

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 Answered

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

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

Not Answered

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.:

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 Answered

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

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.:

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?

Not Answered

How can the grant scheme support this?:

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.

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.:

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.:

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.:

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.:

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.:

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.:

Mountain Woodland Action Group

FGS Review – submission for the support of a more specific mountain woodland grant option, including comments on the use of the low density woodland creation option and regeneration grant for the expansion and creation of mountain woodlands to address biodiversity loss.

Definition.

The MWAG use the term mountain woodland to refer to all tall woody growth above the timber line. In Scotland this means any woodland or scrub at altitudes over 300 – 400 m above sea level, where there is no other continuity of woodland habitat with lower altitude, tall woodland.

Treeline woodland is, generally, where trees no longer reach more than 2 -3 m in height but also where tall shrubs become more prevalent where herbivory allows, including all willows growing above 300 m, juniper, dwarf-birch and rock whitebeam. In Scotland, the native tree species that reach the altitudinal treeline are predominantly birch and pine but also can include more incidental species such as aspen, rowan, bird cherry, hazel and oak.

Aim.

We consider the aim of any grant option for mountain woodland to be essentially a contribution to climate change mitigation and biodiversity protection and enhancement. In practical terms it would be to develop a treeline woodland ecotone that functions as a complete habitat and consequently promotes:

- the safeguard of higher altitude biodiversity, e.g. species dependent on the shrub and tree species mentioned above (which includes a range of invertebrates and fungi) as well as those which tend to favour these habitats, including ring ouzel and black grouse;
- the health and protection of both mammalian wildlife and species important to the upland economy including hares, and ground nesting birds, as well as livestock.
- better management of precipitation in the hills, both in terms of the speed and quantity of run off and the quality of the water reaching burns and rivers. The presence of deciduous tree and shrub species creates more leaf litter and humus, which increases the water absorption capacity of the soil. This moisture retention may provide an improved resilience of upland soils to the current trend in drier periods over the summer months, while also reducing risks of down-stream flooding from more extreme weather events.
- the protection of steep slopes from soil erosion and natural hazards such as landslides and rockfalls
- an increase in canopy height at higher altitude also makes a significant contribution to maintaining lower ground temperatures and so slowing the impact of higher air temperatures.
- the creation of rich vegetation communities. Where management for mountain woodland is combined with a changed, reduced grazing level by, preferably wild herbivores, there is every chance that plant biodiversity would also benefit hugely with an increased presence of herbs and less common dwarf shrubs.

The benefits of mountain woodland restoration are outlined in more detail in this open access publication:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/rec.13701>

Grant needs

Essentially, there is a very limited presence of woodland and scrub habitats above 400 m asl in Scotland and as a result the needs of a grant for mountain woodland can be broken into several types, although it should be possible to combine all where conditions allow. The preparatory features we consider important are:

1. The funding for any scheme will provide the best value for money where it is specifically determined by the conditions on a particular site. As a result we consider a Forward plan to be fundamentally important. This should include a detailed survey of the ground where woodland expansion is proposed and any existing mountain woodland remnants nearby (particularly populations of rarer specialist montane species), along with a monitoring plan to explain how delivery will be demonstrated and measured.
2. An effective grant package would ideally cover the costs of prior survey, propagation, planting, grazing management and monitoring. Funding should acknowledge the increased time and effort required for working in and restoring high-altitude habitats.
3. Natural regeneration should always be the preferred method of expansion, where there is an existing seed source which is suitably vigorous, ie the presence of seedlings across the area and viable seed on trees and woody shrubs. Realistically this scenario will not be very common above 300 m, however this condition should hold when there is significant potential for regeneration and natural colonisation. Supplementary planting near to small, isolated mountain woodland fragments will also be important for facilitating the genetic rescue and regeneration of pre-existing populations, and for enabling wider connectivity between habitat patches.
4. Planting for treeline woodland should consist of site native species of relevant genotypes that are suitable for the soil and exposure conditions. There should be no specific restriction on the proportion of trees to shrubs. In many situations where soils are impoverished using eared-willow and other colonising, pioneer species will facilitate the later spread of other species once the soil conditions have become more suitable.
5. Ensuring that both the site conditions and the plants sources are suitable is particularly important to achieve success where there is a proposal to expand, or recreate specific montane specialist willows, juniper or dwarf birch.

Considerations of practical aspects of a mountain woodland grant include:

1. For any planting at higher altitude consideration should be given to using plants grown from seed collected from within 150 m altitude of the planting site (FR 20..). For any scheme utilising less common, montane-specific willows, or dwarf birch this generally means plants being grown specifically for a scheme. Such work requires a lead-in time of at least 3 years, to collect and then propagate material, while for juniper this time-scale extends to 4 – 5 years. Genetic diversity should be maximised by collecting cuttings and/or seed from enough individual plants to enable a viable population in the long-term. As all the willows and juniper are dioecious plants there is a need to ensure that planting includes near equal distribution of male and female plants, with any bias towards females.
2. Ideally, for the best ecosystem development, the establishment any treeline woodland regeneration or planting scheme should be achieved through a reduction in grazing pressure, rather than fencing. In order for this to be practical for many land managers a deer management element to the grant would be required.
3. There are situations where it would be extremely difficult if not impossible to establish aspects of mountain woodland in the absence of protection, particularly for highly palatable, low growing shrubs e.g. willows. We also recognise that it is not always possible to fully control herbivore numbers at higher altitudes where there are a range of land use objectives, either within a single holding or across neighbouring ground. Ideally there would be a range of protection options to allow for site specific conditions, e.g. individual protection, group protection, or larger fenced areas.
4. In situations where there is a likelihood of regeneration being successful there is a need for the site conditions to determine the length of time any protection is required. In cases where there is a diverse, herb-rich ground flora present it is important that exclusion of herbivores is restricted to only as long as it takes young trees/shrubs to establish and become herbivore tolerant. This may be as little as 5 years but needs to be decided on a site by site basis.
5. Stocking density is very unpredictable at higher altitude due to the increased stress on, particularly planted, young trees/shrubs. Mountain woodland typically forms as a mosaic with other habitat types and so the potential stocking density can vary considerably depending on scale and may thus become difficult to define (for example when high density groups of trees are thinly scattered over a large area).
6. Conditioning plants prior to planting should be a requirement of the propagation process. This aspect relates to how and when funding for a scheme is forthcoming, and how the capital costs of a scheme can be balanced against the final density that is achieved.
7. Regarding no. 4 (above) there is also a need to redefine what is an established tree/shrub. Height is not a good measure of establishment at higher altitude and other criteria need to be used, such as overall plant volume, or evidence of flowering.

Recommendations of changes to the existing FGS native low-density option:

1. A minimum stocking density of 400 stems per ha
2. Increasing the % of native woody shrubs allowable in woodland and scrub at higher altitudes
3. Decreasing the minimum block size to 0.05 ha, but also increasing the maximum area where this can be used as a stand-alone option
4. Introduction of a deer management payment, with landscape-scale grazing management an option rather than the obligate requirement for fencing
5. Grant for set-up of seed orchards/vegetative propagation collections
6. Bio-security measures to limit the chances of introducing *Phytophthora austrocedri* on juniper; *Dothistroma* needle blight on Scots pine and rusts on willows.

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?:

As mentioned in response to Q15: Introduction of a deer management payment, with landscape-scale grazing management an option rather than the obligate requirement for fencing

Small scale mixed land use?:

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

Please add your comments here.:

The Mountain Woodland Action Group was established in 1996. The group plays a central role in promoting the delivery of abundant and self-perpetuating mountain woodland, creating an attractive and biodiverse link between forests and open mountain vegetation. Our advocacy inspires communities and the wider public to value and utilise this resource, whether directly or through the wider landscape benefits that it provides. Members have been individuals with interest, knowledge and experience of treeline or montane scrub, usually supported by their employing organisations (including major conservation NGOs). The MWAG would be keen to work with Scottish Forestry on the development of a bespoke grant for mountain woodland and treeline habitats.

About you

What is your name?

Name:

Sarah Watts (on behalf of the Mountain Woodland Action Group)

What is your email address?

Email:

s.h.watts@stir.ac.uk

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Mountain Woodland Action Group

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