

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-05-16 16:56:57

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.:

The long-term nature of forestry activities, the pressing and recognised need to develop forests as one of the key measures for achieving net zero across the Scottish economy, plus the biodiversity and societal benefits provided by multifunctional forests are strong reasons for ensuring that grant support for forestry should remain a discrete scheme

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.:

This is a topic which would merit more detailed study than we have been able to provide. One area that seemingly could justify further consideration is the extent to which shelterbelt creation/renovation could be supported through a specific scheme which could enable livestock and other farmers to reduce energy inputs into land management.

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.:

The support package needs to be substantially reconfigured to reflect much international research and guidance on ways of enhancing forest resilience to climate change. Recent publications (e.g. Atkinson et al., 2022, <https://cdn.forestresearch.gov.uk/2022/05/UKFSPG026.pdf>) identify a number of measures which can be used to adapt forests to climate change, increase their resilience to the future climate, and therefore enhance the ability of the forest resource to help tackle the climate emergency. The measures listed include: 1) increasing species diversity, 2) fostering mixed species stands, 3) using a wide range of provenances, 4) encouraging natural regeneration and 5) diversifying stand structures. The question that needs to be confronted is whether the existing support package is helping to promote such measures.

Therefore, answering this question needs to take into account the fact that, at the current time, one conifer species (Sitka spruce) accounts for over 60 per cent of the conifer forest area in Scotland (Forestry Statistics, 2022) and an even higher proportion of the conifer timber resource which is the foundation of the Scottish forest economy. Both the spruce and other conifer forests are primarily composed of single species, even-aged stands which are mainly managed through clear felling and replanting silvicultural regimes. Such simple, single species forests are widely considered to be vulnerable both to natural disturbances consequent upon climate change (e.g. windblow, drought) and to a higher incidence of pests and diseases: therefore, their diversification is urgently needed (e.g. Messier et al, 2021, Conservation Letters. 2021;e12829).

In the light of this vulnerability to the climate emergency and comparative lack of resilience, it is not sufficient to state that 'FGS has been a tremendous success story' (Scottish Forestry Consultation Document on Future Grant Support for Forestry, p 7) without examining the type of woodlands that have been created and the forest management approaches that have been supported by the existing schemes. Thus, inspection of FGS statistics for November 2022, indicate that 50 per cent of approved woodland creation schemes are for the 'conifer option' in which Sitka spruce can be between 65 and 75 per cent of the total planted area. By contrast, approved schemes for the 'diverse conifer' and '(productive) broadleaves' options are much lower at seven and three per cent of the total respectively. The implication of such trends, if unchecked, is that the productive forest resource in Scotland will increasingly be reliant upon Sitka spruce, with all the risks that result from dependency upon a single species. The amount of new native woodland that has been created is indeed to be welcomed, but this does not lessen our concern about the failure to foster a more diverse and resilient productive forest estate. Similarly, inspection of data on approved management options indicate a much lower uptake of options that would help to diversify stand structures (i.e. involving 'LISS') than the 'restructuring regeneration' where replanting up to 75 per cent of a single species is acceptable. When one also takes into account the tendency for the supporting text for the Forestry Grant Scheme to be cautious about the use of mixtures (e.g. the 'conifer' creation option allows a maximum of 30 per cent mixture with Sitka spruce), the overall impression of the current grant scheme is that it does little to promote the necessary diversification of the productive forest resource in Scotland and increase its resilience to the inevitable impacts of climate change.

We would suggest that a revised support package could be developed by outlining the future species and structural composition for Scotland's productive forests for 2050(?) based upon the concept of Forest Development Types recently prepared by Forest Research (<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/forest-development-types/>) and compare that with that is likely to occur if present trends are continued. Then a suite of support package measures would be proposed with the aim of encouraging private foresters to shift their management to

embrace greater species diversity, greater use of mixtures and more use of alternative silvicultural approaches such as CCF. If necessary, undertake pilot exercises in major areas of productive forestry to see what measures are most successful.

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 accept that limits on available public sector funding mean that it may be difficult to meet the ambitious Scottish Government woodland creation targets. However, it is also apparent that private sector investors often prefer to invest in low risk projects with a reasonable certainty of outturn. In the productive forestry sector this is likely to mean a concentration upon establishing forests of single species stands where returns can be easily predicted. Arguably, these are precisely the type of forests that do not need to be created (see answer to question 3 above) if a more resilient forest resource is to be developed. These points have recently been explored in detail by Lofqvist et al (2023) <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-023-02037-5>. For these reasons, we suggest that involvement of private investors in funding woodland creation should be explored cautiously through the development of carefully constructed pilot projects where the desired outcome is diverse and species rich forests of a range of types.

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.:

It should be clear from the answer to question 3 that we are not convinced that the present funding package is doing enough to stimulate greater species and structural diversity within Scottish forests, especially within the productive forest resource. We would recommend the following:

1. The maximum percentage of a single species in all types should be reduced to at least 65 per cent, in line with the latest draft of UKFS;
2. There should be a resilience 'bonus' designed to reward foresters where the maximum percentage of a single species to be planted is substantially less than 65 per cent, perhaps below 45-50 per cent. This bonus probably needs to be at least twice the basic rate payable for a single species proportion conforming to UKFS.
3. There needs to be support for creating mixtures of species which conform to the framework outlined in the recent FR publication outlining Forest Development Types. Guidance on mixtures within existing SF publications needs to be strengthened and made more positive.
4. Similarly, there needs to be specific guidance promoting the use of Continuous Cover Forestry and funding to support this. We argue that the term LISS should be abandoned as outdated and CCF should be used to replace it. We have been told by those applying for the current LISS grants that they are not structured to support the flexibility of silvicultural management that is characteristic of a CCF approach and that the actual grant support is inadequate to meet the costs incurred in transformation from even-aged stands. We suggest that there would be benefit from spending more time trying to formulate the characteristics of a successful scheme promoting CCF with private forestry practitioners in Scotland and also to hold discussions with colleagues in Ireland who have developed pilot CCF schemes for use in very similar forest types (see <https://www.gov.ie/en/service/d54212-woodland-improvement-scheme/#what-the-continuous-cover-forestry-scheme-is>).
5. Since early thinning is critical to the long-term development of species and structural diversity in all forest types, there should be specific funding measures to support early thinning on all sites of low and medium windthrow risk. Non-thin regimes should only be accepted on the most exposed and highest windthrow risk sites.

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?:

Please see the answers to question 3-5 for some of our suggestions. In essence, grants should only be provided if the forest managers can show that the proposals in the plan meet the requirements for forest diversity outlined by Atkinson et al (2022). Thus one might expect an analysis of existing species diversity in a forest and the measures proposed to enhance diversity where this is lacking in the existing forest. We also consider that it is essential that greater attention is given to improving the quality of management of existing woodlands.

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

Are there others not listed above?:

Clearer evidence of the long-term benefits of good management of existing woodlands for farm enterprises. Establishing a network of site demonstrations of such benefits could be very helpful.

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.:

Fostering greater collaboration between owners of small woodlands so as to share establishment and management costs and enhance the owners' access to professional forestry advice and to harvesting machinery and markets.

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.:

No comment

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 development of a multifunctional approach to forest management by diversifying tree species and forest structure across the whole Scottish forest resource should result in a greater enhancement of the delivery of a wider range of ecosystem services apart from timber. The consequence could be to increase recreational and other uses of local forests which will result in greater visitor numbers and so benefit local communities.

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.:

No comment

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 feel that the current processes should be examined and adjusted in the light of the recent FPG report on this topic (<http://www.forestpolicygroup.org/blog/communities-experiences-of-new-forest-planting-applications-in-scotland-the-final-report/>).

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?:

With a limited budget, it may be that greater focus needs to be given to improving the quality of management of existing woodlands.

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

An effective grant scheme that concentrates on promoting diversification and resilience of the forest resource is likely to stimulate increased training needs and skills development on its own. Also, there needs to be greater recognition of the need for in-career training throughout the forestry sector. For example, the recent decision of the Swedish Forestry Authority to facilitate the transformation of 20 per cent forests to CCF has resulted in the recognition that there is a need to train forestry professionals in different ways of stand management (see Kruse et al, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tfp.2023.100391>)

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.:

See answers to 13 above

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.:

As outlined in previous answers (see 3 above), we consider that the present structure of FGS does not lay sufficient emphasis upon the diversification of Scottish forests, particularly in the productive forests where much existing support implicitly assumes the continuation of single species stands managed on short rotations through clear felling regimes as the default silvicultural approach. We believe that in future FGS should give a much greater emphasis to fostering the use of a wide range of silvicultural systems including CCF and that this will provide benefits to the provision of a wide range of ecosystem services including biodiversity. A number of recent studies have shown that use of CCF will benefit biodiversity in both productive and native woodlands in Britain (e.g. Calladine et al., 2016 FC Research Note 25 for birds; Alder et al., 2020 and 2023 for bats and ground vegetation respectively).

We suggest that SF could usefully consider the guidance that has been developed by the EU in support of the adoption of 'Closer-to-Nature Forestry' as a key feature of the new EU Forestry Strategy. The discussion papers prepared by the European Forest Institute on 'Closer-to- Nature Forestry' (<https://efi.int/publications-bank/closer-nature-forest-management>) and on 'Forest Biodiversity' (<https://efi.int/publications-bank/forest-biodiversity-europe>) should be examined and their recommendations adapted for use within any future FGS. There are regional guidelines being prepared for use within forests of the Atlantic region which should also be examined since there is useful information being provided based on the Irish experience.

It should also be noted that successful natural regeneration and expansion of native and other woodland types will be critically dependent upon a sustained reduction in the browsing pressure caused by deer and other ungulates.

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?:

This needs to be achieved in conjunction with and in support of actions taken by all statutory bodies including Nature Scot. The support mechanisms could be targeted to provide support for local actions and necessary infrastructure (e.g. enhanced provision of high seats) within the frame of a landscape level deer population reduction strategy. Provision of funding to provide training and qualifications to ensure deer control is undertaken by skilled personnel is also an area where support could be helpful. Support for improved monitoring methods such as remote sensing and the use of drone surveys could be supported to provide more objective data on population levels.

Small scale mixed land use?:

The success (or otherwise) of any support mechanisms at this scale are likely to be heavily influenced by actions taken at the landscape level. However, support for regular monitoring of deer populations and their browsing impacts in local woodlands could be helpful to inform managers of problems affecting their woodland management. Improved information on qualified deer stalkers operating in their area could also be helpful.

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

Please add your comments here.:

It should be clear from the above that we consider that the present structure and composition of Scotland's forests, especially in the productive conifer sector, is far from meeting the aspirations outlined in November 2022 in the Scottish Forestry paper on Resilient Forests (see <https://forestry.gov.scot/publications/about-scottish-forestry/structures/national-stakeholder-group/1451-national-forestry-stakeholder-group-discussion-paper-b>). We feel that it is essential that the in future FGS and its various support measures are designed so as to support the desired change to a more diverse and multifunctional forest resource. To achieve this end, SF might wish to develop a network of long-term demonstrations of the silvicultural approaches, deer management and other measures that could be used to achieve the desired transition. If considered, such a network needs to be located in private as well as in public forests, with individual examples being widely distributed across the country.

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:
Continuous Cover Forestry Group (CCFG)

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

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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?

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