



16 June 2016

FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND REPORT

Scottish Government

Nicola Sturgeon has appointed a new cabinet and ministerial team following her formal appointment as First Minister. As well as new faces in the government, there have also been quite a few changes to the make-up of ministerial portfolios.

Forestry (along with agriculture, fisheries, transport and broadband) now sits with the Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy and Connectivity, Fergus Ewing.

Other areas of the work covered by our previous Minister Aileen McLeod will now fall under the Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, Roseanna Cunningham.

Therefore, although Mr Ewing takes on the lead for forestry, the work that we do will continue to contribute strongly to Ms Cunningham's portfolio, as well as those of other Cabinet Secretaries.

Early discussions have already taken place between SG and Mr Ewing on forestry, his clear priority is the Rural Economy, and he is very focused on increasing commercial planting. Current actions to address woodland creation include the smooth transition to an improved grant scheme (in spite of extensive IT challenges within SG) and working with the sector to find ways to reduce the period of uncertainty associated with the approval of larger schemes.

Work to address the manifesto commitment to complete devolution continues, with close working with SG to develop future options for the delivery of cross-border functions and implementation of the project to move shared services into Scotland, which remains on track, but with the substantial challenge of IT and FAS still the most significant risk.

Increase contribution to water management

Forestry Commission Scotland is producing guidance for the Forestry Sector to help minimise the risk of diffuse pollution. Initial guidance is due to be completed by the end of July. The initiative is a collaboration between Forestry Commission Scotland; Scottish Government; SEPA; Confor; and the Forestry Contracting Association. It mirrors the Farming and Water Scotland Initiative.

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Tree Health

Publication of the new EU Plant Health Regulation expected towards the end of 2016 after which point there will be a three year implementation period to transpose the regulation in to national legislation. The strategic aim of the regulation is to strengthen plant health biosecurity to provide greater protection against the introduction and spread of plant pests and diseases in a risk-based and proportionate approach

The Scottish Plant Health Strategy was published on the 6th March 2016. The Strategy sets out the SG's approach to the protection of the health of plants (agricultural & horticultural crops, plants in parks and gardens, forestry and the natural environment) in Scotland.

The early season 2016 Tree Health surveillance flights began on the 18th of May 2016 and it is hoped they will be completed by the second week of June. A number of suspect sites have been identified but, so far, there is no evidence of significant expansion of Ramorum on larch out with the management zone. Although these flights are primarily undertaken to monitor this disease, they are also being used to detect ill-health in other tree species

Woodland Creation - Forestry Grant Scheme

The new Forestry Grants Scheme, administered by Forestry Commission Scotland, provides support for the creation of new woodland and management of existing forests and is part of Scotland's Rural Development Programme (2014-20). Annually, £36 million has been allocated for the Forestry Grants Scheme (FGS) with £30 million of this specifically for new planting.

Increase economic contribution

In partnership with Wood for Good, FCS delivered a conference on the 3rd of May. 'The Innovative Timber House', held at the Royal College of Surgeons, in Edinburgh attracted 90 architects, engineers and forestry professionals. Other conferences are being held in the next few months across England with a view to increasing timber housing in England opening up markets for Scottish based companies.

FC has published the second edition of "Sustainable Construction Timber: sourcing and specifying local timber" providing updated advice to architects and engineers on the timber characteristics of home-grown timber and where to source the material.

Scotland will host the end of the WoodWisdom programme conference in April 2017. WoodWisdom is a major EU funded research programme comprising 20 partners across 12 European countries. We are currently working with our partners on how best to maximise the benefit to our academics, researchers and forest supply chain companies in Scotland.

FC Scotland Report

Increase contribution to Health and Well-being (urban and rural communities)

Building links between the health and environment sector, the Green Exercise Partnership (FCS, SNH and NHS Health Scotland) has secured joint funding from the NHS to recruit two new 'Greenspace for Health Coordinator' posts. The Coordinators will provide a programme of outdoor activities in woodland, greenspace and gardens within the hospital grounds for patients, visitors and staff to showcase the health benefits that flow from engagement with the natural environment.

Argyll Countryside Trust – has recently secured £192,000 over 3 years to roll out Branching Out across Argyll. This multi award winning FCS flagship health initiative helps people recover from long-term mental health problems through a 12 week programme of woodland activities.

Timber Sales

The second of the five open-market sales events 2016 was held on 13 April, with 100% of parcels, either sold on opening, or being subsequently negotiated. Competition from bidders was strong across all lots; this is believed to be partly the result of less private sector material on the market, partly renewed optimism in line with spring demand and improvements in exchange rates.

Sawlogs remain the most challenging market segment and whilst the downward pressure on exchange rates is to be welcomed, this has not as yet impacted on the sawn price of domestic timber due to high levels of imported stock.

Archaeological Award Shortlisting

The Picts: A Learning Resource has been shortlisted for the Best Public Presentation of Archaeology Award in the 2016 British Archaeological Awards. The resource encourages visits to the Pictish hill forts on Scotland's National Forest Estate; supports local museums and schools with integrated indoor and outdoor learning; and is part of FES's commitment to Outdoor Woodland and Learning Scotland (sitting alongside resources such as Wolf Brother's Wildwoods). The British Archaeological Awards' Ceremony will take place at the British Museum on the 11 July.

Nevis Forest and Mountain Resort Masterplan

FES is working in partnership with HIE, SDI & VisitScotland to market this development opportunity. SDI have appointed and funded a consultant to work on the financial justification of the development sites which will form the basis of a marketing prospectus. In the meantime we are working with local partners to improve the attractiveness of the shared access road.

Disposals

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The Barracks Plantation (Perthshire) sale was completed at the end of the February and Kinnachrechan (Argyll) sold in early April. We have also received an acceptable offer for Monachyle (Stirlingshire) for completion in FY 16/17.

Agriculture

FES has been a partner in the Scottish Government's New Entrant Initiative, which will soon report on opportunities to make more of land for letting below the whole farm scale. To assist with this, FES has developed and piloted a new application & scoring system that recognises the needs of new entrants whilst not excluding established farmers. Seven units have been offered using this system, attracting twenty-three applications with six awarded to new entrants.

Land Registration

The project to complete the Registration of the NFE has commenced following the project manager taking up post at the end of January. The scale of the project is significant with almost 2,000 Land Titles requiring to be registered, needing detailed reference to around 8,000 land disposal documents creating challenging issues for the project team. Additionally, the timescale for the project is extremely tight, requiring to be completed in three years.