

POST-ADOPTION SEA STATEMENT – COVER NOTE

PART 1

To: SEA.gateway@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

or

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PART 2

A post-adoption SEA statement is attached for the PPS entitled:

North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan 2009-2013

The Responsible Authority is:

The Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)

PART 3

Contact name

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Job Title

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Signature & date

 24th May 2010

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1. BACKGROUND

Post-adoption SEA statement for:

North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan 2009-2013

Adopted on:

1st January 2010

Responsible Authority:

Forestry Commission Scotland

2. INTRODUCTION

This document (referred to here as the post-adoption SEA statement) has been prepared in accordance with Section 18 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.

3. AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS

WEBSITE

The full PPS as adopted, along with the Environmental Report and post-adoption SEA Statement are available on the Responsible Authority's website at:

www.forestry.gov.uk

OFFICE ADDRESS

The PPS, as adopted, along with the Environmental Report and post-adoption SEA Statement may also be inspected free of charge (or a copy obtained for a reasonable charge) at the principal office of the Responsible Authority:

Contact name, address and telephone number

Forestry Commission Scotland, Silvan House, 231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh, EH 12 7AT.

Times at which the documents may be inspected or a copy obtained:

Monday to Friday 0900hrs to 1700hrs.

To minimise delays for those wishing to view the documents we would be grateful if you could let us know when you would like to visit. Please telephone 0131 314 6156 or e-mail: fcscotland@forestrv.gsi.gov.uk

4. KEY FACTS

Name of Responsible Authority	Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS)
Title of PPS	North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan (NHFDSP) 2009-2013
Purpose of PPS	To deliver the national themes of the Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS) through actions set out under local key issues.
What prompted the PPS (e.g. a legislative, regulatory or administrative provision)	The North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan has been prepared in the context of the Scottish Forestry Strategy (2006) and the National Forest Estate Strategic Plan.
Subject (e.g. transport)	Forestry
Period covered	2009-2013
Frequency of updates	Every 5 years.
Area of PPS (e.g. geographical area)	The North Highland Forest District (Highland Council area, north of a line between the Cromarty Firth and Upper Loch Torridon)
Summary of nature/content of PPS	The North Highland FD strategic plan outlines how the forests will be managed to deliver the SFS Vision and Outcomes. The plan ensures that local issues are addressed together with national objectives by producing locally-specific policies in response to the seven national themes presented in the SFS.
Date adopted	1 st January 2010
Contact name & job title Address, email, telephone number	Nicol Sinclair Planning Manager Forest Enterprise Scotland 01786 222141 Nicol.sinclair@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Date	24 th May 2010

5. STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan 2009-2013 has been subject to a process of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), as required under the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005. The North Highland Forest District was formed through the amalgamation of the former Dornoch Forest District and the northern portion of the former Inverness FD, following FES reorganisation in 2008. Draft Forest District Strategic Plans were produced for both areas, and these were subject to comprehensive SEA. The relevant findings and alterations recommended made in the relevant environmental reports have been taken into account in the production of the final plan and are detailed below.

The SEA process included the following activities:

- Taking into account the views of the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Ministers (Historic Scotland) regarding the scope and level of detail that was appropriate for the Environmental Report.
- Preparing an Environmental Report on the likely significant effects on the environment of the draft PPS which included consideration of:
 - the baseline data relating to the current state of the environment;
 - links between the PPS and other relevant strategies, policies, plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives;
 - existing environmental problems affecting the PPS;
 - the plan's likely significant effects on the environment (positive and negative);
 - measures envisaged for the prevention, reduction and offsetting of any significant adverse effects;
 - an outline of the reasons for selecting the alternatives chosen;
 - monitoring measures to ensure that any unforeseen environmental effects will be identified allowing for appropriate remedial action to be taken.
- Consulting on the Environmental Report which was undertaken in March 2008 for a period of 8 weeks.
- Taking into account the Environmental Report and the results of consultation in making final decisions regarding the PPS.
- Committing to monitoring the significant environmental effects of the implementation of the PPS. This will also identify any unforeseen adverse significant environmental effects and to enable taking appropriate remedial action.

6. HOW ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS HAVE BEEN INTEGRATED INTO THE NORTH HIGHLAND FOREST DISTRICT STRATEGIC PLAN AND HOW THE ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT HAS BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

Forest District Strategic Plans sit within a wider policy framework which includes the Scottish Forestry Strategy, the National Forest Estate Strategic Plan (NFESP) and Forestry Commission guidelines and policies. The NHFDSPP states that ‘the National Strategic Plan describes the strategic and operational context, monitoring framework and implementation proposals that guide the district strategic plan’.

This national policy context denotes that Forest District Strategic Plans have been developed within a framework which clearly defines environmental, economic and social priorities for the forest sector and which provides equally clear safeguards to guide environmental management. It therefore follows that while each Forest District has analysed locally significant issues and priorities they have ‘inherited’ national policy priorities and, in implementation, will have a duty to ensure high environmental standards.

The SEA of the Draft Dornoch and Inverness Forest District Strategic Plans took into account this wider framework however several environmental issues were highlighted particularly in relation to non-forestry activities and land disposal and acquisition. As a result it was recommended that wherever practical further safeguards should be reflected in modifications to the FDSP prior to final adoption. Table 6.1 below sets out the key findings raised in the Environmental Reports and explains whether they are addressed adequately within the National Forest Estate Strategic Plan (which has also been subject to SEA) or other Forest Enterprise policies and where any additional amendments were made to the NHFDSPP to ensure a robust approach to the avoidance of negative environmental impacts.

TABLE 6.1

SEA issue	Existing problem?	Impact of Forest District Strategic Plan	Proposed measures for the reduction/prevention and offset of significant adverse effects	Implications of policies contained in FES National Forest Estate Strategic Plan	Modification to the NHFDSP, or reason for not having taken this into account
Biodiversity	Overall decline in biodiversity, sensitivity of international, national and locally important nature sites	Renewable energy policy could result in the disturbance of species or damage to habitats	<p>Policy should be expanded to ensure the development of renewable energy schemes and enhanced leisure facilities do not have an adverse impact on biodiversity.</p> <p>Environmental quality policies should be extended to cover all non-forest operations.</p>	The NFESP undertakes to fully consider the environmental implications of renewable energy proposals on the National Forest Estate.	Policy NH1.01 states that wind farm development on the National Forest Estate will be undertaken with due regard to environmental concerns
	Overall decline in biodiversity, sensitivity of international, national and locally important nature sites	Access policies could also have negative impacts on species and habitats through unsustainable visitor numbers or insensitively planning infrastructure	<p>The plan should note the objective of steering recreation activity to those areas which are at least risk of damage from recreation. FCS should work with SNH and Access Authority to ensure that access developments result in a net enhancement of biodiversity.</p> <p>Environmental quality policies should ensure that non-forestry activities, including access promotion and management, do not have a significant adverse impact on biodiversity.</p>	The NFESP commits FES to researching the environmental effects of access and recreation activities on the Forest Estate. The findings can then be fed into future policy developments.	<p>Supporting text for the Biodiversity policies states that the District will work with SNH, RSPB and Highland Council to manage and promote access to and awareness of biodiversity. This will be an important mechanism for ensuring proposals are appropriate and well planned.</p> <p>Management plans for designated sites (Policy NH7.09 etc) will ensure that access does not adversely affect protected species and habitats</p> <p>Policies NH7.12-7.14 undertake to improve knowledge and understanding of biodiversity through engagement with education, communities and stakeholders – this will assist in ensuring users of the Forest Estate exercise their rights responsibly.</p>

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Biodiversity	Overall decline in biodiversity, sensitivity of international, national and locally important nature sites. Potential climate change effects	Timber haulage and woodfuel policies could have negative effects on biodiversity	<p>Policies should ensure that haulage routes are planned to minimise disturbance to delicate habitats and, where possible, prioritise more sustainable modes of transport to limit climate change effects.</p> <p>Woodfuel initiatives should be planned in such a way that road transport and disturbance to habitat is minimised.</p>	The NFESP affirms FES's commitment to seeking sustainable timber transport solutions wherever possible. It also states that FES will continue to work in partnership with other agencies to minimise timber miles and the effect of haulage on the public road network.	Business Development aims for Timber include supporting the local woodfuel market and local outlets for small round wood. New Timber Transport policy NH 2.09 to adhere to agreed route maps for haulage.
Population and human health		Renewable energy developments may have a negative impact on access, tourism and sustainable timber transport (depending on type and location of project)	<p>Policies should ensure that renewables developments do not adversely affect access or quality of life and do not generate unsustainable levels of road traffic (especially relevant to woodfuel projects).</p> <p>Environmental quality policies should be strengthened to ensure that non-forest activities conform to wider FCS environmental standards.</p>	The NFESP undertakes to give 'due consideration' to the potential social effects of renewable energy proposals.	Policy NH 1.01 states that windfarm potential will be considered with 'due regard to community planning and environmental concerns'.
Population and human health		Alternative sources of income and portfolio analysis policies could result in land use change, which may have negative effects on quality of life	Any potential impacts can be mitigated through specifically stating that any development or land use change resulting from the outcomes of portfolio analysis should conform to FCS social and environmental standards, and that implementation of the policy should not jeopardise the success of other FDSP objectives.	<p>Although the social effects of renewables will be considered, concerns remain in relation to other non-forestry activities.</p> <p>The NFESP clarifies the decision-making criteria for land disposal and acquisitions.</p>	Policy NH 3.10 states that business proposals must 'match our wider social and environmental standards'.
Water and soil	Degradation of water and soil environments	Renewable energy, access and alternative sources of income policies could have negative effects on water and/or soil quality. Currently, only forestry operations are covered by environmental quality policies.	<p>A robust soil protection policy should be added to the FDSP to ensure protection at least equal to that of other areas of the environment. It should also include protection for non-forest operations.</p> <p>The Forest District should require any activities, development or operations on FE land to conform to wider FCS social and environmental standards.</p>	The NFESP reaffirms FES's commitment to the FC water and soil guidelines. It also acknowledges that soils will require further consideration in future policy developments.	<p>Policy NH 3.10 states that business proposals must 'match our wider social and environmental standards'.</p> <p>Reinforced Environmental Quality policies in relation to water and soil and note taken of the requirements of the EU Framework Directives on water and soil (proposed).</p>

SEA issue	Existing problem?	Impact of Forest District Strategic Plan	Proposed measures for the reduction/prevention and offset of significant adverse effects	Implications of policies contained in FES National Forest Estate Strategic Plan	Modification to the NHFDSP, or reason for not having taken this into account
Air		Access policies could result in increased private car use, as the public are forced to travel to access improved leisure and recreation facilities	Access policies should be strengthened to ensure that public and non-motorised transport is prioritised wherever possible	The NFESP commits FES to undertake/commission research into the effects of access and recreation on the environment. It also prioritises links with the Core Path Network to maximise non-motorised access to the Forest Estate.	New policies NH 4.01 and NH 4.02 on Woodlands in and Around Towns.
Air		Renewable energy and woodfuel policies have the potential for negative impacts on air quality through increased use of road transport to transfer timber for processing and end use	These policies should seek to ensure that the climate change mitigation benefits that such schemes may accrue are not outweighed by increased vehicular emissions.	The NFESP seeks to prioritise sustainable transport solutions wherever possible.	Business Development aims for Timber include supporting the local woodfuel market and local outlets for small round wood. New Timber Transport policy NH 2.09 to adhere to agreed route maps for haulage and other timber transport policies to reduce the impacts of timber lorries and consider rail and sea as alternative means of transport.
Landscape	Damage to landscape quality	Renewable energy policies could have a detrimental effect on landscape quality through visual intrusion	Policy should be strengthened to explicitly state that no development on the Forest Estate will have a negative effect on landscape quality. Renewables policy should be cross-referenced with landscape and other environmental protection policies to ensure that all development and operations conform to wider FCS social and environmental standards.	The NFESP commits to safeguard landscape quality through effective planning, design and operations. The plan also seeks to ensure that the social and environmental effects of renewable energy proposals are given due consideration by FES when deciding whether to facilitate schemes.	Policy NH1.01 states that wind farm development on the National Forest Estate will be undertaken with due regard to environmental concerns.

SEA issue	Existing problem?	Impact of Forest District Strategic Plan	Proposed measures for the reduction/prevention and offset of significant adverse effects	Implications of policies contained in FES National Forest Estate Strategic Plan	Modification to the NHFDSP, or reason for not having taken this into account
Historic environment	Loss or degradation of cultural heritage sites	Renewable energy and alternative sources of income could have negative impact on the fabric and setting of cultural heritage sites	<p>These policies should be cross-referenced with the Cultural Value policy to ensure that such projects do not have a detrimental effect on cultural heritage sites.</p> <p>The cultural value policy should be strengthened by ensuring that non-forest operations are also covered, and that full archaeological surveys are required in advance on any development or significant operation.</p>	<p>The NFESP introduces a suite of policies designed to enhance protection of the historic environment. By employing cultural heritage professionals to assist in managing the Forest Estate, such developments can be steered away from areas of heritage sensitivity.</p> <p>FES will also seek expert advice upon the discovery of new sites to ensure they are properly managed.</p> <p>(For development, archaeological work will be required to obtain planning consent and often as part of EIA for renewables)</p>	<p>Policy NH1.01 states that wind farm development on the National Forest Estate will be undertaken with due regard to environmental concerns.</p> <p>Policy NH 3.10 states that business proposals must 'match our wider social and environmental standards'.</p> <p>FES policies on disposal of land are based on an analysis of public benefit, which is scored around social and environmental considerations – potential damage to the soil and water environment would therefore be taken into account in decision-making.</p>
Historic environment	Loss or degradation of cultural heritage sites	Woodfuel and habitat network policies may have a negative effect on the fabric or setting of archaeological sites through the expansion of woodland areas	<p>These policies should be cross-referenced with the Cultural Value policy to ensure that any such developments do not have an adverse impact on cultural heritage.</p> <p>This policy should also be strengthened to ensure that any associated non-forest operations do not have a detrimental impact on sites and monuments.</p> <p>Any expansion of woodland should require a full archaeological survey during the planning stage, in advance of ground preparation and planting operations.</p>	<p>As noted above, the NFESP introduces the requirement to employ a cultural heritage specialist to assist with management decisions. Therefore any extension to habitat networks or planting for biomass would be informed by their input – ensuring minimal impact.</p>	<p>The NFESP covers this issue.</p>

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Historic environment	Loss or degradation of cultural heritage sites	Access and tourism policies may result in increased pressure on easily accessible sites and monuments	<p>These policies should be cross referenced with the cultural value policy to ensure that access to sites and monuments is sustainably managed.</p> <p>The cultural value policy should be strengthened to afford greater protection from leisure and recreation activities and infrastructure.</p>	The NFESP states that FES will work with Historic Scotland to ensure that monuments are appropriately managed. Also, the employment of cultural heritage specialists will allow FES to direct the development of access and recreation facilities away from highly sensitive sites and ensure others are appropriately managed.	In addition to the protection provided in the NFESP the cultural heritage policies of the NHFDSP have been extended and amended to focus on the protection of cultural heritage.
Historic environment	Loss or degradation of cultural heritage sites	Business development, portfolio analysis and alternative sources of income policies could result in changes of land use which may have negative effects on cultural heritage	The FDSP should explicitly state that any business ventures and changes of land use resulting from portfolio analysis will have no negative effects on cultural heritage.	<p>The NFESP clarifies the decision-making criteria for land acquisition and disposal, stressing the non-market values embodied in areas of the Forest Estate.</p> <p>The input of cultural heritage professionals on the FES staff should also ensure that areas of high archaeological sensitivity are proposed for inappropriate schemes or development.</p>	In addition to the safeguards within the NFESP Policy NH 3.10 states that business proposals must 'match our wider social and environmental standards'.

SEA issue	Existing problem?	Impact of Forest District Strategic Plan	Proposed measures for the reduction/prevention and offset of significant adverse effects	Implications of policies contained in FES National Forest Estate Strategic Plan	Modification to the NHFDSP, or reason for not having taken this into account
Historic environment	Loss or degradation of cultural heritage sites	<p>Cultural value policy focuses mainly on the interpretation of heritage rather than its protection.</p>	<p>The policy should be revised to ensure that all archaeological monuments – whether Scheduled, known or yet to be discovered – are accorded sufficient protection from all activities on the Forest Estate.</p> <p>The policy should also require full, professional, archaeological survey in advance of forest operations.</p> <p>The policy should be refocused to provide more protection for all archaeological sites – perhaps through cross-references with the ‘Forests and Archaeology’ guidelines.</p>	<p>The NFESP undertakes to develop guidance for the management of unscheduled sites, and to seek professional advice in their management. Similarly, additional training in archaeology for FES field staff should limit the potential for damage to newly discovered sites.</p> <p>By improving levels of information available on cultural heritage sites, their location and form can be more effectively integrated into Forest Design Plans.</p>	Cultural heritage policies extended and amended to provide a focus on the protection of cultural heritage.

7. How opinions expressed during the consultation have been taken into account

The sections below detail the comments received during the SEA process from the consultation authorities (Table 7.1) and those from the general consultation on the Consultative Draft Dornoch and Inverness Forest District Strategic Plans (Table 7.2). In Table 7.1, where relevant, the issues raised in the SEA of the National Forest Estate Strategic Plan and the SEAs of other forest district strategic plans have also been included.

TABLE 7.1 –LISTS CONSULTATION AUTHORITY RESPONSES AND SETS OUT HOW THEY HAVE BEEN TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

CONSULTEE / RESPONDENT (ALPHA ORDER BEGINNING WITH THE CONSULTATION AUTHORITIES)	SUMMARY OF COMMENTS	HOW THE COMMENT WAS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN MAKING THE DECISION TO ADOPT THE FINAL PPS
Scottish Environment Protection Agency	General comment on All FDSPs: Further consideration should be given to environmental protection objectives set at international, EU and member state level – should include main Directives and national statutory instruments which implement them	<p>The North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan is in line with the National Forest Estate Strategic Plan which sets the context as regards national and international environmental protection objectives and includes implementation of important standards and national best practice guidelines.</p> <p>The NHF DSP has been amended to include commitment to the EU Water and (proposed) Soil Frameworks.</p>
	Inclusion of a soil protection policy is vital (as per ER recommendations), as stipulating adherence to Soils and Water guidelines is insufficient mitigation.	<p>The NHF DSP has been amended to include commitment to the EU Water and (proposed) Soil Frameworks.</p> <p>NFESP Post Consultation Comments and Changes: Note climate change action plan mentions that the woodland expansion rationale sets out that FES should move away from peat based soils for woodland expansion. Climate action plan makes various references to protecting soil through management activities and areas of concern that warrant more attention.</p> <p><i>Note also that the Soils guidelines are being revised to develop a more updated series.</i></p>

CONSULTEE / RESPONDENT (ALPHA ORDER BEGINNING WITH THE CONSULTATION AUTHORITIES)	SUMMARY OF COMMENTS	HOW THE COMMENT WAS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN MAKING THE DECISION TO ADOPT THE FINAL PPS
Business Development	Tourism / eco-tourism could have negative effects on soil & water, material assets and air objectives due to increases in visitor numbers, the amount of travel involved and the amount of waste generated	<p>There are a number of safeguards in place to minimise the impacts of tourism, these include:</p> <p>Policy NH 3.10 business proposals must 'match our wider social and environmental standards'.</p> <p>The NFESP commits FES to undertake/commission research into the effects of access and recreation on the environment.</p> <p>Reinforced Environmental Quality policies in relation to water and soil and note taken of the requirements of the EU Framework Directive on water and the proposed Directive on Soil.</p>
Business Development	Release of land for development could have potential negative impacts on soil and water objectives – mitigation ensuring sensitive location and sufficient infrastructure (e.g. sewerage) provision.	FES policies on disposal of land are based on an analysis of public benefit, which is scored around social and environmental considerations – potential damage to the soil and water environment would therefore be taken into account in decision-making.
The Scottish Ministers (Historic Scotland)	No substantive comments	
Scottish Natural Heritage Comments on Dornoch and In verness Plans		
Business Development	The potential social effects of non-forestry developments on the NFE should be minimised through more explicit social criteria for such projects ER mitigation Dornoch	New policy NH 3.10 states that business proposals must 'match our wider social and environmental standards'.
Environmental Quality	Assessment of environmental effects section should refer to the Water Framework Directive, the implementation of River Basin Management Plans and meeting and maintaining Good Ecological Status or Good Ecological Potential SNH Comment on Inverness ER.	New and extended text on flood and catchment management and new policies on the Water Framework Directive under the Environmental Quality theme.
	Plan lists areas of designated FES land, but not features for which the land is designated	Comment no longer applicable as the NHFDSP does not include a list of areas of designated land.
	Legislative context section of Key Species table should include European Protected Species, Annex I habitats and birds, the Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Badger Protection Act SNH comment on Inverness FDSP	Comment no longer applicable as the NHFDSP does not include a key species table.

CONSULTEE / RESPONDENT (ALPHA ORDER BEGINNING WITH THE CONSULTATION AUTHORITIES)	SUMMARY OF COMMENTS	HOW THE COMMENT WAS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN MAKING THE DECISION TO ADOPT THE FINAL PPS
SNH comments on National Forest Estate Strategic Plan and other FDSPs which are also relevant to the North Highland Forest District		
Climate change	Recognise the role of soils as carbon stores	Mention of carbon stores under Renewable Energy. Carbon storage role of peat outlined under Climate Change theme. Planting on low carbon soils is also outlined.
	Add a clearer statement to theme regarding working with natural processes in adapting to climate change (e.g. flood plain restoration)	New text and policy under flood and catchment management relating to the role and impact of forest management practices on catchment management.
	Further consideration should be given to the potential of development or afforestation affecting peatlands to release stored carbon	New policy NH 1.12 to 'keep abreast of peat bog carbon sequestration research and include proposals for open ground habitat restoration in our forest plans'.
Access and Health	Should include a recognition of need for varied access provision to suit differing requirements of the population (challenging as well as shorter, more convenient routes)	New policies for recreation including addressing the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the use of the Countryside for All Good Practice Guide.
	Need more active promotion of Core Paths, the SOAC and the wider access network, in conjunction with local authorities	Text and policies supporting core paths and partnership working to make access easier.
	Should include a commitment to safeguard paths where possible	New policy NH 5.05 to protect public rights of way.
	Access, health and tourism policies should be amended to, where possible, prioritise non-motorised and public transport for visitors to the NFE.	This is not always possible in the more remote areas, however new policies on Woodlands in and Around Towns are included in the NHFDSP and the need to make access easier is also considered.
Environmental Quality	Need to acknowledge the importance of soils as carbon sinks AND a potential source of Green House Gases.	Mention of carbon stores under Renewable Energy.
	Plan should refer to the role of forestry in acid deposition	A need to reduce the risks of acidification is included under the Environmental Quality theme.
	Cultural heritage section focuses on built heritage, but should also include references to 'living cultural heritage' e.g. veteran trees, anthropogenic vegetation patterns (e.g. wood pasture, coppice) relating to ancient patterns of woodland and landscape management	Recently published FCS Policy ' <i>Scotland's Woodlands and the Historic Environment</i> ' provides comprehensive coverage of built and natural elements of the historic environment
	Inclusion of a soil protection policy is vital	New and enhanced policies to adhere to FCS guidelines and EU Directives.

CONSULTEE / RESPONDENT (ALPHA ORDER BEGINNING WITH THE CONSULTATION AUTHORITIES)	SUMMARY OF COMMENTS	HOW THE COMMENT WAS TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN MAKING THE DECISION TO ADOPT THE FINAL PPS
Biodiversity	No clear objectives are given for native woodlands that are not AW, PAWS or designated sites. Important as components of habitat networks and often in poor condition	Strategic priorities for the District include the expansion of native woodland and the enhancement of habitat network links. Policy NH 1.11 includes a review of the existing land holding and its potential for the expansion and establishment of new native woodland'. Also a commitment to 'no longer plant sites which have very low nutritional status... and allow them to revert to either open land or native woodland' (Policy NH 2.08).
	Should acknowledge the importance of transition habitats between woodland and open spaces (e.g. scrub, wood pasture, mosaic – these areas are also important in terms of cultural heritage)	The importance of edge habitats is out lined under the Environmental Quality Theme.
	<p>Theme should be expanded to include geodiversity, as many sites are designated for their geological, as well as ecological, significance. Should also include Geological Conservation Review sites</p> <p>Plan should then deal with maintaining and enhancing geodiversity through access interpretation and promotion. Use Forest Design Plans to develop best practice for geological site management</p>	New policy and text on Geodiversity.

Changes to the North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan arising from wider consultation

The Consultative Draft Forest District Strategic Plans for Dornoch and Inverness were subject to a period of consultation from which a number of comments were gained from a variety of organisations and individuals. These included positive comments in relation to the comprehensiveness of the documents and particular praise for the incorporation of woodland crofts. The importance of the private sector as part of the wider forestry context was also highlighted several times. The finalised FDSP does attempt to take this into account outlining the importance of working with partners particularly in relation to tourism and conservation management. In addition, partnerships with local communities and community engagement are also emphasised in the FDSP.

Other detailed points were in relation to biodiversity, where the need for clarification or a more accurate presentation was set out. The majority of these points were addressed in the final plan and relate to designated sites (their status, important characteristics and the inclusion of missing sites). SNH also noted the important opportunity to consider transition habitats between planted and open ground. A further extension of the deer management considerations within the Plan was also outlined along with a need for the greater incorporation of landscape design into forest design plans. Several navigational issues relating to the layout of the Plan were highlighted, although it is hoped that these will have been addressed within the revised structure of the finalised plan.

A summary of responses has been prepared and is available on the Forestry Commission website www.forestry.gov.uk/fesplans

FES concluded that no significant changes were made between the draft and finalised versions of the NHFDSP that would lead to a requirement to produce a revised Environmental Report.

8. Reasons for choosing the NHFDSP, in the light of other reasonable alternatives

Together with the assessment of the North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan, nine alternative scenarios were developed and evaluated. These were:

- The 'do-nothing' option of continued implementation of the 2000 Forest District Strategic Plans. This option would not reflect the new SFS and progress that had been made since this time on certain key issues;
- Direct implementation of the Scottish Forestry Strategy at a District level. This option would not reflect local key issues and opportunities;
- Pursuing only one of the seven Scottish Forestry Strategy themes as a policy priority (e.g. implementing only climate change policies to the exclusion of all other objectives). This option would result in an imbalanced policy approach.

These alternative approaches highlighted the importance of balance in the Strategic Plan, as the effects of prioritising one policy area generally produced less positive results than a more rounded plan. Similarly, the 2007 plans, for Dornoch and Inverness Forest Districts, demonstrated significant progress over the 2000 versions and presented a more realistic and pragmatic solution than the local application of the Scottish Forestry Strategy. The NHFDSP also provided a more integrated and balanced approach than alternatives which prioritised one policy theme over the others.

9. Measures that are to be taken to monitor significant environmental effects of the implementation of the PPS

The National Forest Estate Strategic Plan identifies a suite of indicators under each of the seven topic areas (with data source, reporting intervals etc). It is proposed that progress towards these National Forest Estate Strategic Plan indicators will provide a monitoring outline for the Forest District Plan (as outlined within the Environmental Report). Although this monitoring will be undertaken at a national level it will reflect local trends and district issues. It is likely that these indicators will be reviewed every 10 years in line with the National Plan.

10. Conclusion

We believe that the SEA process has assisted in developing a balanced North Highland Forest District Strategic Plan. The District Plan itself, together with the wider policy framework of national strategy and guidelines will ensure that forestry in Scotland will contribute to sustainable development, benefiting the people of Scotland and protecting and enhancing the environment during the era of climate change.