

# Scottish Wildlife Trust

## Briefing

Stage 1 Debate:

*Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill*



### Background

Woodlands provide substantial benefits to both wildlife and people. As the former climax vegetation community over much of Scotland, woodland and scrub supports more species than any other terrestrial habitat, particularly ancient semi-natural woodlands which are the surviving descendants of our original natural forests. In addition to supporting much of our biodiversity, woodland provides highly valued social and economic benefits to Scotland's people.<sup>1</sup>

After declining to around 5% around the turn of the 20th century, total forest cover (native and non-native) in Scotland is currently c 18% (i.e. c. 1.4 million ha). This is still low in relation to our European neighbours, and Scotland's forests are also unusual in that they are dominated by a non-native species – Sitka spruce. In fact, native woodland makes up a very small proportion of the total woodland area (< 25%; c. 350,000 ha). Of that area, ancient semi-natural woodland makes up just 4.6% of the total woodland (just over 0.5% of total land area; c. 64,400 ha), and is declining in extent and condition in the uplands.<sup>2</sup>

Productive forests in Scotland are dominated by Sitka spruce and Sitka dominated woodlands are of lower biodiversity value than mixed and native-species stands. There are also potential risks from pests and/or diseases of Sitka spruce (if there is a lack of diversity in tree species within such a commercial forest) should these become established in Scotland. Less than 20% of the National Forest Estate (NFE) is made up of native species.<sup>3</sup>

### Our views on the future of Forestry policy

The Trust wishes to see a significant increase in the quantity and improvement in the quality of Scotland's native woodlands to the extent they are making a major contribution to the restoration of degraded terrestrial ecosystems in both rural and urban environments.<sup>4</sup>

The Trust believes Scotland's woodlands are currently not realising their full potential for helping Scotland adapt to climate change. More connected riparian woodlands for example, could prevent flooding; reduce erosion; improve water quality; and allow wildlife to move through the landscape. Woodlands are also important carbon sinks and therefore help mitigate climate change.<sup>5</sup>

### What we welcome about the Bill

We welcome the clear commitment that Scottish Ministers have made in the Bill by taking a duty to promote sustainable forest management. We note the conclusion that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee came to in its Stage 1 report that this term should be defined in the Scottish Forestry Strategy. We think it would provide greater clarity if the term were defined on the face of the Bill. The Bill has established the duty, and introduced the term, so the Bill should say what it means. To address concerns about flexibility, this definition could be amended by subordinate legislation. We support the following definition of Sustainable Forest Management:

*“Sustainable forest management” means the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains, and where appropriate enhances, their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity and vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions at local, national and global levels, and does not cause damage to other ecosystems.”*

We welcome the fact that the Bill provides a statutory basis for the Scottish Forestry Strategy. This important document will guide the development of forestry in Scotland, and we note that the conservation and enhancement of the environment by means of sustainable forest management will rightly be a key theme of the strategy. We welcome the recommendations of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee that the strategy should be reviewed every five years; that this review should be subject to full public consultation; and that the Parliament should have an opportunity to scrutinise the strategy in draft form before it is laid. We also welcome the Committee's recommendation that it should be clear how the strategy integrates with the UK Forest Standard.

The Trust also warmly welcomes the commitment, implicit in the Bill, that Scotland will retain a substantial holding of public forest land, in the form of the National Forest Estate, and the commitment in the Bill to manage it to promote sustainable forest management. We have alluded above to some of the improvements that we think can be made to the NFE to improve its value for biodiversity, in particular we would highlight a greater use of native species. We also welcome the powers included in the Bill for Scottish Ministers to involve communities in the management of the NFE and other forest land.

### **Three changes we would like to see made to the Bill:**

#### **1 Native woodland creation targets in legislation**

Scotland has led the way in enshrining its greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction targets in legislation. This Bill should follow suit, and should include both the long term forest cover target and interim woodland creation targets in legislation. The Trust believes that the long-term forest cover target should be 30% woodland cover by 2050, and that interim woodland creation targets should be set periodically to ensure that this is achieved. As with the climate change targets the Bill should require the Government to report to the Parliament on progress against these objectives at regular intervals. This could be linked to the cycles for reviewing the Forestry Strategy. We believe that the majority of this new woodland should be native woodland. As a minimum the approach established by the Scottish Government in implementing the Biodiversity Strategy through "Big Steps for Nature", for half of new woodland created to be native woodland, should be followed in relation to these targets.

#### **2 Duty of sustainable deer management for forest owners**

Deer are woodland animals<sup>6</sup>. Using estimates of deer populations in forests in Scotland derived from population modelling, there are about 85,000 to 100,000 roe, sika, and fallow deer in privately owned forests in Scotland, and 40,000 to 45,000 on the NFE; red deer estimates in private forests are between 45,000 to 60,000 and on the NFE between 40,000 to 45,000.<sup>7</sup> About 30% of all deer culling in Scotland has been carried out by the Forestry Commission (e.g. Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) activity on the NFE)<sup>8</sup> which costs the tax payer over £3 million per year (not including fences).<sup>9</sup> This is disproportionate considering the NFE covers 6% of land area. Woodlands are deer habitats, and creation of new woodland creates new deer habitat, and allows deer to colonise new areas. The Trust therefore believes that all owners and managers of private forests and woodland have a responsibility to ensure that arrangements are in place to manage the deer that live in their forests and woodland. This is important both for any future timber crop, and for the woodland's biodiversity value, as well as the impacts deer grazing has on adjacent land e.g. damage to agricultural crops, and also to reduce the risk of road traffic collisions.

The Trust believes there should therefore be a legal requirement for forest owners to take adequate steps to manage and control deer. The Bill should be amended to incorporate a duty of sustainable deer management for all forest owners. This duty should be discharged by having a plan in place to manage deer, and ensuring that arrangements are put in place to carry out the plan. As well as reducing some of the damaging impacts that deer can have, this would also create economic opportunities e.g. as one of the ways in which owners could ensure deer are adequately controlled would be by letting deer-stalking rights to appropriately qualified people, which would result in venison sales, and potentially income for the forest owner, and/or the lessee. By doing this the Bill would help drive the necessary step-change, particularly regarding lowland deer management, which was called for in the 2016 report on deer management by the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee<sup>10</sup>.

#### **3 Funds raised by disposals from the NFE should be reinvested in the NFE**

From 1999 to 2016, the repositioning programme of the NFE (acquisitions and disposals) yielded a net profit of £59.3m. The Trust believes that any profits realised from disposals from the NFE should be reinvested on behalf

of the people of Scotland in securing the sustainable management of the NFE, creating new native woodland, and in acquiring additional outstanding examples of forests and woodland in Scotland to secure them for posterity (e.g. the purchase of land at Rothiemurchus<sup>11</sup>). We welcome the fact that the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee recommended in its Stage 1 report that income generated from disposals should be reinvested into the NFE. The Committee suggested that a commitment to this should be made in the Forestry Strategy. We consider that it would be more appropriate to include this commitment in the Bill.

For further information please contact:

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<sup>1</sup> See Scottish Wildlife Trust's policy on Forestry and Native Woodland:

[https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wp-](https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/002_057_publications_policies_Policy_on_forestry_and_woodland_June_2012_1339581872.pdf)

[content/uploads/2016/09/002\\_057\\_publications\\_policies\\_Policy\\_on\\_forestry\\_and\\_woodland\\_June\\_2012\\_1339581872.pdf](https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/002_057_publications_policies_Policy_on_forestry_and_woodland_June_2012_1339581872.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See Scottish Wildlife Trust's policy on Land Stewardship [https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FINAL\\_Land-Stewardship-Policy\\_07-ONLINE.pdf](https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FINAL_Land-Stewardship-Policy_07-ONLINE.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> See Scottish Wildlife Trust's policy on Land Stewardship [https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FINAL\\_Land-Stewardship-Policy\\_07-ONLINE.pdf](https://scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FINAL_Land-Stewardship-Policy_07-ONLINE.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Op cit 1

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>6</sup> Red deer in Scotland have adapted to living on the open hill, but they use woodland extensively where it is available to them e.g. for winter shelter. Hill red deer are significantly smaller than woodland red deer, and their grazing and browsing is an important factor in preventing woodland re-establishment in many areas. The other deer species in Scotland, roe, sika and fallow (the last two non-native) live mostly in woodland, though they will leave cover to feed on adjacent open ground.

<sup>7</sup> See: Deer Management in Scotland: Report to the Scottish Government from Scottish Natural Heritage 2016

<sup>8</sup> Deer Management on the National Forest Estate Current Practice and Future Directions 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2017

<sup>9</sup> Answer to Question S5W-06043: Claudia Beamish, South Scotland, Scottish Labour, Date Lodged: 13/01/2017

<sup>10</sup> 5th Report by ECCLR Committee: Report on Deer Management in Scotland: Report to the Scottish Government from Scottish Natural Heritage 2016

<sup>11</sup> Rothiemurchus is a native pinewood on the NW edge of the Cairngorms. Part of the pinewood was added to the National Forest Estate