

# National Forest Land Scheme

Application Form for  
Non-Governmental  
Organisation applying  
for the Sponsored Sale  
of Surplus Land

# Application Form

## Introduction

Please read the relevant parts of the National Forest Land Scheme Guidance before completing this form. See [www.forestry.gov.uk/nfls](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/nfls) for the guidance and further information.

Please answer all the questions. You can attach additional information as extra sheets or electronic documents. Please be specific. When answering the questions do not repeat any information you have already given, simply refer to an earlier answer or attached document.

You can complete this form electronically but you must print it off and send us a signed form. If you have completed the form electronically, please also send us an electronic copy. You can choose to send your supporting documents as electronic documents only.

Please return the completed form and supporting documentation to:

National Forest Land Scheme Team  
Forestry Commission Scotland  
231 Corstorphine Road  
Edinburgh  
EH12 7AT

E-mail: [fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

You will receive an e-mail within 7 days acknowledging receipt of your application. We may need to ask you for more information during the application process.

## Section 1 – About your organisation

<b>General Contact Details for your Organisation</b>		
<b>1.1 Name of Non-Governmental Organisation</b>		
RSPB Scotland		
<b>Full postal address for your organisation</b>		
<b>Address</b> Dunedin House 25 Ravelston Terrace Edinburgh		
Postcode <b>EH4 3TP</b>		
Telephone <b>0131 311 6500</b>	Fax <b>0131 311 6569</b>	
E-mail		
Your organisation's website <b>www.rspb.org.uk</b>		
<b>1.2 Title and full name of the main contact in your organisation</b>		
Title <b>Dr</b>	First Name <b>Pete</b>	Surname <b>Mayhew</b>
<b>Position held in your organisation</b>		
Senior Conservation Manager		
<b>Address for correspondence, if different from the organisation address</b>		
<b>Address</b> RSPB Scotland Etive House Beechwood Park Inverness		
Postcode <b>IV2 3BW</b>		
Telephone <b>01463 715000</b>		
E-mail <b>pete.mayhew@rspb.org.uk</b>		

## Section 2 – The land that you want to acquire

### 2.1 Please give the name and location of the land you want to acquire.

You must attach a map clearly showing the land and outlining the boundaries in red (Forestry Commission Scotland will provide you with a copy of the map that you can submit).

**The lands we wish to acquire are Dyke Plantation and parts of Forsinain Plantation, North Sutherland, as shown outlined in red on the attached two plans.**

**We understand that the North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust may wish to acquire part of these plantations also, and acknowledge that (under the NFLS) their interest takes precedent over that of the RSPB. However, we understand that their acquisition plans have not been finalised. The RSPB wishes to acquire any or all sections of land, within the areas outlined in red, in the event of the Trust not proceeding to purchase same.**

### 2.2 What is the size of the property in hectares?

**Dyke – 1426 hectares or thereby, Forsinain – 279 hectares or thereby.  
 Total 1705 hectares or thereby**

### 2.3 Do you wish to lease , or own the land? Please tick one only

Lease	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Ownership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

## **2.4 Please describe how your organisation has a legitimate connection with the land.**

The Non-Governmental Organisation must be able to demonstrate that the national forest land being purchased is central to the delivery of its main objectives. 300 words maximum.

**The blanket peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland are one of the most important wildlife habitats in Britain – with an estimated 4% of the world resource located in the Flow Country. RSPB Scotland has been involved in this area for over 25 years, initially campaigning regarding the extensive planting of blanket peatland but from the mid 90s as a major landowner. We currently manage around 19,000 ha of this internationally important habitat, run a nationally recognised visitor centre and a recently designated National Nature Reserve, have fishing and stalking agreements with several neighbouring landowners and the local hotel along with local farming agreements, have a permanent staff of 4 full time and 3 part time posts based at Forsinard and contribute around £0.5 million annually to the local economy.**

**We have been acquiring plantations for restoration to peatland for over 10 years and have so far (along with our partners in the Peatlands Partnership) felled and started restoration to bog on approx 2000 ha of plantation. This work is partly to protect the adjacent Natura site but also to restore (over the next 20 plus years) the wettest planted ground back to bog.**

## 2.5 Tell us why your organisation wants to acquire the land?

Please give a brief outline of your plans for the land including the long-term objectives you wish to achieve, and how you will manage the land differently. 300 words maximum.

**Given the extremely high conservation value of the Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands and the Flows NNR which we manage on behalf of the Scottish Government our key long term objectives will be to:**

- **Restore the acquired area of forest and open land back to open peatland and associated habitats**
- **Restore the associated vegetation, bird and other wildlife populations**
- **Allow populations of key peatland birds on the neighbouring NNR/SPA (Special Protection Area) to recover from the negative effects exerted by these areas of standing forest**
- **Ensure that the massive carbon store in the deep peats below these plantations (estimated to be 20 to 40 times greater than that in the tree crop) is protected from further loss by drying and is returned to a carbon neutral or sequestering condition.**

**Management would principally involve felling and removal of trees, using methods developed at Forsinard over the last 10 years, in order to allow the bog plant communities to redevelop and create an active, growing bog surface. Hydrology would be restored by drain damming and grazing management reintroduced by fence removal. Regenerating seedlings may have to be removed for about 6 years after felling.**

**If we were unsuccessful and the land acquired by a long-term forestry interest, the opportunity to restore the peatlands to their open wild state of the past 4,000 years would be lost.**

**RSPB fully recognises the need to find a balance between woodland interests in the Flows and restoration of plantations back to bog. This is outlined in the current Peatlands Management Strategy (see section 5.8) and the ongoing work of the Peatland Science Group involving Forest Research, SNH and RSPB. We expect to be able to retain areas of good quality trees beyond the main 5 year felling period in order to provide continuity of timber production and employment.**

## Section 3 – Demonstrating Community Support

### **3.1 How has the local community been consulted on the proposed purchase?**

Please provide evidence of the community consultation carried out and how any issues raised by the community have been addressed.

**Community consultation over our plans is ongoing.**

**To date:**

**We have had long term discussions over the acquisition of both blocks with the North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust who are hoping to acquire the better grown areas of trees on better soils with easy access for management and future timber extraction. The NSCFT membership includes a significant proportion of the population on the north coast of Sutherland who have an interest in woodland management. Discussions have gone well and various mutually beneficial potential acquisition boundaries have been agreed to mesh our separate applications to the NFLS. We have identified a number of ways in which we can work together (as we have in the past over felling and extraction on bog restoration on the reserve) including supply of timber to the NSCFT sawmill at Forsinain and purchase of fencing materials. The Trust support our application and restoration plans but would prefer that our felling timescales were extended to over 5 years to maximise timber extraction and have requested supply of timber free of charge. RSPB's Forsinard Flows Site Manager, Norrie Russell attended the NSCFT's AGM on 28 Oct 2009 to discuss working together and any concerns.**

**To consult within the wider community we issued a press release on 9<sup>th</sup> October to local papers (See Annex attached) raising awareness of our plans and inviting everyone along to view information and discuss our plans with reserve staff. The open house consultation was run from 2 to 9pm on 29 October 2009 in Melvich Community Hall. Key decision makers in the local community were also invited by email to attend the consultation meeting and included ward regional councillors, community council, MP, MSP, NSCFT, UHI and local Biodiversity Groups. It was not expected that there would be a great deal of local interest given that RSPB have been acquiring plantations in the blanket bogs around Forsinard almost annually since 1997 and have restored 1,950ha to date. Attitude and awareness studies carried out within the Life Nature Projects have shown significant and increasing support for such work within all sections of the local community including key stakeholders and policy makers. At the open meeting, which took in an afternoon and evening to allow working people to attend, 11 people came in to discuss our plans. Normally this type of**

open house consultation would be expected to be of interest to people with concerns over the proposals. It was therefore extremely encouraging that the vast majority of feedback responses were positive and supportive. Key topics discussed were wildlife tourism, international environmental profile, potential jobs in the light of economic run down at Dounreay, integration of different types of land management and, of course, environmental benefits to peatlands, birds and other wildlife.

**Issues that came up through the consultation were:**

- 1. Need for NSCFT and RSPB to work in a joined-up approach to maximise local benefit and gain external funding**
- 2. Give public access considerations sufficient weight in plans**
- 3. Do locals and tourists see the benefits?**
- 4. Early cutting would reduce the amount, value and steady flow of timber and benefit to NSCFT**
- 5. NSCFT would lose their current stake via the management agreement with FCS in those sections of the blocks which they do not acquire**
- 6. NSCFT have suggested extending period of timber supply from extraction work as well as being provided with free timber for the Forsinain Mill and much reduced cost to the local community**
- 7. How will long term employment for locals be supported?**
- 8. Are there training and development opportunities for local people and companies and how will these be communicated?**

**These have been addressed by:-**

- 1. Initially attending NSCFT committee meetings to agree areas of interest, provide management survey information collected in the field to date and attend NSCFT's AGM. At the later, there was a long and useful discussion over concerns and areas of mutual benefit with the directors and three other ordinary members present. We will continue to build dialogue with the Trust based on results of District Valuer's report, success of respective acquisitions and community feedback.**
- 2. The Forsinain Trail, which runs partly through one of the blocks, was identified, planned and much of the ground works and interpretation carried out by the RSPB Forsinard Flows staff team, in partnership with FCS, SNH and Peatland Partnership. We give public access, both for locals and tourists a high profile at the reserve and have spent large amounts of time and money on developing visitor facilities in the last two years. We**

will give potential enhancement to these facilities in Forsinain and Dyke a similar level of priority.

- 3. The existing visitor facilities, staffing and events programme at Forsinard Flows has been shown to attract over £187,000 per annum of visitor spend into the local economy creating 5 full time job equivalents in the local area. This will be supported and enhanced by attracting visitors who support and appreciate the habitat and wildlife restoration management carried out at Forsinard by RSPB. RSPB will run an appeal to its membership (over a million members) to fund acquisition of these blocks and, as well as awareness raising of the area to that membership, it is likely that over 50,000 members will directly support the project and have a strong link with the area. This will have undoubted benefits through holidays taken in the Far North to visit the reserve. The project will support existing employment in forest restoration work on the reserve plus additional contract work creating 6 new jobs including skilled machine operator jobs and hopefully allow the NSCFT sawmill to start operating at a level where it is also capable of employing staff to run it.**
- 4. The early felling of these blocks (currently estimated at between 5 and 15 years depending on tree age and wind throw risk) will undoubtedly reduce the total amount of timber that would be produced at full rotation. There are, however, huge areas of local forestry, planted at the same time, which will mature at the original predicted felling period and will be available for purchase by NSCFT for the mill. Our felling will produce some timber ahead of this future glut at a time when these blocks would be planned to produce nothing. Timber supply will therefore be brought forward with supply curves smoothed to the benefit of local processing.**
- 5. Whilst NSCFT will lose their current management agreement with FCS on those areas of the blocks eventually acquired by RSPB, by working closely with them we would hope that they can benefit directly from our restoration felling as outlined in 4 above.**
- 6. To address the NSCFT concerns over timber supply we will review the options for retaining an area of appropriate timber in Forsinain and possibly Dyke. This will be possible once it is clarified which areas NSCFT and RSPB finally acquire, whether there are non-damaging wind firm trees which are likely to have extractable saw logs in them on better soils and what the likely supply need may be once the mill is operating fully again. This area would then be felled over an extended period beyond 2016 to create supply at a time when these plantations would not have been producing any timber normally. As income from timber sales is an essential part of covering part of the felling and extraction costs and as we have obligations to our members as a charity, free timber provision is**

unlikely to be possible. We would however look to give NSCFT priority of supply at market value with proximity to the mill ensuring low at mill material costs. We would like to explore how we could integrate with any developing local wood fuel networks to maximise local use of product.

- 7. Long term employment will be supported as previously stated in this application and attached business plan. It will be significant with over £2million of local contractor spend on management works, will create a new post at Forsinard, will support indirect jobs in timber haulage, processing at a quiet time for local forestry and provide long term land management opportunities. Tourism benefits as described elsewhere as will support the North's largest employment sector.**
- 8. Awareness of the project and resulting development opportunities will be created through local communication, media work and discussions with organisations addressing local employment such as those concerned with the effect of decommissioning Dounreay. New opportunities will be created particularly in the felling and extraction of timber. We will work with local training agencies and relevant partners such as NSCFT to address any gaps in the skills base.**

## Section 4 – Capacity to Manage Land

**You must be able to show that the organisation has the capacity to sustainably manage the land in the long term.**

### 4.1 Business Plan

For all applications to buy land with a market value of more than £50,000 a business plan will be required.

### 4.2 Business Plan attached

Yes – please tick	✓	No – please tick	
-------------------	---	------------------	--

### 4.3 Please tell us how your organisation has the capacity to manage the land.

Maximum 300 words. Please attach any additional documents.

**The RSPB is the largest conservation charity in Europe with an annual turnover of c£100mill and a membership of over 1 million. Established since 1889, we have a staff of 1880 in the UK and 270 in Scotland. RSPB Scotland has its headquarters in Edinburgh, North Scotland Regional Office in Inverness and Forsinard reserve office with 7 staff.**

**As indicated in section 2.4, RSPB has a 19,000 ha landholding in this area and has been managing projects of this scale in the Flows for the last 15 years. At a UK level, we have experience of managing projects of this size over the last 30+ years. The annual expenditure at Forsinard is around £250k. This is mainly funded by RSPB directly but grant aid has also been gratefully received from SNH, the Tubney Trust, the Lottery, SRDP etc. This has been for both individual projects and ongoing management.**

**RSPB was the lead partner in two LIFE projects based in the peatlands over the last 15 years with an overall expenditure of around £5million. These projects resulted in major developments in the Flows ranging from direct land management and peatland restoration to educational work and promotion of the Flows to local communities.**

**The attached business plan and trustees/staff list outlines our organisational governance and the staff who will be involved in the project. The business plan indicates how the money will be raised for acquisition of the land, the proposed management of the land (ie returning it to bog), and the financial plan for covering the cost of management. It should be noted within this that a new staff member will be appointed (at Forsinard) to cover this project, if the RSPB is successful in its application to the NFLS and in acquiring the land.**

Section 5 – Showing that your plans for the land will provide additional benefit, are consistent with the principles of sustainable development, and are in the public interest.

Acquisition should achieve a range of additional public benefits for the community. These can be as economic, social and environmental benefits (but may not involve all of these). The benefits will come from your planned activities and outputs. In addition the land to be acquired should be sustainably used or developed. See Criteria 6 and 7, pp13-14.

## 5.1 What economic benefits will the land acquisition deliver?

300 words maximum.

**The project to return parts of Forsinain and Dyke to an active bog/wet heath system will result in significant expenditure in the area over the next 5-10 years – we estimate around £2million to be spent on tree felling and extraction, drain damming, deer fence works, seedling control, staff employment etc. This money will principally be spent through local contractors as has been the case at Forsinard over the last 15 years. We estimate around 7 FTE jobs will be created during the management of this project – see business plan attached**

**We will also be working in close partnership with the North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust and other local businesses and agencies to ensure as much local economic benefit as possible. For example, we will market as much product as possible through the NSCFT and other local contractors who will, we hope, be able to supply local markets eg supplying the better quality timber to the NSCFT sawmill at Forsinain for fencing materials etc Lower grade material will be used for firewood supply locally and also to sell into the proposed biomass plants that (we hope) will become a reality within the next few years in the Caithness area.**

## 5.2 What social benefits will the acquisition bring?

300 words maximum.

**The social benefits of the project would principally relate to the financial expenditure discussed in 5.1 ie significant employment opportunities for the period of the project, both directly through RSPB and indirectly through contractor employment and marketing of product.**

**In addition to the above, we are very excited about the partnership opportunities that this project will offer ie working, in particular with the NSCFT and others, to ensure that the best public benefits arise from the management work on this forest. While these aspirations are often espoused in principle, we feel that the Forsinain and Dyke project has the potential to deliver these benefits in practice. Benefits would range from ensuring the most efficient but equitable sale of produce, through to building a stronger capacity for partnership working in the Strath.**

## 5.3 What environmental benefits will the project bring?

300 words maximum.

**The environmental benefits of this acquisition and restoration work will be huge. Blanket bog is a rare world habitat of which some of the best examples in the world surround these two forest blocks.**

**Both blocks contain bog pool systems and lochs that survived the original plantings in the 1980's and their survival and recovery will be ensured. A very significant area of damaged blanket bog will be restored to open peatland habitat contributing significantly to Scottish Government biodiversity targets for this habit as well as a number of associated UKBAP, EU and Schedule 1 species such as water vole, otter, salmon, dunlin, golden plover, hen harrier, merlin, short-eared owl and dwarf birch amongst others.**

**It is hoped that, in time, the peatland habitats will recover to the point where they will be included within the area of the SSSI and Natura 2000 sites as well as the National Nature Reserve.**

**Negative edge effects of the forest on the surrounding key peatland bird populations within the Caithness & Sutherland Peatlands SPA will be reduced once restored and new breeding sites will be created within the area of the blocks.**

The landscape will be restored back to its natural treeless open nature but will have good access via the existing roads for recreation and enjoyment by the local population and visitors alike. The Forsinain block in particular is ideal for this already having the Forsinain trail built by FCS and RSPB through the Peatland Partnership.

Climate change is high up the Scottish Government and world agenda at the moment and it is increasingly recognised that soil organic stores such as in the deep peats under these blocks, are a key part of Scotland's carbon balance. Removing timber and supplying for biomass will replace some fossil fuel in the short term but, more importantly, ensure that the massive carbon soil store accumulated over 8,000 years is kept locked up as effectively as possible.

#### **5.4 Tell us how you will deliver these economic, environmental, or social benefits.**

What projects or outputs will bring these benefits about?

Tell us about the capital costs involved in the delivery of the projects, and how these will be met. Please refer to any plans or other documents you are submitting. Please also identify the risk of the project not delivering, and how these risks will be managed. Please attach any additional documents. 300 words maximum.

#### **We will deliver these benefits by:**

- 1. Carefully surveying and planning works using experienced staff**
- 2. Basing restoration on the results of timber, peat depth, vegetation and related surveys**
- 3. Felling the trees in a phased manner over years 2010 to 2016 at a total estimated cost of £1.4mill. This figure is dependent on detailed surveys which will clarify areas where extraction is environmentally and economically sensible. Development of timber market over this timescale and availability of SRDP grant aid will also affect final approach to balance of fell to waste and extraction. New methods and machinery will be trialled where possible to maximise economic and environmental benefit. Areas of timber for longer term retention for use by the NSCFT mill will be identified.**
- 4. Erecting new deer fences to protect remaining adjacent woodland areas estimated at 2.2km in Forsinain and 5.1km in Dyke.**
- 5. Removing redundant deer fences to allow deer free access across the blocks to manage ground vegetation and control tree seedlings. 3.5km in Forsinain and 10km in Dyke**
- 6. Total fence works estimated at £48k**

**7. Controlling regeneration tree seedlings and regrowth by removing 2-3 years and again 4-6 years post felling. Regeneration is hugely variable and as yet unpredictable, but based on averages encountered to date we estimate around £290k for contract work.**

**8. Surveying and installing via local contractors est. 780 dams to raise water tables plus act as sediment and nutrient traps. Estimated cost based on SRDP rates £45k.**

**9. Work with existing and new research partners to monitor carbon flux and water quality effects of the work to improve understanding of habitat mgmt.**

**10. Manage the Forsinain Trail to enhance visitor experience and explore additional opportunities in Dyke.**

**11. Employing an extra staff member for the duration of the project at an approximate cost of £280k.**

**See business plan for more detail on management and costs**

**5.5 Do you intend to apply to have forest land independently certified eg under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme?**

Yes – please tick



No – please tick

**5.6 What negative economic, social, or environmental consequences (if any) may occur as a result of your plans for the land?**

**Economic:**

- 1. As we plan to fell most of the trees around 10 years early of their likely planned rotation length there will be a smaller volume of timber capable of being extracted and used for downstream processing.**
- 2. Extraction of timber from Dyke could cause damage to the fragile public road and bridges on the A897.**

**Environmental:**

**2. Felling and extraction of timber will cause water quality effects which can be negative. Most often release of nutrients, cations including aluminium, low pH and low dissolved oxygen.**

**5.7 How would you propose to minimise these?**

**Economic:**

**1. As most of the forestry in the wider area was planted at the same time in a short time period, most of it will be in peak felling in 10 years time. The loss of production from Forsinain and Dyke will be offset by the early felling and extraction which will usefully spread production and provide contractor**

**employment in an otherwise quiet period. We will also identify some areas of appropriate trees for longer term retention to supply to NSCFT mill.**

**As damage to fragile public roads accessing these blocks (such as the A897) is recognised as a potentially huge cost to the public purse, reduced long-term production will be offset by savings here.**

**Depressed timber market value, high extraction costs on fragile organic soils, slow growth rates and high wind throw risk becoming evident in nearby plantations all reduce any economic value foregone by early felling of these blocks.**

**Environmental:**

**2. Short term water quality effects are an inevitable consequence of forestry felling with the greatest effect occurring in the first summer after felling once needle drop has occurred and tailing off quickly thereafter. Early felling will reduce the future impact as amount of biomass and nutrient acquired are lower and more ground vegetation survives to absorb nutrients before they reach streams and rivers. Felling works will be designed to fell less than 12% of the catchment and follow FCS water guidelines and current Forest Research advice to minimise risk to aquatic system and salmon river.**

## **5.8 Links to other strategies**

How will your plans support or compliment local/regional/national strategies?

The application should take into account local strategies and community plans. 100 words maximum.

**The principle strategy to which this project links is 'The Peatlands of Caithness and Sutherland – management strategy – 2005 to 2015'. Launched in 2005 by the then Minister for the Environment, Rhona Brankin, on behalf of the LIFE Peatlands Project Steering Group, this document outlines the agreed way forward for this internationally important area. The significance of the strategy is that it was agreed between all parties, from national agencies to local groups, after several decades of deep controversy regarding land management in the area.**

**The Strategy covers four main topics: open peatland management, woodland management, community and economic development, and increasing the profile of the Flows. The Forsinain and Dyke project addresses issues in all 4 areas of concern but particularly in relation to the balance between woodland**

and peatland in this area.

**Other government strategies that are relevant to this work include ensuring favourable condition of Natura sites, national and local biodiversity targets for both the bog habitat and the species found on the bog, climate change targets.**

**5.9 It will be helpful to show that you have gained the support of key stakeholders and user groups for your proposals, including site users from outwith the immediate community.**

You can show this through letters of support from local authorities, relevant government agencies, and local community groups. Please submit any letters of support or endorsements with your application and record them on the checklist.

**Endorsement letters or e-mails have been received from the following:**

- 1. Scottish National Heritage**
- 2. Melvich Community Council**
- 3. The Sutherland Partnership**
- 4. Caithness Biodiversity Group**
- 5. Highland Biodiversity Officer**
- 6. North Sutherland Community Forestry Trust**
- 7. John Thurso, Local MP**
- 8. Rob Gibson, MSP**
- 9. Linda Munro, Councillor**

## Finishing Your Application

### **Applicant Signature**

An official of the applicant organisation should sign this declaration. It must be a different person to the main contact given in Section 1.

Part of the information that you give us will be held electronically. It will be used for administering and analysing applications.

I declare that:

The information given in this application and in any other documentation that supports this application is accurate.

Title Mr	First Name George	Surname Campbell
Position held in your organisation	Regional Director North Scotland	
Date	Signature	

## Contact

The National Forest Land Scheme Team  
Forestry Commission Scotland  
National Office  
231 Corstorphine Road  
Edinburgh  
EH12 7AT

Tel: 0131 334 0303

Fax: 0131 314 6152

E-mail: [fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

Web: [www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland)