

Red Squirrel Strongholds

An analysis of responses
to consultation

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Introduction

A consultation on 'red squirrel strongholds' was launched on 25 March 2009 and ran until 26 June 2009. The consultation introduced the concept of red squirrel strongholds as sites for the enhanced management of forests for red squirrels, and presented them within the context of wider work to conserve the red squirrel in Scotland.

The consultation explained that strongholds are part of the Scottish Government's strategy to secure the future of the red squirrel in Scotland. The document asked for views on the proposals. Overall, the consultation aimed to find out whether an appropriate suite of stronghold sites had been identified, together with suitable management prescriptions and support, to give red squirrels a future in mainland Scotland, in the eventuality that grey squirrels spread throughout the country.

This analysis of responses describes the feedback that we received from stakeholders and explains what we plan to do next. The work will be led by Forestry Commission Scotland in association with Scottish Natural Heritage and other parts of the Scottish Government.

The consultation process

The consultation was published on the Forestry Commission Scotland website and stakeholders were alerted to the consultation by means of a flyer, which was distributed electronically and by post.

Stakeholders were identified using lists of forestry stakeholders and grant-scheme applicants held by Forestry Commission Scotland; by seeking local contacts from Forestry Commission Scotland Conservancy offices; and by asking partner organisations for the names of relevant stakeholders. The consultation was advertised through a press release, and by providing articles and PR support to landowner-interest publications. The consultation was listed on the Scottish Government Consultations web pages.

A total of 42 responses were received. A list of respondents is contained at Annex 1.

The type of respondents are as follows:

- Stronghold manager 6 (14%)

- Other individual or land manager 14 (33%)
- Organisation 22 (52%)

This report does not include an analysis of the responses to an earlier, informal consultation, where feedback was received from around 50 owners and managers of candidate stronghold sites, plus managers of sites on the national forest estate. The information provided during that phase was used to develop the proposals to formal consultation stage.

Respondents were asked the following questions:

- Do you agree with the rationale and justification for strongholds? If not, why not?
- Do you think that the management approach for strongholds is appropriate to achieve their objectives? If not, why not?
- Do you have comments on the suitability of any particular site or sites to act as a stronghold? Please state which site(s).
- Do you think that the boundary of any particular site or sites should be changed? Please state which site(s), how the boundary should be changed, and why.
- Do you think that the proposed support for management will be sufficient to achieve stronghold objectives? If not, what support is needed?

Key findings and our future actions

The key findings (*and our response to these findings*) are as follows:

- There was high level of support for the concept of strongholds. *We therefore intend to make strongholds central to our plans for using habitat management to conserve red squirrels.*
- There was concern that the management approach described for strongholds would make them incompatible with wider biodiversity objectives, particularly those involving the development of forest habitat networks, and those where large-seeded broadleaves were an integral component. *We will work with stakeholders to develop principles and management guidance to help managers to achieve stronghold outcomes in the context of wider management objectives and constraints.*

- There was concern that strongholds could divert attention and/or resources away from grey squirrel control, to the potential detriment of red squirrel conservation. *We see the two approaches as being complementary.*
- There was concern about how the policy intention could be translated into actual changes to forestry practice. *We will seek formal agreement with the landowners of each of the stronghold sites and support them in managing their woodlands in accordance with the principles of strongholds.*

In response to the feedback we received, we intend to carry out the following specific actions (response code in brackets):

- We will develop the proposals and make strongholds central to our plans for using habitat management to conserve red squirrels. (FCS 1)
- We will publish the final proposals in 2010 as part of a summary of the government's overall package of measures to support red squirrel conservation. (FCS 2)
- We will seek formal agreements with landowners at the 18 following sites, together with the island of Arran, aiming to announce them as agreed strongholds: Morangie Forest; Glen Glass; Culbin; Black Isle; Ordiequish, Whiteash, Ben Aigan; Daviot Loch Moy; Abernethy, Nethy Bridge; Inshriach and Glenfeshie; Glentochty; Balmoral to Inver; Leanachan; South Rannoch; Inverliever; Eredine; Kilmichael; Eskdalemuir; Fleet Basin; Glenbranter. (FCS 11).
- We will make clear the principles for managing strongholds and the outcomes we are seeking, rather than explaining what is not allowed –in early 2010 we will convene a stakeholder group to help us develop appropriate guidance for woodland managers. (FCS 4)
- In the context of this guidance we will work with landowners to develop management and design statements for each of the sites, taking into account the unique conditions at each site. (FCS 4)
- Where native woodland objectives (such as PAWS restoration) are in potential conflict with stronghold objectives we will seek locally appropriate solutions which contribute to conserving the biodiversity of native woodland but do not compromise stronghold objectives (FCS 5)
- We will modify our proposed management approach and accept that, in the interests of wider biodiversity, some connectivity with other woodland habitat may be needed to achieve satisfactory balance with other biodiversity objectives at many sites.

However, woodland management proposals in the area surrounding strongholds should seek to avoid compromising the stronghold's objectives (FCS 6)

- We will not delineate fixed buffer zones, but we recognise that site-specific protective measures will often be needed in areas around strongholds to increase their resistance to grey squirrel incursions. These measures could include: care in the choice of species for woodland establishment in the vicinity; monitoring/vigilance for grey squirrels; and grey squirrel control where grey squirrels are likely to threaten the red squirrels within a stronghold (FCS 8).
- We will schedule a review of all aspects of the policy in time to provide suitable input to the development of new support measures for the 2014-2020 Scotland Rural Development Programme. (FCS 11, 12, 13)

Detailed summary of feedback, and how we plan to respond.

The following sections provide a more detailed summary of the feedback received. The feedback has been considered in relation to the questions posed in the consultation. Forestry Commission Scotland's comments on the feedback, and what we plan to do next response to the feedback is shown in *blue italics* throughout.

Do you agree with the rationale and justification for strongholds? If not, why not?

The great majority of respondents said that they agree with the rationale and justification for strongholds, with most respondents making very positive comments about the proposals. Clearly the success of red squirrel conservation efforts in Scotland is important to many individuals, land managers and organisations.

FCS 1. The positive feedback about the proposals gives us a mandate to continue to develop red squirrel strongholds as a central part of our approach to conserving red squirrels in Scotland.

Many of those who welcomed the strongholds approach provided further information about the way that the proposals should be implemented. Some respondents were negative about the proposals.

The most common comments were about the relationship of strongholds to the control of grey squirrels. Many of those who supported the concept of strongholds cautioned that strongholds should only be seen as a fallback position in the event of continued expansion of grey squirrel populations – they should not become an alternative to efforts to contain the spread of grey squirrels.

A few respondents went further, arguing that that preventing the spread of grey squirrels is the only solution for red squirrel conservation in Scotland. They argued that strongholds divert focus away from grey squirrel control efforts (or the development of alternatives such as immunocontraception), and will therefore be detrimental to the long-term conservation of red squirrels.

FCS 2. Measures to contain grey squirrels are clearly an important component of a strategy to conserve red squirrels. However, given the number of landowners and land managers who will need to work together to achieve grey squirrel control, we recognise

that it will be an enormous challenge to sustain a co-ordinated approach for the long term (which is what is required). Our work with strongholds is complementary to grey squirrel control efforts, providing a 'belt-and-braces' approach to red squirrel conservation. Furthermore, strongholds may help to buy time for red squirrels while possible control alternatives (such as immunocontraception) are further developed.

To make it clear how strongholds fit with other approaches to red squirrel conservation we will publish the final proposals in 2010 as part of a summary of the government's overall package of measures to support red squirrel conservation. This summary will include the proposals for grey squirrel control which arise from Scottish Natural Heritage's parallel consultation on a Grey Squirrel Control Strategy.

We are currently actively involved in grey squirrel control, in partnership with the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project and Red Squirrels in South Scotland. These projects are co-ordinating grey squirrel control work and will monitor the results to provide evidence of its efficacy and costs.

Some respondents, normally those representing locations without strongholds, expressed concern that all funding for red squirrel habitat management would go to strongholds and there would be insufficient funding available for other red squirrel conservation work. This concern was particularly expressed in relation to smaller non-stronghold woods which had previously been identified as 'Priority Woodlands' and are being managed for red squirrels at present.

Linked to this was the suggestion, from some respondents, that instead of (or as well as) creating strongholds, we should do more to encourage red squirrels (at the expense of grey squirrels) right across Scotland. For example, by making more use of low-impact silvicultural systems right across the national forest estate to encourage coning, and creating suitable new woodland.

FCS 3. Part of the rationale for strongholds is to focus resources on places where we can really make a difference, so it will indeed be the case that these sites will be a priority for funding. However, strongholds are only part of a wider strategy for red squirrel conservation.

Do you think that the management approach for strongholds is appropriate to achieve their objectives? If not, why not?

Many respondents said that they supported the management approach outlined in the consultation document. Some respondents said that the approach could have biodiversity-enhancing advantages for other species. Notably, several respondents who are managers of proposed stronghold woodlands said that they were happy with the suggested management approach, with one commenting 'it is the owner's intention that the forest be managed to UKWAS certification standards which will embody the structural and species diversity required to create the ideal squirrel habitat.'

However, some significant criticisms of the approach were given. The first set of criticisms relates to the conflict that strongholds could have with the management of land for wider biodiversity objectives. Some objected to 'single-species conservation' on principle. Others were more concerned about the way that such conservation would be done, specifically:

- Strongholds have the potential to conflict with management for other Biodiversity Action Plan species, such as capercaillie and black grouse.
- Stronghold management may be in conflict with the management requirements of designated sites, for example where these require the expansion of broadleaf woodland. Furthermore, removing the (usually small) amounts of oak and hazel currently present in strongholds would be detrimental to the habitat quality for many other species.
- Some of the management prescriptions were seen as too narrow – particularly by those who were commenting with reference to Caledonian pinewoods. Here, prescriptions about age class distribution or species diversification were seen as inappropriate for these woods, and difficult to maintain.
- Concern was expressed that the impact of climate change has not been properly factored into the choice of species for strongholds, and that extending their size and altitudinal range could be beneficial.

FCS 4. We do not accept the premise, implied by some responses, that strongholds will be valuable only for red squirrels and will not have wider biodiversity value. Indeed, the management approach which we propose will have the effect of increasing the biodiversity value of the majority of these sites.

In setting out a generalised management prescription for strongholds we did not intend to imply that all strongholds should be managed in an identical way. Those sites which are already diverse woodlands, for example Caledonian pinewoods, should not be modified in the same way as a Sitka spruce plantation, for example. At all sites we will seek to manage for red squirrels and for broader biodiversity benefits, and we will develop advice to help resolve any conflicts if they arise.

To make this clearer, we will set out a framework of principles for managing strongholds and the outcomes we are seeking, rather than explaining what should or should not be done. In early 2010 we will convene a stakeholder group to help us develop appropriate guidance for woodland managers (FCS 4).

Furthermore, we will support the production of design and management statements for each stronghold. These will take account of local constraints and conditions and seek to minimise conflicts between objectives on a site-by-site basis while maintaining the integrity of the stronghold.

- Strongholds could conflict with the conservation of native woods, restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS), or other biodiversity objectives involving large-seeded broadleaves. The plans described in the consultation would discourage the establishment of large-seeded broadleaves, including oak and hazel. It was pointed out that in many areas oak and hazel are components of the native woodland habitat, and that restoration of PAWS is an important policy objective (and sometimes a requirement of UKWAS certification) which has wide biodiversity benefits.

FCS 5. One of the aims of identifying strongholds was to 'narrow and deepen' the focus of red squirrel conservation, choosing a smaller total area of woodland than previous prioritisation exercises (e.g. the selection of Priority Woodlands) but managing those areas more rigorously to prevent the incursion of grey squirrels. This narrowing reduces the conflicts that red squirrel conservation has with other objectives (such as developing native woodland habitat networks or restoring native woods from PAWS), and this conflict has been further reduced by the selection process which discriminated against sites with PAWS. No site has more than 3% PAWS (Glenbranter) – most have much less.

In the limited number of sites where PAWS restoration or native woodland is in potential conflict with stronghold objectives we will seek locally appropriate solutions which will contribute to the biodiversity value of native woodland but will not compromise the stronghold.

- Strongholds could conflict with the development of some forest habitat networks (where these would encourage/require broadleaved woods including large-seeded

broadleaves.) There was much concern expressed about the plans, described in the consultation, to discourage the creation of networks of woodland which increase the connectivity of a stronghold in the wider landscape. Many respondents explained how this would conflict with existing plans for forest habitat networks, and with longer term aspirations for a more inter-connected wooded landscape which will have benefits for biodiversity, particularly in the face of climate change.

FCS 6. The consultation states that 'woodland establishment in the vicinity of strongholds which could make it easier for grey squirrels to reach the site will be discouraged'. This was intended to refer to establishing broadleaved woods near strongholds that could increase risk of grey squirrels visiting the site. The responses make it clear how important woodland links can be for wider biodiversity and we accept that we need to modify the management approach. In the interests of wider biodiversity, some connectivity with other woodland habitat may be needed to achieve satisfactory balance with other biodiversity objectives at many sites.

However, woodland management proposals in the area surrounding strongholds should still take account of the stronghold's objectives, and seek to support, or at least not undermine, those objectives. Landowners should avoid the establishment of patches of large-seeded broadleaf woodland adjacent to strongholds as this could undermine the stronghold. Such habitat could act as a home for a source population of resident grey squirrels (perhaps carrying squirrelpox) whose visits to the stronghold could unnecessarily compromise the red squirrel population within. Our management guidance (see FCS4) will suggest how to achieve the right balance for each site.

The next main set of criticisms relates to how the plans will be achieved:

- Concern that the habitat within strongholds will not be able to support viable red squirrel populations while maintaining their unattractiveness to grey squirrels – and that it will take too long to improve this habitat.

FCS 7. We believe that by starting this approach now, in areas where grey squirrels are unlikely to be found for decades, we can achieve this difficult balance.

- Concern that buffer zones were not specifically delineated. Some respondents thought that buffer zones with grey squirrel control (if required) would be essential to the success of the proposals, with some suggesting that strongholds should be protected by regional grey squirrel control so as to prevent grey squirrels ever reaching them.
- The suggestion that grey squirrels may need to be culled in and around strongholds was criticised by one non-governmental organisation who argued that if strongholds

could maintain populations of red squirrels in the presence of grey squirrels, in the absence of the squirrelpox virus, there could be no justification for killing grey squirrels in and around the strongholds. But another non-governmental organisation supported intensified humane grey squirrel control as part of a strategy to protect strongholds, if squirrelpox containment failed.

FCS 8. (See also FCS 2). Though we do not consider that fixed buffer zones will be necessary, we believe that site-specific protective measures will often be needed in areas around strongholds to increase their resistance to grey squirrel incursions, especially for those strongholds where the woodland composition is likely to remain relatively attractive to grey squirrels.

These extra protective measures could include: care in the choice of species for woodland establishment in the vicinity; monitoring/vigilance for grey squirrels; and grey squirrel control where grey squirrels are likely to threaten the red squirrels within a stronghold – either through ecological competition or through being carriers of the squirrelpox virus. We will work with partners to implement control in the most cost-effective places and in accordance with the forthcoming grey squirrel control strategy. Control may sometimes be more effective at some distance from the boundary of the stronghold, eg to prevent grey squirrels getting beyond strategic 'pinchpoints'.

*Because of their size, however, we would expect that for most sites the management of woodlands **within** the stronghold will be the primary means of deterring grey squirrels from entering the site. This is why the restriction of grey squirrel-attracting large-seeded broadleaves needs to be an integral part of stronghold plans. Deterring grey squirrels from establishing themselves in strongholds through habitat management is, we believe, a much more sustainable solution in the long term than defending entire stronghold sites through trapping.*

- There was concern that if landowners decided not to participate, this would affect the integrity of the stronghold. Linked to this were concerns about how management of land around strongholds could be influenced when it is not part of a stronghold.
- The restriction of large-seeded broadleaves will be resource-demanding and difficult to achieve in some areas where they are regenerating naturally, and some owners will wish to plant these species, even without grant aid.

FCS 9. We will not seek to impose strongholds on managers who are not willing to participate, but we are encouraged that the majority of landowners with whom we have been in contact are very supportive of the proposals. The Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) can provide support for management actions that cost money, but land managers' willingness to participate is much more important.

Where necessary FCS can make use of existing mechanisms to influence the design and species composition of tree planting where biodiversity may be significantly affected; either through felling licensing (for felling and replanting) or the use of Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations (for new planting).

FCS 10. Some suggestions were made as to how to improve the management approach. These included:

- Produce design and management guidance which ensures the conservation of other priority species, habitats and designated sites.
- Ensure that as many native species as possible are encouraged in strongholds – with particular comment on the value of birchwoods.
- Keep the plans under review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose as circumstances change.
- Ensure that strongholds are distributed around the country to sustain genetic diversity and to raise awareness among all Scottish communities.

FCS 11. We welcome the suggestions given for improvement to the management proposals and will follow them through (see also other responses above). We will review the policy in a few years time (see also FCS14). However, with respect to distributing strongholds around the country, we do not intend to increase the number or widen the distribution of strongholds at this time, but will keep the plans under review.

Do you have comments on the suitability of any particular site or sites to act as a stronghold? Please state which site(s). Do you think that the boundary of any particular site or sites should be changed? Please state which site(s), how the boundary should be changed, and why.

Some of the comments which were made about individual sites have been addressed in the comments on management proposals above. This particularly applies to comments on the potential conflict with management for birds such as capercaillie and black grouse, which will be addressed on a site by site basis (see *FCS 6*).

FCS 12. The consultation raised no major objections to any of the proposed sites in the main list, although some comments did suggest that boundary amendments may be required. We will therefore work with the landowners of all 18 sites, as well as the island of Arran, seeking their formal agreement to announcing agreed boundaries to strongholds. The 18 sites are: Morangie Forest; Glen Glass; Culbin; Black Isle; Ordiequish, Whiteash, Ben Aigan; Daviot Loch Moy; Abernethy, Nethy Bridge; Inshriach and Glenfeshie; Glentochty; Balmoral to Inver; Leanachan; South Rannoch; Inverliever; Eredine; Kilmichael; Eskdalemuir; Fleet Basin; Glenbranter.

Since no sites have been dropped from the main list, there is no need to bring onto the list either reserve site (Galloway North and Carsphairn) to maintain the total area of stronghold sites, and these will no longer be pursued as strongholds.

*For the sites listed above, we will ask landowners to agree to incorporate the principles of strongholds into the management of their land. Before we can do this, however, we will publish the management guidance referred to in *FCS 4* so that landowners have certainty about what is expected of them.*

In response to comments about individual sites, we have noted minor boundary amendments where this could help to secure the support of the land managers concerned. Though we very much welcome the suggestions of increasing the size of some sites, we have decided to defer major expansion until the plans are reviewed in a few years time, when we will have more information about each site. At that point we will have more information about the success of grey squirrel control and the potential for grey squirrels to reach each site. Further detailed comments about each site can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Site by site comments

| Comments on each site | <i>Detailed comments for FCS11</i> |
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| <p>Morangie Forest</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support expressed – with the suggestion that this could be extended to include forest to the south of the Scotsburn road and into Ardross and/or linked with the Glen Glass stronghold. <p>Glen Glass</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support expressed – with the suggestion that this could be extended and/or linked with the Morangie stronghold. | <p><i>We propose a small boundary modification to incorporate land where the landowner has asked to be part of the Glen Glass stronghold. We are not convinced that it is advantageous to link the strongholds at this time, but will keep this under review.</i></p> |
| <p>Culbin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential to extend into adjacent contiguous woodland. <p>Black Isle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor boundary amendment. <p>Ordiequish, Whiteash, Ben Aigan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No major site-specific comments. | <p><i>Minor changes to boundary of Black Isle stronghold in response to feedback from land managers.</i></p> |
| <p>Daviot Loch Moy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suggested extension to the north east boundary of the site, to link with adjacent FC plantation. Suggested change to southern part of the site where A9 widening and other built development already proposed. | <p><i>Changes to boundary of Daviot Loch Moy site to include plantation to the north east, and to remove a development site.</i></p> |
| <p>Abernethy, Nethy Bridge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential conflicts with the expansion of oak woodland in the area, and increasing connectivity of this site to other forests in the area. Existing plans to remove non-native conifers could conflict with stronghold aims. Should defend entire Strathspey area, not just strongholds. | <p><i>Many of the concerns expressed about both of the Speyside sites will be addressed by site-specific management and design guidance. We do not intend to alter the boundaries of these sites at this time, but will keep them under review.</i></p> <p><i>We accept the view that these sites should be defended from grey squirrels</i></p> |

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggested extension to Deishar Woods. <p>Inshriach and Glenfeshie</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential conflicts with the expansion of oak woodland in the area, and increasing connectivity of this site to other forests in the area. • Should defend entire Strathspey area, not just strongholds. | <p><i>as part of a wider defence of Strathspey.</i></p> |
| <p>Glentochty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No major site-specific comments. <p>Balmoral to Inver</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comment from land manager that this site could be extended to include Mar Lodge Estate. • Suggestion that pine at Coilacriech could be included. | <p><i>We are very pleased that a neighbouring estate wishes to join the Balmoral to Inver stronghold, but for consistency with the original selection criteria we are keen to keep the stronghold as a contiguous woodland block. Furthermore, if the site were to be extended further towards Ballater (Coilacreich), the site may become harder to defend from future grey squirrel incursion. However, we will keep the boundaries of this site under review.</i></p> |
| <p>Leanachan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local support expressed for this site. <p>South Rannoch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No major site-specific comments. | <p><i>No changes proposed.</i></p> |
| <p>Inverliever</p> <p>Eredine</p> <p>Kilmichael</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some concerns for these 3 sites about potential conflicts of objectives with extension/restoration of Atlantic oakwoods, development of native woodland networks and black grouse. • Emphasis on the potential to defend these sites by stopping grey squirrels from reaching the area from the east. | <p><i>We consider that potential conflicts can be resolved by agreement of suitable adjustments to boundaries and forest design. The proposed Scottish grey squirrel control strategy, subject to a recent consultation held by from Scottish Natural Heritage, does prioritise control to defend this region.</i></p> |
| <p>Eskdalemuir</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objections from owner of land within stronghold to removal of the small amount of large-seeded broadleaf that | <p><i>We recognise that the small amount of large-seeded broadleaf present at Eskdalemuir is unlikely to compromise this stronghold.</i></p> |

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| <p>is present, given the large area of non-native conifer dominating the area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestion that this site should be extended into Craik forest. <p>Fleet Basin</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No major site-specific comments • Potential to link with Galloway Forest North stronghold, through Galloway Forest Park. | <p><i>Given the already large size of these sites (12,500 and 9000 ha respectively) we do not intend to extend either of these sites at this stage; it is important that other biodiversity objectives can be pursued in these areas. We recognise the valuable contribution that neighbouring forest blocks will make to red squirrel conservation and will keep the boundaries of these sites under review.</i></p> |
| <p>Glenbranter</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant amount of PAWS within the site which should be restored to native woodland. | <p><i>Further discussions with local managers confirm that PAWS restoration can be carried out in such a way that it will not conflict significantly with stronghold objectives.</i></p> |
| <p>Arran</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong support for Arran as a stronghold from many respondents. • Suggestion that the map should show only the woodlands which are suitable for red squirrels. | <p><i>As suggested, we will modify the map to show only the woodlands of Arran, though we will still make it clear that surveillance is important for the whole island.</i></p> |
| <p>Reserve sites:</p> <p>Carsphairn Forest</p> <p>Galloway Forest North</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disappointed in downgrading to 'reserve' status; suggestion that this may be because of potential for windfarm development. • Concern that not having stronghold here could cause landowners to give up on red squirrel conservation. • Arguments presented for having a single stronghold from Galloway North through to Fleet Basin, i.e. the majority of Galloway Forest Park. Also extending the site to include Glen App. • Concern expressed about the threat to Carsphairn of grey squirrels moving south from the Ayr and Kilmarnock areas. | <p><i>Some respondents appeared to think that the two 'reserve' sites were intended as a lower-tier set of sites. In fact, the intention was that these sites would be held in reserve so as to maintain the total area of strongholds if other sites from the main list were not taken forward as stronghold sites.</i></p> |

Other

Additional strongholds were suggested at Tarbert, Gartmorn Dam, Kincardine, south west Ayrshire, Glessal Hill (south west Galloway Forest Park), Dava, Carron Valley, Craigvinean, islands in Loch Lomond, other islands.

FCS 13. We very much welcome the support for these proposals implied by the suggestion of additional sites as strongholds. We do not intend to increase the number of stronghold sites at this stage, but will keep the plans under review.

Do you think that the proposed support for management will be sufficient to achieve stronghold objectives? If not, what support is needed?

Some respondents thought that the support would be adequate, welcoming the increased priority that would be given to these sites and recognising that most of the management interventions that are proposed would not be costly to achieve.

A large number of respondents commented on the difficulty of applying for grants under the Scottish Rural Development Programme to support the required management work. They thought that the lack of access to funding, and lack of certainty about funding this work beyond the current SRDP period, could undermine the success of the proposals.

Some respondents explained in detail some of the additional costs which would be associated with management of strongholds and made the case that though these were not individually expensive, together they could add up to a significant burden on forest managers. They suggested that additional incentives would be required to compensate stronghold owners and encourage them to participate fully. The negative impacts included:

- The cost of specialist advice for surveys
- The cost of additional consultation, supervision and organisation
- The administrative costs of applying for grants
- Likely crop instability where trees are retained for the long term, leading to health and safety concerns with respect to windblown areas, and associated management costs
- Loss of revenue as retentions are not harvested, and then either blow over or become too large to harvest
- Possible reduction in land values due to an additional conservation constraint.

FCS 13. We do not as yet see a need for compensation for land managers over and above the grants that are available under the SRDP. Most of the costs associated with managing strongholds can either be supported through grants such as the Woodland Improvement Grant, or are costs that can be supported through the grant for long term forest planning. Our Case Officers will continue to assist forest managers to apply for relevant grants, and we have published technical guidance on how SRDP can support red squirrel conservation.

We will work with the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels project and the Red Squirrels in the Highlands project to support management planning in stronghold forests where required. We will consider the need for any further resources to support the work. The current SRDP lasts until 2013 and by this time we should have evidence as to whether or not strongholds are being managed as intended – and whether any shortcomings are due to a lack of funding. We will review then whether the grant support available is sufficient to achieve stronghold objectives, and what if any additional support might be appropriate for the next stage of SRDP, which will run from 2014-2020.

Other issues raised during the consultation.

Some respondents commented on the role of the planning system with one suggesting that Local Authorities should be exploring ways of linking planning consent with woodland management, while another urged that development should be kept away from strongholds as grey squirrels tend to thrive at the edges of development.

FCS 14. We will notify Local Authorities of the existence of strongholds and encourage them to record strongholds in their GIS systems. We will promote the concept and seek their support for strongholds.

Annex 1: Respondents

The following organisations responded to the consultation:

Boat of Garten and Vicinity Community Council
Torwoodlee and Buckholm Estates Ltd, and Borders Squirrel Management Group
Falkirk Council
Ardross Community Council
Advocates for Animals
Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group
North Lanarkshire Council
Kincaig and Vicinity Community Council
Perth and Kinross Council Ranger Service
Highland Birchwoods
Scottish Natural Heritage
Woodland Trust Scotland
Scottish Wildlife Trust
The Highland Council
National Trust for Scotland
Scottish Native Woods
Red Squirrels in South Scotland
Cairngorms LBAP
Scottish Rural Property and Business Association
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Fife Coast and Countryside Trust
Luss Estates Company
Inverloch and Torlundy Community Council

All of those responses (from individuals and land managers as well as from organisations) where confidentiality was not requested are available for inspection at Forestry Commission Scotland, Silvan House, 231 Corstorphine Road, Edinburgh, EH12 7AT. Please contact Jacquie Christie (jacquie.christie@forestry.gsi.gov.uk) in the first instance.