Scottish Forestry
Coilltearachd na h-Alba

An evaluation of the Forestry Grant Scheme

2015 – 2021

Scottish Forestry is the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulation.

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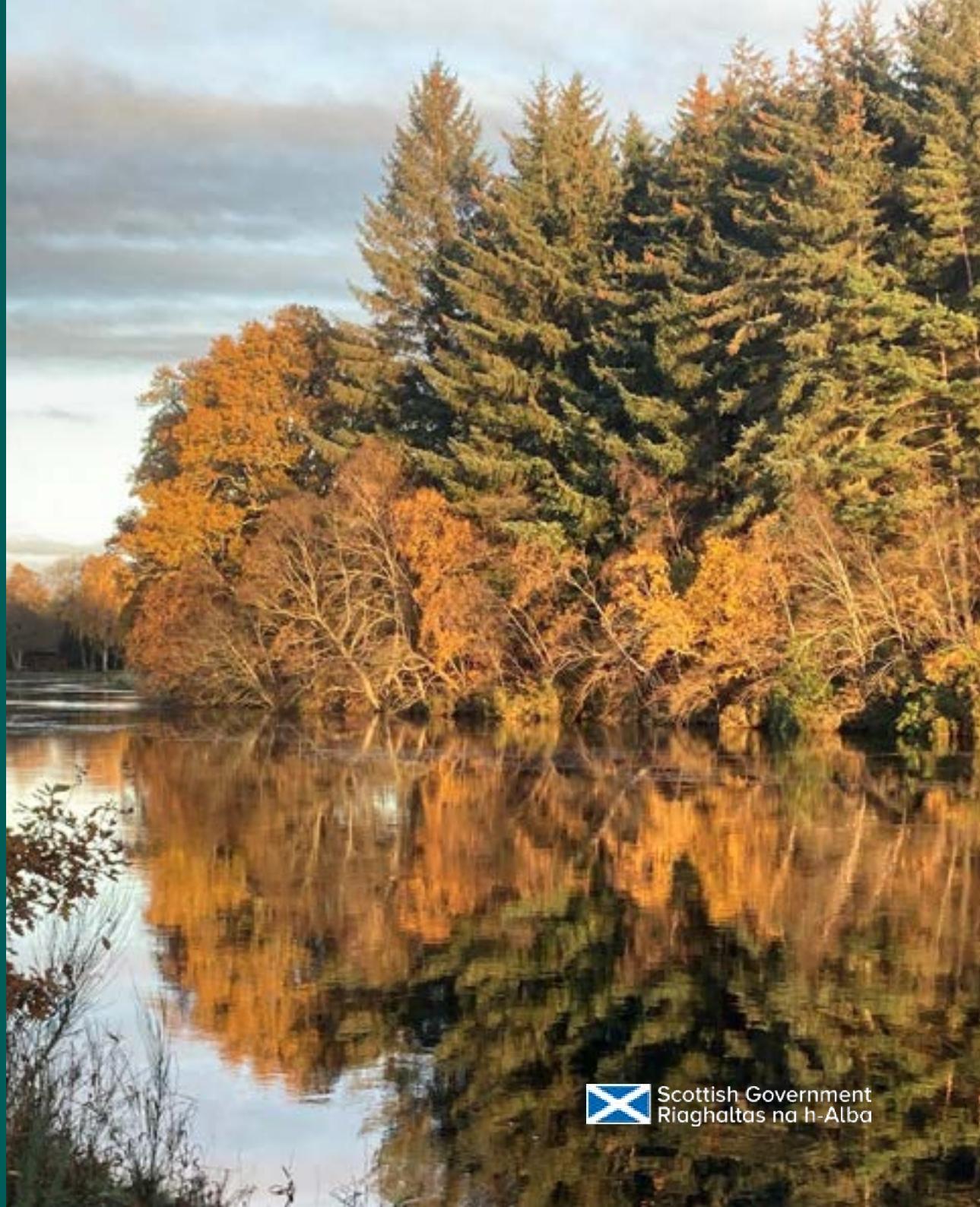

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Key achievements of the Forestry Grant Scheme 2015 – 2021

<10 days
Mean FGS application processing time was 10 days less than customer charter requirements

1,200 hectares +
of natural regeneration funded

328
new Forest Plans supported, bringing over 150,000 hectares of forests into active management

25,000 hectares +
of felled areas restructured, with 45% of applications exceeding minimum UK Forestry Standard species diversity requirements

590 hectares
of peatland restoration funded

8,577 hectares
of new woodland created in the Central Scotland Green Network area

Almost
20,000 hectares
of land covered by grey squirrel controls

1,200 hectares
of previously inaccessible woodland brought into management as a result of grant-funded infrastructure

11,000+ hectares
of land committed to reducing the impact of deer

165
new jobs forecast across the forest nursery and timber processing sectors as a result of FGS grant support

4,693 hectares
of Woodlands in and Around Towns (WIAT) brought into management

9,500 hectares
of land covered by predator control for the benefit of black grouse and capercaillie

48,889 hectares
of new woodland established

Future statistics

11 million tonnes

of Scottish-grown timber expected from FGS-funded new commercial softwood (native and non-native) plantations within 40 years

340,000m³

extra harvested timber expected to be brought to markets as a result of management of previously inaccessible woodlands

8 million tonnes

of carbon expected to be sequestered by these FGS-funded woodlands by 2045

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Section 1

Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

An evaluation of the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) is a European Commission (EC) requirement under the terms of Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) funding.

This report provides information relating to the evaluation of the FGS for its original intended run-time between and including the years of 2015 to 2021. While FGS is still running, we have restricted the evaluation to such a time frame to ensure we are looking at data from whole financial years only.

It is important to note that while the FGS began in 2015, sector confidence and engagement were initially low due to the wholesale change in the grant scheme and administration system. It took up to 24 months to return to the momentum seen under the previous Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities (RDC) forestry grant scheme, which operated from 2007 to 2014.

This loss of momentum is important to consider when reviewing the information within this report, given those initial two years account for a considerable portion of this evaluation period and therefore negatively skew data.

The FGS evaluation has been split into three parts:

1. Phase 1 – Desk Research
2. Phase 2 – Field Research
3. Final Report

The following documents have been produced for this evaluation:

1. Report 1 – Summary Report
2. Report 2 – Technical Report
3. Appendices

1.2 The Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS)

The Forestry Grant Scheme is administered by Scottish Forestry (SF) on behalf of the Scottish Government (SG) and is part of the broader Scottish Rural Development Programme. The FGS provides financial support and incentive for the creation of new woodlands and the management of existing woodlands.

Overall, the FGS aims to reduce the impacts of climate change and provide timber for industry, as well as ensuring that Scotland's forests enhance and protect the environment and provide opportunities for public enjoyment. This is in line with the UK Forestry Standard's three pillars of Sustainable Forest Management: Environmental, Economic and Social.

The FGS provides financial support for:

- the creation of new woodlands
- the improvement and sustainable management of existing woodlands
- tree health
- rural development.

To achieve these objectives there are eight categories of financial support, two for the creation of new woodlands and six for the management of existing woodland:

- Woodland Creation (for the creation of new woodlands)
- Agroforestry (for the creation of silvoarable and silvopastoral woodlands)
- Woodland Improvement Grant (for improving the condition of habitats and species)
- Sustainable Management of Forests (for managing woodlands in a sustainable way)
- Tree Health (to support the control of Phytophthora ramorum)
- Harvesting and Processing (for the purchasing of new equipment to support forest nurseries and timber producers)
- Forest Infrastructure (to improve access to undermanaged woodlands)
- Forestry Co-operation (to facilitate forestry projects at a landscape scale).

Each of these categories has individual aims and many are split into multiple 'options'[1].

1.3 FGS payments

Grant support for each option under the categories listed in 1.2 varies depending on the category, the option, and whether an application is within a target area. The full list of payments can be found under each category on the **Rural Payments and Services website.**

[1]Many of the grant option aims and eligibility have been reviewed and updated throughout the lifetime of the Forestry Grant Scheme. It should be noted that this evaluation will assess against the aims/eligibility that were publicised during the evaluation period and therefore may not reflect the aims/eligibility currently shown.

Grant payments are split into two distinct types:

- Capital payments: One-off payments for capital works, normally paid once the approved work has been completed and inspected (normally for capital works relating to woodland creation, habitat improvements or infrastructure)
- Annual Recurrent payments: Payments claimed annually by the applicant on their Single Application Form (SAF) (normally for maintenance payments or payments to support sustainable forest management).

1.4 Evaluation approach

The purpose of this evaluation was to answer the EC's Common Evaluation Questions (CEQs) by analysing whether the FGS had met its original aims and objectives during the initial term of 2015 to 2021 (inclusive).

The evaluation was carried out by Scottish Forestry's Forestry Development team, with input from other business areas, across two distinct phases:

1.4.1 Phase 1 – desk research

This was a desk-based exercise. Data gathering was conducted through the querying of existing data on SF's internal systems, joint-use systems or files. During this phase, the following sources were queried for the listed information:

Geospatial information:

- data submitted on FGS application maps
- 3rd party mapping data, e.g. designated sites, agricultural data.

Casebook:

- data from approved FGS contracts such as quantities and values of grant supported works
- payment data.

Rural Payment and Services:

- application documents
- details of applications contained within approved Schedule of Works.

Shared network drives:

- any application data held digitally but not available from the sources above.

Hard copies of files held by Conservancy (regional) offices:

- any data held in physical copies or otherwise not available from the sources listed above, for example approved Long Term Forest Plans.

It's important to note that some data relating to FGS is not easily accessible. For example, many grants are paid annually through the Single Application Form (SAF) process, managed by Scottish Government's Agriculture and Rural Economy (ARE) department, and therefore are not captured by Scottish Forestry's own systems.

It is also important to note that this evaluation has, where possible, used committed figures rather than claimed. However, within the report there may be instances of both. This may result in figures appearing to be inconsistent.

1.4.2 Phase 2 – field research

The second phase consisted of the gathering of information through site-based or face-to-face settings and focussed primarily on gaps in information that could not be gleaned through Phase 1. During this phase the following methods were used to gather information:

Customer surveys:

- RESAS' 'Applicant Experience Survey': this survey was carried out by Scottish Government's Rural and Environmental Science and Analytical Services (RESAS) and sent out to over 250 individuals listed as 'Agents' on the Rural Payments and Services (RP&S) system. 77 responses were received (30% response rate). This survey covered applicants' experiences with the application process and many grant options.
- Scottish Forestry's 'New Woodland Creation Survey': this survey was sent to 110 woodland creation contract holders (22 per Conservancy). 28 responses were received (25% response rate). This survey covered additional benefits that applicants had seen from their projects, for example employment or community benefits.

Direct information requests by Scottish Forestry from contract holders:

- Requests for self-assessment were sent to 110 woodland creation contract holders (22 per Conservancy) for the 2018/19 claim year. 84 responses were received (76% response rate). The request was to ascertain the condition of these new woodlands at year 5.
- Emails and letters were sent to applicants requesting information via Microsoft Forms surveys on various grant options.

Scottish Forestry visits to projects/sites:

- Visits were carried out to projects in receipt of funding, including Harvesting and Processing, WIAT and Access grants.

Scottish Forestry stakeholder workshops:

- Discussions with stakeholders were held on grey squirrel control, predator control for black grouse and capercaillie, and WIAT funding.

Rumroy Survey Report:

- A specialist was appointed to carry out independent evaluation work on behalf of Scottish Forestry. This covered assessments of the ecological impact of the Native Woodlands grant, Habitats and Species grants, Woodland Grazing grant, and new woodlands planted for riparian habitat. This was focussed on the outcomes of the grant funding, not whether it met specific contract conditions.

1.5 Evaluation questions

An evaluation framework, setting out the specific areas to be evaluated, was produced for this evaluation with the assistance of internal colleagues and Scottish Government's Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Service (RESAS). A copy of the framework is appended to this report.

The evaluation framework, while a guide for this evaluation, may not have been followed exactly. As the evaluation progressed, data may have been gathered that was not originally intended, or areas not explored in as much depth as set out in the framework.

From the framework, evaluation questions were then devised in order to gather the relevant information against the evaluation areas. These questions were split among the evaluation participants, based on relevant work areas, and timescales were set for the return of this information.

It should be noted that it was decided when creating the evaluation framework that some areas would be looked at in more detail than others. For example, there are a total of eight grant 'categories' (grouping of grant options by theme, such as Woodland Creation) and most of these categories contain multiple grant 'options' (such as types of woodland creation). In this paper some areas are evaluated at a category level, and others at an option level.

The data gathered from the sources outlined in Section 1.4 [evaluation sources] was assessed against the grant category and option aims and, where possible, conclusions drawn as to whether the respective aims have been met.

It should be noted that any assessments made, where applicable, under this evaluation were against the standards relevant to the Forestry Grant Scheme during the evaluation period, for example the UK Forestry Standard (fourth edition).

1.6 Evaluation result

Keeping in mind the caveats relating to data collection and depth of the evaluation mentioned in the previous sections, the overall result of this evaluation has been broadly positive, with all grant options assessed having met their aims either in part or fully. There were no instances of any grant option, when assessed wholly, having not met its aim. However, individual contracts in some cases were found to be lacking. Where any breach or significant deviation of contract was discovered, these were passed to the Operational Delivery team in order to investigate further.

It should be noted that some of the aims set out at the beginning of FGS were structured or worded in such a way as to make their achievability questionable, particularly where aims were vague or lacked measurability, making an evaluation of their success difficult. Where this was the case, the evaluation has attempted to assess whether the work carried out remained within the 'spirit' of the overall aims of the FGS.

On the whole, there is a lot of good news stemming from this evaluation, particularly in areas that are often overlooked by general discourse on the forestry sector. Some of the greatest successes, other than woodland creation, have been found in areas such as habitat improvement, woodland grazing and supporting rural industry.

There are certainly areas that have underperformed in terms of application volumes and therefore impact. Such topics as agroforestry, deer management and conversion towards low-impact silvicultural systems have seen low uptake, although cross-government work is already under way to improve some of these areas. There were no grant options that saw zero uptake: this in itself demonstrates the scheme has succeeded in supporting the areas targeted.

On the basis of this evaluation and on the information available, the FGS has overall been a success and achieved its aims.

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Section 2

Woodland Creation

2.1 Woodland Creation: introduction and aims

The FGS offers nine grant funding options for different types of woodland creation, as well as separate options for woodland creation through Agroforestry and Natural Regeneration. The latter two options feature in the data gathering. However, their analysis and recommendations will be covered in a separate part of the report.

The nine options are:

- Conifer
- Diverse Conifer
- Broadleaves
- Native Scots Pine
- Native Upland Birch
- Native Broadleaves
- Native Low-density Broadleaves
- Small or Farm Woodland
- Native Broadleaves in Northern and Western Isles.

The aim of these woodland creation options is to support the creation of new woodland that will bring economic, environmental and social benefits.

These benefits include:

1. meeting our target to increase woodland cover
2. helping mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions through carbon sequestration
3. restoration of 'lost' habitats through developing forest habitat networks
4. supporting a sustainable forest industry by providing a reliable timber supply
5. protecting soil and water
6. providing community benefits through public access
7. enhancing urban areas and improving landscapes
8. supporting rural development through local businesses and farm diversification.

2.2 Woodland Creation: grants and applications data

This section outlines what grant funding was provided, where, and what the grant funding delivered.

2.2.1 Grant contribution

The grant for woodland creation is split into two payment types: capital and maintenance. Capital payments are provided for all capital works, such as planting and fencing, and are paid upon completion of the works. Maintenance payment is paid for the following five years, claimed on an applicant's SAF, and is intended to cover the costs of maintaining the woodland throughout the establishment phase.

The list of grant contributions is extensive and therefore has not been listed here, but can be found on the **Rural Payments and Services Website.**

2.2.2 What has been funded

During the evaluation period, 48,889 hectares of grant-funded woodland was created. The table below breaks down planting by the nine options plus the WIG Natural Regeneration grant, which is also counted as new woodland creation.

The Conifer option covers the greatest area, at just over half the overall planted area. On the other end of the spectrum, 45 hectares was planted under the Native Broadleaves in Northern and Western Isles option, which equates to 0.1% of the overall planted area. The Agroforestry share was even smaller, with just under 2 hectares planted.

Woodland establishment by natural regeneration claimed within the evaluation period[2] equates to 1,262 hectares.

[2]Natural regeneration payments are paid at year 5 upon establishment, therefore the total area of natural regeneration committed in this period is much higher.

Table 1: Areas of woodland creation by grant option

Grant option	Area funded (Hectares)	% of total
Conifer	26,513	54
Native Broadleaves	6,808	14
Native Upland Birch	4,324	9
Native Scots Pine	3,666	7
Diverse Conifer	3,500	7
Broadleaves	1,690	3
Natural Regeneration	1,262	2
Small or Farm Woodlands	542	<2
Native Low Density	538	<2
Native Broadleaves in Northern and Western Isles	45	<1
Agroforestry	2	<1
Totals	**48,889**	**100**

2.2.3 Size categories of applications

Woodland Creation applications can vary significantly in size. The FGS accepts grant applications down to a minimum size of 0.25 hectares and has no upper limit[3].

Within the FGS Evaluation period a total of 1,397 applications were approved. These fell within the following size categories:

Table 2: Applications by size category

Size (hectares)	# Applications	% of total apps	Total of approved WC area (see table 1)
< 5	395	28.4	2%
5 – 10	209	15.1	3%
10 – 20	216	15.6	6%
20 – 50	306	22.1	21%
50 – 100	135	9.7	18%
>100	126	9.1	50%
Totals	**1387**	**100**	**100**

2.2.4 Woodland Creation applications

The full details of the FGS application process can be found on SF's website. RESAS' Customer Experience Survey asked various questions regarding applicants' experience with the FGS application process, with the following results:

- 30% of respondents had submitted 20 or more FGS applications
- 69% of respondents had all of their applications successfully approved
- 34% of unsuccessful applications were due to not scoring highly enough
- Reasons applications were unsuccessful (grouped thematically):
  - Unsuitable tree species selection
  - Cost of protection
  - Design of new woodland
  - Lack of compromise by SF staff
  - Landowners pulling out due to long application times
- 45% of respondents found the application process 'fairly difficult.' No respondents found it easy
- The most difficult aspect of the application was 'accessing Support for preparing your application' with an average score of 3.05 out of 5.

2.2.5 Business types applying for Forestry Grant Scheme Woodland Creation options

The requirement to provide business type was included in Operational Plans only from 1 April 2021, making it difficult to understand the range of applicant types over the whole evaluation period. The majority of the total area planted is therefore attributed to 'unspecified' businesses.

Of those specified, the top three, in descending order of planting area, were Farm businesses (owned), Mixed Rural Estates, and Forestry businesses.

RESAS survey data of business sizes applying for grants indicated that 20% of respondents were sole traders, 60% were from small businesses (fewer than 250 employees) and 20% were from large businesses.

[3]While the scheme rules do not set out an upper limit per application, applications are assessed on their suitability across many factors, one of which is appropriate scale.

2.2.6 Size of landholdings applying for FGS WC Options

The table below identifies the number of separate ownerships[4] applying for woodland creation grant against the gross landholding size, as well as showing the average percentage of the gross landholding being planted with new woodlands.

Table 3: % areas planted versus size of landholding

Gross Area of Landholding (ha)	Number of Ownerships	Average Percentage of Gross Area being planted with WC
3,000+	117	2.38
1,000-2,999	118	6.91
200-999	403	11.19
0-199	505	37.87
Total	**1143**	

2.3 Woodland Creation: native woodlands

Across the woodland creation options which are to specifically create native woodlands, a total of 15,281 hectares has been planted. This figure doesn't include the 5-10% native woodland required to meet the eligibility criteria of the other Woodland Creation options and the UK Forestry Standard; nor does it include natural regeneration, as it cannot be assumed this will all become native woodland. If the 5-10% native requirement included in other options were to be included, the area associated with other types of new planting would be estimated to be between 1,675 and 3,350 hectares.

2.3.1 Native woodland expansion areas

The table below shows the extent of native woodland planting which either partially or wholly intersects with the primary or secondary zone of a native habitat network. There has also been a small amount of planting in areas identified as existing core native woodland. The aim of planting in these areas is to expand the size and resilience of existing native woodlands by forming key linkages within a habitat network.

Table 4: Areas of woodland planted within native woodland expansion areas (hectares)

FGS WC Option	Core Native Woodland	Primary Zone	Secondary Zone	Total
Native Broadleaves	81.5	2,426.7	3,504.5	6,012.7
Native Broadleaves in Northern and Western Isles	0.1	6.5	10.3	16.8
Native Low Density	9.7	195.7	306.9	512.2
Native Scots Pine	38.3	1,244.4	2,115.9	3,398.5
Native Upland Birch	26.7	1,510.3	2,428.3	3,965.3
Grand Totals	**156.2**	**5,383.6**	**8,365.8**	**13,905.6**

2.3.2 Native woodland adjacent to water (riparian woodlands)

An assessment of riparian woodland is difficult due to there being no specific riparian woodland grant option, so it is not clear whether areas were planted for the express purposes of creating riparian woodland.

Using Scottish Forestry's Geographic Information System (GIS), it was determined that 6,548.48 hectares of claimed native woodland (based on FGS native woodland options or components for WC) intersects within a 20-metre buffer either side of a watercourse or waterbody. This includes the total area of the projects intersecting with the buffer, not just the hectares explicitly within the buffer. While not necessarily planted expressly for the purpose of riparian woodland, it is likely that these projects, planted within the catchment of watercourses/waterbodies, will provide some benefits toward natural flood management and water quality.

Ten projects from the above total were selected and passed to an appointed contractor to assess whether the woodlands created by watercourses were implemented and effective as riparian woodlands. Below are some of the findings from the Rumroy Survey Report:

- Eight projects considered small, being under 10 hectares, with two over 25 hectares
- Age since establishment varies between three and nine years
- Mix of lowland and upland sites, small standalone native broadleaved farm woodlands and native component of larger schemes
- One scheme, in part, has the aim of producing productive broadleaves.

[4]Ownerships and areas are subject to ongoing change due to sale and purchase of land so figures will never be absolutely accurate.

'The over-riding conclusion in consideration of the sampled woodland creation projects assessed as part of the scope of this study for implementation of the FGS WIG Option is that the overall benefits of establishing trees as an enhancement to riparian margins benefits are expansive and wide-ranging, both in the short term and in consideration of the longer term aims and objectives.

As an initiative to integrate with other wider land use management, establishing native trees and shrubs, either as a standalone project or integrated with other woodland projects, is extremely advantageous. In many circumstances, the land being converted is small and fragmented and of reduced capacity for other land management uses.

An appropriate mix of native broadleaved tree species have been planted within all sites included within the assessment. Species have been suitably chosen in accordance with site conditions and have included application of the Ecological Site Classification tool. Faster-growing and quick-establishing species, such as aspen, alder, silver and downy birch and willow, have been planted with the aim of accelerating achievement of the riparian enhancement objectives. Other native species, including Scots pine, sessile oak, rowan, hazel, downy birch, prunus species, holly and other woody shrubs have also been planted.

In review of the age range of the FGS schemes sampled as part of this assessment it can be summarised that the earlier projects were smaller and standalone plantings than those that have been initiated during the last five years. This potentially demonstrates an increased confidence and awareness that the establishment of riparian woodlands as part of larger woodland creation projects is proactive and provides a range of benefits, including consideration of economies of scale.'

The full details of this survey can be found in the Rumroy Report contained within the appendices.

2.4 Woodland Creation: urban woodlands

The Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) Contribution is a target area payment which applies to eligible Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) woodland creation planting options. This is aimed at further incentivising woodland creation in and around key towns and cities in the Central Scotland area.

A total of 8,577 hectares of new woodlands claimed this target area payment.

2.4.1 New woodlands on brownfield, vacant and derelict land

Using Historic Environment Scotland's Historic Land-use Assessment map,[5] data can be filtered to show only features with types of Landfill Site, Industrial or Commercial Area, Mining Area, Opencast Site, Quarry, or Restored Agricultural Land, which provides a proxy for 'brownfield' sites.

Overlaying these HLA sites on FGS WC Options found seven cases which overlapped >50%, so the majority were on 'brownfield' land.

The total area of the woodland creation projects that overlapped these brownfield sites is 249.6 hectares.

An alternative analysis was undertaken to compare data, using the Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Survey (SVDLS) dataset, which is based on local authority surveys. This found no projects overlapping by greater than 50%, with the most overlap of one project being 21%.

The total area of the woodland creation projects that overlapped these SVDL sites is 60.6 hectares.

2.5 Woodland Creation: tree species planted

For the purposes of this evaluation, spatial data was pulled from SF's Geographic Information System (GIS) which identifies the species planted on the ground, irrespective of FGS WC option. It is a requirement that there is a native broadleaf component within conifer options, but in this data it will only show it as conifer. The following chart shows the breakdown by species group, then a breakdown of the Conifer and Broadleaf groups is shown in more detail.[6]

Table 5: Species groups as a % of total planting

Species Group	% of total
Conifer	63
Broadleaf	34
Mixed woodland	2
Native mixed woodland	1
Totals	**100**

[5](HLAmap) HLA (hlamap.org.uk)

[6]Things to note:

- This data is based on claimed areas rather than approved, as claims are captured in GIS after they have been paid, so there will be a difference in area between this data and the previous WC Funded Options data.
- This data only includes planted areas and does not include open ground, so the area shown will be less than the total funded area.
- The area given for any individual species will be underestimated, as is it likely that some of that species will be included within 'mixed' areas. This is especially true for broadleaves as most maps submitted with claims identify 'native mixed broadleaves' as a homogenous group rather than splitting into separate species.
- The Mixed Woodland and Native Mixed Woodland species groups are shown separately as they could potentially contain a mix of conifer and broadleaved species.

Table 6: Top five conifer species planted

Conifer Species	Area funded (Hectares)	% of total
Sitka spruce	15,956	65
Caledonian Scots pine	2,696	11
Scots pine	2,385	10
Mixed conifers	1,624	6
Norway spruce	1,468	6
All other conifers	551	2
Totals	**24,680**	**100**

2.5.2 Tree species planted (Broadleaves)

The four most planted broadleaf species made up 94% of all broadleaves planted:

Table 7: Top 4 broadleaf species planted

Broadleaf Species	Area funded (Hectares)	% of total
Native Mixed Broadleaves	10,130	76
Mixed Broadleaves	992	7
Birch (indeterminate)	986	7
Downy birch	478	4
All other broadleaves	751	6
	13,337	**100**

2.6 Woodland Creation: predicted future timber

Future softwood timber volumes from woodland creation schemes have been predicted using the species data captured by GIS based on claimed FGS WC schemes, and also using Forest Yield Tables.[7]

In order to do this a number of assumptions have to be made, which don't necessarily reflect every situation. For example, Yield Class, management regime and rotation length are based on averages and likely scenarios rather than what will actually happen in every individual circumstance. It is also assumed that in most situations, clear felling takes place once the crop is at or beyond a mean volume per tree of 0.3 m^3.

The total future timber from softwood plantations funded under FGS is predicted to be 11,090,815 tonnes.

2.7 Woodland Creation: geographical spread

Maps provided in the appendices illustrate the geographical spread of woodland creation options across the five Conservancy areas.

The top three local authorities for new woodland funded in their areas are:

Table 8: Local authorities with most new woodlands

Local Authority	Native planting (ha)	Non-native planting (ha)	Total funded area (ha)
Highland Council	7,770.38	2,525.18	10,295.56
Dumfries and Galloway Council	360.92	6,604.67	6,965.59
Scottish Borders Council	980.95	5,540.70	6,521.65

No inference should be taken from this data that might suggest any reflection on the performance of these or other local authorities. The figures are provided only for statistical purposes.

2.8 Woodland Creation: carbon sequestration

The carbon sequestration for the woodland creation under the Forestry Grant Scheme was calculated using the QFORC tool. This is an internal Excel tool that was created by Forest Research.

The total predicted carbon sequestered by 2045[8], for woodlands created with FGS funding up to 2021 [inclusive], is 8,017,083 tonnes.

2.9 Woodland Creation: jobs and rural development

The New Woodland Creation survey asked contract holders about the benefits that their project has yielded for jobs and rural development.

Over the 28 responses, and therefore 28 projects, a total of 3.85 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs were created. This equated to 0.14 FTE jobs per Woodland Creation project[9] in this context. It must be noted that there is no way to accurately extrapolate this beyond the survey, due to significant variability in project types and scale.

Twelve of 28 respondents (43%) said that the woodland creation project had diversified their business. Some examples were:

- timber income

[7]Forest Yield - Forest Research
[8]For the purposes of this assessment we have used 2045 in line with SG targets. It is important to remember that the woodlands planted under FGS will continue to sequester carbon beyond this date and so considerably more carbon will be sequestered in the long term than shown here.
[9]This relates to the employment created as a direct result of the planting of the woodland and does not include downstream jobs created as a result of the new woodland, for example eco-tourism, management, harvesting.

- carbon sequestration
- improved amenity for holiday letting business
- diversifying farm/croft portfolio
- improved cover for sporting activities.

Other benefits, not directly affecting their businesses, were said to be:

- improved biodiversity
- improved landscape/visual amenity
- active deer management.

2.10 Woodland Creation: new planting on agricultural land

One of the aims of woodland creation grant funding is to support rural development through local businesses and farm diversification. This can deliver a range of benefits, such as providing shelter for livestock and crops, providing timber, and enhancing biodiversity and the landscape.

For the purpose of this evaluation, GIS data has been extracted (table below) to show how much woodland creation has taken place on agricultural land, in this instance land classes 2-4.2 (no woodland creation has taken place on land class 1).

Table 9: New woodland creation (hectares) by agricultural land classification

Land Classification	Woodland Creation Area (ha)	% of total
2	133.7	2
3.1	964.7	6
3.2	2,049.2	16
4.1	3,381.8	26
4.2	6,453.9	50
Total	**12,983.3**	**100**

2.11 Woodland Creation: stocking density assessments (SDA)

A stocking density assessment (SDA) is a sample-based approach to assessing the overall stocking density of young woodland. Typically this involves establishing plots on site (5.64m radius circles) that equal 1/100th of a hectare. Every live tree in each plot is counted, then the results averaged and extrapolated. A detailed methodology on SDAs can be found here.

In September 2023, 110 woodland creation projects from the claim year 2018/19, totalling 20% of projects claimed that year, were randomly selected and contacted to provide a self-assessed SDA of their project. These projects were reaching their fifth year since planting and therefore the end of what is normally the 'establishment phase.'

Returns were accepted up to February 2024. There were 85 returns, 77% of the total requests. These were assessed by Scottish Forestry staff using the following 'RAG' system:

- **RED:** Greater than 25% deviation from contract densities
- **AMBER:** Between 11 and 25% deviation from contract densities;
- **GREEN:** within 10% deviation of contract densities.

The results were as follows:

Table 10: Stocking density assessment results by Conservancy

Conservancy	Number sent out	Number returned	GREEN	AMBER	RED
Highland and Islands	22	16	11	4	1
Grampian	22	16	11	2	3
Perth and Argyll	22	19	14	2	3
Central	22	16	10	2	4
South	22	18	14	2	2
Totals	**110**	**85**	**60**	**12**	**13**

This indicates that while the majority of projects (71%) are continuing to meet their contract requirements by year 5, 14% were rated amber and were therefore cause for concern, and 15% were rated red and were therefore failing.

There are many factors that can affect the success of woodland establishment, some of which can be unexpected or unforeseeable. While it is expected that stocking densities should meet contract requirements at year 5, FGS woodland creation contracts are for 20 years, ensuring that action can be taken to rectify any issues found on site for a significant time.

The results of this assessment were passed onto the relevant Scottish Forestry department to be followed up.

2.12 Woodland Creation: protection

In addition to the initial planting grant, there is support for a number of operations which may be required to ensure the successful establishment of new woodland, which includes fencing and tree shelters. The presumption is that fencing is the preferred method of protecting new woodland, though tree shelters may be supported where they are a lower-cost option.

Protection costs made up 36% of the total capital expenditure for initial costs of creating new woodlands.

2.12.1 Tree guards

Tree shelters are normally used in the absence of deer fences and normally only for discrete areas of planting, in order to protect species most vulnerable to browsing. Vole guards are used where populations of voles or similar are high, normally where new woodlands are being established in or adjacent to grassy areas. The table below shows the number, value and weight in tonnes of tree shelters funded through FGS WC options. The weight data has been included to estimate how much plastic has been funded to establish new woodlands.

Table 11: Total tree shelters and plastic funded

Capital Item Name	Quantity Funded (units)	Value (£)	Approx weight each (tonne)[10]	Total weight (tonne)
Tree Shelters 0.6m - 1.1m	481,388	538,644	0.00009	43.3
Tree Shelters > 1.2m	1,807,416	3,576,757	0.000221	399.4
Vole Guard	13,505,742	2,547,364	0.000024	324.1
Total	**15,794,546**	**6,662,765**		**766.9**

Tree shelters amounted to 19% of total funded protection costs.

2.12.2 Fencing

The fencing-off of new woodland creation sites is normally crucial to establishment, due to unnaturally high populations of deer in Scotland. The table below shows the general quantity and value of funded new fencing and associated capital items funded through FGS WC options.

Table 12: Total fencing funded

Capital Item Name	Quantity Funded	Value (£)
Deer fencing	29,221.73 kilometres	22,970,583
Stock fencing	545.43 kilometres	2,396,497
Upgrading stock to deer fence	209.19 kilometres	676,504
Fence enhancements	762.57 kilometres	2,362,561
Gates	4,147 units	671,748
Total		**£ 29,077,893**

Fencing amounted to 81% of total funded protection costs.

2.13 Woodland Creation: forest and woodland strategies

Indicative Forestry Strategies (IFS) are created by local authorities and used principally to guide future woodland expansion and restructuring of woodlands to maximise the benefits for the local economy, communities and environment.

At the heart of an IFS is a strategy diagram, setting out areas that are considered "preferred", "potential", "potential with sensitivities" and "unsuitable" for new planting.[11] The table below identifies how much woodland creation is taking place in the most suitable areas.

Table 13: Total area of woodland creation by IFS land classification

Area Type[12]	Total Area Planted (ha)	% of IFS Type
Preferred	18,710.99	46%
Potential	21,566.43	44%
Potential with Sensitivities	3,850.72	7%
Unsuitable	618.35	3%
Grand Total	**44,746.49**	**100%**

With 90% of woodland creation taking place on preferred or potential land, this indicates that the forest strategies are fulfilling their role in facilitating appropriate woodland expansion.

[10]Based on Tubex specifications
[11]The Right Tree in the Right Place – Planning for forestry and woodlands
[12]Things to note about this data:
- The Forestry and Woodland Strategy Scotland data is an amalgamated dataset from SpatialHub and does not cover the entirety of Scotland. Therefore, it does not consider all of our Woodland Creation Option data.
- There are other categories but for the purpose of this task, 'preferred', 'potential', 'potential with sensitivities' and 'unsuitable' were considered the best types to evaluate.

2.14 Woodland Creation: community and public benefits

Urban woodlands are of particular benefit to the public due to their accessibility from population centres. An urban woodland is defined as being located within one kilometre of settlements with a population of over 2,000 people. FGS offers support for 'Woods In and Around Towns' (WIAT), which helps to bring existing woodlands into management and to develop opportunities to use and enjoy both existing and newly created woodlands, such as through the installation of formal footpaths.

The table below shows how FGS Woodland Creation intersects with WIAT eligibility areas, identifying potential for accessible woodlands access near to settlements to provide additional public benefit.

Table 14: Total area of woodland created in WIAT areas

	New woodland (ha)
WIAT Area (1km around settlements of 2000 people)	1,425.3
WIAT Priority Area (500m around most deprived areas)	107.2

As there is no specific WIAT woodland creation option, it is not possible to discern whether these woodlands were created with the direct intention of being accessible to the public. However, access cannot be restricted to any FGS-funded project, so these woodlands could be enjoyed by local communities.

The New Woodland Creation survey asked respondents what public benefits have been realised as a result of their projects. Some examples of community benefits were:

- new walking routes
- increase in use by the public, such as picnicking, walking, biking and horseriding
- improved landscape/visual amenity.

2.15 Woodland Creation: other survey results

The Applicant Experience Survey was conducted in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of approximately 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

These survey results have been included here as they do not neatly fit into any other evaluation heading, but are considered pertinent to the evaluation.

Of the respondents, the most popular Woodland Creation option was Native broadleaves (82.4%) followed by Conifer (72.1%).

The main benefits respondents expected to see from their new woodland creation were improved biodiversity (92.6%) and carbon sequestration (86.8%).

Community benefits were least often expected to be gained from schemes (60.3%).

83.8% of respondents said they went beyond minimum UKFS requirements when designing their new woodland.

27.9% of respondents said at least five FTE jobs were created as a result of their woodland creation scheme.

76.5% of respondents said they made provision for public access in their new woodland.

23.1% of respondents said between 1 and 50 people visit their new woodland each month. 15% said 51-100 visitors, and 15% said over 250 visitors per month.

80.9% of respondents said their chosen Woodland Creation option allowed them to achieve their objectives.

Comments on why some objectives could not be achieved:

- Not allowed to plant desired % of productive species
- Requests for projects to go beyond minimum UKFS requirements
- Options were too restrictive or not flexible enough.

Summary of other comments on Woodland Creation options (grouped thematically):

- Set options are too restrictive when trying to create multi-purpose woodlands
- Clearer lists of required surveys and consultees
- More capital items for access and recreation
- Dedicated Atlantic Rainforest option
- Review of Agroforestry
- Better support for Riparian Woodlands
- Manual forms are clunky and slow – online system desirable
- Capital costs too low – need to track with inflation
- Better support for Shelter Belts
- Sheep and Trees extended should include cattle farms
- Better balance of grant rates (conifer vs native BLs)
- Review types of species allowable to plant
- Reduce use of plastic
- Use grant to encourage use of greener technology/machinery/protection
- Better access to professional forestry advice required
- IACS / LPIDS etc. not fit for purpose in forestry context
- Applicants shouldn't be pushed to go beyond UKFS.

2.16 Woodland Creation: data analysis

Assessing the data, the following observations can be made:

- A total of 48,889 hectares (120,807 acres / 488km^2) of new woodland has been established. This is just short of the original scheme aim[13] of 49,000 hectares over the seven-year period.
- Over half of new woodland creation is through the Conifer option at 54% (26,513 hectares).
- The desired 50/50 split of 50% Conifer and Diverse Conifer options and 50% other woodland creation options[14] was not met. Instead the ratio has been 61/39 respectively.
- While nearly 30% of applications were for projects of 5 hectares or below, this accounted for only 2% of total woodland creation. Conversely, fewer than 10% of applications were for >100 hectares in size, but these made up 50% of all new woodland creation.
- 69% of all new woodland creation (native or non-native) is considered productive, where timber is a key objective. Native woodland will form a component of this, to meet the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) and grant scheme requirements (see below).
- Native woodland creation options equate to 31% of all new planting (15,381 hectares). However, this does not include the native component of other options, so the total area will be higher.
- Between 1,675 and 3,350 hectares of additional native woodland planting are associated with other woodland creation options.
- Agroforestry has had very limited uptake, with only 2 hectares planted.
- 1,262 hectares of woodland creation has been established through natural regeneration.
- 90% of native woodland options are planted in the Native Woodland Expansion Zone.
- 42% of native woodland projects intersect with riparian zones (within 20 metres of a watercourse or body) although may not be planted expressly for that purpose.
- Just over 8,500 hectares of woodland creation has been planted in the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN) area, with 69% opting for the Conifer option.
- 11 million tonnes of Scottish-grown timber is expected be available from FGS-funded new commercial softwood (native and non-native) plantations within 40 years.
- The total carbon sequestration from the woodland creation (up to 2022) in the FGS by the year 2045 is just over 8 million tonnes of CO2e.
- 10% of WC applicants own more than 3,000 hectares of land. 44% of WC applicants own between 0-199 hectares of land.
- Most applicants don't specify their business type when applying for grant.
- Just over 50% of all FGS-funded native planting has taken place in the Highland Council area, followed by 10% in Argyll and Bute and 9% in Perth and Kinross.
- 20% of all FGS-funded non-native planting has taken place in Dumfries and Galloway, followed by 17% in Scottish Borders and 10% in Perth and Kinross.
- Almost 16 million tree guards have been funded, 86% of them vole guards.
- An estimated 767 tonnes of plastic has been used in tree shelters.
- Almost 3,500 kilometres of fencing has been funded, 84% of it deer fencing.
- Almost £36 million has been spent on protection costs (tree guards, fencing and associated capital costs).
- Protection costs make up 36% of the total capital cost for initial planting.
- An estimated 12,983 hectares of woodland creation has taken place on LCA 2-4.2, with 2% on class 2, 6% on 3.1, 16% on 3.2, 26% on 4.1, 50% on 4.2;
- Almost 90% of all woodland creation has taken place in 'preferred' or 'potential' areas identified in Local Authority Woodland Strategies.
- 1,532 hectares of woodland have been planted within 1km of a settlement of 2,000 or more people, providing the potential for public access.
- 29% of sampled projects are deviating by greater than 10% from their contractual tree densities, suggesting that areas are not being maintained to contract standards.

[13]Aims set out in figure 27, page 250 of the Scottish Rural Development Programme – domestic: programme 2021.
[14]This aim was set out on page 248 of the Scottish Rural Development Programme – domestic: programme 2021.

2.17 Woodland Creation: assessment against aims

To assess impact, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims and objectives of the Woodland Creation grant option. These are:

1. Meeting our target to increase woodland cover

Overall, the woodland creation grants have been a success. The target set at the outset of FGS was 49,000 hectares. The total planted within the evaluation period amounted to 48,889 hectares, 99.8% of the original target. This does not take into account any subsequent changes to the annual target.

2. Helping mitigate climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions through carbon sequestration

Approximately 8 million tonnes of CO2 will be sequestered by 2045 by woodlands planted under FGS.

3. Restoration of 'lost' habitats through developing forest habitat networks

90% of native woodlands are planted in the Native Woodland Expansion Zones, thus restoring lost habitats through habitat networks. In addition, a significant amount of native woodlands are planted in riparian zones, which can benefit soils and the water environment.

4. Supporting a sustainable forest industry by providing a reliable timber supply

69% of new woodlands are for productive options, potentially providing more than 11 million tonnes of timber in the future. Where this is used in timber products, the carbon will be locked in for the lifetime of those products.

5. Protecting soil and water

42% of native woodland options were planted within riparian areas (defined by this evaluation as being within 20 metres of a watercourse or body), reducing water runoff and soil erosion.

6. Providing community benefits through public access

Over 8,500 hectares of new woodlands have been planted in the Central Scotland Green network area. Across Scotland, 1,532 hectares of woodland have been planted within 1km of a settlement of 2,000+ people, providing the potential for public benefit.

7. Enhancing urban areas and improving landscapes

All new woodlands have been through a robust UKFS assessment prior to contract approval. This means new woodlands align with the UKFS Forests and Landscape guidance, ensuring that they complement and integrate into existing landscapes.

8. Supporting rural development through local businesses and farm diversification

The options have also supported farm diversification, through the Sheep and Trees grant (see Infrastructure), which has supported over 1,000 hectares of new woodlands on farms and provided associated road infrastructure. It can also be assumed that any woodland planting on ground considered prime agricultural land will be to support an ongoing farm business, with just over 3,000 hectares being planted on land classes 3.2 or better, although the Agroforestry option has had very limited uptake.

Further feedback on a sample of projects suggests 3.85 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs were created over 28 individual projects. This suggests an average of 0.14 FTEs created per woodland creation project in this sample.

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Section 3

Restructuring Regeneration (RR)

3.1 RR: introduction and aims

The aim of the Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG): Restructuring Regeneration grant support is to incentivise forest owners to improve the biodiversity, resilience and species diversity of woodlands in the long term. This will be achieved through restructuring their age and species composition at the point of re-planting after felling.

Grant support for restructuring regeneration is on the basis that we are providing a contribution to the extra costs of species diversity over the most dominant species in Scotland, namely Sitka spruce.

3.2 RR: grants and applications data

3.2.1 Grant contributions

This grant option was split over two payment options with different requirements:

- Delivering UK Forestry Standard Woodland: £300 per hectare

The level of tree species diversity meets the UK Forestry Standard so that no more than 75% is allocated to a single species. A minimum of 10% 'other species' must be present within each application/claim.

- Delivering Diversity and Resilience Woodland: £550 per hectare

The level of tree species diversity goes beyond that required by the UK Forestry Standard so that no more than 60% is allocated to a single species. A minimum of 20% 'other species' must be present within each application/claim.

3.2.2 What has been funded

From Casebook, we were able to extract data relating to the scale of RR grant applied for over both payment rates, up to and including the 2021 claim year.

Within this period there were a total of **1,060 applications** covering **25,547 hectares.**

Table 15: Total areas and value of RR grant funding

Option	Area (ha)	%	Value (£)	%
Delivering UKFS Woodland	14,141	55%	4,411,598	41%
Delivering Diversity and Resilience	11,406	45%	6,249,084	59%
Totals	**25,547 hectares**	**£10,660,682**		

The totals in this table were committed figures, not claimed.

3.2.3 Ownership types applying for grant

In order to determine the type of ownership, we used data from the sample of Long Term Forest Plans. It should be noted that while an applicant has indicated on the plan template that it is a forest business, this does not necessarily mean it is not forestry on a farm or owned by an estate.

Table 16: Business types applying for RR grant

Business Type	% of Applications
Forestry	68
Estate	24
Farm	8

3.2.4 Felled areas under Restructuring Regeneration Contracts

The table below gives numbers for FGS WIG Restructuring and Regeneration and how they related to different types of approved felling. P1 + P2 means the first and second phases (the first 10 years) of the Long Term Forest Plans approved under the respective grant scheme.

'Approved felling' includes any areas where a permission to fell was active within the evaluation period, not what was approved during the evaluation period, and does not necessarily mean the area had been felled, hence why some felling licences from 2011 onwards may have intersected the later evaluation period:

Table 17: Areas felled covered by RR applications

Felling Type	Approved Felling (ha)	Area covered by RR (ha)	% felling covered by RR
FGS WIG LTFP[15], P1+P2	35,612	5,454	15.32%
RDC-RP FP[16], P1+P2	73,548	15,282	20.78%
Felling Permissions and Licences since 2011	58,104	8,116	13.97%
Totals	**167,264**	**28,852**	**17.25%**

Some things to note:

- The total area under management is greater than other figures in this section due to including RR applications beyond 2021.
- The same area can be approved for felling multiple times, for example if felling permission is granted but not carried out and then reapplied for.
- Felling may also be approved by planning permission and Statutory Plant Health Notices, but these were not included in this analysis.
- Some open ground will be included in RR Options, but is generally not included in felling areas. This will account for some of the RR that doesn't overlap felling, but is likely a minority.

3.2.5 Species diversity

Using GIS data on claimed applications, we can examine the woodland types being replanted using RR grant funding (figures are rounded):

Table 18: Areas of tree species planted under RR grants

Species	Area (hectares)	Area covered by RR (ha)
Sitka spruce	14,545	62
Mixed conifers	2,457	11
Native mixed broadleaves	2,211	9
Norway spruce	1,681	7
Scots pine	743	3
All other types (combined)	1,917	8
Totals	**23,554***	**100**

*This total is for claimed hectares (when species data is captured), therefore this total is 1,993 hectares less than the committed figures.

The question as to whether this grant encouraged greater diversity than would have otherwise been achieved was difficult to answer. A sample of 50 long-term forest plans (10 per Conservancy) that had associated RR grants were studied to assess whether forest-wide diversity had been increased. While the majority (56%) of forest plans had a primary species less than 60% at year 20, it is not possible to attribute this level of diversity to this grant.

The Customer Experience Survey showed that 83.7% of respondents said they went beyond minimum UKFS requirements when restructuring their woodland.

65.1% of respondents said the RR grant did not encourage them to bring forward the diversification of their woodland.

60.5% of respondents said the RR grant did not encourage them to replant a greater diversity of species.

3.2.6 Establishment techniques used in management

Only 62.8% of respondents to the FGS Evaluation Survey used fertiliser to aid in establishment.

Varying techniques were used by respondents to ensure establishment. The most common management techniques, from responses, were:

- brash harvesting/removal
- mounding (continuous, inverted, hinge and trench)
- fertiliser application (slow release)
- planting bare-root, treated trees
- top-up spraying for weevil
- deer management
- weeding (hand and chemical)

[15]Forestry Grant Scheme, Woodland Improvement Grant, Long Term Forest Plan
[16]Rural Development Contracts – Rural Priorities, Forest Plan

3.3 RR: other survey results

The Applicant Experience Survey was conducted in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of approximately 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

These survey results have been included here as they do not neatly fit into any other evaluation heading, but are considered pertinent to the evaluation.

Summary of comments (grouped thematically):

- Payment rate too low
- Sliding scale for felling area size (larger areas get less)
- Not suitable for small felling areas (cost to apply vs grant received)
- Meeting basic UKFS requirements shouldn't be grant funded
- Remove lower payment rate and enhance higher rate
- Too complicated to apply
- If UKFS compliant plan is already in place, shouldn't need to specify detail for restocking
- Should be used to encourage natural regeneration
- Should not support planting of Sitka but instead enhance payment for broadleaves and soft conifers.

3.4 RR: data analysis

- While the majority of businesses said to be using this grant option are 'forestry' businesses, it is not possible to determine whether these are also related to an estate or farm, or whether these are individually-owned forests.
- Over half (55%) of all applications are for UKFS Woodlands, with 41% of the grant monies paid for this option. This means most applications are only going as far as minimum requirements under UKFS to diversify their woodlands, which would still be required regardless of grant aid.
- The payment rates used for the restructuring of woodlands are in stark contrast between the north of Scotland (78% D&R Woodlands rate in Highland and Islands Conservancy) and south of Scotland (80% UKFS Woodlands rate in South Scotland Conservancy). Perth and Argyll Conservancy has the most even split between payment rates, at 58% UKFS rate and 42% D&R rate. These splits are broadly to be expected, in terms of what types of woodlands are known to exist within these areas.
- In areas known to be predominantly Sitka spruce forests, such as the south of Scotland, most applications are for the lower rate (75% single species). This suggests that the higher rate is not a sufficient incentive to encourage diversification away from Sitka spruce.
- It appears that only 17% of areas felled since Phase 1 of RDC-RP Forest Plans have been restocked under grant aid. However, this does not take into account RDC-RP restructuring grants. The intention of this data was to assess how much the WIG-RR grant has been used to restock felled areas (a legal requirement), but because we have no record of the year of felling, it is not possible to narrow the data to be FGS-specific.
- Of all tree species planted under WIG-RR grant support, 61% has been Sitka Spruce, followed by 'Mixed Conifers' which make up 10% of all species planted. This indicates that the grant, intended to pay for woodlands to be diversified, has predominantly been used to plant a single species.

3.5 RR: assessment against aims

To assess impact, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims/objectives of the WIG-RR grant option:

'The aim of the RR grant support is to incentivise forest owners to improve the biodiversity, resilience and species diversity of woodlands in the long term. This will be achieved through restructuring their age and species composition at the point of re-planting following felling.'

In terms of improved biodiversity it is impossible to know, either through desk-based or field research, whether this grant option will have positively or negatively impacted biodiversity. This is because there was no requirement to submit baseline biodiversity data for the grant application areas. This means there is no way to effectively quantify a net improvement or deterioration in biodiversity.

In terms of improved resilience, there is certainly a positive move toward more resilient woodlands, as demonstrated by 45% of applications being for the higher payment rate and therefore a maximum of 60% single species. However, with 55% of applications being for the UKFS minimum – a standard that is considered best practice regardless of grant aid – it seems more could be done to incentivise better diversity and therefore resilience.

In terms of species diversity, Sitka spruce made up 61.75% of all tree species planted using this grant. While this is far below the 75% minimum requirement under the lower-paying UKFS Woodlands rate, it still signifies that the largest proportion of the grant monies being paid is for what is already the predominant softwood crop in Scotland. Therefore it would be difficult to say that paying for this much Sitka spruce offers significant improvements to species diversity in Scottish forests.

It is difficult to understand the types of businesses benefiting from this grant, due to the lack of detail provided in the application process. Further, it is difficult to quantify how widespread this grant is used when restocking woodlands (data in 2.3), which is already a legal requirement, and therefore how much incentive is being provided by this grant to diversify and the point of replanting.

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Section 4

Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS)

4.1 LISS: introduction and aims

The LISS option, which can be accessed through both the Woodland Improvement and Sustainable Management of Forests grant options, is specifically aimed at:

Facilitating the transformation of stands to low-impact silvicultural systems (LISS).

A low-impact silvicultural system is a type of woodland management that helps to increase species and structural diversity. It normally causes less rapid change to the landscape and to the physical environment than clear felling systems and so can help the landowner meet multi-purpose objectives.

In the context of climate change, varied silvicultural systems will increase the resilience of forests and may limit the damage caused by extreme events such as gales or pest outbreaks.

4.2 LISS: grants and applications data

4.2.1 Grant contributions

A variety of capital grant options are available under WIG – LISS (see here). To be eligible for these, the applicant must either have an existing Forestry Grant Scheme SMF – LISS or apply for this option within their application.

SMF – LISS is an annual grant to support the additional costs for deer control and management planning that are required to implement low-impact silvicultural systems. The rate is £30 per hectare per year for up to five years.

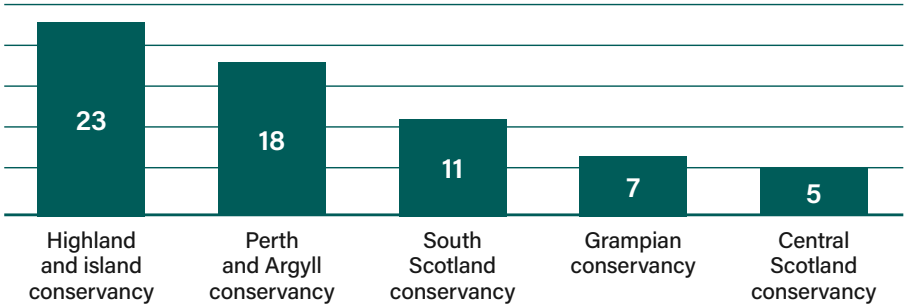
4.2.2 What has been funded

There have only been three applications for LISS options. One application is for SMF LISS only, whilst the other two are for both SMF and WIG LISS activities. The latter two cases were not due to be claimed until 2022, so are technically outwith the scope of analysis. One case is within Grampian Conservancy and the others are within Perth and Argyll Conservancy.

4.2.3 Forest Plans containing LISS

A total of 64 approved FGS Forest Plans have stated LISS as a management activity within the 10-year approval period. This is captured on GIS along with the first and second felling phases. The chart below shows the number of cases across all Conservancies. The total area recorded as being managed through LISS is 4,699.69 hectares. This represents 18% of all approved FGS Forest Plans.

FGS Forest Plans containing LISS



50% of respondents to the WIG:LISS section of the Customer Experience Survey said that the grant encouraged them to use LISS where they otherwise would not have. These respondents also stated that the grant encouraged CCF, small harvesting areas, and low ground pressure harvesting.

67% of respondents to the SMF:LISS section of the Customer Experience Survey said that the grant did not encourage them to use LISS. Only one respondent stated that the grant encouraged them to adopt the Shelterwood system.

4.3 LISS: direct requests for information

Scottish Forestry contacted 25 (five per Conservancy) approved Forest Plan owners who had included LISS in their plan. They were invited to complete a survey on whether or not they applied for the grant and their reasons for doing so.

Of the 25 invited to the survey, there were nine respondents (36%).

Two (22%) stated that they had submitted an application for LISS, but felt the grant rate was not sufficient to cover deer management costs.

The remaining seven respondents (78%) did not apply for LISS support. Feedback on why they did not apply were (grouped thematically):

- the application process was complex/difficult
- the grant failed to meet operational costs
- risk of having to repay grant if regeneration fails to establish
- expensive administrative process to monitor and claim grant
- high timber prices switched focus away from LISS to clear-felling operations within the plan period
- lack of flexibility for innovation and techniques for deer management infrastructure, for example use of deer repellent.

Other general feedback (grouped thematically) included:

- lots of duplication of information required for LISS application that is already contained within the forest plan and deer management plan
- consider whether LISS stands could be included under the Woodland Carbon Code.

4.4 LISS: other survey results

The Applicant Experience Survey was conducted in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of approximately 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

These survey results have been included here as they do not neatly fit into any other evaluation heading, but are considered pertinent to the evaluation.

Summary of comments (grouped thematically):

- LISS only achievable when timber markets are buoyant
- LISS needs smaller felling coupes, but costs of fencing encourage larger felling coupes
- LISS should be better integrated during planning process.

Summary of other comments on SMF: LISS option (grouped thematically):

- too much information required on top of existing LTFP and DMP
- SF staff not knowledgeable enough on LISS.

4.5 LISS: data analysis

- Despite 64 approved Forest Plans stating that LISS will be included as part of their management strategy, only three cases of LISS (5% of total) were approved in the evaluation period.
- It appears that the largest barrier to entry is the level of additional information beyond the forest plan and deer management plan.
- Applicants feel the grant rate is too low to incentivise uptake.

4.6 LISS: assessment against aims

To assess whether these options have been successful we must assess them against the key parts of the original aim:

Facilitating the transformation of stands to low-impact silvicultural systems (LISS).

A low-impact silvicultural system is a type of woodland management that helps to increase species and structural diversity.

As there were three applications to LISS it can be said that the grant did achieve its aim of facilitating transformation of stands to LISS, albeit on a very small scale.

Given the low uptake versus the number of forests looking to undertake LISS, it is clear that the grant is not sufficiently incentivising a move toward LISS at a broader scale.

Further, high buoyancy in the timber market appeared to counter any move towards the transformation of stands to LISS, because clearfelling was a more profitable approach.

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Section 5

Woodland Improvement Grant: Planning

5.1 Planning: introduction and aims

Planning grants are designed to support the preparation of forest and / or management plans that set out management objectives for woodlands. This includes five different plan types:

- Long Term Forest Plans
- Forest Plan Renewals
- Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) Urban Woodland Management Plans
- Woodland Grazing Plans
- Deer Management Plans.

The aims and objectives of each of these grant options are detailed and addressed in section 5.5.

Data relating to the different planning options was primarily gathered from Casebook and GIS. As part of this evaluation, an exercise was undertaken to look more closely at LTFPs to identify whether Forest Plans go beyond the UKFS minimum in terms of species and structural diversity, including levels of deer management.

To that end, a random sample of 50 LTFPs (10 per Conservancy area) were analysed.

Relating to deer management, of the 50 plans sampled, 38 make some positive statement to controlling deer (76%). However, this ranges from a few sentences within the plan, stating deer will be controlled, to having a full Deer Management Plan in place.

5.2 Planning: grants and applications data

5.2.1 Grant contributions

The grant rate for each planning option can be found **here**.

5.2.2 What has been funded

5.2.2.1 Woodland Grazing Management Plans

A total of 23 WIG Woodland Grazing Management Plans (WGMPs) were claimed during the evaluation period, covering 2,054.47 hectares.

Fourteen of these WGMPs (1,338.86ha) claimed for the Sustainable Management of Forests (SMF): Woodland Grazing within the evaluation period.

Three of these WGMPs (62.02ha) claimed for the Sustainable Management of Forests (SMF): Woodland Grazing grant outwith the evaluation period.

Six of these WGMPs (653.59) resulted in no subsequent grant applications for woodland grazing.

A further four WGMPs were offered a contract but either never claimed the grant or withdrew their contract. These have associated, approved SMF: Woodland Grazing Applications, which suggests that the applicants wanted to continue with the activity but no longer wanted the grant associated with the WGMP.

The effectiveness of the implementation of these plans through the Sustainable Management of Forests: Woodland Grazing grant option is explored in section 11.

5.2.2.2 WIAT Urban Management Plans

67 WIAT Urban Management Plans have been approved, covering 2,728.22 hectares in total.

5.2.2.3 Deer Management Plans (DMP)

There have been eight applications for Deer Management Plans under FGS, with a total area covering 16,000 hectares. Only six of the eight plans have so far been approved. There were no Deer Management Plans approved within the Central or South Scotland Conservancy areas.

The total area covered by Deer Management Plans is 16,006 hectares.

The total value committed to DMPs is £59,416.92.

The average intended reduction of deer over all approved deer management plans is 14 per square kilometre.

The Customer Experience Survey asked respondents about their experiences with Deer Management Plans. Of the 10 respondents, 90% said they already carried out deer management before applying for the grant.

20% of respondents said that the grant encouraged them to carry out deer management where they otherwise would not have.

60% of respondents said that the grant improved their ability to carry out effective deer management.

Reasons why effective deer management could not take place included (grouped thematically):

- a poor market for venison
- high population areas/recreational use.

60% of respondents said that they managed to bring deer populations below 10 per km^2 within three years of plan implementation.

5.2.2.4 Forest Plans and Forest Plan Renewals

There have been 475 applications for FGS funding for the production of Long Term Forest Plans (LTFPs), of which 147 (31%) are for Forest Plan Renewals.

This isn't the overall figure of forests and woodlands under management; rather how many applicants have applied for either a new forest plan or a forest plan renewal through FGS.

The Customer Experience Survey asked respondents about their experiences with forest plans. Of the 45 respondents, 78% said the forest plan they submitted was previously covered by an expired forest plan.

47% of respondents said that they would not have created a forest plan if the grant had not been not available.

64% of respondents said that the grant encouraged them to plan their forest differently. This was because the grant covered the additional time taken to allow the ability to go into more detail in most areas. Ways in which the plans for their forest changed included (grouped thematically):

- increases in species diversity
- improved planning of infrastructure
- improved climate resilience
- better planning of areas for commercial and/or biodiversity outcomes
- better understanding of local issues.

5.2.3 Forest Plans and species diversity

It is difficult to assess whether plans go beyond the UKFS minimum. The approach taken was to look at how many of the sample FGS Forest Plans have applied for the higher rate of Restructuring Regeneration (RR) grant 'Delivering Diversity and Resilience.'

There are two rates of grant: 'Delivering UK Forestry Standard Woodland' – where no more than 75% of the forest is allocated to a single species; and 'Delivering Diversity and Resilience Woodland', where no more than 60% of the forest is allocated to a single species.

To be eligible for the higher rate there are two steps. Firstly, the forest needs to already have, or aim to have, no more than 60% allocated to a single species by year 20, which exceeds the minimum requirements of the UK Forestry Standard. Secondly, an applicant is also required to have a minimum of 20% 'other species' present within each application/claim.

Of the 50 Plans sampled, 28 (56%) had applied for the higher rate of grant, indicating that they have gone beyond the minimum required for species composition at the forest plan level.

Whilst some of the plans sampled met Step 1 of the grant eligibility criteria for the higher rate, they may not have met Step 2. This means that there is a direct correlation between the higher rate of grant and a higher level of existing or proposed species diversity in the forest. However, where the lower rate of grant has been applied for, it does not necessarily mean the forest has only met the minimum species composition of the UKFS.

5.2.4 Forest Plans and felling phases

As previously mentioned, it isn't easy to say whether a plan goes beyond the UKFS minimum. Of the 50 plans sampled, only five (10%) indicate having more than four felling phases, which at face value would suggest that the stand structure across most forests is limited. However, there are a number of factors not taken into account: previous felling carried out before plan approval; areas not considered for felling/permanent woodland or long-term retention; or other reasons influencing the forest structure.

It is also the case that the LTFP template (which applicants are encouraged to use) only asks for four phases, with the remaining areas being noted as 'outwith plan period.'

5.3 Planning: other survey results

The Applicant Experience Survey was conducted in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of approximately 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, putting the response rate around 30%.

These survey results have been included here as they do not neatly fit into any other evaluation heading, but are considered pertinent to the evaluation.

Summary of other comments on WIG: LTFP option (grouped thematically):

- Forest plans take too long to be approved.
- Templates and forms are clunky and should be improved, using technology where possible.
- Not having access to paid mapping software locks out applicants
- Better opportunities to review the plan within the 10-year period, where applicable, as intentions can change significantly in that time.
- The grant rate is too low.
- The process of creating plans is too bureaucratic/not focussed on outcomes.

Summary of other comments on WIG: Deer Management Plan option (grouped thematically):

- Forest plans should include design elements giving thought to deer control, for example ATV tracks.
- Deer management planning doesn't consider local venison markets and how this might impact control.
- Grant assistance toward Herbivore Impact Assessment training would be desirable.
- Grants (including those provided by other public bodies) should focus on making the whole supply chain more viable so that culling is profitable and therefore carried out more readily.

5.4 Planning: data analysis

- There have been 475 FGS Forest Plan applications across Scotland, as well as 67 WIAT Urban Management Plans. This isn't the whole picture: applicants apply for grants to produce a plan and can claim the grant on completion of the plan, so some of these applications may not yet have a completed Forest Plan associated with them. There are also legacy plans through previous grant schemes which are still live, as well as non-grant funded plans, particularly for smaller woodlands less than 100 hectares.
- The split between Conservancy areas is expected, based on the physical nature of woodland types and proximity to local populations. Highland and Islands, Perth and Argyll and South have the highest numbers of Forest Plan cases, whereas Central has the higher proportion of Urban Management Plans. Grampian has a smaller amount of both, but may have a higher proportion of non-grant funded Management Plans in place.
- There have been 328 initial Forest Plan applications and 147 Forest Plan Renewals. This indicates that 328 forests have come into active management since the beginning of FGS.
- There have been 23 Woodland Grazing Plan applications. However, this is a very specific activity and relates to predominantly native woodlands (PAWS sites can be included) to improve biodiversity and natural regeneration. Highlands and Islands Conservancy has over half of all the Woodland Grazing Plan applications.
- 26% of approved Woodland Grazing Management Plans did not apply for the subsequent woodland grazing grant payment.
- There have been eight Deer Management Plan applications. None of these is in Central or South Conservancy. 76% of total approved Forest Plans state deer management will be undertaken as part of the forest management.
- Over the current six out of eight approved DMPs, the average reduction in deer densities will be 14/km^2. All plans propose to maintain deer below 10/ km^2.
- The payment rates used for the restructuring of woodlands is quite different between the north of Scotland (78% D&R Woodlands rate in Highland and Islands Conservancy) and south of Scotland (80% UKFS Woodlands rate in South Scotland Conservancy). Perth and Argyll Conservancy has the most even split between payment rates, at 58% UKFS rate and 42% D&R rate. These splits are broadly to be expected, in terms of the types of woodlands known to exist within these areas.
- It's difficult to gauge a true picture of stand structure through felling phase data without forensically analysing each forest plan, which is outwith the scope of this evaluation.
- FGS Forest Plans which include LISS as a management objective are fairly evenly split across all Conservancies, ranging from 19%-22%, except for South which has slightly fewer at 12%.

5.5 Planning: assessment against aims

It is easiest to reiterate the aims of each option in order to consider whether they have been met.

Forest Plans

Provide support for the creation of a long-term forest plan that sets out the management objectives for your woodland.

At face value, this option has met its main aim, although as previously mentioned, this isn't the whole story and doesn't consider other non-FGS funded plans, or how many forests and woodlands don't have a plan in place. A strategic objective is to have more forests and woodlands managed under a plan, and this grant option has helped toward that objective.

Forest Plan Renewals

Provide support for the renewal of an existing forest plan that sets out the management objectives for your woodland.

A number of Forest Plan applications are plan renewals – i.e. the forest has had a Forest Plan previously, and is therefore only eligible for the lower rate of grant. It is a guideline of the UKFS and indeed UKWAS that woodlands should have a forest management plan in place, and to be eligible for some other grant options a Forest or Management Plan must be in place.

Woodland Grazing Management Plans

Provide support for a specialist to prepare a Woodland Grazing Management Plan as per the Woodland Grazing Toolbox. This plan is designed to support the SMF Woodland Grazing and WIG H&S for specific capital items.

23 plans have been approved for this option, which suggests the grant has gone some way to meeting its aim. However, six of these never resulted in a subsequent application for either WIG or SMF: Woodland Grazing.

WIAT (Urban Woodland) Management Plans

Provide support for the creation of a WIAT (Urban Woodland) Management Plan which will set out the management and public access objectives for your woodland.

There have been 67 Urban Woodland Management Plans approved, the majority in Central Scotland Conservancy, as would be expected due to its large population centres. This would suggest that the aim of this option is being met.

Deer Management Plans

Reduce deer densities to an agreed target (5-10 deer per km2). This grant is for the work required to carry out the population survey and baseline damage assessment at a landscape scale.

The six approved DMPs (of the total eight funded) all commit to target deer densities of 10/km^2 or less, with the highest target density being ten and the lowest being three. This is in line with the aims of the option. However, the few applications for this option would suggest that this deer control isn't being widely delivered, and from the data it isn't clear why that would be.

The eligibility criteria could be viewed as too onerous. It requires applicants to collaborate with neighbours to be effective. The effort required may be considered too much for the grant funding received.

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Section 6

Habitats, Species and Native Woodlands

This section concerns the evaluation of the Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) 'Habitats and Species' grants as well as the Sustainable Management of Forests (SMF) 'Native Woodland' grant. These have been evaluated together as they share common outcomes.

6.1 Habitats and Species: introduction and aims

The overarching aim of the Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) option, which includes Habitat and Species, is to provide capital grants for a range of activities in existing woodlands that will:

- encourage natural regeneration and benefit priority habitats and species
- increase species and structural diversity through low impact silvicultural systems management
- contribute to the sustainable management of urban woodlands and improve public access
- support the preparation of forest and / or management plans that set out management objectives for the woodland
- improve the biodiversity, resilience and structural diversity of even aged woodlands.

The Habitats and Species option is specifically aimed at:

- improving the condition of native woodlands and restoring plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites to native woodland
- restoration or conservation of non-woodland habitats (such as lowland raised bogs and blanket bogs) that are present within the internal boundary of the woodland
- species associated with woodland edge (such as the pearl-bordered fritillary)
- Woodland Designed Landscapes.

6.2 Habitats and Species: grants and applications data

6.2.1 Grant contribution

A variety of capital grant options are available under WIG – Habitats and Species, found here.

6.2.2 What has been funded

The desk assessment identified 132 WIG Habitats and Species cases in total, with 80% applications in Highland and Islands Conservancy.

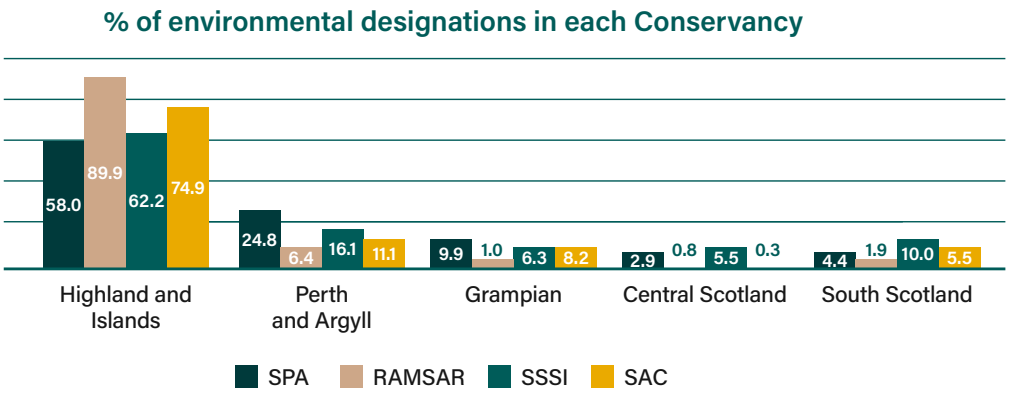
81 of the 132 cases (61%) state in their application the work will benefit designated features on a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Protection Area (SPA) and/or Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The table below shows the distribution of applications on sites across all Conservancies.

Table 19: Numbers of H&S contracts per site type

Conservancy	Cases on designated sites	Cases on non-designated sites	Total Cases
Highland and Islands	63	43	106
Perth and Argyll	11	0	11
Grampian	4	4	8
Central Scotland	2	2	4
South Scotland	1	2	3

The trend in the distribution of applications, and of applications on designated sites, is not surprising when compared to the geographic spread of designated sites across Conservancy areas. The following chart displays the percentages of the national total of each designated site type found in each Conservancy area:

Chart 1: % of environmental designations by Conservancy



This chart demonstrates a clear correlation between the number of sites in a given Conservancy with the number of applications received by that Conservancy, as would be expected.

6.2.3 Native Woodland and PAWS (Planted Ancient Woodland Sites) Restoration

All applications (with the exception of non-woodland habitat cases, see section below) relate to improving the condition of native woodlands and/or improving the habitat for species associated with those woodlands. Only one application was found to make a clear statement about restoring an area of PAWS back to native woodland. There are applications which detail improvement activities within and adjacent to PAWS, but full restoration to native woodland wasn't stated as a main objective.

6.2.4 Rhododendron clearance

1336.79 hectares of rhododendron clearance was approved through this option. 54% of rhododendron clearance cases claimed to be in the target area for rhododendron control.

Further information on rhododendron clearance and the success of its implementation was included in the Rumroy Survey Report. More information can be found in Section 9.3.

6.2.5 Non-woodland habitat

Approximately 590 hectares of peatland restoration was carried out, split over two applications. There was also an application (244 hectares) to pull back the forest edge from the adjacent blanket bog to improve habitat for priority bird species. All three applications relate to the Caithness and Sutherland SAC and SPA in the Highlands.

6.2.6 Natural regeneration

Applications for new natural regeneration must be stand-alone applications and made separately from other WIG Habitat and Species capital operations.

1,262 hectares of natural regeneration was approved and claimed, all of which had taken place in the Highland and Islands and Grampian Conservancy areas.

6.2.7 Woodland designed landscapes

Seven applications proposed to undertake work within woodlands which are on the Inventory of Garden and Designed Landscapes.

All applications were for rhododendron control, with six in Highland and Islands Conservancy and one in Central Scotland Conservancy.

6.2.8 Landscape-scale projects

57 applications state that they are contributing to a landscape-scale project. However, it appears to be ambiguous what that means – both in terms of what the question in the Supporting Information Template is intending to find out, and what the applicant understands it to mean. There does not appear to be any further information provided by applicants to support the answer.

6.2.9 Fencing

The browsing of domesticated and non-domesticated herbivores is considered to be one of the greatest negative pressures to woodland recovery, due to natural regeneration being inhibited by overgrazing.

There were 79 applications containing new deer or stock fencing, equating to 60% of all applications to Woodland Improvement Grants.

The table below shows the type, extent and cost of fencing activity across all WIG H&S applications.

Table 20: Total fencing operations funded under H&S

Activity	Quantity (metres)	Cost (£)
Fencing (all)	169,979	1,890,795
Fence enhancements/ modifications	96,525	390,543
Fence Removal	9,554	23,885
Total	**£2,305,223**	**100**

Further information on the fencing-off of sites and the success of its implementation was covered in the Rumroy Survey Report. More information can be found in Section 9.3.

6.3 Habitats and Species: Rumroy Survey Results

In 2024 a contractor was appointed to carry out an independent assessment of certain grant options. Under Habitats and Species, this included 17 projects for operations such as **Rhododendron ponticum** (RP) clearance, the fencing-off of sensitive sites to reduce deer pressure, and some restoration of Planted Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS).

The projects sizes ranged from under 10 hectares to over 1,000 hectares.

A summary of the RP control and fencing can be found below. The full report, additionally covering PAWS restoration, exotic tree removal, deer management, grazing, and vegetation removal, can be found in the appendices.

6.3.1 Rhododendron ponticum results

Seven projects were sampled, located throughout Scotland, each comprising a Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) with targeted funding for invasive species Rhododendron ponticum removal:

- One project covered an area of 181 hectares, three were over 20 hectares and three smaller-sized projects of 15 hectares and under.
- Three of the projects were located within a Site of Special Scientific Interest with Qualifying Features for priority habitats and species.

The following excerpt from the Rumroy Survey Report relates to the findings on projects using fencing to achieve results:

The over-riding conclusion in consideration of the sampled WIG targeted Rhododendron control FGS Options assessed as part of the scope of this study is that the aims of the corresponding grant-funded schemes have been addressed and adhered to. The benefits of the R. ponticum control operations have been advantageous to the woodlands subject to each individual programme, with tangible results, to varying degrees of success found in all sites.

All of the sites have had further R. ponticum control implemented since the end of the assessed FGS period as sampled for this study. This demonstrated a significant commitment by the landowners and managers to address the issue of the detrimental effects of the establishment of the invasive species within woodlands, particularly those supporting priority habitats and species.

The largest project was less successful than others surveyed, since initial control took place. Despite control continuing to have been implemented by the landowner, the scale of the area covered appeared to be a limiting factor in managing the ongoing expansion of the invasive species.

6.3.2 Fencing results

Most fencing projects paid under the H&S grant were to protect vulnerable woodland sites from the pressures of deer browsing. For this reason, it was often the case that the project would include both a grant for fencing and the SMF: Native Woodland grant option. The latter paid £25/hectare per year for five years and contributed to the cost of culling deer and habitat monitoring.

Of the eight projects focussing on deer exclusion through fencing, five (63%) also received the SMF: Native Woodland grant.

The following excerpt from the Rumroy Survey Report relates to the findings about projects using fencing to achieve results:

'The construction of fencing as an FGS-funded capital output has been used as a main component of working towards achieving habitat improvement. This operational output has been implemented predominantly as an aid to encouraging natural regeneration of native woodland and to promote age-class diversity as a means of habitat improvement.

As a jump start to facilitate measurable and accelerated enhancement, although considered intrusive and at odds with other land management aspects, and requiring continued monitoring and maintenance, the results of fencing are assessed as being generally positive. This is particularly so in terms of the first five years of a project.

The size and priority of the fenced enclosures applicable to those FGS projects included within the sample assessment can be deemed variable – ranging from very large to small. Where the enclosures are larger, for example in several of the upland

sites included within the assessment, and encompass a mix of woodland structures, there is considerable evidence of continued deer browsing. This in part contributes to a reduction in the success of native trees regeneration establishment.

Success of the fencing as a main output in consideration of the overall projects' aims and objectives is variable, being highly dependent on a range of parameters, particularly the size of the enclosures, the overall FGS area and the associated operations. As is widely appreciated, fencing on its own without phased further additional operations generally does not produce an overarching solution to habitat improvement over the medium and/or longer-term.

In the short term, the removal of excessive damage from browsing via fencing may enable natural regeneration to start to establish, particularly where the vegetative layer was depleted from previous intensive land uses. However, over time and without disturbance, the early regeneration is unable to further establish and is increasingly competing with vigorous bracken and heather growth.

Overall, the fencing inspected during the site visits was found to be remaining in good and secure condition at all. Signage, where applicable, was also found to be in place identifying that the area was subject to European funding.

The success of the use of fencing in combination with other operations was found to be good. At three designated sites – where there was a suitable and adjacent seed source, fencing or stringent deer management had been implemented, and there had been managed ground disturbance to break up the underlying ground layer – the overall success was evidently positive.'

6.4 Habitats and Species: other survey results

The Applicant Experience Survey was conducted in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of approximately 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, putting the response rate around 30%.

These survey results have been included here as they do not neatly fit into any other evaluation heading, but are considered pertinent to the evaluation.

Summary of comments (grouped thematically):

- Application process is too difficult.
- Better guidance is needed on when Actual Cost projects are appropriate.
- Grant rates need to track with inflation.
- There needs to be more emphasis on reducing plastic use.
- Better priority should be given to managing existing woodland rather than creating new ones.

6.5 Habitats and Species: data analysis

- In all but three cases, the intention of WIG H&S applications is to improve the condition of native woodlands. Analysing the Supporting Information Template for each case, it's not always easy to pick out the main objectives without forensically analysing the applicant's text in detail, so determining the benefits for woodland species which may be supported is difficult.
- The Supporting Information Template does not directly ask the question whether PAWS (Planted Ancient Woodland Sites) will be restored to native woodland, although this is one of the aims of the option. As a result this information could not easily be determined, with the exception of one case which made a clear statement that this was an objective of their application.
- Some woodland creation cases include deer fencing or Enhancing or Modifying a Deer fence capital item under the WIG H&S option rather than under the Woodland Creation option. It is not clear why this would be the case.
- Information on applications which claim to benefit a designated site was retrieved manually from a question asked on R&S. However, in analysing the Supporting Information Templates, it was clear that information on this was sometimes at odds.
- All natural regeneration cases are in the Highland or Grampian Conservancy areas.
- The majority of applications have been in the north of Scotland, with Highland and Islands Conservancy processing 80% of all cases.
- Highland and Islands Conservancy have also processed 78% of applications relating to a designated site.
- 60% of all cases include either new deer or stock fencing.
- 72% of new fencing (deer and stock) has been carried out on a designated site at 80% of the overall fencing costs, due to actual rather than standard costs being claimed.
- There are 44 schemes containing rhododendron control, 89% of them within Highland Conservancy, with 54% of these cases claiming to be in the target area for rhododendron control.

- Some applications state they are within the target area for rhododendron control even though they are not actually applying for any of the capital items associated with it.
- 57 cases claim to 'contribute to a landscape scale project' but it is not clear what is meant by this and what its relevance is to this option.

6.6 Habitats and Species: assessment against aims

It is important to reiterate the main aims of this option in order to consider whether they have been met:

Improving the condition of native woodlands and restoring Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites to native woodland

It is clear that this option delivers against improving the condition of native woodlands, given that there have been 129 applications for exactly that, although it isn't clear how many PAWS have been restored to native woodland.

Almost £2 million has gone towards funding new deer and stock fences (79 cases), so it can be assumed that one of the main objectives of these cases is to allow natural regeneration of native tree species and associated shrub/field layer by excluding deer and livestock.

Restoration or conservation of non-woodland habitats (such as lowland raised bogs and blanket bogs) that are present within the internal boundary of the woodland

Three applications were associated with non-woodland habitats, all relating to the same designated blanket bog. Despite the low application numbers, bogs within internal boundaries of woodlands tend to be less common, so it is unsurprising that there were few applications relating to this.

Species associated with woodland edge (such as the pearl-bordered fritillary)

It is not easy to determine what species will directly benefit from woodland improvements, although some detail can be assumed from the capital items applied for. For example, fence removal is usually associated with benefitting capercaillie and black grouse habitat.

Woodland Designed Landscapes

There were seven applications relating to the Inventory of Garden and Designed Landscapes, meaning this option did successfully support the improvement of woodland designed landscapes.

6.7 SMF Native Woodlands: introduction and aims

The purpose of the SMF Native Woodlands grant is to provide an annual payment, for five years, to contribute toward the costs of deer control and habitat monitoring in native woodlands. Deer are one of the greatest constraints against the restoration of native woodlands, due to overgrazing.

The aims of the grant option is to:

- maintain native woodland
- bring native woodlands and designated woodland features into good ecological condition
- restore plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites to native woodland through deer control and natural regeneration.

6.8 SMF Native Woodlands: grants and applications data

6.8.1 Grant contribution

The payment rate was £25 per hectare per year with no upper ceiling, but greater planning and justification was required for applications exceeding 100 hectares.

6.8.2 What has been funded

There were a total of 50 applications for SMF: Native Woodland during the evaluation period. Payments for SMF grants run for five years, so not every one of these contracts will have received all of their payments within the evaluation period. Some contracts may not have started to receive payment within the evaluation period.

Table 21: SMF applications and areas by Conservancy

Conservancy	# Applications	Area covered (ha)
Highland and Islands	35	18,774
Perth and Argyll	12	1,018.9
Grampian	2	1,159.6
Central Scotland	1	25.5
South Scotland	0	0
Totals	**50**	**20,978 hectares**

The total funding committed during the evaluation period for 20,978 hectares, at £25 per hectare, is **£524,450**.

6.9 SMF Native Woodlands: sample application review

A requirement of the grant is that an annual monitoring form is submitted each year with the claim for grant. This form is to assess the impact of deer browsing each year on natural regeneration and thereby the condition of the woodland.

26 (52%) of the applications for SMF Native Woodlands were reviewed to see whether these returns were being provided and a short analysis took place of their findings. The main findings were:

- Seven out of the 26 projects reviewed never submitted an annual monitoring form and were therefore ineligible for payment.
- 16 of the reviewed projects had submitted annual monitoring forms which indicated that the sites were showing an improvement and that natural regeneration was occurring uninhibited by grazing.
- Three of the reviewed projects had submitted annual monitoring forms but the sites were said to remain under significant browsing pressure.
- Nine of the projects specifically mentioned being for the benefit of designated woodland sites (SSSI/SAC).

6.10 SMF Native Woodlands: Rumroy Survey Report

In 2024 a contractor was appointed to carry out an independent assessment of certain grant options. Five of the sites selected for inspection were in receipt of SMF Native Woodland payments.

The results of these visits can be found in section 6.3.2 above and within the Rumroy Survey Report in the appendices. As a summary, it was found that browsing pressure has been reduced and natural regeneration is taking place, but competing vegetation appears to be becoming an issue.

6.11 SMF Native Woodlands: data analysis

- Significant areas of native woodland (over 20,000 hectares) have been in receipt of this grant, supporting their protection and enhancement.
- Most applications have been in the Highland and Islands Conservancy area. However, this is expected due to being predominantly native woodland cover.
- Most applications for NW have been achieving the desired outcome, with browsing reduced and natural regeneration increased.
- Surveys of sites suggest that while browsing pressure is reduced, competing vegetation (primarily bracken) is now an issue due to less ground disturbance.

6.12 SMF Native Woodlands: assessment against aims

It is important to reiterate the main aims of this option in order to consider whether they have been met:

Maintain native woodland

With over 20,000 hectares committed under this grant option, it can reasonably be said that maintaining native woodlands has been achieved as an aim. This is caveated with the fact that some applications under this figure did not submit annual monitoring and therefore did not receive all grant payments, so it is not possible to know how, or if, these areas were maintained.

Bring native woodlands and designated woodland features into good ecological condition

The sampling used for this evaluation found that 19 of the sampled applications had submitted annual monitoring forms. Sixteen of these (84%) indicated that the grant was improving the woodland. Nine of those applications were directly related to designated woodlands and all of these saw an improvement in their condition. Based on this sampling, therefore, it would appear that this aim has been met.

Restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites to native woodland through deer control and natural regeneration.

The sampling conducted for this evaluation did not find specific mention of PAWS type woodlands within the annual monitoring forms. It may be that these applications did not relate to PAWS. It is inconclusive whether PAWS sites have seen an improvement under this option.

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Section 7

Species Conservation

7.1 Species Conservation: introduction and aims

The overarching objectives of Sustainable Management of Forests: Species Conservation grants are to reduce predators of vulnerable species, and reduce the impact of deer on sensitive sites. There are three options available, with individual aims:

Grey Squirrel Control

To support the targeted control of grey squirrels (Sciurus carolinensis) in areas where they are a threat to red squirrel (S. vulgaris) populations.

Predator Control for Capercaillie and Black Grouse

Support for predator control to benefit capercaillie and black grouse which are vulnerable to predation. This is only available on forested land.

Reducing Deer Impact

To reduce deer impacts to a level that will allow the regeneration of unprotected soft conifer and broadleaved species at a landscape scale, to help promote the regeneration of new woodlands, diversify forests and improve their conservation value.

To assess the impact of FGS, records and spatial data were collated from Casebook and GIS and studies conducted by partners such as FLS and Saving Scotland Red Squirrels. Stakeholder workshops and surveys were also carried out.

7.2 Species Conservation: grants and applications data

7.2.1 Grant contribution

The grant contributions for each option are as follows:

- Grey Squirrel Control: £200 per trap per year (up to five years)
- Predator Control for Capercaillie and Black Grouse: £6.60 per hectare per year (up to five years)
- Reducing Deer Impact: £6.00 per hectare per year (up to five years)

7.2.2 What has been funded – Grey Squirrel Control

There have been 120 applications for Grey Squirrel Control, the majority in South Scotland and Perth and Argyll. There were no applications in Highland Conservancy.

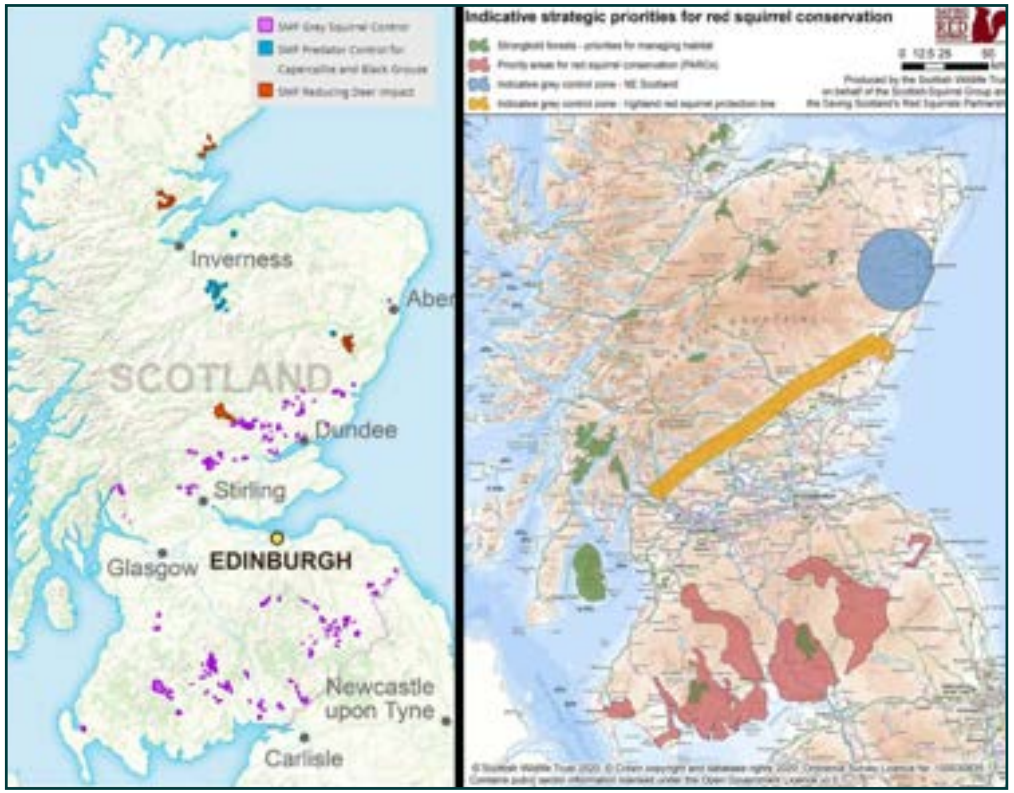

Table 22: Grey squirrel control quantities by Conservancy

Conservancy	Area (ha)	# of traps	Value (£)
Grampian	54.42	85	17,000
Perth and Argyll	7664.83	5,625	1,125,000
Central	20.15	20	4,000
South Scotland	11,460.39	7,630	1,526,000
Totals	**19,199.79 ha**	**13,360 traps**	**£2,672,000**

Most of this data is not surprising in terms of geographic spread. As can be seen in the image above, the largest priority areas[17] for controlling grey squirrels are the 'priority areas for red squirrel conservation (PARCs)' within the South Scotland Conservancy boundary, and the 'indicative grey control zone – Highland red squirrel protection line' within the Perth and Argyll Conservancy boundary. The image above demonstrates the consistency of applications in line with these priority areas.

One area of note is the low application rates in Grampian Conservancy, particularly given that the 'indicative grey control zone – North East Scotland' is entirely within the Grampian Conservancy boundary. However, this was addressed at a stakeholder workshop (see next section).

7.2.2.1 Grey Squirrel Control: workshop

Stakeholders agreed that the grant aim and objectives were broadly achieved, based on the FGS Evaluation information provided, in relation to Priority Areas for Red Squirrel Conservation (PARCs).

It was concluded that the low applications in the Grampian region were in line with low grey squirrel numbers across the area, which were not likely to adversely affect predominant current red squirrel populations.

Stakeholders shared the following recommendations for future grants associated with grey squirrel control:

- Consider as part of eligibility criteria to make it compulsory to be part of national Red Squirrel Group monitoring reporting. This will promote effective control and best practice sharing in terms of training and skills development for the species conservation work.
- Consider promoting FGS support for population control in high-density grey squirrel areas, not only in woodland in target areas.
- Consider employing a full time Grey Squirrel Officer (GSO) as part of strategic SMF-Species Conservation work, who can monitor culling records, offer advice and train volunteers.
- Promote better communications around grey squirrel control and red squirrel sighting on landscape scale level.
- Promote auditing and monitoring for compliance in liaison with local GSOs.
- Encourage Estates to collaborate with other landowners to work effectively on landscape scale conservation partnerships.
- Adopt a dashboard for reporting mechanisms on red squirrel conservation efforts to praise best practice and encourage support.
- Carry out audit checks using paid professionals to ensure FGS eligibility is continuing to be met.

7.2.2.2 Grey Squirrel Control: feedback from Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels

Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels (SSRS) was an important delivery partner for the Grey Squirrel Control grant option, since a requirement of the application process was to have a letter of support from SSRS.

SSRS staff provided some of their own feedback on the grant option, identifying some issues that they felt may have an impact on the deliverability of this grant, based on their close experiences with its delivery. These were:

- Ineffective trapping, such as:
  - traps set in poor locations
  - trapping density too low
  - trapping at sub-optimal times of year
  - incorrect baiting techniques
  - lack of trap maintenance
  - inadequate checking of traps
  - no trap covers
  - traps without excluders
  - pheasant feeding sustaining grey populations.
- Poor quality data, such as:
  - incomplete trapping records
  - illegible records
  - inaccurate records.

[17]Priority areas take from Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels 'Indicative strategic priorities for red squirrel conservation', 2020.

SSRS has made a number of recommendations, based on its findings and on the premise that its funding may not continue and therefore a skill-gap may occur in the implementation of this grant. Its recommendations were:

1. Install technical resource to cover functions previously carried out by SSRS.
2. Update guidance for landowners.
3. Update documents and web-links.
4. Improve data processing by refusing inaccurate or incomplete forms.
5. Arrange data sharing agreements between SF and SSRS, so information is not lost.
6. Flag estates that would be suitable for grey squirrel control through observing other activities, for example the forest planning process.

7.2.3 What has been funded – Predator Control for Capercaillie and Black Grouse

There were eight applications for this option: three in Grampian and five in Highland and Islands. Some of these applications were for single species protections, and others were for both.

The following table shows the specific species associated with the applications and the total hectares covered:

Table 23: Predator control quantities by Conservancy

Conservancy	Area (ha)	Value (£)	Species
Grampian	1,342.57	36,142.64	Capercaillie
Highland and Islands	3,519.49	116,143.15	Capercaillie
Highland and Islands	4,711.32	155,473.60	Black Grouse and Capercaillie
Totals	**9,573.38 ha**	**£307,759.39**	

While it is unsurprising that most applications relating to capercaillie predator control relate to Highland and Islands and Grampian, due to the core areas being mostly within those Conservancy boundaries, there are still some eligible large core areas within Perth and Argyll Conservancy that have not been subject to any applications.

In terms of black grouse predator control, all the applications relate only to Highland and Islands Conservancy within the area identified as the 'Stable Northern Population' zone. There were no applications received in any Conservancies within the 'Declining Southern Population' zone, despite arguably being of greater priority.

7.2.3.1 Predator Control for Capercaillie and Black Grouse: workshop

Stakeholders agreed that the grant aim and objectives were broadly achieved based on the FGS Evaluation information provided. It was broadly agreed that the grant has been to the benefit of a currently stable population in grant-funded areas, but it is still difficult to tell to what extent it has benefitted the birds more widely.

Stakeholders agreed that some leniency should be granted in eligibility criteria by expanding eligible ground to include the land directly adjacent to a forest, as predator control is often undertaken on the edges of forests.

It was agreed that the reason there were fewer applications that benefit black grouse in the Southern Declining Zone was likely due to land ownership patterns, with forest blocks being smaller and more isolated.

Feedback on supporting information requirements indicated that it is difficult to supply quantities at an application stage, with predator control often reactive and variable. It is hard to quantify the number of days at the start and these may change.

Stakeholders shared the following recommendations for future grants associated with Predator Control for the benefit of capercaillie and black grouse:

- Including all land within 1.5km of a lek site as eligible might assist in bringing smaller sites forward, particularly due to the financial disparity of control versus labour costs in small woodlands. This may help in increasing application numbers in South Scotland.
- A mid-way review point in the five years, with an opportunity to adjust quantities to reflect conditions on the ground, would be welcome.
- Consider ensuring that costs are tied to inflation, as current grant rates are out of step with actual costs.
- Consider being more prescriptive on when predator control takes place. Peak control is normally in March/April but it should be encouraged as early into the year as possible to ensure predators have no dependants.
- Consider making the use of data collection apps mandatory – for example, EpiCollect, which is used by the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust – in order to build a better database of predator control.
- Consider paying for diversionary feeding as well as lethal control to increase likelihood of success.
- Consider pushing deer control as an alternative to deer fencing where capercaillie/black grouse populations exist.

- Consider offering grant 'bundles' for conservation work like the Sheep and Trees initiative. For example, offer Woodland Grazing, Predator Control, and fence removal and/or marking as a package to maximise benefits to the populations.

7.2.4 What has been funded – Reducing Deer Impact

There were nine applications for Reducing Deer Impact: four within Highland and Islands, four within Grampian, and one within Perth and Argyll:

Table 24: Reducing deer impact quantities by Conservancy

Conservancy	Area (ha)	Value (£)
Highland and Islands	4,747.16	142,333.44
Grampian	2,842.31	85,269.30
Perth and Argyll	3,219.97	96,599.10
Totals	**11,809.44 ha**	**£324,201.84**

Given the scale of the application areas, it is easy to see that this grant has been applied at a landscape scale. However, since red deer are a transient species, the efficacy of this grant may be reduced if not being used across adjacent ownerships.

7.2.4.1 Reducing Deer Impact: site visits

Site visits were undertaken on four of the project areas to determine the impact on the ground. The key results (grouped thematically) were:

- Natural regeneration was occurring across all contracts in areas designated for it, mostly in restocking areas, with minimal signs of current or historic browsing.
- There was little sign of current or historic browsing on restocked areas, either on broadleaves and soft conifers.

These visits were accompanied by the applicant/agent and feedback was sought on their experience of the grant. Feedback (grouped thematically) was:

- The grant has not tracked with inflation and is now insufficient to incentivise its use.
- The grant should be outcome based, i.e. based on recruitment of natural regeneration or levels of browsing on restocked areas, not on number of deer per km^2.
- A higher grant rate could be offered where multiple owners have submitted collaborative applications.
- The grant could be packaged with some capital support to maintain/repair strategic fence lines, particularly where landscape-scale collaboration has not been possible.

7.3 Species Conservation: other survey results

The Applicant Experience Survey was conducted in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of approximately 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

These survey results have been included here as they do not neatly fit into any other evaluation heading, but are considered pertinent to the evaluation.

67% of respondents on this topic area said they felt there were barriers to applying for SMF: Species Conservation grants. These were:

- the complexity of the supporting documents
- the high cost of administering the grant
- restrictive requirements, such as the focus on culling foxes and crows in the springtime.

Summary of other comments on Species Conservation options (grouped thematically):

- Reporting forms are clunky.
- Reducing Deer Impact grant does not work in a lowland setting/smaller forests.
- The claims process put off re-applications.

7.4 Species Conservation: data analysis

- Most grey squirrel control is happening in areas where it is expected, within core areas, with the notable exception of Grampian which contains the North East control zone but has had no applications.
- Applications for predator control for the benefit of capercaillie and black grouse have been limited to the two northernmost Conservancies, which house the most stable populations.
- There were no applications for predator control for black grouse outside the Highland and Islands Conservancy boundary. This is of particular concern as Perth and Argyll, Central, and South Scotland are in areas marked as having population decline.

- There were very few Reducing Deer Impact applications, and these were all limited to Perth and Argyll and North, indicating that these are likely addressing red or sika deer populations. Smaller, more fragmented ownership patterns in and south of the central belt may be a factor in fewer landscape scale deer management projects going ahead, but this can only be assumed anecdotally.
- Where SMF: Deer Management has been employed, it appears to have achieved its intended results, with low levels of browsing on sampled sites.

7.5 Species Conservation: assessment against aims

To assess whether these options have met their original aims, we should revisit their respective aims:

Grey Squirrel Control

To support the targeted control of grey squirrels (Sciurus carolinensis) in areas where they are a threat to red squirrel (S. vulgaris) populations.

While it is evident that support has been provided for targeted control of grey squirrels it should be noted, as per the analysis, that there is a large gap in control within the Grampian core zone. Consistent, landscape-scale control is required to effectively manage non-native species and so further research in Phase 2 is required to understand why this is the case and whether this gap is likely to have significant adverse effects.

Predator Control for Capercaillie and Black Grouse

Support for predator control to benefit capercaillie and black grouse which are vulnerable to predation. This is only available on forested land.

It is evident that support has been provided for this and therefore has met that part of the objective. Funding has assisted in maintaining stable capercaillie populations in and around the Cairngorms. However, there is once again a gap in funding, particularly around black grouse, in central and southern Scotland. This appears to be due to land ownership patterns and the disparity between grant rates and costs of implementation in smaller woodlands.

Reducing Deer Impact

To reduce deer impacts to a level that will allow the regeneration of unprotected soft conifer and broadleaved species at a landscape scale, to help promote the regeneration of new woodlands, diversify forests and improve their conservation value.

The scale of grants that have been paid indicates that this has been carried out at a landscape scale. Site visits to a sample of contract areas have demonstrated that the outcomes are being achieved, particularly in relation to the recruitment of new natural regeneration and in playing a role in protecting the restocking of more diverse species, such as soft conifers. The option has only been used in upland settings in Perth and Argyll and further north, suggesting that control has been focussed on red or sika populations.

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Section 8

Woodland Grazing

8.1 Woodland Grazing: introduction and aims

The overarching objective of the Sustainable Management of Forests: Woodland Grazing grant is to enhance biodiversity and encourage tree regeneration through controlled livestock grazing in native woodlands or Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites that are actively being restored to native woodland. There were three aims under this grant:

- maintain or enhance the condition of native woodland habitat
- maintain or increase the overall extent of priority woodland habitat where feasible and desirable
- benefit designated features or priority habitats or species, such as the pearl-bordered fritillary and the chequered skipper butterfly.

8.2 Woodland Grazing: grants and applications data

8.2.1 Grant contribution

The grant rate was £100 per hectare[18] paid every year, for five years.

8.2.2 What has been funded - Woodland Grazing

As described in section 8.2, there have been a total of 14 WIG Woodland Grazing Management Plans (WGMPs). These WGMPs are a prerequisite to the Sustainable Forest Management: Woodland Grazing option.

During the evaluation period there were 20 claimed cases of SMF: Woodland Grazing, totalling £155,583.

Making up these 20 cases were:

- 14 WIG: WGMPs (one of which was associated with two SMF applications) totalling 1,338.86 hectares, and
- five non-grant aided WGMPs submitted with SMF applications, totalling 431.52 hectares.

These 19 plans cover a total area of 1,770.38 hectares of woodland grazing.

This appears as a discrepancy against the total approved value, which should equate to 155.58 hectares if divided by the payment rate. This is due to the SMF grant being paid over five years, meaning that some of the grant claimed has been beyond the evaluation period.

8.3 Woodland Grazing: Rumroy Survey Report

In 2024 a contractor was appointed to carry out an independent assessment of selected grant options. This included an assessment of seven woodland grazing projects to determine their success.

The sites ranged in size from less than 50 hectares to up to 500 hectares.

An excerpt from the survey is as follows:

'All FGS projects sites sampled and visited were assessed as complying with the FGS contracted requirements and including the scope of operations of the corresponding Woodland Grazing Management Plans. It should be noted that no project sampled and assessed remained within the FGS 5-year contract term.

The over-riding conclusion in consideration of the sampled controlled woodland grazing projects assessed as part of the scope of this study is that the benefits of the controlled grazing regimes have been particularly advantageous to the woodlands, subject to each individual programme, with tangible results of varying degrees presenting in all sites.

As is well understood by all involved with implementing controlled woodland grazing management, a fine balancing is required to facilitate achieving the required results, and this requires a very good understanding of woodland grazing management.'

The full details on woodland grazing can be found the Rumroy report in the appendices.

[18]There was no cap to applications during the evaluation, however a cap was applied in 2023 at a maximum application size of 100 hectares.

8.4 Woodland Grazing: data analysis

- Woodland grazing is a small area of spend, totalling just over £155,000.
- There were only 20 applications spread over 19 Woodland Grazing Management Plans, an average of less than three applications per year over the evaluation period.
- There was insufficient data available through the desk research exercise to make a judgement on how the grant met its aims.
- The field research carried out indicates that the applications have been successful in delivering the desired outcomes.

8.5 Woodland Grazing: assessment against aims

In order to conclude whether this option met its original objective, we should revisit the aims:

Maintain or enhance the condition of native woodland habitat

In all but one of the visited sites, the contractor found that the woodland grazing was maintaining or enhancing the condition of the native woodlands.

Maintain or increase the overall extent of priority woodland habitat where feasible and desirable

The Rumroy survey results state that all but one of the sites visited had maintained or increased the overall extent of priority woodland habitat.

Benefit designated features or priority habitats or species, such as the pearl-bordered fritillary and the chequered skipper butterfly

It was found through surveys that the ecological conditions of the woodland were being improved through woodland grazing. These operations have demonstrated a positive impact on biodiversity, including for rare butterflies, and increase the rate of natural regeneration of native tree species.

Overall it is evident from the information gathered that the option has met its aim. However, there are sensitivities around ensuring that the benefits gained from investment are not lost. Due to the long time it takes to see significant change to woodland condition through woodland grazing, there is a risk that if the operations are not continued in a structured and controlled way, the benefits realised to this point may be lost.

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Section 9

Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) and Rural Access

9.1 WIAT and Rural Woods: introduction and aims

This section covers three separate grant options under two categories: Sustainable Management of Forests (SMF) and Woodland Improvement Grants (WIG). These options support public access projects both in Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT) and Rural Woodlands.

It is important to note that claims for SMF are submitted through the Single Application Form (SAF) and are therefore not stored on Casebook. The figures used here are committed figures and not claimed figures.

WIAT woodlands, or urban woodlands, are those located within one kilometre of settlements with a population of over 2,000 people. Rural woodlands are anything else.

The aim of the SMF Public Access WIAT grant option is to 'provide support for the sustainable management of urban woodlands for public access', contributing toward the costs of:

- carrying out annual tree and path safety inspections
- keeping access routes free of litter and tree debris
- keeping paths, signs and recreational facilities up to an acceptable standard.

The aim of the SMF Public Access Rural Woods grant option is to 'provide support for the sustainable management of rural woodlands for public access', with the contribution to costs covering the same as the bullets above.

The aims of the WIG grant option is to 'provide support for operations that will contribute to the sustainable management of urban woodlands and provide a range of public benefits', such as:

- bring neglected woodlands into management
- develop opportunities to use and enjoy existing and newly created woodlands
- enhance woodland sites supported under previous programmes.

9.2 WIAT and Rural Woods: grants and applications data

9.2.1 Grant contribution

SMF Public Access (WIAT)

This grant provides £100 per hectare per year for the first 10 hectares and then £10 per hectare per year for any additional areas, for up to five years.

SMF Public Access (Rural Woods)

This grant provides £100 per hectare per year, for up to five years.

WIG WIAT

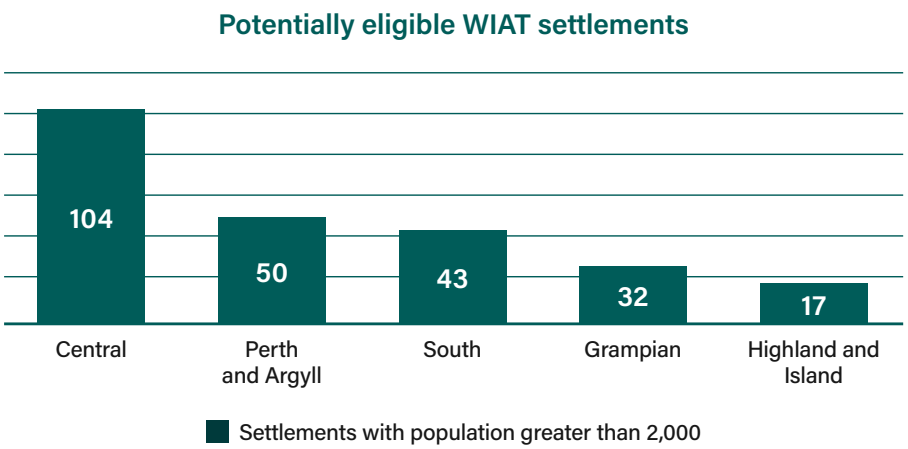
This grant provides funding for capital works such as scrub removal, path building and fence erection, at fixed rates per item. The maximum funding is £100k per business per year.

9.2.2 Settlements potentially eligible for WIAT

The definition of a WIAT or Urban Woodland is a woodland within one kilometre of settlements with a population of over 2,000 people.

The following chart displays the number of settlements within each Conservancy that have a population of greater than 2,000. However, the distance to a nearby woodland has not been assessed, so these may not fit the eligibility of a WIAT settlement.

Chart 2: Potentially eligible WIAT settlements



9.2.3 What has been funded

9.2.3.1 SMF Public Access (WIAT) and Public Access (Rural Woods)

All projects under the SMF option are specific to the maintenance of existing infrastructure in order to maintain public access. There have been a total of 41 SMF Public Access (WIAT) applications and a total of 20 SMF Public Access (Rural Woods) applications.

Table 25: Public access applications by Conservancy

Conservancy	WIAT apps	Value (£)	Rural Woods apps	Value (£)
Highland and Islands	0	0	13	158,913
Perth and Argyll	8	37,409	2	21,796
Grampian	2	6,948	1	7,650
Central	29	108,106	1	76,925
South	2	3,571	3	6,566
Totals	**41**	**£156,034**	**20**	**£271,850**

The total value committed under SMF WIAT and SMF Rural Woods was £427,884.

SMF WIAT project funding is committed based on the woodland size on a per hectare basis. The total area funded by SMF WIAT is 4,693 hectares.

SMF Rural Woods project funding is committed based on a calculation per linear metre of path to be maintained, plus a buffer on each side of the path. The total area of paths funded by SMF Rural Woods is 151,251 metres or over 151 kilometres.

9.2.3.2 WIG (WIAT)

All projects under the WIG option are related to capital works for the creation or enhancement of infrastructure for public access.

There have been a total of 53 WIG WIAT applications:

Table 26: WIG WIAT applications by Conservancy

Conservancy	WIG WIAT apps	Value (£)
Highland and Islands	0	0
Perth and Argyll	11	663,812
Grampian	2	36,335
Central	36	2,278,324
South	4	554,653
Totals	**53**	**£3,533,123**

The following is a breakdown of who applied for funding, by business type, and the values committed:

Business Type	# of Applications	Value (£)	% total value
Local Authority*	29	1,679,735	48%
Private Company	16	1,387,390	39%
Community Group	4	326,402	9%
Charity	4	139,596	4%
Totals	**53**	**£3,533,123**	**100%**

*One application in this category was a regional NHS Health Board.

Across the 53 WIG WIAT projects, applications totalling 104,572m^2 of new paths were approved. The grant is structured such that it is paid per square metre, not linear metre, requiring a minimum width of 1.2m. Therefore, multiplying by 0.8 to provide for 1 linear metre, the total length of new footpaths funded totals 83,657m or over 83km.

9.3 WIAT and Rural Woods: on-site outcomes

Scottish Forestry undertook sample visits to 20 project sites spread across Scotland, covering the WIAT (12 projects) and Rural Woods (eight projects) grant options.

WIAT

Of the 12 projects visited, eight were for the creation of totally new access opportunities, while four were for the formalisation/upgrading of existing path infrastructure.

50% of the projects were creating access opportunities where no other woodland access previously existed in the locality. The remaining projects all provided linkages to other nearby existing outdoor access networks.

100% of the projects were carried out and maintained in accordance with the project specification.

According to project owners, the regular maintenance issues facing the project sites were:

- tree safety/dangerous trees
- litter
- drainage
- encroaching vegetation.

Across the 12 sites, a total of 416 visitors were observed during the visits, averaging 34 people per site per day. Extrapolating this and taking into account that these visits were during working hours on a weekday, it is reasonable to estimate that annual averaged visitor numbers would be in the region of 8,000 – 10,000 per year.

Rural Woods

One of the eight projects selected for visiting was never claimed, meaning only 7 site visits were undertaken.

Of the seven projects visited, the main use of the grant was carrying out tree safety surveys, keeping path edges clear of vegetation and litter picking.

Other activities were also carried out using the grant support that extended beyond the aims of the grant. These were:

- the creation/maintenance of mountain bike trails
- installation of fencing and gates
- maintenance of drystone dykes
- helping with costs of liaising with local communities.

Other feedback from the project owners on how the grant could better service rural access was (grouped thematically):

- Add more flexibility.
- Increase grant contribution and cap in line with inflation.
- Support for capital works/projects such as signage or visitor zone improvement to encourage access.
- Support for bridge maintenance. Rural paths tend to have more bridges, and they're expensive to maintain.
- Preference for the grant to be longer-term, e.g. 10 years with a mid-point review.
- Grant support to help with costs of liaising/co-operating with other land users to formalise access requirements, e.g. work with mountain bikers to create formal routes rather than informal tracks.
- Reduce admin by building in to forest planning process to reduce need for additional templates/repeating information.

9.4 WIAT and Rural Woods: public benefits

Based on the Applicant Experience Survey, respondents stated a number of public benefits associated with the grant funding they received for their projects.

For WIAT, 83% of respondents stated that public access to their woodland had increased as a result of grant funding, with an approximate average of 2,700 monthly visitors to five woodland sites alone.

For Rural Access, 50% of respondents stated that public access to their woodland had increased as a result of grant funding, with only 20% saying public access had not increased. 30% of these respondents stated they had over 100 monthly visitors, although 50% said they did not have a record of visitors.

Respondents also identified additional public benefits from these grants:

- improved access (including all-abilities)
- improved woodland safety and security
- improved signage and educational materials
- cleaner woodlands
- biodiversity enhancements.

9.5 WIAT: workshop results

A number of stakeholders were invited to attend an online workshop in November 2023 to discuss the attendees' experiences with the three WIAT grant options:

1. WIG: Urban Woodland Management Planning
2. WIG: Woodlands In and Around Towns (WIAT)
3. SMF: Public Access (WIAT).

The main feedback, grouped thematically, was:

- The aims of these grants are relevant and do not need to change.
- WIAT funding is seen as crucial in getting woodlands accessible to the public.
- Too much fine detail is asked for in the Urban Woodland Management Plan, particularly as plans may change. These plans should be high-level and detail saved for operational plans.
- A lot of detail is duplicated between management planning and operational plans. Clearer separation would be desirable.
- Maximum funding per business limits local authorities' abilities to implement more than one project per year due to large land ownerships.
- Ten-year contracts for SMF, with a formal review at year 5, would be desirable. This would also be in line with 10-year operational strategies produced by local authorities.
- Requirements of BRNs, LPIDs and SAF submissions are very onerous for local authorities, particularly due to so many separate departments being involved in running the sites.
- Capital item suitability needs to be considered in the context of WIAT, for example the need to install metal or vandal-proof infrastructure.
- Contribution towards costs of engaging with the public would be welcome.
- Some sites that are used by predominantly urban populations might fall outwith the current definition, but should be included due to high usage.
- Could capital costs be set at a % contribution to actual costs rather than fixed rates.

9.6 WIAT and Rural Woods: other survey results

The Applicant Experience Survey was conducted in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of approximately 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, putting the response rate around 30%.

These survey results have been included here as they do not neatly fit into any other evaluation heading, but are considered pertinent to the evaluation.

On this topic area respondents said they felt there were barriers to applying for these grants. These were:

- Grants have not tracked with inflation which has increased costs.
- Requirements for quarries to switch to white diesel has increased costs of aggregates.
- Woodland Officers lack experience in managing WIAT woodlands.
- The application process is lengthy/expensive due to the requirement to prepare both a management plan and a subsequent operational plan.
- There are no grants to create infrastructure in rural woodlands.

9.7 WIAT and Rural Woods: data analysis

- The majority of SMF WIAT (70%) and WIG WIAT (68%) applications and funding committed have been in Central Conservancy. This is not surprising given it covers the most heavily populated area of Scotland.
- The majority (65%) of SMF Rural Woods applications and funding have been in Highland and Islands Conservancy. Again, this is not surprising given the Conservancy covers the most rural and sparsely populated areas of Scotland.
- There were no SMF WIAT or WIG WIAT applications in the Highland and Islands Conservancy area, despite there being 17 potentially eligible settlements[19]. It should be noted that many factors may affect this, such as whether woodlands are eligible against our own criteria, are within relevant range, or the availability of other grants for similar works within the area.

[19]Data taken from National Records of Scotland 2020 estimates. The NRS definition of settlement: Where the population is 500 or more (for the purposes of this evaluation, any settlement with a population lower than 2000 has been excluded). Some settlements cover an extensive area, and consist of more than one distinct town or city. For example, the settlement of Glasgow consists of many towns, such as Paisley, as well as the city of Glasgow itself.

- The areas of Grampian and South Scotland Conservancies had low uptake of both SMF grants and the WIG grants, suggesting that the incentivisation of public access enhancements in these areas has been low. However this is not to say provision for access does not exist, as these may be funded through alternative measures.
- 64% of the WIG WIAT budget was committed to applications in Central Conservancy, despite the area having 42% of potentially eligible settlements.
- 54% of WIG WIAT applications were made by local authorities.
- SMF Rural woods – Areas applied for are not including in Casebook reporting despite being present on the SoW, meaning all applications had to be checked manually to determine total metres of path funded.
- Local authorities, in particular, appear to struggle with the requirements of the grant scheme against the complexity of their own operating models.

9.8 WIAT and Rural Woods: assessment against aims

In order to come to a conclusion, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims/objectives of the grant options:

SMF WIAT

'provide support for the sustainable management of urban woodlands for public access'

The analysis shows significant support for the management of urban woodlands, with 4,693 hectares of urban woodlands being brought into management since the beginning of FGS.

All projects visited as part of Phase 2 of the evaluation have been kept in good repair, in line with the SMF contract conditions.

On the basis of the information gathered over both phases, it appears that the aim of this option has been met.

SMF Rural Woods

'provide support for the sustainable management of rural woodlands for public access'

The analysis shows significant support for the management of rural access, with over 150km of rural paths being brought into management since the beginning of FGS.

All projects visited as part of Phase 2 of the evaluation, which were claimed, have been kept in good repair, in line with the SMF contract conditions. While there were some instances of deviations from aim of the grant, any additional or extra-curricular work carried out was in keeping with the spirit of the aim.

On the basis of the information gathered over both phases, it appears that the aim of this option has been met.

WIG WIAT

'provide support for operations that will contribute to the sustainable management of urban woodlands and provide a range of public benefits'

The analysis shows significant support for the operations described within the WIG WIAT option, with 53 applications being committed across Scotland to a value exceeding £3.5 million.

Information gathered during Phase 2 has indicated that there were many constraints to projects coming forward for WIAT, indicating that the figures above could have been higher. While this may be the case, all projects visited had carried out the required work and maintained it to contract standards, delivering on the aim of the grant.

On the basis of the information gathered over both phases, it appears that the aim of this option has been met.

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Section 10

Harvesting and Processing

10.1 Harvesting and Processing: introduction and aims

This category provides grants towards the purchase of machinery and equipment to support the harvesting and processing of timber, increased capacities and outputs of forest nurseries, and to purchase relevant equipment to aid forest businesses with recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The three aims of this option were:

1. New specialised equipment which will increase local small-scale harvesting and processing capacity for:
   - bringing woodlands into management
   - promoting the economic and sustainable production of timber and timber products through processing
   - adding value to local economies on a non-industrial scale (less than 10,000 tonnes per annum of roundwood for harvesting or extraction equipment, or less than 5,000 tonnes per annum of output for primary timber processing equipment or less than 500 cubic metres per annum of output for secondary processing)
   - providing support to facilitate and enable farmers and forestry businesses to diversify, and to assist with the creation of new small enterprises and related employment.

2. New specialised equipment for forest tree nurseries, including tree seed supply businesses and equipment for afforestation ground preparation projects, including forestry fencing projects for:
   - promoting economic development in rural areas in Scotland by supporting new and existing forestry businesses
   - scaling up and expanding the capacity within the forest tree nursery and seed sector and the forestry contractor resource to help delivery of the Scottish Government's ambitious woodland creation target
   - helping forest nurseries to adapt, become more resilient and recover from Covid-19.

3. Support for mobile equipment to help forestry businesses to adapt and recover from Covid-19[20], for:
   - promoting economic development in rural areas in Scotland.

10.2 Harvesting and Processing: grants and applications data

10.2.1 Grant contribution

The grant is capped at 40% of actual costs incurred, with the following additional limits:

Table 27: Harvesting and Processing aims and rates

Aim	Grant contribution per application
1 – Harvesting and Primary Processing	Min £2,500 – Max £50,000
1 – Secondary Processing	Min £1,000 – Max £6,000
2 – Nursery, seed supply, and ground preparation equipment	Min £2,500 – Max £50,000
3 – Mobile equipment to adapt and recover from Covid-19	Min £2,500 – Max £50,000

10.2.2 What has been funded

Data was collected by manually inspecting all 198 H&P applications relevant to the evaluation period. These applications were assessed manually as the information contained within the supporting documents is not stored digitally.

It is important to note that the following figures are based on the data submitted in applications that is a forecast only and therefore may not match the actual outcome of the funding.

[20]This option was only added post 2020 and therefore low application rates are to be expected over this evaluation period.

The following table are a summary of the data gathered across all applications:

Table 28: Business types applying for H&P grants

Business types applying for grant	Number of applications
FRM Tree Nursery	109
Small Scale Processor	33
Forestry Contractor	33
Private Owners	13
Farm Business	5
Social Enterprise	3
Community Group	2
Total	**198**

Table 29: Number of H&P applications by aim

Grant aim applied for	Number of applications	%
Aim 1 (Harvesting and processing)	66	33
Aim 2 (Forest tree nurseries)	128	65
Aim 3 (Covid-19 Recovery)	4	2

10.2.3 Forecasted outcomes from grant funding

Table 30: Headline figures from totalled H&P contracts

Total grant value paid	£4,214,897
Average application value	£21,287.36
Number of FTE jobs created	165

The following tables display averaged baseline and forecasted figures for turnover and outputs due to the grant-supported equipment. Note that forecasts are for two years from the date of purchasing the equipment.

Turnover has been calculated as an average over the 198 applications:

Table 31: Average turnover figures across all H&P applications

Average starting turnover:	£384,000
Average forecasted turnover at year 2:	£553,000
Average increase in turnover (over 2 yrs):	£169,000

Timber production has been calculated as a sum of the relevant applications and is therefore a national figure:

Table 32: Average output figures across all H&P applications

Starting output:	99,495 tonnes
Forecasted output at year 2:	167,807 tonnes
Anticipated increase in output (over 2 yrs):	68,312 tonnes

The following are other outputs gained as a result of grant funding under this category. These forecasted outputs are also over two years from the date of purchasing the equipment:

- Capacity for additional 62.27 million tree seedling production
- Capacity for additional 4,565 hectares of ground preparation
- Capacity for additional 141.5km of fencing
- Capacity for additional 600,000 trees to be planted
- Capacity for collection and processing of 100,000 tree seeds.

10.2.4 Actual outcomes from grant funding

Site visits to 25 projects (five per Conservancy) were undertaken during 2023. This sample represents over 10% of total approved applications within the evaluation period. Of the 25 projects sampled:

- 21 were visited and the applicants were interviewed
- two were visited but the applicants were unavailable for interview
- one contract was varied and machinery purchased outside of the evaluation period
- one project was cancelled and the grant repaid.

Job creation

Of the 21 projects that were visited where the applicant was interviewed, each was asked about the actual creation of Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) jobs versus what they had forecasted in their FGS application.

- 16 (76%) stated that their FTE job creation exceeded their forecast.
- Four (19%) stated that their FTE job creation did not meet their forecast.
- One (5%) stated that they did not know whether they had met their forecast.

The table below provides the forecasted FTE jobs of the 20 businesses that provided actual details of job creation, then the average actual FTE jobs created, as provided by the applicants themselves:

Table 33: Actual job creation figures across sampled H&P applications

Average forecasted jobs at year 2:	2 FTEs
Average actual jobs created at year 2:	3.7 FTEs
Average actual total increase:	1.7 FTEs

This shows that the average actual increase in FTE jobs was 185% of forecasts for the sampled projects.

Turnover

Of the 21 projects that were visited where the applicant was interviewed, each was asked about their actual turnover versus what they had forecasted in their FGS application.

- 15 (71%) stated that their turnover exceeded their forecast.
- Four (19%) stated that their turnover had not achieved their forecast and provided no further information.
- Two (10%) stated that they did not know whether or not they had achieved their forecast.

The table below provides the declared average starting turnover of the 15 businesses that exceeded their forecast, then the average actual turnover, as provided by the applicants themselves:

Table 34: Actual turnover figures across sampled H&P applications

Average forecasted turnover at year 2:	£1,025,000
Average actual turnover at year 2:	£2,039,533
Average actual total increase:	£1,014,533

This shows that the average actual increase in turnover was 199% of forecasts for the sampled projects.

Outputs

Of the 21 projects that were visited where the applicant was interviewed, each was asked about their actual outputs versus what they had forecasted in their FGS application:

- 15 (71%) stated that their outputs had met or exceeded their forecast.
- Two (10%) stated that their outputs had not achieved their forecast.
- Four (19%) stated that they did not know whether or not they had achieved their forecast.

As the projects covered a range of business types, from tree planting, fencing, forest nurseries to sawmills, the table below aggregates the average forecasted increase to outputs (grouped by theme) and the actual increase to outputs.

Table 35: Actual output figures across sampled H&P applications

Business Type	Forecasted output	Actual output at year 2	Actual total (increase or decrease)
Nurseries	36,500,000 seedlings	60,500,000 seedlings	+24,000,000 seedlings
Fencing	80km erected	92km erected	+12km
Tree planting	1,200 hectares	2,000 hectares	+800 hectares
Timber Harvesting	1,500 tonnes	3,000 tonnes	+1,500 tonnes
Timber Extraction	25,500 tonnes	25,000 tonnes	- 500 tonnes
Hardwood Mills	1,303 m^3	2,023 m^3	+720 m^3
Firewood Processing	1,050 tonnes	1,500 tonnes	+450 tonnes

This table demonstrates that, for the sampled projects, almost every business type's outputs exceeded their forecasts by a significant margin.

10.2.5 Direct feedback from applicants

During the visits to projects, applicants were given the opportunity to feed back on their experiences with the grant scheme. The following is the feedback received (grouped thematically):

- RP&S System is complicated and requirements for a registration are excessive for applying for a contribution towards machinery.
- Businesses have seen remarkable increases in both time and resource efficiencies.

- Grant should allow for purchase of forest establishment equipment.
- Application process is slow, resulting in missed opportunities for contracts.
- Would appreciate allowing video applications to help those who are less articulate in writing.
- Would like to see a grant to incentivise conversion to electric equipment from petrol/diesel, or to more modern/efficient fossil fuel machinery.
- Assistance toward green energy production for fixed premises, e.g. solar panels.
- The grant encouraged owners to invest where they otherwise may not have.
- Lack of skilled workforces available: could training be supported?
- Would like to see buildings being included.
- Support for 'tertiary' processing, for example using sawdust, brash bailing and other waste.
- Would like to see small tractors made eligible for nurseries (capped at 110hp).

10.3 Harvesting and Processing: survey results

A survey of FGS applicants was carried out in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of around 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

The Customer Experience Survey asked respondents about their experiences with the Harvesting and Processing grant option. A total of nine respondents out of the 77 (12%) completing the survey had applied under this option.

56% of respondents stated that they were already considering expanding/diversifying their business before being aware of this grant.

33% of respondents stated that the grant had a fundamental impact on their decision to expand/diversify their business.

37% of respondents stated that the forecasted full-time equivalent jobs in their grant application were actually created. 25% said they were not.

25% of respondents stated that the forecasted turnover in their application was achieved, whereas 25% said it was not.

A summary of other comments on the Harvesting and Processing option (grouped thematically):

- The grant needs to take into account that many business operate on credit and don't have large cash reserves.
- Requirement for three quotes is restrictive, especially for niche/bespoke equipment.
- Grant contribution should be greater.

10.4 Harvesting and Processing: data analysis

- It is apparent that for the relatively modest investment, this grant will have a significant impact on the turnover and outputs of Scottish businesses, and create a large amount of FTE roles across Scotland.
- Most applications have been for the increased production of forest nurseries.
- The additional ground preparation capacity yielded as a result of grant investment only equates to 18% of the increased seedling production, suggesting that additional capacity in ground preparation may be required to keep up with seedling production.
- There has been low uptake of Aim 3 in relation to Covid-19 recovery.

10.5 Harvesting and Processing: assessment against aims

To reach a conclusion, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims/objectives of the grant option. These aims were to support investment in three main areas:

Aim 1: New specialised equipment which will increase the local small-scale harvesting and processing capacity

Aim 2: New specialised equipment for forest tree nurseries, including tree seed supply businesses and equipment for afforestation ground preparation projects, including forestry fencing projects

Aim 3: Support for the mobile equipment to help forestry businesses or enterprises to adapt and recover from Covid-19

It is evident from this evaluation that financial support has been provided to each of the three aims. Further, it appears that the majority of projects visited directly have seen the forecasted benefits of investment being exceeded, resulting in increased turnover, job creation, and outputs. While it is not possible to extrapolate this to all projects that have received financial support, it does appear that the forecasts provided have been, in most circumstances, achieved.

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Section 11

Agroforestry

11.1 Agroforestry: introduction and aims

This option provides support for land management, where trees and agriculture co-exist for multiple benefits.

The aims of grant support is to help create small scale woodlands within sheep grazing pasture land (silvopastoral system) or on arable land (silvoarable system) for benefits such as:

- shelter for livestock
- timber production
- increased biodiversity
- landscape enhancement
- contribution to Ecological Focus Areas (in specific situations).

11.2 Agroforestry: grants and applications data

11.2.1 Grant contribution

The grant claim depends on the number of trees planted per hectare and includes a capital grant for initial establishment and an annual maintenance grant paid for five years.

Stocking levels under the available rates[21] are:

Planting Density	Payment
400 Trees/Ha	£3,600/Ha
200 Trees/Ha	£1,860/Ha

11.2.2 What has been funded

There have been four Agroforestry applications during the evaluation period. The table below summarises the areas of application, the type of Agroforestry system employed, and total areas and committed grant.

Table 36: Funded agroforestry projects

Conservancy	Trees/Ha	Type	Approved Area (Ha)	Value committed (£)
Grampian	200	Silvopastoral	1.77	3,292.20
Perth and Argyll	400	Silvopastoral	0.59	2,124.00
Perth and Argyll	200	Silvopastoral	2.52	4,687.20
Perth and Argyll	400	Silvoarable	0.99	3,564.00
Totals			**5.87**	**£13,667.40**

11.3 Agroforestry: survey results

A survey of FGS applicants was carried out in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of around 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

The Customer Experience Survey asked respondents about their experiences with the Agroforestry grant option. One respondent out of a total of 77 completing the survey had applied under this option.

The respondent stated that the grant did encourage them to diversify their farm business where they otherwise may not have.

The respondent also stated that the grant did allow them to achieve their objectives but provided no further detail.

[21]These stocking levels and payment rates changed in 2023 but were applicable during the evaluation timeframe.

11.4 Agroforestry: data analysis

- The low application rate for this grant category suggests that it is not performing as desired.
- 75% of applications have been for silvopastoral systems, suggesting that the current grant requirements are better suited to this system of approach.
- One applicant applied for both the higher and lower stocking rates on same farm area. However, the area of higher stocking was only about a fifth of the total area, suggesting different approaches despite both being silvopastoral and on the same farm unit. There doesn't appear to be any justification in the application for the differing approaches.
- Feedback from stakeholders[22] suggests that disproportionately high protection costs versus grant contributions, as well as the strict focus on producing timber as the main outcome, are reasons for low uptake. However, this has not come through in evaluation surveys.

11.5 Agroforestry: assessment against aims

To reach a conclusion, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims/ objectives of the grant option:

The aims of grant support is to help create small scale woodlands within sheep grazing pasture land (silvopastoral system) or on arable land (silvoarable system) for benefits such as:

- shelter for livestock
- timber production
- increase biodiversity
- landscape enhancement
- contribute to Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) (in specific situations).

The four schemes were recently undertaken, with earliest started in 2019 and latest in 2021. As these are still in establishment phase, they are unlikely to be delivering shelter or timber benefits at this stage. However, their planting does increase prospects for biodiversity from species diversities and habitat improvement, and will serve to enhance landscapes, having been assessed against UKFS Forests and Landscapes.

In terms of contributing to EFAs, the very fact that these areas have been planted meets this aim, as under the EFA requirements 'the area is subject to an agreement with the Forestry Commission[23] under agro-forestry and has been planted since 1 January 2015' means it is to be deemed an EFA project.

[22]Anecdotal feedback from stakeholder in the Trees on Farms sub-group.
[23]Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) is still quoted in areas of the Rural Payments and Services Website, however from 01 April 2019 FCS legally transitioned to Scottish Forestry and so should be substituted.

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Section 12

Forest Infrastructure and Sheep and Trees

12.1 Infrastructure and Sheep and Trees: introduction and aims

There are two overarching aims for this option:

1. To provide support for new access infrastructure that will bring small scale, undermanaged or inaccessible existing woodlands back into active management so as to:
   - improve the economic value of forest and woodland through timber production
   - increase the area of woodland in Scotland that is in sustainable management
   - improve the environmental and social benefits of woodland.
2. To provide support for new access infrastructure to new woodlands as part of the Sheep and Trees initiative. This initiative is aimed at raising awareness of the many opportunities woodland can bring to land managers.

12.2 Infrastructure and Sheep and Trees: grants and applications data

12.2.1 Grant contributions

Grant support is available for a number of capital grant operations associated with new forest infrastructure.

1. Existing Woodland

Capital grant operation	Payment Rate
Construction of Forest Road	£25.80 per linear metre
Construction of lay-bys, turning areas and loading bays	£6.60 per square metre
Construction of bell-mouth junction	£32.40 per square metre

2. Sheep and Trees

Capital grant operation	Payment Rate
Construction of Forest Road	£25.80 per linear metre
Construction of lay-bys, turning areas and loading bays	£6.60 per square metre

12.2.2 What has been funded

A list of all forestry infrastructure applications, including sheep and trees cases which include woodland creation, was produced from Casebook.

The actual number of separate woodland blocks which will be serviced by new infrastructure will be greater. This figure was not captured due to this data not being consistently available.

There have been a total of **53 Infrastructure applications**, totalling **£782,293**.

There have been a total of **29 Sheep and Trees applications**, totalling **£641,372**.

Timber volumes

The total volume of timber now accessible for harvesting and marketing as a result of installed infrastructure is approximately **339,061m^3**.

This figure is based on information provided by applicants in the Operational Plan template at the time of applying for grant.

This data doesn't consider Sheep and Trees schemes which may also provide access to existing woodlands. For these cases the Woodland Creation Operational Plan is used at application stage, which doesn't ask for timber volumes. However these new woodland schemes will be included in the Woodland Creation Timber Volume estimates.

Woodland areas

Approximately **1262 hectares of woodland is now accessible** due to the Infrastructure grant for existing woodlands. The actual figure will be slightly higher as not every Operational Plan template provided woodland size information.

Approximately **1,010 hectares of new conifer woodlands** through the Sheep and Trees scheme are now **serviced by new forest roads**.

12.3 Infrastructure and Sheep and Trees: survey results

A survey of FGS applicants was carried out in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of around 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

The Customer Experience Survey asked respondents about their experiences with the Infrastructure grant option. Seven respondents had infrastructure projects.

85% of respondents said that the infrastructure grant allowed them to achieve their objectives for their woodland.

50% of respondents said that farming activities had also benefited from the grant. 25% said gamekeeping activities had benefitted.

Other comments on the infrastructure grant included (grouped thematically):

- Allowed conversion to continuous cover forestry as clearfell not required to fund the road.
- Increased public recreation as people prefer to walk on roads.
- Increased the value of the property.
- Grant rate needs to be increased.
- Would value separate infrastructure grants to keep recreation and harvesting routes separate.

12.4 Infrastructure and Sheep and Trees: data analysis

- 76% of all Sheep and Trees cases have been in South Scotland Conservancy.
- The highest spend on infrastructure across both case types is in South Scotland Conservancy at £724,113.
- Grampian has the largest number of Existing Woodland Infrastructure cases.
- 1,262 hectares of woodland has been brought in to active management through the infrastructure option and 339,061 m^3 of timber is now available as a result.
- Approximately 1,010 ha of new conifer woodlands through the Sheep and Trees scheme are now serviced by new forest roads.
- For existing woodlands, woodland area and timber volumes had to be extracted manually, through checking the Operational Plan (OP) of every case in RP&S. The OP templates have changed over time, and earlier versions did not ask for specific information such as woodland area or total standing volume. This has meant that some information extracted from each case may be incorrect or missing.

12.5 Infrastructure and Sheep and Trees: assessment against aims

To reach a conclusion, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims/ objectives of the grant option:

1. To provide support for new access infrastructure that will bring small scale, undermanaged or inaccessible existing woodlands back into active management so as to:
   - improve the economic value of forest and woodland through timber production
   - increase the area of woodland in Scotland that is in sustainable management
   - improve the environmental and social benefits of woodland.

2. To provide support for new access infrastructure to new woodlands as part of the Sheep and Trees initiative. This initiative is aimed at raising awareness of the many opportunities woodland can bring to land managers.

Between the two options, over 2,000 hectares of existing and new woodlands are now accessible for active management, so the aims of the option are being delivered. For existing woodlands this has potentially released 339k m^3 of timber. Improving the environmental and social benefits of woodland is difficult to determine here, as there is no easy way to measure this for this evaluation.

Unsurprisingly both grant options have been popular in South Scotland, likely due to geography, existing land use (upland sheep farming), and a greater extent of commercial woodlands – many of which are smaller isolated blocks – as well as greater suitability for new commercial woodlands.

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Section 13

Co-operation

13.1 Co-operation: introduction and aims

This category supports key landscape scale projects involving landowners to sustain rural Scotland's economy, environment and culture.

The aim of this grant option is to encourage collaborative projects between two or more landowners by providing support for project facilitation and co-ordination to address specific issues. The subsequent management activity can then be supported through other options within the Forestry Grant Scheme.

13.2 Co-operation: grants and applications data

13.2.1 Grant contributions

Grant support of £250 per day is available for up to 40 days, or up to 10 days for small-scale (under 10 hectares) woodland creation schemes, to support the cost of a project co-ordinator for feasibility studies (exploratory phase) and writing up the details found (consolidation phase).

13.2.2 What has been funded

A total of **26 cases have been approved**.

To be eligible, each application must benefit a minimum of two land holdings (or four for woodland creation schemes) and must address specific issues. Each application can address more than one issue. Only Highlands and Islands and South Conservancies have had any applications relating to this option. The table below shows the issues addressed by applications across both Conservancies:

Table 37: Issues included in co-operation grant applications

Issue	# of applications included in	% of total
Woodland Creation: Improving water quality and natural flood management	10	38%
Woodland Creation: Farm/croft woodlands	15	58%
Woodland Creation: Landscape scale expansion of habitat networks	20	77%
Woodland habitat improvement for Capercaillie and/or Black grouse	5	19%
Native woodland restoration and Rhododendron control in priority areas	7	27%
Landscape scale woodland deer management	6	23%
Active management of Farm/croft woodlands	5	19%
Supporting rural communities	11	42%

62% of the 26 applications were in relation to a SSSI/Natura designated site.

A total of just over £151,000 was spent on co-operation grant projects.

13.3 Co-operation: survey results

A survey of FGS applicants was carried out in spring 2023. The survey was sent to the Rural Payments 'Agents' mailing list, consisting of around 250 individuals. A total of 77 responded, a response rate of around 30%.

The Customer Experience Survey asked respondents about their experiences with the co-operation grant option. Of the 77 respondents to the FGS Evaluation Survey, three had co-operation projects.

100% of these respondents stated that subsequent grant applications or management activities had taken place as a result of the co-operation grant.

Of those projects brought forward, two-thirds said that 75-100% of the participants in the scoping stage of the co-operation grant went on to carry out future operations.

Two-thirds also said that they felt those subsequent operations would not have taken place if not for the grant.

Two of the three respondents agreed that this was a good grant option and helpful for high-level assessments.

13.4 Co-operation: data analysis

- Only two Conservancies have any co-operation cases, with 18 being in Highland and Islands and 8 in South Scotland.
- The majority of cases relate to woodland creation, with South Scotland's cases being almost an even split between the main WC objectives, and Highland and Islands' cases having a greater focus on expansion of habitat networks.
- There were more applications focused on other objectives across Highland and Islands, with a greater emphasis on supporting rural communities, habitat improvements for capercaillie and black grouse, deer management and bringing croft woodlands back in to active management.
- Outwith woodland creation schemes, South only had one application, which related to native woodland restoration of a SSSI Woodland.
- 62% of the applications were in relation to a SSSI/Natura Designated site.
- Just over £151,000 has been spent on grant funding.
- In total, the applications proposed to create 5.11 full-time employees and 20.11 temporary full-time employees, and safeguard 21.11 full-time employees across both Conservancy areas.
- There were no collaborative projects relating to supporting P. ramorum control in local communities. However, it appears that this is a more recent addition to the eligibility criteria
- Three co-operation projects have led to a further 11 FGS applications for support to deliver work on the ground – predominantly to expand woodland habitat networks, improve habitat in designated woodlands, and rhododendron control in priority areas.

13.5 Co-operation: assessment against aims

To reach a conclusion, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims/ objectives of the grant option:

1. This option aims to encourage landscape-scale collaborative projects between two or more landowners by providing support for project facilitation and co-ordination.

From the data analysis, the grant option has delivered against its aims of supporting project facilitation and co-ordination for collaborative landscape scale projects.

Whilst some of the objectives are regionally or target area specific, it's not clear why there isn't a greater range of projects addressing a wider range of issues across the whole of Scotland and indeed all Conservancies. However, it does require collaboration between land owners, which can be a difficult task.

Only three out of the 26 co-operation projects had led to subsequent FGS applications during the evaluation period. Whilst this seems low, there are a number of reasons why this might be the case, including timescale (cases may have come forward outwith the evaluation period) and feasibility, as well as the continuing need for all parties to still be on board with taking a project forward.

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Section 14

Tree Health

14.1 Tree Health: introduction and aims

This category provides support for prevention of the spread of tree fungal disease such as **Phytophthora ramorum** within affected forests by supporting tree removal work and carrying out subsequent replanting operations. It supports the protection of woodland from the impacts of non-routine tree pests or diseases through activities such as:

- provision of competent agents' services
- removal of relevant tree or host species
- replacement planting.

It should be noted that Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHNs) are issued to landowners regardless of being registered or eligible for grant support. Tree Health grants may support compliance with issued SPHNs; being in receipt of one being a prerequisite of grant support.

14.2 Tree Health: grants and applications data

14.2.1 Grant contributions

There are multiple grant options under this category, such as employing the services of an agent to carry out various parts of compliance relating to Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHNs) or capital costs associated with compliance, for example the felling and replanting of trees.

The list of grant contributions can be **found on the RP&S website**.

14.2.2 What has been funded

SPHNs issued vs grant applications

Data received from the Tree Health Data Officer indicates that there were a total of **786** Statutory Plant Health Notices (SPHNs) issued to private landowners[24] over the evaluation term. There were **290** unique applications for Tree Health grants, totalling **37%** of SPHNs issued.

Agent's services

There have been a total of 231 applications that include agent's services over the course of the FGS evaluation period. Agent's services cover the cost of an agent to assist with SPHNs in three distinct work areas:

- advice (assisting landowners with advice on how to comply with an SPHN)
- compliance (organising contracts to comply with an SPHN)
- harvesting and marketing (organising and supervising contractors throughout the felling, extraction and marketing of timber associated with an SPHN).

Only one grant may be applied for. Higher payments cover the requirements of the lower-value grants, i.e. harvesting and marketing requires the applicant to provide services from advice, through compliance, to marketing.

Table 38: Total applications for agent services

Agent Services Option	Payment rate	Number of Applications	Total Value
Advice	£200	9 (4%)	1,800
Compliance	£500	79 (34%)	39,500
Harvesting and Marketing	£1000	143 (62%)	143,000
Totals		**231**	**£184,300**

Uneconomic Felling and Tree Clearance and Restocking

There were 198 applications that included Uneconomic Felling and Tree Clearance, with a total felling area of 566 hectares.

There were 201 applications that included Restocking, with a total replanting area of 812 hectares.

Restocking exceeds felling due to being eligible for all restocking areas that may have been felled in order to access the affected areas, or felled to a secure, windfirm ('green') edge. However, the felling grants are only eligible for trees affected by **P. ramorum**.

[24]Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) would also be in receipt of a large number of SPHNs across the public forest estate, however would not be eligible for grant support so have not been included here.

Rhododendron Control[25]

There have been 46 applications for Rhododendron ponticum clearance that have been undertaken in order to reduce the spread of P. ramorum , totalling **64.45 hectares**.

12.08 hectares of follow-up treatment has also been grant funded, in order to stop the recolonisation of R. ponticum into areas previously cleared.

The total spend for Rhododendron Control was **£410,144**.

14.3 Tree Health: data analysis

- Only 37% of issued SPHNs issued are followed up with a Tree Health grant application.
- 62% of agent's services grants were for the highest rate, suggesting that most landowners required assistance with SPHNs end-to-end throughout the process.
- 34% of agent's services grants were for compliance only. When coupled with harvesting and marketing, this amounts to 96% of all applications covered the costs of agents, from advice through to compliance with relevant SPHNs.
- 4% of agent's services only covered the payment of an agent for advice on how to comply with an SPHN. It is not clear if or how the SPHN was subsequently complied with.
- There were three more applications for Restocking versus Felling within this category, totalling 245 hectares more grant funded restocking than felling. This suggests that large areas of felling were carried out without grant aid.
- The largest area of felling was recorded at South Conservancy, forming 61% of total grant-funded felling. This high proportion is to be expected and is congruent with Scottish Forestry's P. ramorum Action Plan. The disease is currently widespread within the 'Management Zone' in South-west Scotland.
- Felling in Perth and Argyll and Central Conservancies were 20% and 14% respectively. These Conservancies cover sections of the Risk Reduction Zone, so again these figures are to be expected, in line with the Action Plan. This area, along the Central-west to North-west of the country, has recently seen a gradual increase in the spread P. ramorum, hence the increasing numbers of SPHNs served.
- Highland and Islands and Grampian Conservancy had the smallest areas of felling: 5% and 0.01% respectively. This is again expected as these areas cover the Priority Action Zone and affirm that the disease is indeed less prevalent in the North and East of Scotland.
- The recorded SPHNs served and authorised felled areas present a good picture of the disease occurrence and how Scottish Forestry Action Plan is helping to control the rate of spread across the country.
- Most R. Ponticum treatments have been using the manual option, and there was no use of the 'light' option, suggesting that occurrences of **P.ramorum** are generally found in areas more densely colonised by **R. Ponticum**.

14.4 Tree Health: assessment against aims

To reach a conclusion, the above analysis must be compared to the initial aims /objectives of the grant option:

1. This option provides support to prevent the spread of Phytophthora ramorum (P. ramorum).

The very act of granting applications can be seen as meeting this aim. Providing funding towards works in order to comply with SPHNs is supporting the prevention of the spread of P. ramorum. The total SPHNs issued versus the total number of unique applications for tree health grants evidences that this grant has substantially supported the actioning of SPHN compliance, and therefore the prevention of spread.

2. This option helps with the restoration of forests affected by P. ramorum by supporting the work to remove affected trees and carry out subsequent replanting.

There have been a total of 198 applications for grant assistance for the uneconomical felling of affected trees, indicating that this part of the aim has been met. There have also been 201 applications for restocking, indicating that areas felled have indeed been restored through subsequent replanting.

[25]It should be noted that, by ministerial agreement, support for rhododendron control under the Tree Health category ceased in 2020. This was due to a policy change, meaning SPHNs were no longer to be issued on *Rhododendron ponticum.*

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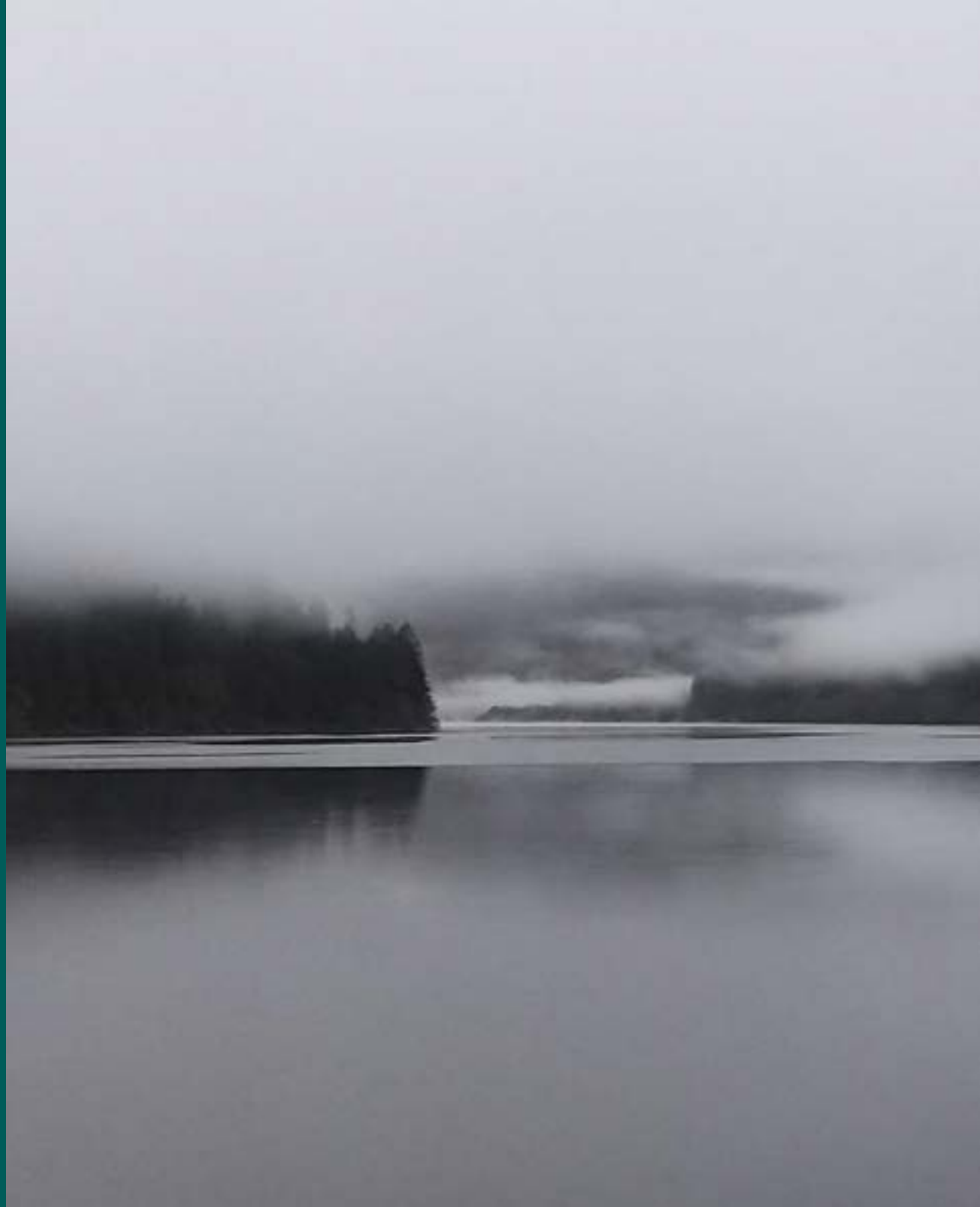
Section 15

Other



This section of the report is for high-level data collected that does not necessarily fit within any one of previous evaluation criteria above.

Note that SMF grants are claimed through annual Single Application Form (SAF) and therefore are unknown. The figures contained here are the committed values, not necessarily the paid values.

15.1 Customer charter and processing times by grant option

Please note that the 'total number of cases' displayed below are cases counted by distinct applications, not by category or options applied for. There may be multiple grant options/categories in a single application.

Table 39: Processing times broken down by grant option

FGS Option	Total Number of Cases	Average Processing Time (days)	Customer Charter (days)	Percentage Within Customer Charter
Agroforestry	4	140	91	50 %
Woodland Creation	735	64	91	74 %
Woodland Creation - High Rates	366	63	91	81 %
Woodland Creation - CSGN	414	72	91	69 %
Woodland Creation - Nat Regen	57	54	91	82 %
Forest Infrastructure	88	58	70	69 %
Forestry Cooperation	26	56	70	62 %
Harvesting and Processing	257	49	70	82 %
SMF Native Woodlands/LISS	70	60	70	73 %
SMF Public Access/WIAT	45	77	70	64 %
SMF Rural Access	24	82	70	58 %
SMF Species Control	141	59	70	77 %
Tree Health	297	37	70	86 %
WIG Habitat and Species/LISS	115	58	70	69 %
WIG Planning	719	60	70	71 %
WIG RR	1128	58	70	72 %
WIG WIAT	59	68	70	68 %
Mean values		**66 days**	**76 days**	**71%**

Note: Processing times are based upon the time held within Casebook and include the time that applications have been 'returned to applicants' for alterations or amendments, therefore the above figures may not be an accurate representation of the actual handling time by SF staff.

15.2 Total applications and values by category

Please note that the 'number of applications' displayed below are how many times a grant category or option has been applied for, not the number of distinct applications (some applications may contain more than one category/option).

Table 40: Total applications and values by grant category

FGS Option	Number of Applications	Value Claimed (£)
Woodland Creation	2,118	155,037,286
WIG Planning	485	1,914,713
WIG RR	957	11,038,838
WIG Habitat and Species/LISS	106	6,724,688
WIG WIAT	51	3,091,523
Harvesting and Processing	197	4,218,557
Forest Infrastructure	84	1,823,188
Tree Health	244	1,913,551
Forestry Cooperation	19	151,710
Total	**4,261**	**185,914,054**

15.3 Highest and lowest spends under SMF and WIG categories

The figures in the tables below are values spent at 2021. These figures differ from the focussed evaluation areas in the rest of this report as they do not include the value committed in the application, i.e. Annual Recurrent payments.

Table 41: Highest and lowest SMF spends

Highest 3 SMF spends (option names)w	Number of Cases	Value Committed (£)	Area Committed (ha)
SMF – Species Conservation – Grey Squirrel Control	110	1,591,800	20,698
SMF – Native Woodlands	44	1,560,082	62,403
SMF – Woodland Grazing	21	514,616	5,146
Lowest 3 SMF spends (option names)	**Number of Cases**	**Value Committed (£)**	**Area Committed (ha)**
SMF - Low Impact Silvicultural Systems	1	982	33
SMF – Species Conservation – Reducing Deer Impact	5	152,445	25,408
SMF – Public Access - WIAT	41	156,034	4,693

Table 42: Highest and lowest WIG spends

Highest 3 WIG spends (option names)	Number of Cases	Value Committed (£)	Area Committed (ha)
WIG - Restructuring Regeneration	984	11,516,730	30,740
WIG - Habitats and Species	132	7,864,104	4,480
WIG - Woods In and around Towns (WIAT)	53	3,591,316	873
Lowest 3 WIG spends (option names)	**Number of Cases**	**Value Committed (£)**	**Area Committed (ha)**
WIG - Woodland Grazing Management Plan	27	32,400	2,315
WIG - Deer Management Plan	8	59,417	16,005
WIG - WIAT Urban Woodland Management Plan	91	149,621	3,140

15.4 FGS Public Register (comments on Woodland Creation cases)

The following data is for the period of December 2018 to March 2022 (inclusive) and does not cover the whole evaluation period, due to this information only being available since the migration to our current Casebook system on 30 Nov 2018.

Table 43: Public register comments received on applications

Number of cases published on the Public Register:	724
Number of cases commented on:	108 (15% of total)
Number of comments submitted:	301
Of these. Were from statutory consultees:	37 (12%)
Of these. Were from other parties:	264 (88%)

It should be noted that these figures only capture what is submitted through the system. However, we know that some consultation responses can be submitted directly to the Conservancy email inboxes or to the Woodland Officer (case officer) dealing with the application, therefore total responses to cases may not be accurate.

15.5 General comments from the FGS Evaluation Survey

The following were general comments from the RESAS FGS Evaluation Survey. These comments were gathered at the end and were not associated with a specific grant option. The following are grouped thematically:

- Application processes seem to be getting more difficult.
- SF staff need better training.
- Conservancies need more resources.
- SF staff need to be more visible.
- Inconsistencies in interpreting rules between Conservancies.
- SF is too deferential to stakeholder opinions.
- Capital works for improving woodland is too expensive up-front for some land owners.
- Grants should track with inflation.
- Supporting information templates are often clunky and functions don't work.
- Payment rates should be on a scale depending on project size, i.e. higher rates for smaller projects, lower rates for larger.
- Separate FGS from SAF claims.
- Change the claim deadline to post-planting season.
- LPIDs are not fit for purpose.
- Forestry processes are easier than permitted development.
- A balanced, unbiased approach to species choice is desired.

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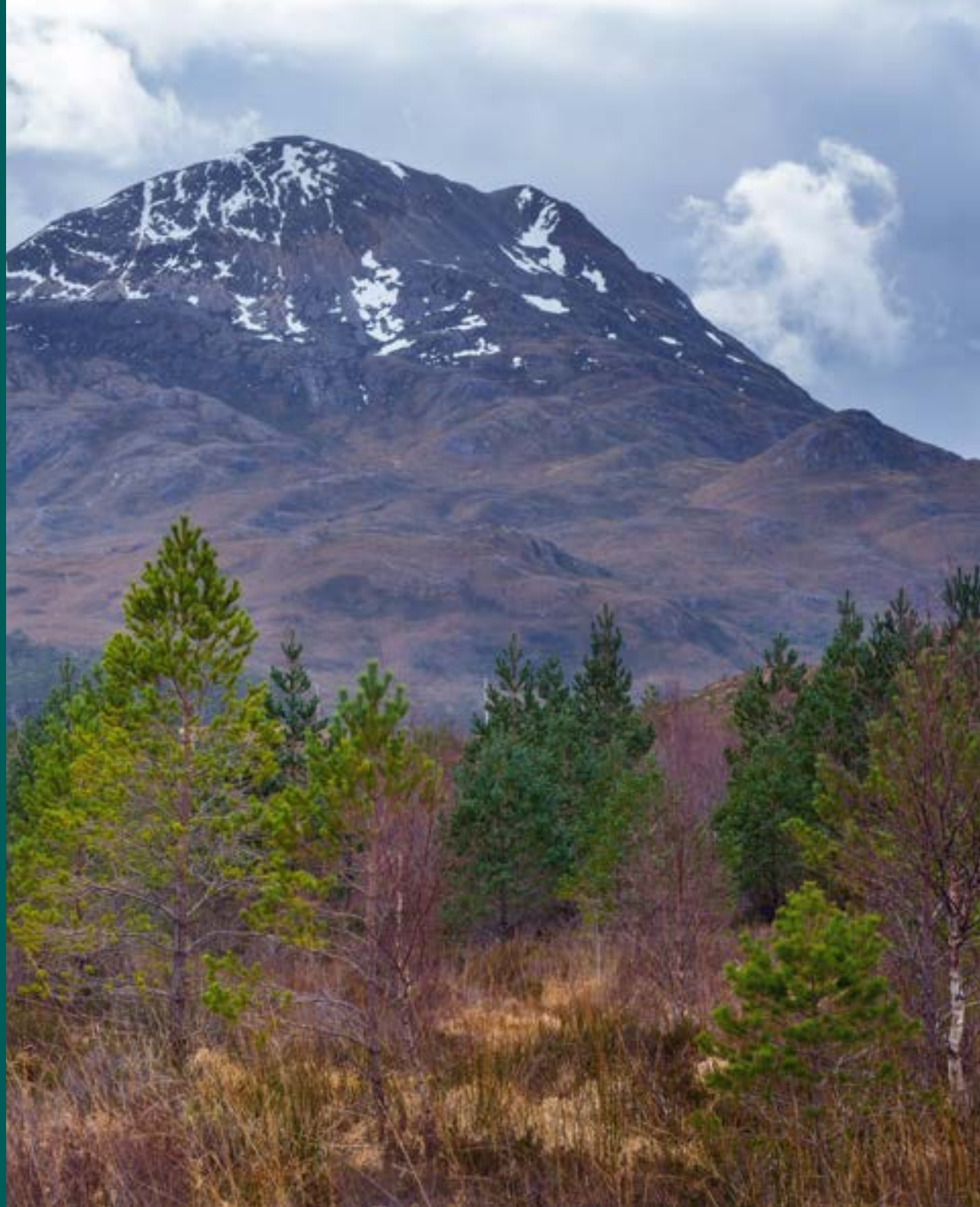
Section 16

Lessons Learned and Next Steps



16. Lessons learned

The process of carrying out this evaluation has provided good learning opportunities. The Forestry Development team is relatively new, having only been established in 2019, and the team had very little experience of carrying out an evaluation of this scale. This has resulted in some lessons being learned through the process, particularly in relation to how Scottish Forestry keeps data and on how evaluations could be approached in future. The key takeaways in this regard were:

- Not all grant options are captured on case management systems, nor geospatially, meaning data cannot be aggregated. This resulted in significant amounts of manual checks (visiting offices to check through files or checking individual cases on RP&S). This was inefficient. In future, information relating to grants (even if just relating to the specific aim of the grant option) should be stored digitally for easy access.
- Many of the aims/objectives for the grant categories or options were not SMART and therefore it was difficult to assess whether they had been met without making assumptions. Future objectives should be based on the SMART principle.
- The information asked for in application documents should more clearly reflect the aim/objective of that option.
- Information could be better displayed in application documents to make it clear what the intentions of the application are. During this evaluation many applications had to be forensically analysed to draw out this information, which was time consuming.

17. Next steps

The data and findings of this evaluation will be reviewed by Scottish Forestry and considered against the current Forestry Grant Scheme. Where opportunities have been highlighted, these will be considered for implementation.

18. Appendices

1. FGS Evaluation Framework
2. Customer Experience Survey Full Report
3. New Woodland Creation Survey
4. Rumroy Survey Report
5. FGS All Woodland Creation Options
6. Map of Woodland Creation in Highland and Islands
7. Map of Woodland Creation in Grampian
8. Map of Woodland Creation in Perth and Argyll
9. Map of Woodland Creation in Central Scotland
10. Map of Woodland Creation in South Scotland