

FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND
The role of Scotland's National Forest Estate
and strategic directions for 2013-2015

**STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL FOREST ESTATE -
FEEDBACK**

BACKGROUND

The consultation on Strategic Directions for the National Forest Estate ran from 16/07/2012 to 12/10/2012. 43 responses were received, some of which followed discussion meetings with stakeholder bodies and Regional Forestry Forums.

Of the 43 responses:

- Seven were from government/public bodies;
- Five were from forestry and/or wood using organisations;
- Two were from land use organisations;
- Five were from environmental bodies;
- Four were from community, recreation and/or tourism organisations;
- Two were from community organisations;
- Four were from regional Forestry Forums; and
- Fourteen were from individuals.

The consultation was undertaken through the Scottish Government consultation portal, which encourages responses against a set of specific questions. However, about 2/3 of the responses were by separate letter or e-mail, structured around the priorities and comments of the recipient. For this reason, we have not strictly adhered to the consultation question structure in this document, but have used a format that best expresses the comments made.

COMMUNICATING STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL FOREST ESTATE

This document used a very different layout compared to the previous Strategic Plan. It aims to convey more about the nature of the Estate and the way its history has shaped it. It lays out broad directions and key commitments, with relatively little emphasis on specific actions, which are to be articulated through FES corporate plans.

Some respondents found the narrative and more visual approach helpful, but some felt that the purpose of the document needed to be clearer and that stronger links needed to be made, both with broader Scottish Government national strategies, and around how the key commitments will be implemented across the Estate. A number of respondents wanted to see commitments to specific actions and targets linked to the key commitments. Several respondents suggested the value of taking an ecosystem services approach to describing the Estate.

Several respondents did not make the distinction between the National Forest Estate and FES that manages it. Several raised FES organisational aspects like workforce development and skills, financial performance and governance.

Two recipients advocated sale of most of the National Forest Estate, one with an emphasis on withdrawal from timber production activities, and the other also questioning state provision of recreation facilities.

FCS response: We will:

- **Strengthen presentation of the links with the wider Scottish Government strategic landscape.**
- **Describe more clearly how a new planning hierarchy will help inform and implement national key commitments on the ground.**
- **Publish a set of actions linked to key commitments, and tied back to the Scottish Government's performance framework.**
- **Make stronger connections with the ecosystem services approach to natural resource management.**

Specific targets and more detailed actions towards meeting the key strategic commitments, as well as financial and performance information are published annually in the FCS corporate plan and annual reports. The FCS Corporate Plan and FC People Strategy lay out our commitments to corporate and people development. These can be found at <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/>.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TIMBER BENEFITS

A number of respondents were from the economic development, commercial forestry and timber processing sectors. Their view tended to be that the document did not give sufficient emphasis to the importance of the Estate as an engine for economic activity, or for the production of softwood timber as a feedstock for Scotland's timber processing sector. Several responses drew attention to the pivotal role the Estate has played in the development of Scotland's successful timber processing sector through providing confidence in long-term supplies as a basis for major investment decisions. Respondents stressed the view that whilst private sector sources of timber have grown in importance, the role of timber production from the Estate in providing market stability and encouraging investment remains.

Several respondents were concerned that there was insufficient emphasis on the role of Sitka spruce as an engine of the Scottish timber processing sector. Others felt that greater emphasis should be given to diversifying timber resources with greater use of other conifers and hardwoods.

Several respondents involved in the timber sector were confused by the brief reference to moving production forecasting to a sustainable yield approach.

There were several calls to re-think or expand on the term 'rural development benefits' to overtly embrace the economic dimension. Others expressed views that there needed to be greater emphasis placed on delivering economic benefits to communities in the locality of Estate land holdings.

FCS response: We will:

- **Draw attention to the past and present role played by the National Forest Estate in encouraging investment in Scotland's wood using sectors.**
- **Emphasise the many ways the Estate contributes to local economic development in rural areas through the likes of direct and contract employment and downstream tourism and wood processing benefits, and in urban areas as a component of urban regeneration.**

The reference to sustainable timber forecasting reflects the distinction now being drawn in the national production forecast between biological potential production and specific timber marketing commitments. For the sake of clarity on this technical issue, we will remove the confusing reference. This in no way diminishes our commitment to either sustainable timber production or making timber marketing commitments.

COMMUNITY, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

A number of respondents were keen to ensure that the role of the National Forest Estate as a community resource was emphasised, along with the National Forest Land Scheme – the mechanism by which communities can seek to acquire Estate land. Several came from a mainly rural perspective, for example in relation to providing local employment; suggestions on establishing 'starter forests'; going further in local consultation and engagement; doing more to give rural communities control over forest and land assets; and supporting communities that do take on assets on an ongoing basis. Wider points were made about establishing a forest culture, for example through the hutting movement and encouraging local harvesting of non-timber forest products.

One respondent suggested that 'rural development benefits' rather excluded urban areas. The value of local decision-making involving local people was emphasised by several respondents, as well as providing local jobs, work, training and entrepreneurial opportunities. One respondent sought adoption of the 'subsidiarity principle' as a basis for devolving and localising decision making, and suggested there should be targets for increasing community ownership.

Several respondents felt that there should be more effective local consultation on matters relating to the National Forest Estate, with some emphasising consultation with local geographic communities and others emphasising communities of interest, for example in relation to recreation and tourism interests.

Several respondents sought greater emphasis on the education, health, spiritual and cultural benefits provided by the Estate. One respondent encouraged greater use of Gaelic.

FCS response: We will:

- **Strengthen the emphasis on the role of the Estate as a community resource, both in relation to tangible benefits around land management, and wider community empowerment and capacity building benefits.**
- **Recognise in the document the value of providing local economic benefits, especially in fragile rural communities.**
- **Recognise in the document the importance of the estate for provision of education, health, spiritual and cultural benefits.**
- **Provide a Gaelic summary of the document.**

There is strong support for our approach to delivering community benefits, recognising that we have achieved much, for example through appointment of local Community Rangers, the Woods In and Around Towns programme, the National Forest Land Scheme, and community renewables, but also recognising that our capacity is under pressure. Looking ahead, we will commission an external "health check" of our performance to help us sustain and develop our delivery of community benefits.

FCS recognises the benefits of devolved decision making, and wants to encourage the involvement of local communities in how the Estate is managed. However, we also recognise the value of regional and national perspectives in the securing and use of resources where they can best benefit Scotland. In some cases this results in parts of the Estate being a net draw on resources, and in others a net contributor of resources. For this reason, we do not see that the circumstances are right for adoption of the subsidiarity principle for management of the National Forest Estate.

We will continue to explore how we can provide local employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, especially in economically fragile rural areas, within the bounds set by the requirements of competition and accounting regulations.

On the suggestion of targets for community ownership, we are not convinced that this would be helpful as it could easily result in a top-down focus, rather than a bottom-up response to the aspirations of individual communities. This, however, in no way diminishes our commitment to facilitate opportunities for communities to get more involved with, and acquire, Estate land.

RECREATION AND TOURISM BENEFITS

A number of respondents from these sectors felt that tourism was given insufficient weight in the document, and that this area needed to be given greater recognition in the way the Estate is managed, including within National Parks. Several respondents were mountain biking organisations, and suggested that mountain biking and specific mountain biking initiatives/facilities be given more weight. Several respondents

emphasised the importance of the Estate for a wider range of outdoor sports.

The specific issue of car park charging was raised by several respondents in the light of the recent extension of car park charging to a number of additional sites (charges are made at 15% of recreation sites on the Estate to support investment in high quality recreation facilities. 85% of sites remain free).

One respondent felt that more focus needed to be given to accessibility across the estate, and the need for forest operations and deer fencing to better accommodate this.

FCS response: We will:

- **Strengthen the recognition given in the document to the important contribution to tourism made by the National Forest Estate, and identify key actions for maintaining and increasing this contribution, including within Scotland's National Parks.**
- **Ensure our national strategic directions take into account the predominant importance of the National Forest Estate as a mountain biking resource, and through this activity, as a contributor to the rural tourism economy.**
- **Recognise the value of the Estate for a range of outdoor sport activities.**

Car park charges are acknowledged in the document as an important and necessary contribution to funding recreation facilities. We recognise that these are not welcomed by all and will continue to work with stakeholders on management of recreation facilities at the 15% of sites where charges are made.

We work to minimise barriers to accessing the National Forest Estate, are part of the National Access Forum, and are currently involved with renewing guidance on access and forest operations.

LAND USE AND ENVIRONMENT BENEFITS

A number of respondents welcomed the breadth of land uses and activities highlighted in the Strategic Directions document and the increasing emphasis on landscape/catchment scale management. Several respondents looked for further linkage to the Scottish Government Land Use Strategy, and greater emphasis on catchment scale, ecosystem and integrated land use. Several emphasised the value of demonstrating how agriculture and forestry could be better integrated, and one recommended an overt linkage with the recommendations of the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group. Others wanted to see more emphasis on management of open land and moorland.

One respondent felt the focus on climate change should be stronger. Some environmental respondents felt there was greater opportunity to

use woodland creation to enhance environmental quality and contribute to flood management, through linkage to River Basin Management Plans.

Several respondents felt that coverage of renewable energy potential was weak. One expressed concerns about windfarms on the Estate, whilst several others were positive about renewables as long as there was no loss of productive woodland.

One respondent felt that an SEA should be prepared specifically for renewable energy developments on the Estate. This respondent also wished to see further SEAs for aspects like short rotation forestry trials, as well as EIA on all local level spatial plans (forest plans).

Several respondents touched on how the Estate sits within Scotland's overall land and forest resource, and one suggested greater emphasis on working with other land owners, and another raised provision of 'off-site' services around training, technical development and sharing best practice.

Several respondents recognised the importance of the Estate as a place for research and development of best practice and wanted this emphasised.

Several respondents were concerned that the Estate wasn't seen as a land bank for built development.

FCS response: We will:

- **Emphasise links with the Land Use Strategy.**
- **Indicate a role to explore and demonstrate land use integration, particularly in relation to forestry and agriculture.**
- **Include a linkage to the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group's agreed recommendations.**
- **Indicate in the document demonstrates the value we place on open land and habitats.**
- **Ensure the document demonstrates the role of the Estate in relation to climate change and providing environmental services.**
- **Make reference to our commitment to implementing the Scottish Government's woodland removal policy.**
- **Reference our desire to work with neighbours and others, and share best practice where this will enable us to better deliver the Estate's objectives.**
- **Emphasise the role of the Estate to support R&D and development of best practice.**

This document has been subject to an SEA scoping exercise. Furthermore we have agreed with the SEA authorities to undertake a full SEA of District Strategic Plans, linked and coordinated through a national spatial analysis, which will explore and lay out how national priorities and directions can be best achieved across the estate. All local spatial plans (forest plans) are subject to EIA screening by FCS Conservancies, with EIA undertaken where deemed appropriate.

CONSERVATION AND BIODIVERSITY BENEFITS

A number of environmental respondents recognised progress made on habitat and species management on the Estate, although felt these could be given higher profile in the document. They welcomed the commitment to further strengthen biodiversity monitoring, but were concerned to see specific targets for delivering further and greater biodiversity benefits, and formal annual reporting of progress. Several respondents wanted to see a report on progress since an environmental review in 2006.

Specific aspects for emphasis raised by different respondents include habitat networks, restoration of priority open habitats and conservation lessons to be learned from shoot management. One respondent wanted to see much greater ambition in developing the biodiversity potential of the Estate and offered a vision for an estate predominantly comprising native woodland and open habitats.

FCS response: We will:

- **Strengthen the linkage between key biodiversity commitments and targets for the next three years.**
- **Ensure that our commitment to enhance biodiversity on the Estate is made clear.**

In 2012 we published 'Variety in the Spice of Life: action for nature on Scotland's National Forest Estate' to showcase our commitment to, and management for, biodiversity on the Estate ([http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcs-biodiversity-publication.pdf/\\$FILE/fcs-biodiversity-publication.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcs-biodiversity-publication.pdf/$FILE/fcs-biodiversity-publication.pdf)). We have a number of Agency indicators and targets to focus our biodiversity work (see [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FESPERFORMANCEMANAGEMENTFRAMEWORK.pdf/\\$FILE/FESPERFORMANCEMANAGEMENTFRAMEWORK.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FESPERFORMANCEMANAGEMENTFRAMEWORK.pdf/$FILE/FESPERFORMANCEMANAGEMENTFRAMEWORK.pdf)), in line with the FCS Biodiversity Strategy, which lays out management priorities ([http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcfc122.pdf/\\$FILE/fcfc122.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/fcfc122.pdf/$FILE/fcfc122.pdf)). We contribute to the annual reporting of progress against the biodiversity theme of the Scottish Forestry Strategy (see <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/infd-6aggzw>).

SILVICULTURE AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

Many respondents either supported the commitment to managing tree pests and diseases, or sought additional emphasis. Some respondents wanted to see specific silvicultural emphases. Several wanted more emphasis on Sitka spruce, some on alternative and greater diversity of productive species, some on native species. Several wanted more emphasis on silviculture per se, and others on increasing species and structural diversity, and more emphasis on alternatives to clear felling and fine-grained management. Several respondents wanted greater recognition of the tree densities required for high quality timber

production, whilst one wanted to emphasise the value of low densities for woodland grouse.

FCS response. We will:

- **Recognise the significance of tree health and the priority that needs to be afforded to biosecurity.**
- **Seek to ensure the document reflects our intention to diversify the National Forest Estate and to increase the range of silvicultural techniques used where the circumstances are right.**

Forestry Commission Scotland
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