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Submitted to Future Grant Support for Forestry
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Ministerial Foreword - Forestry in Scotland is a sector that we can be justly proud of.

1 - Introduction and Rationale for Providing Grant Support for Forestry

1. Do you agree that grant support for forestry should continue to be improved and developed as a discrete scheme within the overall package of land support?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Probably, from a community woodland perspective this is the clearest way forward although it does tend to keep land managers in their categories and some of our community woodland groups are managing urban/peri-urban greenspace that is not “forestry” or even “woodland”. An alternative might be to have support systems categorised under:
• Farm Crops
• Forest/Woodland/Trees
• Natural environment
• Enterprise – agriculture and timber processing, perhaps delivered in partnership with enterprise agencies.
• Public Access – woodlands & farmland. Perhaps delivered in partnership with Local Access Officers.

An online questionnaire or series of short questionnaires might direct potential applicants to the most suitable grants for their management objectives, completed at the time they develop land management plans.

SRDP and FGS is reasonably familiar to us now, it is probably best to keep the current system and tweak it to make it simpler and in some cases more inclusive. This may include a means of working more closely with local authority woodland officers to deliver Woodlands & Greenspace In and Around Towns.

2. Are there any changes that would allow for better complementarity between the forestry and agriculture funding options?

Yes

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

There is no complementarity when farmers are offered a basic payment to support their businesses and do not have to prepare a management plan to support grant applications. Do we want to remove the red diesel subsidy too?

Forestry policy and Agriculture policy need to be seen as equal within Scotland’s Land-use Strategy.

It does help to have all the grant options together under SRDP and the application process in the Rural Payments website. To integrate things further you could replace “Agri-Environment Climate” with an “Environment Scheme”. Or divide grants as per the response in Q1. Public Access, Enterprise and Environment would be umbrellas for all applicants. How do we make SRDP inclusive for peri-urban and urban schemes where even registering land under the LPIS is difficult?

The IACS/SAF process is complex for farmers and can be onerous for foresters, especially if they only have to submit a SAF for annual FGS payments. The complexity of the rules and risk of penalties means that agents are usually required, even for small holdings.

Applications to all schemes would need to be accompanied by management plans; the complexity of which would be dependent on the scale of the farm/forest or application.

2 - Forests Delivering for Scotland’s Climate Change Plan

3. How can the support package for forestry evolve to help tackle the climate emergency, to achieve net zero, and to ensure that our woodlands and forests are resilient to the future climate?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

All government subsidy must be tested against the principle of net zero and CO2 (equivalent) reduction.

The support package for forestry must be geared around the climate emergency strategy: Is it to focus on carbon sequestration through tree growth and biomass accumulation? Or substitution of petrochemicals with wood/wood cellulose? Or local timber production to reduce ‘wood miles’? Or all of these things?

There is already significant support for woodland creation. There could be better support for natural regeneration to expand woodlands. Scottish Government needs to have a clear strategy and focus on deer reduction if deer are the only real limiting factor for ecological restoration across Scotland.

There may also need to be better support for deadwood creation and accumulation in existing woodlands. There may need to be better support for local processing and growing of quality timber that will go into the building industry without accumulating too many 'wood miles'.

The climate emergency and resilience needs to be tackled at a strategic level: technology to move away from fossil fuel use in farming and forestry; reducing livestock farming; getting more wild venison into the food chain; supporting industry in using alternative tree species (species other than Sitka spruce) or buying from local suppliers. These wont just be resolved by SRDP.

Community woodlands play a key role in helping communities see the role of woodlands in nature restoration and reducing our climate impacts. Can more resources go into advancing community engagement in woodland management, either directly through ownership, leasing or partnership or through forest plan consultation, working with community councils or special interest groups?

4. Private investment through natural capital and carbon schemes can make a valuable contribution to climate change. Do you agree that the grant support mechanism should have more flexibility to maximise the opportunities to blend private and public finance to support woodland creation,

Not sure

Please explain you answer in the text box.:

Not all landowners think it is ethical or appropriate to register with the Woodland Carbon Code, or equivalent schemes. Government support should be at a standard level. If the landowner decides to apply for carbon finance as well, that is their choice, so it probably would be better to keep carbon financing separate from FGS. Carbon finance schemes should be properly assessed for complementarity.

How dependable is the market for carbon sequestration and natural capital? The price per CO2 equivalent could be low at the time of applying for grant and have doubled by the time of claiming the grant.

When FGS funding is a contribution to costs, carbon finance or nature recovery funding could be essential to assist cover the full cost of a project, especially when the project is delivering entirely public benefit rather than an investment for future income.

Tenants are not eligible to receive carbon credit funding unless it is by agreement with and through the land owner.

If Government wants better integration they could establish a carbon finance fund to top up carbon sequestration projects – private companies would buy credits from the government and the government would invest them in projects on private and state land through land management grants. It would use the carbon finance a bit like a carbon tax to provide grants for approved projects.

More research is required to enable clear assessment of natural capital gain through improvements in the management of existing woodlands. This may support the development of forestry grants or alternative streams of funding through private investment in natural capital.

5. How could the current funding package be improved to stimulate woodland expansion and better management across a wide range of woodland types, including native and productive woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

The effort and drive to create new woodlands has to be applauded, but has the focus of directing grant support at woodland creation starved the sustainable management of existing woodlands? Could more be allocated towards woodland expansion through natural regeneration and perhaps to support the management of native and community woods? It has become more difficult to access SRDP funding for improving public access.

The grant application, reporting and claim process is administratively time consuming. Currently there is no financial incentive for small woodland owners to apply for anything, apart from, for example infrastructure improvement or timber processing grants. However, this might change if, at the time of approving a woodland management plan some objectives could be agreed for delivery 5 to 10 years down the line that would streamline entry into a woodland management grant scheme. Smaller woodlands might be eligible for a basic annual management grant or 60% of a capital grant paid in year one with the balance paid at year 5 or 10, based on delivery of the agreed objectives.

When creating new woodlands, if deer fencing is required, then the actual cost is a lot higher than the grant rate, especially if original fences have to be removed.

6. Do you agree that it should be a requirement of grant support that woodlands are managed to ensure that they become more resilient to the impacts of climate change and pests and disease?

Yes

How can the grant scheme support this?:

It is in everyone's interest that woods are resilient. There are many uncertainties and factors that are outwith the owner's control. We know the weather systems will probably be windier, but is that going to make us more dependent on no-thin, clear-fell Sitka spruce silviculture? We don't know where the storms will have most impact. We know that temperatures are increasing but have the Environmental Site Classification models changed to exclude more areas from being suitable for Sitka spruce? Foresters need confidence that there will be markets for alternative tree species if they are planting productive woodland with species other than Sitka spruce.

Woodland management plans include sections on resilience and biosecurity. These may need to be 'beefed up' before a plan is approved and therefore

before grants can be applied for.

3 - Integrating Woodlands on Farms and Crofts

7. Which of the following measures would help reduce the barriers for crofters and farmers wanting to include woodland as part of their farming business? Please select all that apply.

Better integration of support for woodland creation with farm support mechanisms, Knowing where to get reliable advice, Clearer guidance on grant options, Flexibility within options, Intervention level, Support with cashflow, Information on how current land use could continue with trees integrated throughout

Are there others not listed above?:

Few of our CWA members are also crofters, but the experience with FGS to support woodland creation is:
• SF Woodland Officers could do more to explain the full costs and requirements of a woodland creation scheme;
• Securing Woodland Creation grant is complex and even for a small area requires a forestry agent to help crofters through the process;
• When plans change, even the variation process is off-putting;
• Annual maintenance funding is essential to assist with beating up and other maintenance costs;
• Up-grading an existing stock fence to deer fence needs to be an option;
• 1600 trees/ha for native woodland is excessive within a deer fence, 1100/ha should suffice;
• Could there be a realistic grant rate to support 'inverted mounding' as an alternative to hinge mounding?

8. Establishing small woodlands can have higher costs. What specific mechanisms would better support small scale woodlands and woodland ownership?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Community woodlands and especially urban and per-urban woodlands often fall into the bracket of "small woodlands". There could be standard costs per hectare based on a sliding scale according to area so that for any one application the grant brings in at least £2,500 if, for example it is delivering agreed objectives over a 5-year period. There might be one rate per hectare for delivering native woodlands, another value for delivering amenity woodland. Outcomes might be determined by independent deer impact surveys and woodland condition monitoring including deadwood components and invasive species.

Small, productive woodlands might get higher rates of payment for low impact silviculture or restructuring regeneration to help justify the time spent creating an application for what would otherwise be a modest return.

Additional capital grants may still be required for items such as creating road infrastructure.

Alternatively, small woods might qualify for support for submitting grant applications. Or landowners working within a catchment could be better encouraged to work together to reduce grant application and administration costs.

There could be more support to enable communities into woodland management. For example working alongside Scottish Land Fund with their development support so that funding is there for skills development or hiring professional forestry advice to work through the initial complexities of forest planning and grant options. Or the better resourcing of Conservancies so that Woodland Officers can better guide communities into woodland management, and in the case of urban woodlands, bolster the LA Tree Officers to enable them to deliver capacity building for community groups, or implementation of local authority forest and woodland strategies and local biodiversity plans.

4 - Forests Delivering for People and Communities

9. How can forestry grants better support an increase in easily accessible, sustainably managed woodlands in urban and peri-urban areas?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Scottish Forestry already supports community woodlands in a variety of ways (funding CWA directly and delivering the Community Fund) and this is greatly appreciated.

Do we need to ring-fence a substantial national budget for Trees & Greenspaces In and Around Towns? If we are going to have greener communities we need good quality greenspace within walking distance of our homes. We need a system that supports street trees, community orchards, etc. Is SRDP, which depends on LPIS the best mechanism for this? Is 'Forestry' and 'Woodlands' sufficiently inclusive of urban greenspace, or are projects excluded from existing support mechanisms because they aren't 'woodland'?

Is there the possibility of partnerships with other funding organisations, such as National Lottery to offer community groups 100% or nearly 100% funding for establishment and maintenance grants? Perhaps as a limited period challenge fund?

Assess projects based on the level of support from key stakeholders such as community councils. Target areas of deprivation, and support projects that support training and community involvement from across the social range in the local community.

Bolster the local council woodland officer team by having a woodland development officer that works with community groups, by planning projects and applying for grants. Support the local council in taking on neglected land that is being land banked by investors but is outside a development zone and

give these areas to community groups to develop as greenspace.

10. How can grant support for forestry better enable rural communities to realise greater benefits from woodland to support community wealth building?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Improve the grants and application process for improving public access in woodlands. The current levels of funding to support the provision of public access is limited, and the equivalent options available under WIAT are not accessible. Good quality paths connecting in and out of a community attracts visitors to an area and needs to be better supported.

Consider removing the distinction between paths and tracks/forest roads. Tracks used for management purposes can be an integral part of the public access network and need managing for public access as much as paths do. Consider similar options to WIAT for any rural woodland that establishes a comprehensive public access plan.

Maintain the grant option for small scale harvesting and processing to enable the establishment of local firewood or sawmilling enterprises. Also consider support for niche products and services such as building a foraging or Forest Schools business.

Ensure there is adequate funding for skills development and training. This may take the form of bolstered development grants to pay for knowledge transfer and advice from forestry consultants.

Enterprise and training support might be better delivered through Enterprise or Community Development agencies.

There may be other ways to enhance community engagement in forestry schemes, e.g. email alerts for those registering to be notified of grant applications, management plans, woodland creation plans within a geographic area. Or more information accessible through the Forestry Map Viewer?

11. How can the forest regulatory and grant processes evolve to provide greater opportunities for communities to be involved in the development of forestry proposals?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Community/stakeholder consultation is an important part of developing forest plans and woodland creation schemes and is already supported through the LTFP grant. Perhaps there needs to be better guidance to ensure this is done most effectively. Scottish Land Commission might set the standard for community consultation and empowerment.

When private landowners apply to FGS, give priority to the forestry schemes that allow community councils to bring community members together to invest in the forestry project (much as a windfarm development might allocate 2 turbines in a scheme to be built with community shares), or that leases an area (e.g. community orchard) or a path network to a community group for them to manage.

As per 10 above; email alerts or other improvements in technology to enable community members to hear about projects and schemes within their area.

WIAT options might be opened up to any community group, whether ‘urban’, ‘peri-urban’ or ‘rural’.

12. How can the forestry regulatory and grant processes evolve to ensure that there is greater transparency about proposals and the decisions that have been made on them?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Publish the scoring process? Publish the reasons why forestry projects deserve public funding? Use the SF Map Viewer map to access this information?

Could SRDP/FGS applications work like planning permissions? Where registered stakeholders would get email alerts for applications in their geographic area of interest, where searches for live and schemes in process are easy, where all of the relevant documents can be accessed?

13. Forestry grants have been used to stimulate rural forestry businesses by providing support with capital costs. Do you agree that this has been an effective measure to stimulate rural business?

Not sure

a. How could this approach be used to support further forestry businesses?:

Sometimes. Small-scale, community-based enterprises will benefit from some start-up funding and if the business plan and training is in place they should be able to sustain themselves. Supporting forest management activity also helps rural enterprises sustain themselves, but only if the grants and management activity are sustained.

Perhaps Government needs to establish rural enterprise grants that operate across all sectors, administered by HIE or equivalent, but with input from a relevant sector, e.g. farming or forestry. Might be called Land-use Enterprise Grants.

Work with local business partnerships to identify local projects that have most traction within a community.

How did we arrive at the situation that allowed the Boat of Garten sawmill to be bought by a foreign investor, only to be closed a few months later as it

was not profitable enough?

b. How could this approach be used to support further skills development?:

Forestry apprenticeship schemes?

14. How could the FGS processes and rules be developed to encourage more companies and organisations to provide training positions within the forestry sector?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Not sure that FGS is the right vehicle for this. Consider enterprise grants to support apprenticeships, mid-year opportunities that pays companies or owners for additional management/supervision of trainees and a living wage for trainees. Only some of the larger management companies have staff capacity to take on and support trainees and provide then with the continuity of work.

5 - Forests Delivering for Biodiversity and the Environment

15. The primary purpose of FGS is to encourage forestry expansion and sustainable forest management, of which a key benefit is the realisation of environmental benefits. How can future grant support better help to address biodiversity loss in Scotland including the regeneration and expansion of native woodlands?

Please explain your answer in the text box.:

Community woodlands operate at a wide range of scales and interests but many of them are founded on objectives for nature restoration. Environmental benefits are often best delivered if they are made at a landscape scale rather than just a forest scale. Forest plans in their development need to refer to local strategies, local biodiversity plans and deer management plans. What are the options for development and consideration of river catchment plans, or community catchment plans?

This might ensure that forestry projects fit within the landscape and create the network of habitats required at a landscape scale. In a similar way, a community catchment plan might account for local interests and priorities and where there are opportunities to work in partnership with community or special interest groups.

Consider moving some of the re-structuring payments for Sitka spruce to native species woodland.

Better incentivise deer management at a landscape scale. Even paying for more monitoring might better evidence whether higher deer culls are required.

16. Herbivore browsing and damage can have a significant impact on biodiversity loss and restrict regeneration. How could forestry grant support mechanisms evolve to ensure effective management of deer populations at:

Landscape scale?:

This needs greater political commitment at a national level and perhaps can not be addressed simply by government grants.

Deer management groups might be required to develop management plans that evidence environmental restoration from past experience and to modify culls and methods where change is required. DMG management plans need to better reflect local and national biodiversity plans. DMG plans and outcomes need to be better scrutinised by NatureScot and the public.

Small scale mixed land use?:

Encourage working with neighbours so that they can all benefit from deer management grants. Perhaps bonus payments at year 5 where environmental targets are met? Or an enhanced rate for the next 5 years where some sustained effort is required to maintain positive outputs?

Enterprise grants might include support for costs to build deer larders to serve a local area, deer stalking and butchery courses and the marketing of wild venison.

Deer fencing might be seen as a last resort, but is still necessary while a) grants are insufficient to replace the client stalking value of deer and b) the labour costs of getting deer numbers to required levels is high.

If you wish to make any other relevant comments, please do so in the text box below.

Please add your comments here.:

In general community woodland groups find forestry grants and other support from Government really valuable and they welcome and appreciate this support. We appreciate that Conservancy Woodland Officers are stretched and under-resourced and it would be great if their numbers are boosted to better enable them to mentor community groups through grant rules and processes.

Community groups often find the FGS process unnecessarily bureaucratic, complicated and costly. Not all of the bureaucracy is a legacy of European requirements, but we do need to create robust systems of public funding that are not drowned in procedure.

There may be some very simple things to resolve, for example the quality of form templates varies, some being inappropriate to individual situations, and

formatting styles fluctuate, spell checker is not enabled on many! So just getting IT consistency across departments might be an improvement.

Perhaps there is no need to radically alter the FGS: consistency is valued, so that grant support is sustained. We don't want a hiatus like the one experienced when we transitioned to SRDP. But tweaks to the system would be appreciated, especially if this allows for simplification to reduce the time spent administering grants and to improve implementation.

About you

What is your name?

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Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

Organisation

What is your organisation?

Organisation:
Community Woodlands Association

Scottish Forestry would like your permission to publish your response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

Publish response with name

We may share your response internally with other Scottish Forestry policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Forestry to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?

Yes

I confirm that I have read the privacy policy and consent to the data I provide being used as set out in the policy.

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