

Consultation response



***UK Forestry Standard and
Forests and Biodiversity Guidelines***

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About the Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) was founded in 1964 to take all appropriate measures to conserve the fauna, flora, and all objects of natural history in trust throughout Scotland. With over 35,000 members, several hundred of whom are actively involved in conservation activities locally, we are proud to say we are now the largest voluntary body working for all the wildlife of Scotland. The Trust owns or manages 123 wildlife reserves and campaigns at local and national levels to ensure wildlife is protected and enhanced for future generations to enjoy. SWT manages 2,398 ha of woodland across 88 reserves.

SWT's core aim is to advance the conservation of Scotland's biodiversity for the benefit of present and future generations.

SWT's vision for Scotland's wildlife requires a network of healthy, resilient ecosystems supporting expanding communities of native species across large areas of Scotland's land, water and seas. This can be achieved through:

- Protecting vulnerable areas from further loss
- Restoring and enhancing degraded habitats
- Expanding these areas to form an integral part of large-scale, wildlife-rich landscapes
- Having a diverse range of people who are increasingly knowledgeable of, and actively engaged in, wildlife and conservation.

Response to the UK Forestry Standard and Forests and Biodiversity Guidelines Consultation Drafts

SWT is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the draft UK Forestry Standard and Guidelines. Our response comes in two parts: comments on the draft UK Forestry Standard and comments on the draft Forests and Biodiversity Guidelines.

UK Forestry Standard

1 General Approach

Looking at the revision project as a whole, does the approach taken meet the objectives [...] above?

The Consultation Draft does meet the objectives set out in para 6. We are concerned, however that the objectives do not address the question of the conservation of biodiversity which is a legal duty of the Forestry Commission

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Scotland¹. Objective v could be expanded to include biodiversity or an additional objective to “include domestic and international initiatives on biodiversity and the role woodlands can play in the conservation of biodiversity”.

2 Scope

Does the UKFS & Forestry Guidelines series adequately address the elements of sustainable forest management, as identified by internationally agreed principles and criteria?

No, see comment above.

3 Requirements

Does the range of UKFS requirements in the table capture the essentials of sustainable forest management?

No, not if the question refers to the table on pp27-42.

LCLR2.2 is not a comprehensive guide to exemptions to a felling license and should be expanded.

LCGFPR4 should link to guidance to assist woodland managers.

PLGFPR9 and PGFP9 in this context the word “protected” is ambiguous and should be replaced with an alternative term such as “managed”. In urban areas, for example, trees can be protected by discretionary management rather than off-the-shelf protection measures such as tubes which are not always the most appropriate solution. “Management” would encourage consideration of a wider range of options.

LGFP3 “supports local distinctiveness” is ambiguous and should be explained. Local distinctiveness should reflect natural communities in their local setting, including, where appropriate, locally important genetic distinctiveness. This requirement should be tied in with Local Biodiversity Action Plans.

BGFPR1 forest management should protect *and* enhance biodiversity, rather than protect or enhance biodiversity.

¹ Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 s1(1): It is the duty of every public body and office-holder, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions.

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BGFPR2 should be strengthened. Either replace “should” with “must” or replace “considered” with “included” so that the requirement reads “opportunities for enhancing biodiversity should/must be included in forest plans.” Alternatively, it may be helpful to recast the guideline as “forest plans must show how biodiversity is to be protected and enhanced.”

BGFPR4 should include expansion of priority habitats and species to reflect the provisions of Article 10 of the Habitats Directive² which promotes the expansion of features of biodiversity importance.

4 Clarity and Detail

In general, are the UKFS and Guidelines clearly written and adequate in terms of their length and detail?

No. The level of detail is not sufficient as a number of ambiguities are contained in the documents. As the UKFS and Guidelines are intended to be working documents used by woodland managers this gap could be readily filled by linking to appropriate weblinks or referring to appropriate documents. For example, paragraph 71 should refer the reader to the FC publication *Tree Felling – Getting Permission* (2007).

5 Additional Guidance

Some of the new Guidelines have less practical detail than previous versions, this will now be covered in supporting publications. Are there particular topics you can identify where you would like further practical information and guidance?

It would be of assistance to woodland managers to have further clarification of the 5m³ felling exemption in a practical context.

6 Equality and Diversity

In relation to para 13 above, do you feel that the UKFS and Guidelines will have positive and equitable impacts on all groups in society?

This is beyond our remit and we have no comment.

² Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p.7)

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7 The UKFS – General

Do you have any general comments about the scope and content of the UKFS?

No.

8 The UKFS – Scope

Do you feel there are any omissions of unnecessary inclusions?

The UKFS should make reference to the importance of reducing timber imports for climate change mitigation and for biodiversity. Imported timber can act as a vector for biotic pest species and disease which threatens biodiversity, native woodlands and the domestic timber industry.

9 The UKFS – Detail

Do you have any questions about the level of detail contained in the text of the UKFS (excluding sections 5 & 7)?

We warmly welcome much of the emphasis on biodiversity contained within the draft UKFS but feel that insufficient priority is given to conserving and enhancing biodiversity throughout the document. At para 57 the impression is given that priority habitats and species are the only elements of biodiversity which should be protected or enhanced. The duty to further the conservation of biodiversity in Scotland does not only apply to designated species or habitats, but to biodiversity as a whole. We feel that para 57 should reflect this.

Given the applicability of the UKFS to Scotland, we are concerned that the biodiversity duty under the 2004 Act³ does not appear to feature in the main text of the consultation draft. As this legislation should provide a main driver for forestry strategy in Scotland we hope that this omission will be rectified in the final Standard

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 should also be reflected in the final Standard which should reference the forthcoming sustainable land-use strategy which is required by the Act.

We have a number of specific comments about section 6.

Para 115: wayleaves should be included in non-woodland elements.

³ Op cit.

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PPG 1 – it is unclear whether this is referring to a commercial non-native or native forestry and native woodland (such as ancient semi-natural woodland). If UKFS is to deliver regulation of composition, there is a need to clarify and define woodland types.

PPG4 – we believe that a 15% minimum of the forest management unit managed with conservation and biodiversity as a major objective is insufficient and that the proportion managed for this purpose should be increased.

PPG16 – where forest land is lost through other land-use changes, appropriate mitigation measures should be taken to create new, high nature-value woodland.

10 UKFS Detail Requirements Table and Forest Practice (Sections 5 & 7)

Do you have any comments about the level of detail contained in the text of sections 5 & 7: the UKFS requirements table and the forest planning and general forestry practice section?

See answer to Question 4 above.

Forests and Biodiversity – Guidelines

GQ 1 General

Do you feel the Forests and Biodiversity Guidelines are adequate in terms of length and detail?

Yes.

GQ 2 Content

Do you feel that there are any omissions, or unnecessary inclusions?

Please see our answer to question 4 and our other comments.

GQ 3 Technical

Bearing in mind the function of the Guideline publications described in the diagram inside the front cover, do you feel the information is pitched at an appropriate level in terms of technical content?

Yes.

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GG4 Guideline Bullet Points

Do you have any comment on the guideline bullet points set out under each factor?

BG6 – The 1m and 25ha figures given in the guideline on deep blanket peat are arbitrary and unhelpful and should be removed. Active blanket peat can have a range of depths and can be of significant biodiversity and carbon importance at depths less than 1m. 25ha is an excessively large area to act as a lower limit upon which new planting or cultivation should be avoided.

BG7 – Planting or regeneration should also be avoided on areas that would adversely affect the hydrology of adjacent areas that are capable of restoration to active status.

BG13 – Rather than “consider using natural processes” as a way of delivering management objectives, this BG13 should be strengthened to “Use, wherever practicable, natural processes [...]”

BG16 – Local circumstances may require the use of local source material to protect genetic integrity; it is not always appropriate to use a range of origins for source stock and this should be reflected in the guideline.

BG17 – The guideline should make clear that the condition and genetic characteristics of adjacent woodland is a significant factor in deciding whether or not to use non-local native species in the establishment of new woodland.

BG18 – “environmental objectives” should be clarified. The requirement for 5% native broadleaf or shrubs is too low and should be increased.

BG20 – Should read “manage a minimum of 15% of the forest management unit with conservation and enhancement of biodiversity as *the* major objective.” All forestry should be managed with conservation and the enhancement of biodiversity as a major objective.

Other Comments

SWT welcomes the draft *Forests and Biodiversity Guidelines* which complement FCS’s biodiversity programme 2008-2011 *Woods for Nature*. *Woods for Nature* commits FCS to a wide range of activities to protect and enhance biodiversity through, for example, working at a landscape or ecosystem scale. This needs to set the context for forestry and biodiversity in Scotland and it would be helpful for woodland managers to have this context explicitly referenced in the guidelines.

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Further reference should be made, and earlier in the document, to the biodiversity duty under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 and what this means for Forestry Commission Scotland and for forestry in Scotland.

We welcome the inclusion of the ecosystem approach in the guidelines. We are concerned by the ambiguity of some of the language used, however. The meaning of “flexibly” (first bullet, para 24) is unclear and should be explained.

The Good Practice Forestry Requirements (BGFPR1 to BGFPR5 inclusive) would benefit from being strengthened. “Should” ought to be replaced by “must”; it is not overly onerous to require woodland managers to give consideration to protecting, enhancing and restoring biodiversity.

SWT broadly welcomes the draft Forestry Standard and Biodiversity Guidelines; we feel that they would benefit from strengthening as outlined above and, if properly implemented, resourced and monitored can make a contribution to the enhancement and protection of biodiversity through the delivery of landscape-scale, ecosystem-based conservation.

SWT’s Forestry and Woodland Policy and Woodland Operational Policy are attached as appendices to this response.

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