



Forestry Commission Scotland's response to the Environment Review of Scotland's National Forest Estate

November 2006

Summary of FCS response

We warmly welcome this report and are grateful to the review team for the insights and recommendations they have given, and for their time and commitment.

We agree with the thrust of the report and the identification of areas where we can increase environmental delivery from the National Forest Estate. We very much embrace the spirit of the report as we seek to implement the recommendation of the Review of Land managed by FCS that we pursue opportunities for more ambitious environmental work, and balance this with the delivery of other economic and social public benefits, and with resource availability.

At a national level this will be taken forward by articulating a vision for the National Forest Estate and laying out the emerging priorities and principal deliverables in an FES Management Statement. Alongside this will be a review of the current set of performance indicators and development of a broader and more sophisticated monitoring and evaluation framework for FES.

We believe that commitments on the national composition of the Estate should be strongly guided by nationally agreed principles and national level guidance, delivered by specific local-level commitments arrived at through the District strategic and forest planning processes. We will increase our collation capability to establish national commitments based on these local decision processes.

We aim to increase delivery of environmental benefits from the National Forest Estate through effective planning and appropriate management. We will also use investment in and sale of land assets to increase our ability to deliver landscape scale environmental benefits.

Through an FCS Biodiversity Programme Plan we will lay out a costed set of priorities for biodiversity conservation. We will use this to inform the Spending Review process and opportunities to bid for additional funding, from Executive and other sources. Progress will be in the light of best possible information, secured through specifically commissioned research if necessary. This will include identifying the best basis upon which to value the environmental contribution of the Estate.

Vision and purpose

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Establish a 50-year broad vision for the NFE based on a practical articulation of its purpose and its role as one of a number of delivery mechanisms (R1, 52, 54, 56, 63).
- Articulate at national and local level what mix of woodland types, habitats and management regimes can best deliver the vision (R7).
- Define strategic indicators and milestones to chart progress (R53, 61).
- This should include 40-60% native woodland by 2050 (R8).

FCS response

We will articulate a vision for the NFE as part of the further development of the Agency Framework Document and in the context of the revised Scottish Forestry Strategy. The revised document will lay out the role of the NFE within the context of wider woodland cover and land use, and the range of delivery mechanisms available.

We will use the FES strategic planning process to establish and articulate an appropriate balance of woodland types and management regimes at a local level. The outcome of this process will be collated to quantify the vision at national level, and to set milestones to chart progress. National guidance will provide objective criteria for the process.

The relatively low proportion of native woodland on the NFE reflects the past nature and purpose of the Estate. A significant increase in the overall proportion of native woodland, to around 27% of woodland on the Estate, is already embedded in approved forest design plans. The ERG recommendation of ‘a public expectation’ of ‘perhaps 40-60% native species’ seeks to establish a greater scale of ambition. We recognise that there is more to be done.

In line with R63 we will draft guidance to provide a strong national framework for local strategic and forest planning processes to guide local managers in determining where the benefits of native woodland development are justified within available budgets. We will require that District Strategic Plans lay out the scale and nature of commitment to native woodland development, and that this will be collated and reported at the national level.

Planning

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- The NFE should form core native and ATC woodland areas of strategic forest habitat networks (R13).
- Forest planning, as envisioned by the Global Partnership on Forest Landscape Restoration, should be at a landscape scale and involve surrounding land owners so as to increase the contribution of NFE in delivering strategic environmental benefits, landscape-scale habitat restoration and regional habitat networks (R14, 33, 66, 67).
- The concept of 'restructuring' should be not just be applied to individual stands, but to whole forest landscapes (R17).
- Full use should be made of modelling tools such as BEETLE (R15).
- FCS should identify pilot/exemplar projects in regions of particularly high and low woodland cover and to demonstrate the role of woodlands in sustainable catchment management (R34, 35, 36).
- Strategic and forest design plans should have more robust and consistent coverage on environmental priorities. This requires national guidance, monitoring and training (R64, 65, 68, 74).
- A national system of environmental data collection and management must inform this process (R72).

FCS response

We broadly agree with these recommendations. **We will identify the core of low impact silviculture and native woodland areas at a local level** through the strategic planning process.

We will strengthen the landscape scale and catchment level approach to forest design planning where necessary, particularly using the strategic planning process to set the wider context for local management of the NFE. **We will prepare national guidance** to provide a consistent basis for local decision making. **We will identify strategic scale exemplar projects** and use them as a basis for training and skills development.

At the design plan level **we will explore how to integrate BEETLE and other decision support tools into the forest design process** when they will add real value to the process.

We will develop our GIS and database systems to facilitate national collation of environmental data. However, we believe that in most cases local management of this data offers a most sustainable solution to ongoing management of data. As far as possible national environmental data sets will accord with the requirements of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and other national frameworks for reporting.

Scottish biodiversity commitments

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Ensure fully keyed into UKBAP and SBS processes (R11).
- Bring all designated sites into favourable condition (R32).
- Develop an SBS linked action plan for restoration of open ground habitats (R28).
- Set targets for aquatic habitats and species (R37).
- Undertake monitoring required to report against SBS (R71).

FCS response

We broadly agree with these recommendations. **We will ensure that our biodiversity priorities reflect those of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and conservation designations.** At a strategic level we will produce a costed FCS Biodiversity Programme by the end of the financial year, which will be reflected through the strategic and forest planning processes.

Habitat networks

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Create high quality habitat networks by maintaining existing semi-natural habitats, restoring degraded habitats and creating new habitat linkages (R5, 6, 42).
- Riparian, wetland and floodplain habitats should be expanded and connected (R16, 30, 31).

FCS response

We agree with these recommendations. **Creation of habitat networks at a site and landscape scale will be a primary design tool in forest plans. District strategic plans will articulate how the NFE can best contribute to habitat networks at a regional scale.**

Native woods & PAWS

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Full survey of PAWS and ASNW (R24, 27).
- Presumption for PAWS restoration as an urgent priority but at an ecologically appropriate pace (R24, 26).
- Establish criteria for exceptions (R25)
- Expand and buffer ASNW (R22, 23).
- Identify exemplar expansion/restoration and hardwood silviculture projects (R10, 12).

FCS response

We agree with these recommendations. **We will undertake a full survey of PAWS and ASNW sites through the Scottish Native Woodland Survey. We will make spatial commitments to PAWS restoration and ASNW expansion through the strategic and forest planning processes. We will identify exemplar projects** and use them as a basis for training and skills development.

We will increase our focus on native hardwoods as a timber resource, within the context of sustainable forest management. **We will identify a geographical range of exemplar projects** and use them as a basis for training and skills development. Where possible, **we will work with local wood workers to increase local usage of hardwood timber.**

Woodland management

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Presumption for ATC management of native woodlands (R9).
- Increase structural and species diversity of plantations through mixtures, ATC, minimum intervention stands and conversion to native woodland, especially on lower ground where competing factors are greatest (R 9, 18, 19, 20, 21, 43).
- Attention needed on diversifying forest edges, and watercourses (R29, 46)

FCS response

We agree with these recommendations. **We will implement through the strategic and forest planning process within the context of national guidance.** This local process will be used to establish and spatially define national programme targets.

Wider biodiversity

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Important elements of environmental activity on the NFE are:
- management of native woodland seed sources (R47);
- tackling the spread of invasive non-native plants (R48);
- grey squirrel control where they threaten woodland ecosystems (R49);
- objective led deer and well planned management (R50, 51);
- management action based on sound research (R73).

FCS response

We broadly agree with these recommendations. **We will publish new guidance on sourcing native planting stock in 2006. We will make native woodlands on the NFE available for seed collection** and where justified undertake stand management to promote or facilitate seed production and collection. **We will identify native species stands that may be suitable for registration** as seed stands.

We agree that control of invasive non-natives is a priority. **We will identify species that are threatening the environmental value of the NFE, establish their scale and distribution on the NFE, determine national priorities for control, and identify the resources required for a sustained programme.** We will work with SNH in this process and in the context of the national invasive non-native species initiative. The outcome of this process will be reflected in District strategic and business plans.

We will work with SNH on grey squirrel control tactics as part of the red squirrel action plan. We currently see no other ecological imperative for grey squirrel control. **We aspire to be an exemplar in deer impact management,** basing our practices on research and best practice.

Wider environment

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Sequestration should not be a primary driver for woodland management and expansion (R38).
- We need to better understand climate change impacts on forestry to inform actions (R44).
- We should explore and use the potential of protection forestry (R45).
- We should look at ways of improving our environmental performance as an organisation (R39, 40)).
- Using and promoting use of woodfuel is an important opportunity (R41).

FCS response

We disagree with the assertion that sequestration should not be a primary driver for woodland management and expansion. The Scottish Climate Change Programme recognises that the principal focus should be on emission reductions as the primary means to meet commitments under the Kyoto Protocol. However, the significant scale of Scotland's forest resources gives them an important role in climate change mitigation as a carbon sink and as a source of renewable wood fuel and timber. Given the great multi-purpose potential of woodlands, carbon sequestration will only be every one of the functions of new woodland. **Any new woodland created on the NFE will demonstrably contribute to delivery of other public benefits as well as carbon sequestration.**

We recognise that adaptation to climate change is a key challenge for the forestry sector and that the NFE has an important role to play due to its scale and as an exemplar of best practice. We also recognise the role of FCS in promoting the adoption of woodfuel for heating. **We will consider the feasibility of woodfuel heating for all new offices or when new heating systems are required. We will also factor the needs of local woodfuel supply chains into our wood marketing plans.**

The role of the NFE in adaptation and mitigation strategies will be included in the scope of a Forestry Sector Climate Change Action Plan, a commitment for which is made in the Scottish Climate Change Programme. This plan will also identify where changes in forest practice are appropriate in the light of climate change predictions. A programme of research is being initiated to inform Action Plan development.

Forestry Commission Scotland, with the rest of the FC, is participating in the Greening Government initiative, which provides a framework for continuous improvement of our corporate environmental performance.

With input from Forest Research, **we will explore specific opportunities to enhance the role of the NFE for environmental protection in Scotland.**

Acquisition & sale

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- Establish an acquisition and disposals programme to assist move towards the clearly defined vision for the NFE (R9, 57).
- Operate the programme according to a clear set of criteria and strategic prioritisation (R58, 59).
- The strategic role of ensuring softwood timber supplies should be shifted progressively to the private sector (R60).
- Facilitate by establishing a revolving fund (R62).

FCS response

We agree with the recommendations to establish a revolving fund. We have ministerial agreement to establish a revolving fund as recommended by the 2004 Review of Land Managed by FCS. Criteria for investment and sale have been established and we are now in the process of categorising the NFE accordingly. Given the interest in this process in other parts of the FC, this is likely to be undertaken on a GB basis.

Recommendation 60 touches on the rationale for timber production activity on the NFE. When the 2004 Review of Land Managed by FCS considered this it recommended that 'FCS works with the private sector to consider how best to use timber production from the national forests as a catalyst for development of this sector of the economy'. We are currently undertaking further work to analyse the rationale for the national forest estate, linking in with the review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy and the establishment of a Timber Development Programme. When complete, this will be used as a basis for a wider dialogue on the future timber production role of the NFE.

Financial and best value

Summary of Environment Review Group recommendations

- More should be done to value the environmental contribution of the NFE (R3, 4).
- Environmental goals should be less constrained by income targets (R69, 70).
- These considerations should be reflected in the funding of FES (R2).

FCS response

We agree the desirability of valuing the environmental contribution of the NFE, whilst recognising the limitations of non-market valuation techniques. An economic analysis of the contribution of the forest estate managed by FCS was published in April 2004 and included an exploration of the value of environmental benefits from the NFE. As we develop a specific vision for the NFE, **we will build on this work to establish a basis for better valuing and monitoring the environmental contribution of the NFE.**

We agree the need to increase links between expenditure and outcomes on the NFE. A new accounting system will be introduced from April 2007 which will improve our ability to do this. Furthermore, we are developing a range of specific programme plans to lay out what we will do and what resources have been allocated to do it. **We will publish an FCS biodiversity programme plan** as part of this work, laying out a prioritised and costed set of commitments for conservation of biodiversity on the NFE.

Like any organisation, we have to work within financial constraints and disciplines. As we are a net-funded organisation these disciplines must extend to establishing income expectations within forest district budgets. However, **we will ensure that our business planning and spending review processes do not prejudice achievement of priority environmental outcomes.**