



Scottish
Forestry
Coilltearachd
na h-Alba

Highland & Islands Regional Stakeholder Group Meeting

Date & Time:	11 April 2024
Venue:	Garden Room, Strathpeffer Pavilion, Strathpeffer
Present:	<p>Neil Murray – Conservator, Highland & Islands Conservancy - Scottish Forestry (Chair) (NM)</p> <p>Phil Di-Ducca – Kelpie Woodlands (PDD)</p> <p>Alex Macleod – Forestry and Land Scotland (AM)</p> <p>Linzi Sievwright – Caorann (LS)</p> <p>Gordon Cumming – Woodlands Trust (WT)</p> <p>Richard Lockett – Agri Environmental (RL)</p> <p>Megan Parker – Scottish Woodlands (MP)</p> <p>Tom Luthman – Crosscut Forestry (TL)</p> <p>Jason Coleman -</p>
Minute:	<p>Lee Miller – Highlands and Islands Conservancy – Scottish Forestry</p> <p>Presenters - John Risby (JR), Scottish Forestry, Carrie Higgins (CH) UHI, Jon Holligdale</p>
Apologies:	<p>Grant Holroyd -</p> <p>Lorna Schofield -</p> <p>Amanda Bryan – Scottish Forestry Trust and UHI</p> <p>Ewan Robertson - Tilhill</p> <p>Kenna Chisholm - RSPB</p>

Agenda Item	Discussion	Action
1.	<p><u>Welcome and Introduction</u></p> <p>NM welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made by all participants.</p>	
2.	<p><u>Update on Conservancy case work and the budget announcement</u></p> <p>Neil updated the group on the Conservancy staffing, approvals and workload. The 2024 revised budget, changes to woodland creation budget categories and limitations on variations were highlighted.</p>	



	<p>It was noted that the SG woodland creation target could not be achieved with the reduced budget.</p> <p>Questions that arose from the discussion: Would 2025 budget remain static or would the reduced budget put people off applying for 2024 or 2025? The uncertainty over 2025 when there was only one year budget award was noted. Figures for 2025 are at normal level for now but should increase with receipt of further applications. NM acknowledged the budget reduction was a blow but despite this, Grant Applications are still being approved for 2024 and Budget categories and scoring will help to manage approvals. Would 'good' applications which couldn't be approved be retained in the system? The Grant Scheme is still open and applications can still be cleared for later years.</p> <p>Concern was expressed that the time taken to get applications through process and to clearing means that scores may change in the interim which introduces uncertainty for applicants and may limit proposals being developed.</p> <p>Could N+2 be extended to N+3 to spread costs of large applications? No plans to change this rule.</p> <p>What were the reasons behind the cut? Cuts to SG capital budgets. NM also confirmed that it is not possible for Scottish Forestry to carry forward unspent budget balances to later years.</p> <p>The point was raised that with the NPF4 requirement for biodiversity net gain, there may be an opportunity to fund some native woodland work. It was noted that this would need to be in addition of compensatory requirements.</p> <p>A question was raised as to whether there has been a change in the type of applicant. There is still a good mix including estates, crofters, and farmers. What was new in the last few years was investors buying some estates for carbon offsetting through native woodland expansion and peatland restoration.</p>	
3.	<p><u>SSC Curriculum and Skills Development</u></p> <p>CH provided an overview on proposed changes to further and higher education courses in forestry were explained, particularly the move to</p>	



	<p>work placed study. This had been done due to declining numbers, students not returning from work placements and to respond to industry feedback. This year there were 34 applicants to higher education.</p> <p>The increase in career changers was noted and the revised offer from SSF would support this.</p> <p>The changes were warmly welcomed</p>	
4.	<p><u>Jon Hollingdale Carbon finance</u></p> <p>JH outlined the reports he had produced in which he feels the funding gap for climate and biodiversity and estimate of jobs had been overestimated. For forestry he highlighted the practical limits on delivery of woodland creation and the decline in the forest carbon sink forecast as first rotation forest planted in the 1970s and 80s are harvested. Better strategic land use planning was needed. He challenged the assumptions used and suggested that the role of Government grants was still very important. Whilst recognising the need for private finance he suggested that investment return should not be the primary factor in deciding which project proceed rather that finance should support environmental and social benefits, be accessible to all owners/crofters and ideally done in partnership with communities.</p> <p>Was biodiversity net gain going to be increasingly important? Jon felt this would be at the margins.</p> <p>It was noted that many owners were wary of the long liabilities from selling carbon units.</p>	
5.	<p><u>John Risby Scotland's rainforest strategic approach</u></p> <p>JR summarised the importance of Scotland's rainforest and his work over the last year. The threats and need to work at a population of landscape level, for cooperation and long term management were highlighted. NGOs and communities were leading the nine initial priority areas. Following engagement with the Alliance for Scotland's rainforest and delivery partners across the rainforest zone a draft strategic approach</p>	



	<p>and funding framework had been produced and comments were sought on this from members.</p> <p>The role of regulatory powers and proposed changes to deer legislation was discussed. The importance of private sector delivery of deer management was highlighted and the need for targeted incentives. FGS enhancements announced in November 2023 included additional support for deer management in priority rainforest areas.</p>	
6.	<p><u>AOB</u></p> <p>Unfortunately the full agenda meant that there was essentially no time to take AOB items and have a wider discussion. The key lesson here is to make more time in Agenda for AOB</p> <p>Future items for agenda included:</p> <p>Woodland creation process changes- concern was expressed about the process and inconsistencies.</p> <p>Progress with training and skills in SF</p> <p>Changes to peat depth guidance produced by NS-It was confirmed that 50 cm in UKFS v5 remained the depth in Scotland</p> <p>Query was raised as to why conifer regen on other habitats required felling permission</p>	

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Next Meeting – TBC