

Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
Submitted on 2023-05-12 17:45:08

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?

No

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There should be more integration of discrete land use decision-making activity (e.g. across farming, forestry and other land uses).

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

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

More informed assessment about productive land use options, requiring intelligent interpretation of carbon audits, biodiversity assessments, land use classification and business options. For example, balancing the risks and benefits of planting more trees in relation to expected carbon inventory and positive / negative impacts on species. Some species may benefit from woodland and forestry expansion. Others may be impacted by increased range of predators. Wading birds are vulnerable to predation where woodland expands into their habitats.

Planting on mineral soils may have a detrimental effect on carbon sequestration, with release of CO2 and potential desiccation.

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.:

All land considered for planting should run through initial carbon and biodiversity audits and environmental impact assessments to gauge positives and negatives for decision purposes.

Simple training support package for small, private woodland owners to assess new woodland possibilities alongside other land uses, ongoing management of growing trees, recognition of diseases, mitigation options. Link this to a small-medium size woodland management accreditation scheme, where there is a gap. Certification should assist owners and managers to sell into markets.

Help to build awareness of different public and private funding sources

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,

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

A qualified yes, since Scottish Government first needs to establish a governance framework and benchmarking to ensure oversight and outcomes are consistently recorded, measured and refined in an adaptive management system. This should be applicable to both public and private funding. Without this, confidence in a blended approach may be affected by risks to integrity of the schemes. The governance framework must remove any overlaps in payment for the same works to ensure return on investment is maximised.

Practical investment in schemes may also depend on mitigating opportunistic land pricing so that sensible decisions are made on productive land use options balanced against biodiversity benefits and impacts.

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.:

Suitable assistance for landowners and managers to arrive at sensible decisions that balance efficient, profitable land use productivity (natural capital provisioning) with appropriate biodiversity stewardship.

Currently, scale is an issue for small / farm woodland proposals that require fencing, where cost of fencing materials makes it difficult to take forward initiatives. This could mean that areas of farmland that would be well suited to tree planting are not considered. Perhaps this might be altered by a different scale of capital contribution up to a certain size to encourage smaller compartment or connectivity planting (though we note in Small or Farm Woodland Scheme Grant information that "...new small woodlands should not adjoin other woodland creation options), where these can lead to important benefits for production, shelter, amenity and biodiversity.

The same might also be considered for hedge planting round specific fields, particularly where there are benefits in terms of biosecurity (e.g. 3m separation between livestock in different fields for initial isolation of new stock, or to prevent spread of disease) and biodiversity/ habitat. Hedges also provide valuable carbon sequestration benefits:(Hedgerow Carbon Code: "good news for UK agriculture, climate change and British wildlife" - Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (gwct.org.uk))

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?:

Yes, this should be a requirement of support. Equally, more help to manage for the increasing risks of wildfire, e.g. in terms of woodland plans (firebreaks), equipment and risk reduction techniques through management of fuel loads, should be a requirement.

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, Intervention level, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

All of the above. Critical to climate change and biodiversity recovery ambitions is the development of a cadre of advisors who can bridge between assistance for efficient, productive land use, and sound management for environmental dividends.

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.:

Cost of stock or deer fencing may prevent some applications proceeding either because of the proportion of capital to planting / establishment costs, or because the owner / manager is not prepared to carry a significant part of the capital costs. Either way, this may be ruling out areas of unproductive farmland or other areas that would be amenable to tree planting for a variety of purposes (connectivity, shelter, biosecurity).

Some consideration of capital costs scale and refinement to encourage more small-scale planting may therefore be appropriate.

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.:

Awareness-building as to options and availability via community groups, local authorities and developers?

Working in collaboration with Scottish Land Commission to identify vacant or derelict land that could be planted up.

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.:

Not specifically via FGS, but perhaps facilitation funding from both FGS and future farming schemes to help community groups survey and enter into discussion with landowners and managers to develop local woodland and riparian plans.

Facilitation funding would support the engagement of an adviser to help with proposals, plans, maps, co-ordination and meetings with land managers (similar to Natural England package: Facilitation Fund 2023: Countryside Stewardship - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk))

This helps the formation of landscape-scale farmers clusters:

www.farmerclusters.com (For farmers, facilitators and advisors)

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.:

As per Q. 10, facilitation funding to help community councils and local groups develop plans and meet with landowners and managers

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.:

The groundwork has been established via website access and information. Perhaps broad, regular communication about current proposals, and periodic updates that the facility exists to look up information and comment on new plans.

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?:

We are certain that capital costs grants can help stimulate rural forestry business, particularly where the scale of planting can lead to economic production. We are less certain whether capital grants are currently encouraging small or farm woodland applications. This may be a function of the prevailing high prices for fencing materials. As we comment elsewhere, this is likely to impact on small-scale plantings in suitable areas on farms, arguably a growth area that we should be encouraging.

As far as capital grants go for harvesting and processing equipment are concerned, we think there's an opportunity here for collaboration between owners and managers of small woodlands in purchase and use of equipment. As per earlier suggestions, this could be achieved by encouragement of local management clusters so there is scale efficiency.

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

We think that in some cases, small or farm woodland owners and managers rely primarily on advice of forestry consultants, but this comes at a cost which is often geared to more commercial enterprises. Perhaps grant support for small woodland skills training and accreditation would foster local management knowledge, which would in turn engage more intelligent purchase of harvesting and processing equipment for smaller-scale enterprises. This would help to address under-management of woodland and improve appreciation of both commercial, environmental and amenity benefits

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.:

Internships

Relevant college sponsorships

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.:

Expansion of forests and woodland has the potential to impact both positively and negatively on keystone species and habitats. Negative impacts, potentially stemming from the reduction of globally rare habitat including peatland, and on mammals (mountain hares) or birds (waders including Curlew and Lapwing, Black Grouse and other hill edge species) should be avoided. Generalist predators (particularly foxes and crows) will benefit from woodland expansion. Their impact on vulnerable bird populations is well documented (e.g. Fletcher, K.L., Aebischer, N.J., Baines, D., Foster, R., & Hoodless, A.N. (2010). Changes in breeding success and abundance of ground-nesting moorland birds in relation to the experimental deployment of legal predator control. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 47: 263-272). The impact of expanding woodland should be monitored and suitable responses (such as predator control) included in linked agri-environment support options.

The importance of full Environmental Impact Assessments or other analysis techniques will be critical in objective evaluation of opportunities for, and threats to biodiversity stemming from regeneration or expansion of woodlands.

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?:

A key challenge for deer control in lowland environments is the more fragmented nature of land ownership compared to open hill. This makes it difficult to achieve consistent, co-ordinated management of Roe Deer in particular. Forestry grant mechanisms could address this through the same principles we have noted for collaborative / cluster management, whereby funding for facilitation support to engage an individual in helping farming / land management groups address deer control at suitable landscape-scale. This could be done by convening meetings, developing a local management plan, appointing and monitoring stalking control, and organising regular meetings to review and agree decisions.

We also think that mobile recording used by stalkers to log information on deer culls, locations, health, and tracing through larders would be particularly useful. GWCT has developed mobile recording projects using Epicollect5 for this purpose in upland settings, but there are no obvious limitations to applying this in lowland situations. Funding to support and refine such recording would be valuable.

Small scale mixed land use?:

As above, support to facilitate the development of clusters to address challenges at small-scale mixed land use would be very useful.

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

Please add your comments here.:

About you

What is your name?

Name:

[redacted]

What is your email address?

Email:

[redacted]

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (Scotland)

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

Publish response only (without 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