

Policy Summary

FORESTRY AND WOODLAND

Around 16% of Scotland's land area is tree-covered. This is a relatively low level of woodland cover when compared with European or global figures. SNH supports, in principle, a continued expansion of the forest resource, so long as this pays adequate regard to other land uses and natural heritage interests. Forestry delivers a wide variety of benefits including quality products, biodiversity, landscape, recreational and social opportunities for individuals and communities.

SNH's vision is for Scotland's forests and woodlands to develop as a diverse resource that is productive, ecologically robust, scenically attractive and provides people with pleasure and recreational opportunities. This wide range of benefits will contribute to sustainable development in rural Scotland.

Background

Responsibility for promoting and regulating forestry lies primarily with the Forestry Commission. Government forestry policy, set out in *Sustainable Forestry: The UK Programme* (HMSO 1994), seeks sustainable management of existing woods and forests and a steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many benefits that forests provide. The UK Forestry Standard (1998) consolidates best practice and standards on the management of forestry.

Under the EC Habitats Directive the UK Government has a legal obligation to protect and enhance particular habitats (e.g. native pinewoods and Atlantic oakwoods) involving the designation of Special Areas of Conservation. In addition, although not covered by statute, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan commits the government (and others) to targets for the restoration, expansion and improvement of a wide range of native woodland habitats. EU (EAGGF) assistance to forestry until 2006 will be delivered through the Rural Development Regulation and largely administered by the Forestry Commission.

SNH's Position

SNH's main focus is on optimising the contribution multi-objective forestry can make to the natural heritage and its enjoyment. SNH engages with forestry through its statutory role as a consultee in the forestry sector; by protecting and managing areas of woodland on National Nature Reserves; through management agreements with owners of woodland SSSIs and through policy advice with regard to the natural heritage. SNH also contributes grant funding to support individual projects and woodland initiatives such as the Central Scotland Forest Initiative and Highland Birchwoods, as well as through broader programmes such as the Southern Uplands Initiative. SNH works in partnership with the Forestry Commission, forest owners, farmers and other landowners and local communities.

SNH's aims are to:

- encourage the establishment of the right trees in the right place, managed in the right way and thereby to achieve a reasonable balance between forestry and other interests at the local, regional and national scale;
- protect, enhance and expand existing semi-natural and ancient woodlands and expand the native woodland resource;
- increase the ecological and environmental value of all forests and other tree cover, in particular their contribution to landscape, biodiversity and recreation and the role they play in protecting natural environmental processes related to water, air and soil resources;
- promote the role of forestry as a sustainable land use to contribute to sustainable rural development which respects or enhances the natural heritage; and
- promote the engagement of people and communities in planning, managing and making use of forests as a means of realising natural heritage benefits while increasing the benefits to local economies and quality of life.

To help realise these aims SNH will:

- encourage the development of a more diverse wooded landscape;
- encourage the national and local development of Forest Habitat Networks as the main strategic mechanism for the conservation of woodland biodiversity and a range of other benefits;
- continue to work in partnership with the Forestry Commission and other organisations to improve information on woodlands, in the development of schemes to promote sustainable management of forests, and in partnership initiatives at a local level;
- promote the role of woodland in assisting the management of water resources and river systems;
- promote the role of forests in providing outdoor recreation, particularly in areas where demand is most significant;
- promote local value-adding uses of native woodlands; and
- promote the role of low input forest systems, and the expansion of the native woodland resource generally, in the sequestration of carbon in the short and medium term.

References:

Department of the Environment (DOE) ; and others (1994). Sustainable forestry: the UK programme. (Command Paper. Cm.; 2429). London : HMSO.

Contact:

Alan Hampson
0131 446 2425
alan.hampson@snh.gov.uk

Address: Scottish Natural Heritage
National Strategy
2 Anderson Place
Edinburgh
EH6 5NP

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