



Highland & Islands Regional Stakeholder Group Meeting

Date & Time:	Tuesday 7 th February 2023 - 10:00am
Venue:	Garden Room, Strathpeffer Pavilion, Strathpeffer
Present:	<p>John Risby – Conservator, Highland & Islands Conservancy - Scottish Forestry (Chair) (JR)</p> <p>Amanda Bryan – Consultant, Scottish Forestry Trust and UHI SSF lecturer (AB)</p> <p>Alex MacLeod – Forestry and Land Scotland (AM)</p> <p>Ewan Robertson – Tilhill (ER)</p> <p>Gordon Cumming – Woodlands Trust (GC)</p> <p>Kenna Chisholm – RSPB (KC)</p> <p>Linzi Sievwright – Caorann (LS)</p> <p>Megan Parker – Scottish Woodlands (MP)</p> <p>Phil Di Ducca – Kelpie Woodlands (PDD)</p> <p>Richard Lockett – Agri-Environmental (RL)</p> <p>Tom Luthman – Crosscut Forestry (TL)</p>
Minute:	<p>Fiona Pirie – Highland & Islands Conservancy – Scottish Forestry</p> <p>Presenters – Neil Murray (NM), Scottish Forestry, Emma Cooper (EC) and Alex Currie (AC), Scottish Land Commission</p>
Apologies:	<p>Graham Neville – NatureScot</p> <p>Lorna Schofield – Knoydart Foundation</p>

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action
1.	<p><u>Welcome, Introduction and Terms of Reference (TOR)</u></p> <p>JR welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made by all participants. JR gave a brief overview of the Terms of Reference for the Group, with the main purpose being:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To provide advice to Highland & Islands Conservancy, specifically on regional issues that impact on the delivery of Scotland's Forestry Strategy and the Scottish Governments forestry policy and targets. To discuss emerging issues and share knowledge. <p>JR advised that the Group would aim to meet twice yearly.</p>	



2.	<p><u>Conservancy Update</u></p> <p>JR gave an update on the work of the Conservancy detailing (as per presentation attached):-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approvals • Woodland Creation and New Natural Regeneration figures • Current Workloads and shortage of Conservancy staff in 2022 <p>He noted the small area of planting under the conifer option (Sitka Spruce). The group had a general discussion around this the impact of closure of grant schemes and asked about the shortfall of approved woodland creation in 2022. JR advised this was mainly due to a few large schemes which take longer to work through to approval stage. Some members commented on the lack of people to deliver work on the ground and also that the grant scheme had not kept pace with the rising costs e.g. for fencing, which is dissuading people from accessing woodland creation funding. There was also a feeling that some agricultural/crofting landowners were holding back from making applications for funding due to forthcoming changes to agricultural support which were still unclear. The rising felling programme was also noted.</p>	
3.	<p><u>Land Rights and Responsibilities & Interim Principles for Responsible Investment In Natural Capital</u></p> <p>EC took the Group through a presentation detailing (as per presentation attached):-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land Use Change • Green Lairds • Community Experience of planting applications • Land Rights and Responsibilities • Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital • Good Practice Programme <p>This prompted Group discussion around community consultation. EC commented on the importance of engaging communities at the right time and considering the collective impact of schemes on the community. JR advised that Scottish Forestry has in place a consultation process however much of the emphasis is on the applicants/agent to do thorough due diligence to engage with communities to mitigate any negatives. It was felt there should be clear messages in terms of consultation in relation of who's undertaking the proposals and why they are doing it. EC queried whether Scottish Forestry could make it any clearer to communities of what to expect at consultation stage as it is difficult for them to navigate and at which point they can influence proposals. NM stated that Scottish Forestry are making improvements to information provided on the website, pulling all the information together to try and make it easier to understand. It was raised that it may be that larger</p>	



	<p>corporations buying land for carbon offsetting may be are more accountable regarding consultations than some traditional landowners perhaps making them more open to public pressure. EC advised the larger corporations do have concerns around public perceptions and want to get things right and the suggestion is that they have someone local employed to respond to any community questions.</p> <p>AB shared with the Group some work she has been undertaking in conjunction with Confor around stakeholder engagement. Often Forestry Managers had no training in how to engage stakeholders but that this was expected as part of their role. There is now work being done to design and deliver training on stakeholder engagement for those in the forestry sector which will be tested in a group setting, modified if necessary and then rolled out.</p>	
4.	<p><u>Carbon and Woodland Creation</u></p> <p>PDD spoke to the Group about his experience of the Woodland Carbon Code. Now that the Code was well established there have been increased projects over the last 3 years. The carbon code remains complicated but it is important for supporting planting of native woodlands. The code could provide significant additional funding which was needed for high cost, particularly medium sized schemes but many owners were not keen to sell predicted carbon up front instead register the planting but await verification and therefore gain hoped for increases in future carbon values or for future offsetting of their business carbon emissions. It seems that carbon income is tax free. The process was complex and recent changes to standard costs made meeting the additionality test difficult for productive planting however excellent support and advice is available via the SF Carbon Code Team in Edinburgh. The long term nature of the agreements could be a barrier for some owners but did encourage better maintenance and management of woodlands. The difficulty in small schemes benefitting from carbon funding was highlighted due to the administration and upfront costs. The issues around crofting and tenants was also highlighted. There is provision for group schemes so hopefully smaller applicants could use this route if it could be tested further in H&I. JR believed that carbon funding was a significant feature and was influencing the type and size of schemes coming forward to the Conservancy.</p>	
5.	<p><u>Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) Consultation</u></p> <p>NM updated the Group on the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) Consultation which will go live on week commencing 20th February 2023 (as per presentation attached) detailing that the aim was to build on the success of FGS and identify further improvements of the scheme focussing on 6 key areas.</p>	



	<p>The presentation lead to discussion within the Group about how grants can be developed to better deliver for climate change, to ensure forests deliver for people and communities and how to deliver more for biodiversity and the environment.</p> <p>The group highlighted the following issues and areas for improvement;-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for creating and improving public access in rural areas. • The cost of producing a plan was not funded so in effect that this was a sup front cost for the applicant which was a particular issue in farming/crofting. • Could loans be made available for community landowners to ease the cash flow and issues around access to funds. • The concerns about up-front costs could be prohibitive for small scale landowners/crofts. • Could grants be capped for large woodland creation schemes that were registered for carbon? • The current grants were very prescriptive could this be more flexibility around criteria to reflect local, place based issues. • There was a general desire to make the grants easier to access particularly for smaller proposals and crofters. • Fuel poverty was a big issue and could firewood be supported as a community benefit • Riparian woods were important so could the minimum width of 15m and size of 0.25ha be reduced to encourage more crofters and farmers to plan? • To help recruit and retain people into the sector at all levels could the grant scheme include funding for skills including apprentices. • Deer management remained a key issues and better funding towards active deer management, training and planning infrastructure was needed. • Slope stability was a big issue in parts of the H&I could the grants target this better? • Could there be more support for low density/montane woodland? • Issues related to tree species restriction in terms of types of tree that can be planted under the woodland creation and restocking grants. Could this be relaxed to encourage more diversity of species. However the group recognised the continued high consumer demand for Sitka spruce (SS)/white wood. To change this would require buy in from the sector and change in consumer demand, a cultural change. It was noted that there were other white woods in addition to SS, could these be developed for greater use? JR to include discussion re use of spruce and diversity as an agenda item at the next meeting. <p>The Group were encouraged to take part in the consultation and also highlight it to others. Link to consultation:- Scottish Forestry - Citizen Space</p>	<p>JR</p>
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DATE OF NEXT MEETING
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Tuesday 12th September 2023 – BSW Kilmallie, Fort William. Theme timber production and Sitka spruce