

National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS) – North Sutherland forests;
Applicant – RSPB

FDM Comments

1) Would the proposal be significantly detrimental to the management of the national forest estate?

FDMs Comments – No. This land has been declared surplus under the FES repositioning scheme.

2) In your opinion, does the community body have the capacity to manage the land?

FDMs Comments – In this case applicant is an NGO rather than a community group and, in the case of the RSPB, they clearly have the capacity to manage the land. In this case however, I feel the question is more about whether the RSPBs proposals for woodland removal/peatland restoration are acceptable under the NFLS rather than whether they have the ability to manage the land.

By way of informing this debate I feel its worth making two points. Firstly, under current guidance FES would not consider planting peatland sites, such as Dyke and Forsinain today. Planting trees on deep peats and blanket bog is no longer considered to be sustainable under UKWAS. Secondly, if these forests were to remain under FES management, using current guidance a significant proportion would not be restocked once the first rotation had been cleared. That said, FES had no plans to prematurely fell the current crop and with the developing woodfuel market would have expected to harvest and extract a high proportion of timber that is already there.

The RSPB are big landowners and in other parts of the country are heavily involved in woodland creation. If they are successful with this NFLS bid and then want to take forward their plans for woodland removal, a commitment to carry out compensatory planting on other parts of their estate might help allay concerns over the large scale loss of woodland in this part of Sutherland