

2020/21 Statement on Sustainable Economic Growth

Introduction

This is the second 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 Sixth year; interest in the scheme remains strong and the rate of new applications continues to grow, with significant increases in applications to plant new woodland.  Submitted applications to the scheme now have a combined value of nearly £302 million, of which £268 million have received their grant contract.  These applications will create 61,740 hectares of new woodland (53,480 hectares approved), as well as providing support for the management of existing forests.

The final planting total for Scotland in 20/21 was 10,600 hectares of new woodland, which shows Scotland was responsible for 79% of new woodland creation in the UK.  Being one of very few industries with a net carbon reduction, Scotland’s tree planting efforts have made a critical contribution to responding to the global climate emergency, with the latest figures showing the forestry sector supports the net removal of almost 1.7 million tonnes of CO2 each year in Scotland (Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions 2019).

Around 70 percent (7,148ha) of FGS supported woodland creation was planted as productive woodland, specifically aimed at growing sustainable timber, with the remaining 30 percent increasing our native resource.  Forestry makes a significant contribution to the rural economy, supporting over 25,000 jobs in the sector and producing over £1 billion of Gross Value Added.

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 20/21 the total budget was £8 million.

We must safeguard the ability of Scotland’s forests and woodlands to provide a wide range of benefits to current and future generations. Given the degree of uncertainty about future environmental, ecological, economic and social conditions, relative to the lifespan of our trees, our approach will be to support and enable improvements to the adaptability and resilience of Scotland’s forests and woodlands.

We will achieve this by:

* Improving the understanding of the threats to Scotland’s forests and woodlands and potential mitigating actions, through education, research, surveillance and the development of new technologies.
* Managing for, and mitigating against, the threats posed by tree pests and diseases through surveillance, monitoring, statutory and non-statutory control actions, biosecurity measures and contingency planning.

Scottish Forestry’s woodland engagement programme was shortlisted for the Scottish Public Service Awards Community Engagement Award in December 2020. The programme encourages greater use of forests and woodlands by a more diverse range of people, in particular, members of protected characteristics groups. The programme champions Equality Diversity and Inclusion in the outdoors and provides opportunities for underrepresented communities to take part in activities including woodland wellbeing sessions, woodland wheels assisted cycle rides, immersive forest walks, faith celebrations, International day of peace celebrations and PRIDE outside events.

Scottish Forestry worked in partnership with the University of Edinburgh and the University of Glasgow on a research proposal for the Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) programme. Securing funding for a 2-year post doc study ‘using secondary data to examine whether the WIAT programme of physical and social environmental interventions enhances community health and wellbeing. The innovative research Study will start in June 2021.

We are supporting Paths For All who are leading a review of the BT Countryside for All Accessibility Standards (2005). A guide to disabled people’s access in the Countryside. To help make paths and trails more accessible and promote inclusive access. This is a UK wide project to refresh and update the good practice guide for inclusive access to the countryside. Paths For All awarded the contract to the Sensory Trust who will review the 2005 guidance. A steering group was established and had its first meeting on 23 Sept 2020.  An online survey was completed by UK representatives and stakeholders. This feedback is being analysed and the updated guide will be published in 2021.