

2022/23 Statement on Sustainable Economic Growth

Introduction

This is the fourth Statement on Sustainable Economic Growth since forestry became fully devolved to Scotland and Scottish Forestry became a new Scottish Government agency. Our role today involves helping Scottish Ministers develop forestry policy, supporting the sector and the regulation of forestry activities and builds on a century of excellence and professionalism under the auspices of the Forestry Commission.

Statement

The Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) is in its eighth year; with interest in planting new woodland continuing to increase.  During 2022-23, six hundred seventy grant applications were submitted with a value of £43.9m and covering 10,500 ha of woodland creation of which six hundred eighty three grant applications were approved with a value of £37.5m and covering 8,437 hectares of new woodland as well as providing support for the management of existing forests.

Around 64% (5,245ha) of FGS supported woodland creation in 2022/23 was planted as productive woodland specifically aimed at growing sustainable timber, and 36% (2,945ha) of FGS supported woodland was planted with native trees.  This activity makes a significant contribution to the rural economy, with the forestry sector as a whole supporting over 25,000 jobs and producing over £1 billion of Gross Value Added.

The total area of new woodland planted across Scotland in 2022/23 was 8,190 hectares, which shows Scotland was responsible for 63% of all new woodland creation last year.  Being one of very few industries with a net carbon reduction, each year Scotland’s tree planting efforts make a critical contribution to responding to the global climate emergency, removing c7.6 million tonnes of CO2 from theatmosphere annually *(*[*Quantifying the Sustainable Forestry Carbon Cycle*](https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/publications/quantifying-the-sustainable-forestry-carbon-cycle-report-download-page/)*:* 2022).

Scottish Forestry continues to manage the threats and spread of existing pests and diseases through surveillance, monitoring and control actions with 1.4 Million Ha of trees surveyed this year.  Work has been ongoing with local authorities and transport operators to share best practice on how best to monitor and manage Ash dieback.

We are  continuing to improve the understanding of current and potential threats to Scotland’s forests and woodlands.   This includes ways to reduce or manage the threats through contingency planning, research and development of new technologies.

We continued to allocate The Strategic Timber Transport Fund to projects that minimise the impacts of timber transport on communities and the environment by reducing road miles and improving rural road infrastructure. In 22/23 £6.5 million was allocated to twenty eight public road improvement projects, a floating pier project providing coastal shipping of timber direct from ana area of forest and to the Timberlink shipping service that has avoided 432,000 lorry miles over the year.  The Fund is also supporting a 3 year trial of two electric timber trucks.

Scottish Forestry supported the first Pride Outside (CIC) LGBTQ+ wellbeing festival in 2018 at Auchenshuggle woodlands in Glasgow. This initiative was in response to the rise in poor mental health outcomes for the LGBTQ+ community in Scotland with the aim to provide a safe, family friendly outdoor space where LGBTQ+ people could experience the wellbeing benefits of nature. Since this first festival demand has increased and in 2022/23 Scottish Forestry supported Pride Outside to deliver their third festival along with 10 additional woodland wellbeing sessions. These sessions combine nature connection (plant identification, foraging, fire lighting, eco arts and crafts) with wellbeing (forest bathing, meditation, mindful movement).  In addition Pride Outside secured funding from additional partners to support this expanded programme of woodland wellbeing. Over 560 participants engaged with the festival and associated programmes in 2022/23.  Pride Outside have now secured external funding that will allow them to continue to develop and expand the woodland wellbeing programme engaging more people on a regular basis.

Scottish Forestry is a key member of the of the Green Exercise Partnership (GEP) along with Nature Scot, Public Health Scotland and NHS National Services Scotland. The Partnership has continued to build links between the health and environment sectors, following growing evidence that public health can be improved by getting people engaged with the natural environment. Through its NHS Greenspace Demonstration Project, the Partnership has worked with a number of Area Health Boards to show the range of benefits that flow from positive investment in, and management of, the fabric of the NHS estate - the greenspace around hospitals and healthcare centres. This year the  GEP has continued to work with Scottish Government (SG) Climate Change Directorate and NHS Assure Sustainability Manager Greenspace Biodiversity to provide support and guidance to allocate the capital greenspace funding. This year 2 area health boards have received funding to deliver capital improvements with a further 2 health supported to develop proposal for delivery in 2023/24.