

Review of Land Managed by Forestry Commission Scotland

Consultation Paper



Preface



We have 667,000 hectares of national forests in Scotland. This is nearly one tenth of our land area – or an area bigger than the whole of Aberdeenshire.

These national forests are owned by Scottish Ministers and are managed by Forestry Commission Scotland.

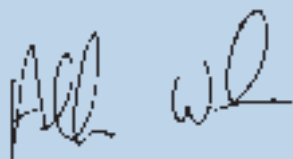
The national forests produce timber for Scotland's wood processing industries, providing direct employment for some 1,000 people as well as many more jobs for contractors, hauliers and others. They offer recreational space for the millions of people who visit them each year, including many tourists. They are homes for a rich variety of wildlife. Modern forestry is about sustainable delivery of these social, economic and environmental outputs.

The national forest estate we enjoy today has developed as a result of changing pressures and priorities:

- immediately after the First World War, the priority was to make sure that we had enough timber in this country to supply pit props to our coal mines, without relying entirely on imports;
- through the middle part of the twentieth century, the estate continued to expand, growing timber for industry and creating rural employment;
- the recreational potential of our forests and woodlands came to be recognised and, by the 1970s, there were hundreds of picnic sites, car parks and forest trails;
- between 1979 and 1997, well over 100,000 hectares of public forest were sold. Large-scale disposals were stopped after the change of Government in 1997; and
- with devolution in 1999, the ownership of Scotland's national forests passed to Scottish Ministers. Our *Scottish Forestry Strategy* (published in 2000) recognised the valuable role of these publicly owned forests.

We believe that publicly and privately owned forests all have an important role, but we also believe that our national forests should bring the widest possible benefits to all our communities. That is why we are undertaking this review. Rather than simply accepting the status quo, we want to look ahead, develop a vision for the future of our national forests, and make any changes that are necessary to improve their ability to deliver our priorities.

This consultation paper gives you the opportunity to express your views on the future of Scotland's national forests.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Allan Wilson'.

Allan Wilson MSP
Deputy Minister for Environment and Rural Development

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1.1 Purpose of review

Announcing this review in August 2003, Scottish Forestry Minister Allan Wilson said that:

“The purpose of this review is to take stock of our national forest estate and to ask whether its current size, nature and geographical distribution are appropriate for the 21st century.”

He asked for a report by the end of April 2004.

The terms of reference of the review are:

“To review the long-term role of Scotland’s national forest estate, making recommendations to Ministers about changes that can improve its ability to deliver the priorities set out in the Scottish Forestry Strategy, together with other Scottish Executive policies.”

This review is being carried out by a Working Group consisting of staff from the Forestry Commission, the Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), together with an external assessor from the forest industry. The Forestry Commission National Committee for Scotland is the Steering Group for the review. Membership of both groups is given in Annex 1.

The responses to this Consultation Paper will be central to this review. Responses should be made by 27 February 2004: further details are given in section 5. In addition, consultants are being commissioned to carry out an economic analysis in order to help identify ways to increase the contribution of the estate.

At present, responsibility for day-to-day management of Scotland’s national forest estate lies with Forest Enterprise Scotland, which is an agency within Forestry Commission Scotland. Once the outcome of this review is known, it will be necessary to consider what organisation and structural arrangements within Forestry Commission Scotland would be best for the future.

1.2 International context

As part of the UK, Scotland is committed to following the principles of sustainable forest management that were set out at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 and reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002. In addition, the UK is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity and this, too, has important implications for forestry in Scotland. These commitments form part of the foundation of the *Scottish Forestry Strategy*.

Scotland's national forests account for 36 per cent of Scotland's forest and woodland area. In Europe, excluding the Russian Federation, about half (51 per cent) the forest and other wooded land is in public ownership and half (49 per cent) in private ownership.

FOREST AREAS IN PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IN WESTERN EUROPE	
PORTUGAL	8%
AUSTRIA	18%
SWEDEN	20%*
SPAIN	22%
NORWAY	24%
FRANCE	25%
FINLAND	28%
DENMARK	32%
ITALY	34%
SCOTLAND	36%
UK (AS A WHOLE)	37%
BELGIUM	43%
NETHERLANDS	51%
GERMANY	54%
IRELAND	60%
SWITZERLAND	73%
GREECE	82%

*Since this figure was reported the state-owned forest company has acquired the assets of a major private forest company.

(Source: *State of European Forests 2003, Ministerial Convention on Protection of Forests in Europe*)

In recent years, a number of countries have reassessed the role of publicly owned forests as they have developed national forest programmes in response to Rio. In Denmark, for example, state forests will be used to implement principles of near-to-nature forest management: this means choosing species on the basis of ecological suitability, to promote the use of native species whilst ensuring economically sustainable wood production. In Japan, new policies have changed the primary function of national forests (which account for 30 per cent of all forest land) from timber production to environmental protection. In the USA, key objectives for public forest land include watershed management, conservation and recreation; public forest land represents 42 per cent of the total forest area, but just 11 per cent of the USA's annual timber harvest.

1.3 Scottish Executive priorities

The *Scottish Forestry Strategy* is the Scottish Executive's forestry policy. It sets out five strategic directions for Scottish forestry:

- to maximise the value to the Scottish economy of the wood resource becoming available for harvesting over the next 20 years;
- to create a diverse forest resource of high quality that will contribute to the economic needs of Scotland throughout the 21st century and beyond;
- to ensure that forestry in Scotland makes a positive contribution to the environment;
- to create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests in Scotland; and
- to help communities benefit from woods and forests.

Underpinning these strategic directions are five principles: sustainability, integration, ensuring positive value, securing community support, and recognising local diversity and distinctiveness.

The Scottish Executive's two cross-cutting aims are to promote sustainable development, combining economic growth with social and environmental justice; and to close the opportunity gap between the most disadvantaged and the average for Scotland. Effective implementation of the Scottish Forestry Strategy will help deliver these wider priorities, for example through the benefits this will bring for communities.

The role of land in the Scottish economy is changing rapidly. Common Agriculture Policy reform will take this further. While primary production remains important to the rural economy, land is also valued for other reasons, such as conservation, amenity and recreation. Apart from their intrinsic environmental value, these apparently non-productive functions have a critical economic role (providing a landscape that helps to attract tourists and inward investment) and a significant social role (providing green opportunities for healthy exercise and relaxation). Meanwhile, the land reform programme reflects the Scottish Executive's commitment to increase the social capital of rural communities.

The *Scottish Forestry Strategy* recognised that, although they bring wider public benefits, the environmental and social benefits from forestry do not necessarily generate cash income for the owner. Private owners have access to grants (through the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme) to help meet the costs they incur in providing public benefits. Scotland's national forests are managed in the public interest and Forestry Commission Scotland is expected to deliver public benefits as the key part of its job. For the next three years (2003/04 – 2005/06), the Scottish Executive has allocated an average cash sum of £24.5 million per year towards the cost of running the national forests. In addition, it has provided for a capital charge of £26.1 million per year (reflecting the notional cost of capital and other non-cash items such as depreciation).

1.4 Scotland's national forests

The *Scottish Forestry Strategy* confirmed the importance of both publicly and privately owned forests in Scotland. By far the largest area of publicly owned forests is the national forest estate, owned by Scottish Ministers and managed by Forestry Commission Scotland. This covers 667,000 hectares and forms Scotland's biggest landholding, representing 8.5 per cent of Scotland's land area and 36 per cent of Scotland's woodland and forests.

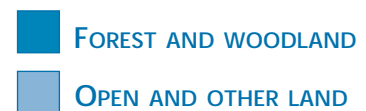
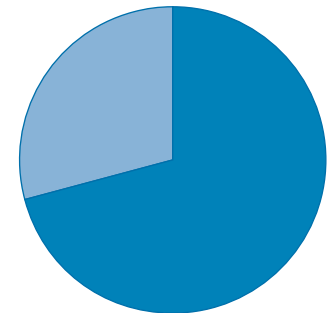
Map 1 on page 9 shows all Scotland's woods and forests and highlights the area that falls within the national forest estate. It also shows areas where management options are particularly constrained due to high wind exposure; there is a good deal of this exposed land because traditionally national forests were located on poorer ground, less suitable for agricultural production. As well as forest and woodland, the national forest estate includes significant areas of open land, such as hill tops, open land within the forest, and some agricultural land.

Multiple-benefit management

The management of Scotland's national forests is carried out within 15 professionally staffed Forest Districts which all benefit from the economies of scale of a large organisation. The underlying philosophy is that the national forests should be managed sustainably for multiple benefits – social, environmental and economic. Forest District Strategic Plans identify local priorities and programmes for action. These Plans are prepared in the context of the *Scottish Forestry Strategy*, other Executive policies, local stakeholders' views and the constraints of available funding.

The species composition and age structure of the national forests reflect the changing priorities outlined in the Minister's preface. Spruce species occupy about 60 per cent of the area; and about three-quarters of the estate was planted between 1950 and 1990.

LAND USE WITHIN THE NATIONAL FOREST ESTATE



SPECIES COMPOSITION	'000 HECTARES
SPRUCES	268.7
SCOTS PINE	47.5
OTHER CONIFERS	106.0
BROADLEAVES	28.9
TOTAL	451.1

AGE STRUCTURE	'000 HECTARES
PLANTED BEFORE 1950	36.2
1950-69	148.0
1970-89	195.8
1990-2003	71.1
TOTAL	451.1

The historical role of the national forest estate, and its potential for future development, is discussed in a recent publication, *Forest Renaissance*. This paper, commissioned jointly by the Forestry Commission and WWF, discussed the role of state forestry in Britain - looking back to 1919 and forward to 2050. It recognised the significant efforts that have been made, particularly in recent years, to deliver multiple-benefit forestry - producing social and environmental benefits, as well as timber. It also highlighted the achievement of securing certification of all national forests under the Forest Stewardship Council's certification scheme, and the award, by WWF, of its Gift to the Earth award to the Commission.

One aim of Forestry Commission Scotland is that its approach to land management should be recognised as an exemplar of best practice. It has sought to achieve this in various ways, ranging from the development of innovative planning tools and deer management techniques through to marketing of timber in ways that stimulate new private investment by harvesting and processing businesses.



Social benefits

All national forests are open for access by walkers, cyclists and horse riders, except where temporary diversions are needed in the interests of safety. As Map 2 opposite shows, they offer an extensive range of recreation facilities. In total, there are 400 forest walks, over 100 cycle trails, 11 horse riding routes, five forest drives, nearly 300 car parks and over 100 picnic sites. Many sites make specific provision for people of all abilities and, wherever possible, specialist interests are accommodated. Many of the facilities are concentrated within the six Forest Parks. There are also eight visitor centres, the largest of which - the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park Visitor Centre - lies in the heart of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park.

Woods and forests can also be used by schools and colleges as “living classrooms”, and a good deal of curriculum-related teaching resource material is available through the Forest Education Initiative www.foresteducation.org.uk

Recent investments in recreation facilities have included:

- the development of world-class mountain bike facilities (in Lochaber and Peebles – bringing immediate benefits to local tourist economies);
- new eco-tourism opportunities (including public viewing of otters on Skye, white-tailed eagles on Mull and ospreys in the Borders);
- the refurbishment of holiday cabins in the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park; and
- completion of a “Long Walk In”, connecting low-level woodland walks with the mountain path network in the Cairngorms National Park.

Such facilities allow people to enjoy outdoor activity in a stress-free environment. This brings direct health benefits. These benefits depend, however, upon forests being readily accessible. Map 2 shows that relatively few recreation facilities are located close to areas of high health or disability deprivation. Section 3.1 discusses ways in which this issue might be addressed.



Forestry Commission Scotland is also committed to working with local communities. Local communities and other stakeholders are encouraged to take part in discussions about Strategic Plans and Forest Design Plans. Communities may also, if they wish, become more actively involved in hands-on forest management through the development of partnership arrangements. There are now many community partnerships of various kinds throughout Scotland. The Commission's Forestry for People Panel has provided advice on how these processes could be further improved, and this issue is also discussed further in section 3.1.

In Loch Sunart oakwoods, to the south of Ardnamurchan, European funds were made available to help with the costs of removing invasive, non-native vegetation so as to restore the native woodland. At local meetings, people asked about how their community would benefit. As a result, local people were trained to undertake the work, which was organised to fit in with their other commitments, such as crofting. Enthusiastic local archaeologists have surveyed the woods, local schools have designed the interpretation material, and local tourism businesses have promoted these new attractions. The whole project is now overseen by a local Steering Group.

Environmental benefits

Through its management of Scotland's national forests, Forestry Commission Scotland is responsible for large numbers of designated conservation and heritage sites. These are all managed in accordance with plans agreed with Scottish Natural Heritage or Historic Scotland.

In addition, there are many non-designated sites of conservation and heritage value. These embrace much ancient and long-established woodland, as well as sites that carried woodland in the past. Map 3 opposite shows the location of ancient woodlands, long-established woodlands, other woodland present in 1750, together with the sites of such woodlands within national forests.

SOME CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE FEATURES IN SCOTLAND'S NATIONAL FORESTS

SITES OF SPECIAL SCIENTIFIC INTEREST (SSSIs)	39,293 HECTARES
ANCIENT WOODLANDS OF SEMI-NATURAL ORIGIN	16,917 HECTARES
LONG-ESTABLISHED (PRE 1860) WOODLANDS	648 HECTARES
ANCIENT WOODLAND SITES	21,330 HECTARES
LONG-ESTABLISHED WOODLAND SITES	45,704 HECTARES
OTHER WOOD OR WOODLAND SITES SHOWN ON 1750 MAP	7,570 HECTARES
FOREST PARKS	149,453 HECTARES
NUMBER OF SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS	300

A new GIS (Geographic Information System) called "Forester" is being used to pilot new methods of compiling and analysing environmental information, and reporting on progress against Biodiversity Action Plan targets. It will also be used to help monitor commitments in relation to implementation of the EU Water Framework Directive.

"150 ha of plantations have been removed from ancient woodland sites in the last five years.

"A further 127 ha of conifer removal on ancient woodland sites will be carried out by 2005.

"Our current plans indicate a commitment to restoration of about 50 per cent of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS).

"During 2001 management intentions for all PAWS sites in the District will be digitised onto GIS ..."

*Extract from section on evidence, targets and monitoring in
West Argyll Forest District Strategic Plan*

An important way of increasing the wider conservation and heritage value of the estate is through "restructuring". This is a design process that improves the structure and composition of uniform plantation forests. It is a key element in creating more

diverse habitats and more attractive landscapes. It involves careful analysis of the landform, and conservation and heritage potential of the site. This forms the basis for long-term felling plans, and for decisions about suitable species for replanting and about which areas (for example, beside burns or lochs) should be left unplanted.

“By Increasing naturalness we mean trying to work with rather than against natural processes and so develop a forest that is both better for wildlife and also more attractive...”

“The plantation forestry that established most of our forests today stressed a managed approach of intervention and manipulation: site improvement, mono-cultures, crop improvement and use of exotics. We now see real benefits (financial as well as ecological) of mimicking natural processes and adopting low-input, low-impact systems of management.”

Extract from Moray Forest District Strategic Plan, Consultation Draft July 2001

On suitable sites, managers may decide not to clear-fell when the trees are mature but to practise an alternative form of management called ‘continuous-cover forestry’. Trees are still harvested, but on a smaller scale so that the visual and ecological impact is reduced and natural regeneration can be encouraged. This also leads to the development of a more varied forest structure. One important reason for improving forest structure is to create a more interesting environment for recreational activities, with associated benefits in terms of health and tourism.

The size of the estate means that national forests make more contribution to implementing Biodiversity Action Plans than any other landholding in Scotland. Demonstration projects show how environmental gains can be delivered through positive management. The continuing challenge is to secure the necessary resources to allow more ambitious programmes to be undertaken, and this is discussed further in section 3.2 and section 4.3.

Glen Affric National Nature Reserve in Inverness-shire is the largest Caledonian Forest Reserve within the national forest estate. At 14,500 hectares, it includes native pinewoods, with birch, alder, aspen, holly, juniper, rowan and willow. In some areas non-native conifers planted in the past are being cut out from among the native trees.



Economic benefits

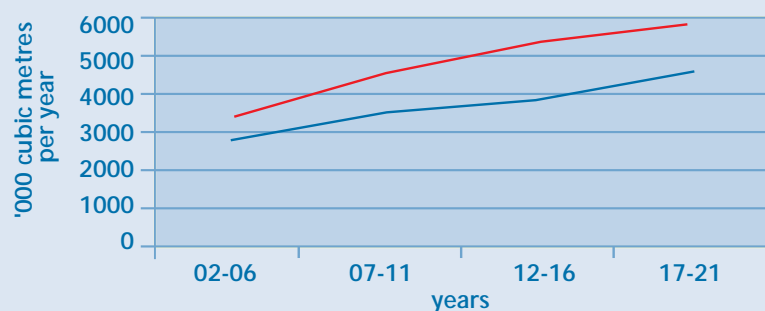
Scotland's forests, and the processing industries that rely on their wood, employ about 10,000 people. There are many more jobs in the associated industries, for example servicing machinery and adding value to forest products through secondary processing. Overall, forestry contributes £130 million to the Scottish economy, and wood processing contributes £430 million per year; for comparison, agriculture contributes £880 million per year (from 80 per cent of Scotland's land) and the total for all industries is £64 billion per year.

The traditional role of forestry employment has changed considerably over the years, particularly with the mechanisation of forest operations. As new technologies and markets emerge, and existing markets adapt to external pressures, changes within the industry are likely to continue.

KEY

- National Forest
- Private Forests

FORECAST OF SOFTWOOD AVAILABILITY



Scotland's national forests are a major source of wood, producing over 3 million cubic metres per year: this is about 60 per cent of Scotland's wood production. It is unusual for the public sector to play such a significant part in the market place. However, the wood production potential of the estate is important. It provides a reliable source of raw material for industry, and the ability to use national forests to guarantee delivery of significant volumes of wood has been a critical factor in attracting new processing capacity to Scotland (with investments of over £1 billion in the past 20 years). Although their relative significance will decline as more wood from privately owned forests comes onto the market, national forests



will remain important in this context. They are also a major source of certified wood, carrying the assurance of coming from forests that are sustainably managed.

Timber sales also provide a key source of income for Forestry Commission Scotland, helping to pay for the management of the estate.

Map 4 on page 18 shows the location of the main wood processing sites in Scotland. It also shows the distribution of a wide range of other forestry-related businesses, including smaller-scale processors, harvesting contractors, forest managers and associated businesses. This is derived from information supplied by the Scottish Forest Industries Cluster; more information about the Cluster can be found on www.forestryscotland.com

The creation of economic opportunities is of particular importance in more fragile rural areas. As manager of Scotland's national forests, Forestry Commission Scotland has a critical role to play in fostering and encouraging new developments and strengthening the rural development role of national forests. It can do this by structuring contracts (for timber sale, harvesting or management work) to suit small-scale businesses, and by giving greater weight to local considerations.

Scotland's national forests also contribute to local economies through tourism and recreation. The economic importance of recreation facilities was highlighted during the Foot and Mouth Disease crisis. Temporary closure of the forests led to an outcry from tourism-related businesses that depended upon their customers making use of opportunities for recreational activity in national forests.

The issue of how the estate might do more to help create economic opportunities is considered further in section 3.3.

At the heart of this review lies the question of whether the current size, nature and geographical distribution of Scotland's national forests is appropriate for the 21st century. The answer

to this question depends upon their future role and purpose. The overall vision of the *Scottish Forestry Strategy* is that: "Scotland will be renowned as a land of fine trees, woods and forests which strengthen the economy, which enrich the natural environment and which people enjoy and value. High-quality trees, woods and forests can help make Scotland a better place for people to live in and work in and to visit. Increasingly, confidence in the future of forestry will encourage investment that will benefit current and future generations."

The *Scottish Forestry Strategy* said "public-sector ownership of forests in Scotland is important where it can bring public benefits that could otherwise be lost" and recognised the role of these forests in "developing and demonstrating good forest practice".

A proposed vision for Scotland's national forests is that:
"They will benefit everyone in Scotland, promoting vibrant and healthy communities, enriching natural environments and creating opportunities for economic development."

If this vision is realised, it should be possible to say that:

"National forests benefit everyone in Scotland...

"Everyone who wants to can easily visit a national forest. National forests are part of a better Scotland for people to live in, work in and visit. People have favourite woods to enjoy, with special trees and places full of history and meaning.

"Promoting vibrant and healthy communities...

"National forests are agents of change for communities, fostering greater participation in community activities and encouraging healthy lifestyles. Scotland's national forests help refresh our towns and cities. Communities are involved in their local national forests and can participate more actively





Question 1:

We propose a vision for Scotland's national forests. This is that:

"They will benefit everyone in Scotland, promoting vibrant and healthy communities, enriching natural environments and creating opportunities for economic development."

**Do you agree with this proposed vision?
If not, what changes should be made?**

in their management, if they wish to do so.

"Enriching natural environments..."

"All national forests are attractive - valued by people and wildlife. An increasing area is of national or international importance because of its conservation or heritage value. Scotland's national forests are a haven for rare and beautiful wildlife. Internationally important Atlantic oakwoods hug the lochs and shores; and great Caledonian pinewoods extend from valleys to natural mountain tree-lines, with landscape-scale natural forests forming an integral part of Scotland's natural heritage and offering unique opportunities to enjoy it.

"Creating opportunities for economic development..."

"A wide variety of jobs are based upon national forests. These include jobs in the wood-processing industries, in the tourist industry, and in forest management. National forests help underpin Scotland as the centre of the UK timber industry. Significant new uses of wood, including production of high-specification, engineered wood products and green energy, are firmly established. Scotland's national forests have helped to inspire a renaissance in the use of Scottish wood in our homes and our workplaces."

3.1 Promoting vibrant and healthy communities

Community involvement

Since the *Scottish Forestry Strategy* was published in 2000, much has happened to take forward the social forestry agenda in Scotland. The role of community involvement is becoming more widely recognised and more extensively practised. Forestry Commission Scotland has benefited from the advice of its Forestry for People Panel. A report (*Responding to the Challenge: Forest Enterprise and Community Involvement in Scotland*) by a consultant with extensive overseas experience has highlighted current good practice and challenged the organisation to do more.

Current Forestry Commission Scotland policy, which is modelled on best practice developed as part of the land reform process, is to give local people opportunities for close involvement in decisions which affect their community. In recent years, much has been done to develop community consultation and to facilitate community involvement. In some places community facilitators are employed; in others, forest rangers play an important part in working with communities.

There is, in effect, a range of opportunities, recognising that different communities have different needs and aspirations - and that these may vary over time. Thus, there is scope for consultation over plans about the future shape and design of local woodlands; and there are mechanisms for developing partnership agreements (which may be informal, or more formal and legally binding) to encourage greater active participation.

An important aspect of this work has been the need to train staff, to give them skills and confidence in working more closely with communities. Related to this has been the time commitment, on the part of both communities and Forestry Commission Scotland staff. This has been given willingly, but is nevertheless a contribution that should not be underestimated and that needs to be taken into account when considering future developments.



Question 2:

Should Forestry Commission Scotland do more to encourage local community involvement in the management of national forests? If so, how?

Question 3:

Should local communities be able to purchase or lease woodland (or other national forest assets) that are not identified as “surplus”? If so, what criteria should apply?

Whilst many communities welcome the opportunity to participate in the management of national forests without the expense or responsibility of ownership, others believe strongly that there would be clear benefits from ownership or leases. Ownership benefits would include the ability to tap into a wider range of funding and focus on local priorities, as well as the long-term security that ownership brings. This would also contribute to the aim of the land reform agenda to increase the diversity of land ownership in Scotland.

Under current policies, however, only surplus land can be sold to communities. Surplus land is defined as land that makes little net contribution to the Forestry Commission’s public policy objectives. (This includes some agricultural land, land associated with buildings, other un-wooded land and relatively isolated areas of forest land which are expensive to manage.)

Development land is also sold when this is in the public interest. Where public access is important, land is only sold if there is a formal access agreement in place. If communities are interested in purchasing surplus land, and can demonstrate its special value to the community, they are given a first option to buy, at the market price. A number of communities have taken advantage of this opportunity.

Recreation

Woodland recreation can offer opportunities for physical activity, for peace and quiet, for enjoying nature and for education. While the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 created a right of responsible access to land, facilities are not always available. National forests can provide paths and picnic places, as well as more sophisticated interpretative facilities, backed up by professional rangers. Furthermore, since the forests belong to the nation, visitors know that they are unreservedly welcome.

Map 2 on page 12 shows, however, that the match between the location of national forest recreation facilities and Scotland’s population centres is not strong. This is even more striking when the location of national forests is compared with areas suffering the highest levels of health and disability deprivation.

For many people, the recreation facilities in Scotland's national forests are difficult to reach without a car. This has important consequences in terms of how Scotland's national forests might help to close the opportunity gap and combat social exclusion.

Forestry Commission Scotland's website www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland allows people to identify recreation facilities that it manages within stated distances of a chosen point on the map. From central Glasgow, there are 25 facilities within 50 kilometres. Of these, 13 are more than 30 kilometres away; 8 are 20-30 kilometres away; 4 are 10-20 kilometres away and none is within 10 kilometres.

The present distribution of Scotland's national forests limits their capacity to provide recreational and learning facilities near towns. The inequalities this creates could be addressed by creating more woodland opportunities close to towns.

This has been demonstrated at Callendar Wood, in Falkirk, which is located in the heart of a heavily populated area. Forestry Commission Scotland has managed this wood since 1999, rejuvenating the path network and working with local people to make it more attractive and interesting. While newly planted woodland can provide some recreation facilities, such as paths and picnic areas, mature woodland - such as the Callendar Wood - can usually absorb more people and give them a greater sense of shelter, peace and quiet.

A recent conference on Woods In Around Towns (proceedings on www.forestry.gov.uk) confirmed the scale and significance of such opportunities, and highlighted the importance of working with other partners, such as local authorities, health authorities, development agencies and bodies such as the Central Scotland Forest Trust.

Question 4:

Should Forestry Commission Scotland seek to provide new opportunities for recreation in national forests in and around towns and cities? If so, how should priorities be set?





Question 5:

Should Forestry Commission Scotland undertake a number of large-scale, long-term environmental projects (such as forest landscape restoration, or water catchment or wilderness projects) on the national forest estate? If so, how should priorities be set?

3.2 Enriching natural environments

As explained in section 1.4, much is already happening to enhance the environmental value of Scotland's national forests, but there is scope for more. In its conclusion, the publication *Forest Renaissance* accepted that much has been achieved over the past ten years, but argued that:

"... the Forestry Commission should continue with more radical changes, leading to a genuine renaissance in the extent and quality of forests and woodlands ..."

Some of the ideas put forward were:

- **Forest Landscape Restoration**, including "... development of state forests within the Central Scotland Forest and around other major urban areas, along with further extension of native woodlands in Highland Scotland..."
- **a landscape-scale approach**, emphasising a "shift from forest sites to forested landscapes". This was seen as critical in biodiversity conservation, with the authors adding that competing land uses can be addressed and public participation more fully embraced at this scale;
- **recreating a wilderness experience**, allowing forests to develop natural characteristics - for example, through the re-creation of large core areas of native woodland (10,000 hectares or more), surrounded by buffer zones of multi-purposes forest types; and
- **beyond certification**, providing a leadership role in promoting forest certification.

There is also increasing recognition of the value of cultural landscapes, reflecting human interaction with the land over many centuries. These landscapes embrace ancient monuments and similar artefacts, but go further by setting them in their wider context. The national forest estate itself represents an inheritance from twentieth-century forestry, and overlies earlier cultural landscapes. Its scale is such that it could play an important role in the conservation of cultural landscapes.

Realising these environmental ambitions might involve adding land to the national forest estate, for example, where large, strategically located areas of land become available, in order to secure cost-effective, integrated management at the landscape scale. As an alternative to acquisition or lease, this might be achieved through management agreements; perhaps suitable adjacent land is already in public ownership and managed by other bodies such as the Scottish Executive Environment & Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) or Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Such integration would embrace forested and non-wooded land, and provide a more representative range of native woodland types on the national forest estate.

In some places, these environmental ambitions might be realised through radical changes in management of the existing estate. For example, having already substantially increased native woodland creation in west Knapdale, Forestry Commission Scotland is now considering whether to extend this approach throughout the whole area of 4000 hectares.

Such projects would bring undoubted environmental benefits, on a scale that should achieve international recognition. There would, however, also be both capital costs and the expense of long-term management input without any prospect of significant revenue streams.

3.3 Creating economic opportunities

Section 1.4 outlined the role of national forests as a major source of raw material for Scotland's wood-processing industries. A key priority is to harvest timber in accordance with published production forecasts so that the processing industries can predict future supplies with confidence. Future availability of wood supply will also be affected by forest management decisions. For example, restructuring policies have had a marked impact on the harvesting profile of many forests. Decisions to lengthen rotations on environmental grounds, not to restock with conifers, or even to withdraw from wood production in areas that are expensive to harvest, would all tend to reduce production.

Question 6:

Should Forestry Commission Scotland become more ambitious in its environmental work on the national forest estate, including – in particular – delivery against Biodiversity Action Plans, improving the biodiversity of conifer forests and enhancing the contribution that national forests make to Scotland's landscapes? If so, how should priorities be set?

Question 7:

Should Forestry Commission Scotland do more to recognise and conserve the cultural heritage value of the national forest estate? If so, how should priorities be set?

Question 8:

What emphasis should be given to the strategic role of national forests in the supply of timber to Scotland's wood-processing industries? What are the priorities?

Question 9:

Should sustaining and developing local economies be a key objective for the management of national forests? If so, how should this be done?

It is vital that the industry is presented with a clear and accurate analysis of any changes in future softwood availability. This is achieved through regular updating of the forecasts. Forestry Commission Scotland will continue to provide the wood-processing industry with five-year forecasts of wood supply, and will continue to consult the industry about changes that could significantly reduce the volume of wood supplied from national forests over the short and medium term.

Questions about the role of the Forestry Commission, as a seller of timber from national forests throughout Britain, were addressed in a recent discussion paper presented by the Forestry and Timber Association www.forestryandtimber.org. This Association represents the interests of private forest owners and managers. The discussion paper (*A level playing field for forestry*) said:

"FC is the dominant 'commercial' operator, presently producing roughly half the timber being harvested within GB. Competition should be the driver of both the efficiency and vibrancy of any sectoral business environment. However, it is important that such competition is, and can be seen to be, fair and reasonable. A dominant player in any industrial sector will inevitably exert a strong influence on the development and functioning of that sector and, rightly or wrongly, will be seen by some to distort business activity within that sector."

Section 1.4 also explained that the potential contribution of national forests to local economies extends beyond wood supply. The way in which contracts are structured and awarded can be critical for local businesses. The national forest estate also provides opportunities for a wide range of non-timber business activity, particularly in the tourism sector, but also as a location for other commercial activity (ranging from making films to adventure training).

4.1 Size and distribution of the estate

A more dynamic approach?

As the Minister explained when announcing this review, it is important to ask questions about the size, nature and geographical distribution of the national forest estate. Changes in the size and distribution can potentially be achieved by adding land to the estate, by selling it, or by a combination of the two. With a few notable exceptions (such as Callendar Wood in Falkirk), little land has been added to the national forest estate over the past 20 years. Over the past five years, sales have averaged 1,700 hectares per year, but this is now reducing. A more dynamic approach would allow such changes to take place on a greater scale.

Adding to the national forest estate?

Land could be added to the estate where this would bring significant public benefits. Acquisition is not the only option. Other possibilities include long-term leases and management agreements. Thus, for example, Forestry Commission Scotland might agree with another public body to bring land into the national forest estate. Clearly, the legal arrangement and the financial implications would need careful consideration, but there could be positive opportunities if this approach were pursued.

Traditionally, land acquired for management by the Forestry Commission was bare, without any trees, but this need not be the case. Mature woodlands can offer a wider range of public benefits in a shorter time scale. Particular opportunities may also arise in areas of derelict land, where Forestry Commission Scotland is able to call upon the technical expertise of scientists in the Commission's research agency, Forest Research.

As well as addressing technical issues, Forestry Commission Scotland could work with local communities so that local people become stakeholders in the new national forest.

Question 10 (a):

Should there be a more dynamic approach to the size and distribution of the national forest estate?

Question 10 (b):

In what circumstances should land be added to the national forest estate? What criteria might be applied?

Question 10 (c):

In what circumstances should national forest estate land be sold? What criteria might be applied?

Thus, land could be added to the national forest estate in a number of ways. Clearly, there would be funding implications. In addition to any capital cost, future management costs would also need to be taken into account.

Sale of national forest estate land

At present, national forest land is only sold in restricted circumstances, such as the sale of surplus land or the sale of land for development. If this policy were relaxed, it would open the way to selling more land, perhaps to communities that wished to acquire it, to neighbouring landowners who wished to consolidate their estates or to local businesses seeing new opportunities. It would also be one way of generating cash; and if areas that are expensive to manage were sold, this would help reduce the cost of running the estate.

On the other hand, the history of disposals in the 1980s and 1990s revealed that there can be major local opposition to the sale of national forests. Now that there is to be a right of response access, fear of loss of access should no longer be a factor - but there may nevertheless be concerns about a less welcoming approach, or fewer opportunities for community involvement. Another consideration is that when productive forest is sold the future revenue-earning potential of the estate is reduced. If the national forest estate were entirely orientated towards social and environmental outputs, without any significant timber production, then there would be no timber income to help offset the cost of managing for social and environmental outputs.

During a review of Forest Enterprise in 1999, it was suggested that there should be increased disposals of areas of forest with low public benefit – and that the proceeds should be invested in developing the social and environmental value of the estate (either through acquisitions or other major projects). If this policy were implemented, fairly large areas would need to be sold to realise significant amounts of cash, with perhaps 1500 hectares of remote forest being sold to realise £1 million.

4.2 Management of the estate

Management decisions will also determine the nature of the national forest estate in the future. As explained in section 1.4, Forestry Commission Scotland's multiple-benefit management philosophy fits well with the Scottish Forestry Strategy and international commitments to sustainable forest management.

In some places, however, there are difficulties with the current approach. Typically, these are areas that were originally acquired and planted with a view to sustained timber production, but where it is doubtful that this continues to make sense, for example, because the forests are located a long way from markets (or on islands). The cost of transport means that the overall cost of wood production exceeds potential revenue, given current low timber prices. Similar considerations may apply on sites that are highly exposed. (As shown by comparing Maps 1 and 4, there is a fairly high coincidence of exposed sites and sites that are comparatively remote from markets.) On these difficult sites, even if the trees are harvested, questions arise about whether the site should be restocked and, if so, whether wood production should continue to be an objective of management.

Possible responses to this problem include:

- Deferring harvesting (and so also defer associated roading costs). This has been normal practice during short-term price troughs in the past. There are forests where this policy cannot continue indefinitely without risking windblow damage. Such delays can also compromise restructuring plans. In addition, they may have a negative impact on local employment. On the other hand, delayed felling can be beneficial from the point of view of biodiversity.
- Developing local markets to reduce transport costs. This may be possible on a small scale, or over time, particularly if wood-fuel options become more economic. However, at present efficient, large-scale processing depends upon transporting wood to major mills.

Question 11:

In what circumstances should there be a radical re-appraisal of management options in national forests, for example, in relation to wood production objectives?

- Minimal intervention, allowing the woodlands to take their natural course without resorting to felling and restocking. This would lead to windblow and areas of forest could become impenetrable for a period of years. Some people would probably find this lack of management unattractive; others might welcome it as a “near to nature” approach to management, albeit with non-native species.
- Changing the objectives of management so that the focus is on conservation and landscape. Options include leaving the ground unplanted and accepting whatever comes in the way of natural regeneration; or converting the land to native woodland. (Where deforestation is considered, formal environmental impact assessment is required under EU law.)

The third and fourth options would mean accepting that regular wood production was no longer a significant objective of management.

4.3 Funding

Most of the cost of running Scotland's national forests is met by funding from the Scottish Executive and from timber income. In cash terms, the Scottish Executive provided £26.0 million in 2002/03, and sales of timber yielded £34.0 million (partly offset by costs of harvesting).

The income and expenditure account for 2002/03, which takes account of resource costs (noted below) as well as cash, is as follows:

	£ million
Operating income	
Sales of timber	34.0
Other	5.4
Operating expenditure	(69.2)
Net operating cost	(29.8)
Net social and environmental expenditure	(7.1)
Surplus on sale of properties	0.2
Notional cost of capital	(28.7)
Net cost for year	(65.4)

(In these accounts, operating expenditure included a £12.0 million revaluation reserve adjustment. The notional cost of capital is based on 3.5 per cent of the average net asset value. At 31 March 2003, the value of the forest estate was £357.7 million.)

Timber prices have been at an all-time low for the last four years. On average, timber prices are about half what they were when they peaked in 1995, and (in crude terms) a 50 per cent recovery would eliminate the operating deficit. Unfortunately, however, there is no immediate prospect of such a recovery. While the forestry industry is accustomed to cyclical fluctuations in timber price, the depth and duration of the current trough is such that there are fears that it represents a structural shift in prices rather than a short-term price shock.

Question 12 (a):

Do you have any views on the creation of a challenge fund for special projects aimed at significantly increasing public benefits from the national forest estate?

Question 12 (b):

Should this be funded in part by any ring-fenced income derived from the sale of national forest estate assets?

The Scottish Executive's Spending Review 2002 made the following provision for funding the national forests over the next three years:

£ MILLION	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
NET OPERATING COST	14.9	14.9	14.9
RECREATION, CONSERVATION, HERITAGE	6.9	8.9	9.1
NEW PLANTING	0.5	0.5	0.5
OTHER CAPITAL SPENDING	1.3	1.3	1.3
SALES OF SURPLUS ASSETS	-0.5	-0.5	-0.5
CAPITAL AND OTHER NON-CASH CHARGES	26.1	26.1	26.1
TOTAL	49.2	51.2	51.4

The Commission has worked hard to increase operational efficiency in order to reduce the cost of running the estate, while at the same time responding to increasing public expectations with respect to its social and environmental objectives. In practice, a good deal of work (such as attending community meetings) has been undertaken voluntarily by staff outwith their normal working hours.

It is almost inevitable, however, that the cost of implementing imaginative new ideas for improving the social and environmental value of the estate will exceed the amount of cash that is available. One solution that has been suggested is to "ring-fence" the budget for social and environmental work, so that it is not cut when timber prices fall. In practice, however, this would mean that other publicly financed programmes would need to meet any deficit caused by a fall in timber prices.

An alternative approach might be to create a challenge fund for projects aimed at enhancing the social and environmental value of the estate. This might be funded, for example, from the proceeds of disposals, from earmarked money provided by the Scottish Executive, and from contributions from external funding sources. Forestry Commission Scotland's Forest District Managers would then bid for funds from this challenge fund to

cover the costs of special projects (which might, or might not, include acquisitions) aimed at significantly increasing the social or environmental value of the estate. Funds would then be allocated to the highest-ranking projects.

4.4 Partnerships

In recent years, partnerships have become an increasingly important feature in the management of Scotland's national forests. They are an important agent for change - partly because they can inject additional funding, but also because they can bring new ideas and expertise. Some partnerships make use of other sources of public money, such as European funding. Others have developed in response to lottery fund programmes. Private-sector investors have also shown a willingness to contribute to worthwhile projects that bring clear public benefits.

Money from BP is currently helping to fund the creation of native woodland on newly acquired land in Aberdeenshire and woodland establishment in central Scotland.

European Regional Development Fund money has contributed towards the costs of conservation and recreation projects in the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park, and to the "7stanes" recreational and heritage project across the south of Scotland.

EU LIFE funds have contributed to restoration of Caledonian pinewoods and Atlantic oakwoods.

There are, however, legal constraints, stemming from the forestry legislation, that constrain the Forestry Commission's ability to become involved in certain types of partnership. For example, there can be difficulties in establishing joint ventures that might otherwise be used (for example) to help fund new forest holiday cabin sites. And there are also legal constraints that prevent the Forestry Commission being associated with partnerships whose remit extends beyond the promotion of

Question 13:

How should Forestry Commission Scotland take forward its approaches to working in partnership in order further to develop the national forest estate?



Question 14:

How should the national forest estate be used to take forward wider Executive priorities, for example, in relation to renewable energy, rural housing, health and tourism?

Question 15:

How should we ensure that everyone is aware of what Scotland's national forests have to offer?

forestry: this has prevented initiatives aimed at a broader, multi-disciplinary approach to land holding and land management.

Partnerships, some of which may be underpinned by legal agreements, are also an important means of making full use of the national forest estate to deliver wider Executive priorities. In relation to renewable energy, they can provide supplies of wood for fuel and locations for wind farms. Working with Communities Scotland, Forestry Commission Scotland is seeking to identify sites suitable for development for social housing. As discussed in section 3.1, it will be necessary to work with a wide range of partners if full use is to be made of the national forests as a resource for healthy living.

Another requirement for effective partnership working, and for ensuring full use of Scotland's national forests, is that everyone is aware of what they have to offer. This can be a particular challenge outwith the rural areas where Forestry Commission Scotland is long established.

4.5 Priorities for change

Forestry is a long-term process and there are undoubted benefits in pursuing a measured, long-term approach to management. On the other hand, social demands and economic pressures tend to change much more rapidly and it is difficult to anticipate the issues that are likely to be of concern in 50 years' time (when trees that are planted now may be mature).

Financial resources also affect change. As discussed in section 4.3, financial resources are limited and it is not necessarily going to be possible to implement every worthwhile idea that is put forward to improve the national forest estate.

An important issue will, therefore, be to determine priorities for change. This requires consideration of where there is need for a more rapid approach to bring about elements of the proposed vision outlined in section 2. It may also mean trying to express

this vision in more detail, and attempting to quantify what needs to be done. There would need to be a clear and transparent process for undertaking such work.

Another related issue is that of attempting to strike a balance between national and local public interests. Tension could arise in a number of ways. For example, if national forest land were sold in one region in Scotland, local people may argue that the proceeds should be reinvested locally, rather than being used to fund priority work in other parts of Scotland. Where a local community group seeks ownership of national forest land, other people might be concerned if they thought that this could reduce their ability to enjoy or make use of it. Consideration needs to be given to the balance between such issues, and approaches that might be adopted to try to resolve them.

Question 16:

Given the long-term nature of forestry, the proposed vision will largely be delivered through gradual, evolutionary change. Is there a need for a more rapid approach to bring about some elements of the vision and, if so, what are they?

Question 17:

Is it useful to try to express the proposed vision in more detail, perhaps quantifying the size, mapping the geographical distribution and describing the nature of Scotland's national forests at some date in the future (say 2025, or 2050)? If so, how should this be done?

Question 18:

What approaches might be adopted to strike a balance between local and national interests?

Membership of Working Group and Steering Group

Working Group

David Henderson-Howat (Chair), Forestry Commission

Alan Hampson, Scottish Natural Heritage

Simon Hodge, Forest District Manager,
Forestry Commission Scotland

Bill Mason, Forestry Commission Research Agency

Ian Melville, Countryside and Natural Heritage Unit, Scottish
Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department

Pat Snowdon, Economist, Forestry Commission

Frank Strang, Head of Land Use and Rural Policy Division,
Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department

Peter Weston, Forestry Commission

Peter Wilson, Forest Industries Development Council

Kenny Murray (Secretary), Forestry Commission Scotland

Steering Group

(Forestry Commission National Committee for Scotland)

Andrew Raven (Chair), Non-Executive Forestry Commissioner

Bob McIntosh, Director, Forestry Commission Scotland,
Forestry Commissioner

Hugh Insley, Acting Chief Executive, Forest Enterprise Scotland

Paul Snaith, Head of Corporate Services,
Forestry Commission Scotland

John Graham, Head of Scottish Executive Environment
and Rural Affairs Department

Martin Gale, Non-Executive Forestry Commissioner

Simon Pepper OBE, Non-Executive Committee Member

Kenny Murray (Secretary), Forestry Commission Scotland

References and sources of further information

Documents referred to in this Consultation Paper

**Forests for Scotland – the Scottish Forestry Strategy*,
Scottish Executive, 2000

**Forest Renaissance. The role of state forestry in Britain, 1919-2050: a discussion paper*, M. Garforth and N. Dudley,
Forestry Commission and WWF, 2003.

A level playing field for forestry,
Forestry and Timber Association, 2003

Other sources of information

**Native Woodlands in Scotland*, Forestry Commission, 1998

**Delivering the Scottish Forestry Strategy*,
Scottish Executive, 2002

**Forestry Statistics 2002*, Forestry Commission, 2002

**National Inventory of Woodland and Trees, Scotland*,
Forestry Commission, 2002

**Scotland's trees, woods and forests*, Forestry Commission, 2002

**Scotland's Forest industries*, Scottish Enterprise, 2003

*These publications can be viewed on the Forestry Commission Scotland website www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland

Please express your views on these questions, using the proforma attached to this Consultation Paper if you wish. You will also find a downloadable version of this document at: www.forestry.gov.uk/consultations

There is, of course, no need to comment on every issue. However, if you wish to expand on your response on a separate sheet of paper please ensure that you state the question number you are responding to. You are also welcome to raise other issues that you consider important in this context. We may need to contact you to discuss any new issues that you identify.

To help you think about these questions further, and discuss them with others, the Working Group will be organising a series of meetings in different parts of the country:

LOCATION	DATE	TIME	CONTACT NUMBER FOR FURTHER DETAILS
Oban	19/01/04	14.00-16.30	01631 566155
Dundee	20/01/04	18.00-20.00	01738 442830
Dingwall	22/01/04	14.00-16.00	01349 862144
Newtown St Boswells	23/01/04	14.00-16.00	01750 721120
Newton Stewart	26/01/04	to be confirmed	01671 402420
Glasgow	28/01/04	18.15-20.30	0141 941 2611
Inverurie	29/01/04	13.45-16-45	01466 794542

A summary of stakeholder comments will also be published on the Forestry Commission's website.

Please submit your responses to this review by 27 February 2004.

They should be sent to:
Kenny Murray,
Forestry Commission Scotland,
231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh EH12 7AT
or by email to: kenny.murray@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

All responses will be made available to anyone who wishes to read them, **unless confidentiality is specifically requested.**

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS

Please express your views in the white boxes below.

NAME:

ADDRESS:

DAYTIME TEL:

E-MAIL:

Question 1: We propose a vision for Scotland's national forests. This is that they will benefit everyone in Scotland, promoting vibrant and healthy communities, enriching natural environments and creating opportunities for economic development. Do you agree with this proposed vision? If not, what changes should be made?

Question 2: Should Forestry Commission Scotland do more to encourage local community involvement in the management of national forests? If so, how?

Question 3: Should local communities be able to purchase or lease woodland (or other national forest assets) that are not identified as "surplus"? If so, what criteria should apply?

Question 4: Should Forestry Commission Scotland seek to provide new opportunities for recreation in national forests in and around towns and cities? If so, how should priorities be set?

Question 5: Should Forestry Commission Scotland undertake a number of large-scale, long-term environmental projects (such as forest landscape restoration, or water catchment or wilderness projects) on the national forest estate? If so, how should priorities be set?

Question 6: Should Forestry Commission Scotland become more ambitious in its environmental work on the national forest estate, including – in particular – delivery against Biodiversity Action Plans, improving the biodiversity of conifer forests and enhancing the contribution that national forests make to Scotland’s landscapes? If so, how should priorities be set?

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Any additional comments:

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