any deer in that fence", and it takes no time at all to disprove both of these statements. The trees are trying to regenerate but deer are still having high impacts.

Small scale mixed land use?:

The option to fund further deer control if this isn't already part of the scheme. Funding a full-time job within rural areas is something we need far more of, and the current approach of having people come in from somewhere else in the country, sticking up a fence & planting trees, then leaving, is not sustaining as many permanent livelihoods within rural areas as ongoing woodland management would.

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

Please add your comments here.:

[Redacted] It concerns me hugely that I am going to end up like my older colleagues who have been working in the same field for decades and haven't seen the 'deer problem' truly addressed in all their time of working in ecology. I don't want to see more native tree plantations whilst existing native forests fall apart and die with all the associated biodiversity lost. I want to see the facilitation of forest regeneration to the point where planting trees for native forest seems like a complete waste of time, because from what I've seen, it often is.

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 only (without 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