

## Climate Change and the National Forest Estate

Renewable Energy. Agree.

Woodland Creation.

This now seems potentially rather out-dated. Much new planting is grant-aided and is aimed at taking valuable agricultural land out of production - this is at a time when we are being told that world production of agricultural crops needs to be increased by many times simply to keep up with the present growth in demand. This does not even begin to address the problem of the potential effects of future global warming to decrease still further agricultural productivity in threatened areas. Much agricultural land across the World is concentrated in low-lying river basins, ie. those areas likely to suffer disproportionately the first effects of any sea-level rises. Surely a balance needs to be struck between maintaining agricultural land and the planting of new woodland to mitigate the effects of climate change.

One answer might be to leave agricultural land alone and to plant on agriculturally-marginal land. Unfortunately, these areas often comprise ecologically-sensitive lands. These can be brought into production without great harm provided expert management of such undertakings are achieved. At present, the only organisation with the necessary skills and impartiality to undertake such works is the Forestry Commission itself.

Using the National Forest Estate.

Is it true that the woods and forest are, "owned by Scottish Ministers"? Surely, are they not publicly-owned and held in trust by the Scottish Government - elected by the voting public?

It is important to note that many parts of the estate considered to be of less importance for their heritage content are now having to be re-evaluated in the light of new research. My own efforts in Aberdeenshire have demonstrated this point (Shepherd, C. 2007. "*Mediaeval Fields in North-east Scotland*," in *Landscape History*, 29, 47-74; *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland*, 2007 and forthcoming). It is, therefore, critical not to assume an absence of recorded heritage features reflects an actual absence of such features. A similar situation is also likely to occur as regards the natural heritage.

Potential Opportunities.

Whilst I agree that it would be sensible for the Forestry Commission to enter into joint ventures with other parties in order to maximise potential profit, I do not see that by removing the rights to the sale of timber in order to place that potential profit into the hands of private companies is going to lead to greater profits for investment in your stated aims. The Forestry Commission, if permitted do so, would be able to create as large a profit from timber sales as any private company and, without having to reward shareholders, would be in a position to add a greater share to your stated aims. Private companies are there only to maximise profits for their shareholders at almost any cost. They are certainly not geared up for being safe custodians of our heritage.

Scottish Climate Change Bill.

- *Forestry Commission Scotland to enter into joint ventures for the purposes of participating in renewable energy programmes, subject to the approval of the Scottish Ministers:*

Sounds reasonable to me.

- *Scottish Ministers to lease land for forestry purposes and Forestry Commission Scotland to grant cutting rights over this forest:*

A disaster waiting to happen. Potential profits for your stated aims would be lost to private enterprise and the heritage - natural and built - would be ravaged.

- *Scottish Ministers the option of transferring the ownership of this leased land to a not-for profit*

*trust that could also make use of the funds generated from the sale of these rights to promote woodland creation in order to mitigate climate change:*

The 'not-for-profit trust' would inevitably be made up of interested parties who would sell our heritage down the river. This happens every time a national resource is sold off. If you want to follow in the same footsteps as Thatcher, Blair and Brown you will end up with the same reputation as lackeys of an unregulated free market experiment that has gone so hideously wrong. Surely the FC could, in reality, be run as a 'not-for profit' organisation with a proven track record - not a bunch of wannabes there only for their 'expenses' (aka fat fees) or for the strings they can pull to accommodate theirs' (or spouses' or relatives') vested interests. 'Not-for profit' trusts have the habit of turning into rubber-stamping mechanism for large corporations, and the woodlands (in reality if not in name) would be lost to the nation. (Sorry to be so cynical, but all 'Private Eye' readers know the truth of these things).

#### Conclusion:

The stated aims are laudable though thought does need to be addressed to the issue of the forestation of valuable arable lands at a time of world food shortage. The only organisation with the relevant skills and impartiality to bring such plans to fruition is the Forestry Commission itself. Yes, permit it to go into partnership with private companies with relevant skills, such as those specialising in renewables. Let the FC keep its share of the profits from such partnerships in order to plant additional lands in its responsible fashion. (Bear in mind that it is only relatively recently - within the last 15 years or less - that the FC has become a 'responsible' manager of the heritage. Before then it was as irresponsible as present private corporations are. Only a governmental desire to be seen as 'responsible custodians' in the face of mounting public pressure occasioned such a change in its remit. No such constraints attend private constitutions - paltrey fines for offences have never been a safeguard in situations concerning planning consent and the heritage). Furthermore, extra investment in felling equipment for the FC would permit it to compete in the marketplace and ensure that greater resources were ploughed back into the stated aims - not merely the (probably undervalued) fees from any land-leasing deals.

In other words, the aims could be achieved more cost-effectively and securely by investing trust and resources in the present expert organisation in the field, ie. the Forestry Commission, and letting it get on with the job.

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