



29 June 2017

## FORESTRY COMMISSION SCOTLAND REPORT

### Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill

The Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill was introduced to Parliament on 10 May 2017.

The Bill will deliver:

- Improved **accountability, transparency and policy alignment**. Forestry will be fully accountable to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament.
  - A **modernised legislative framework** to develop, support and regulate forestry in Scotland.
  - **More effective use of Scotland's publicly owned land**. The National Forest Estate will be managed to deliver economic, environmental and social outcomes and we will be able to offer land management experience and expertise to others [fulfilling a manifesto commitment to establish a Land Agency for Scotland].
- **New organisational structures** for forestry in Scotland were announced which recognise and value the skills and experience of FCS and FES staff – they are vital to achieving Scottish Government ambitions for growth of the sector. Affected staff will transfer to the Scottish Government and will remain civil servants.
  - The new structures will be:
    - A **new executive agency, Forest and Land Scotland**, based on the existing Forest Enterprise Scotland. It will focus initially on management and development of the National Forest Estate and have potential to take on a wider land management role.
    - A **dedicated Forestry Division** within the Scottish Government to lead on forestry policy, advice, regulation and grants.

The Scottish Government will continue to work with UK and Welsh Governments and Forestry Commission to develop **new collaborative arrangements for delivery of cross-border forestry functions**.

Stage 1 of Bill scrutiny has started, and the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee of the Scottish Parliament took evidence from officials (including FC) on 7 June.

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## Tree Health

### Plant Health and EU exit

FCS and SG Plant Health colleagues have been engaging with the Animal and Plant Health UK Administrations Working Group in support of the Senior Officials Devolution Group. The aim of this group is to strengthen collaborative working across the UK on animal and plant health and animal welfare (APHW) as we prepare to leave the EU. The initial focus is on establishing a shared understanding of the current landscape and arrangements for APHW policy and implementation across the UK to provide a backdrop against which the group can consider future policy options and any issues arising from EU exit negotiations.

### Annual tree health aerial surveillance and monitoring programme

The early summer annual tree health aerial surveillance and monitoring helicopter flights were undertaken between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of May. Ground surveys of potentially infected sites observed from the air are underway, and subsequent laboratory analysis of samples will be carried out where necessary.

### *Phytophthora ramorum* on Mull

Concerns have been raised about the continued spread of *Phytophthora ramorum* in Scotland and the cost-effectiveness/affordability of current statutory control measures, particularly on Mull.

### Dothistroma needle blight (DNB)

Conserving our Caledonian pinewoods in the face of tree health threats remains a high priority. However, the nursery sector and those involved with woodland expansion raised legitimate concerns about initial FCS guidance on DNB (2013); this included a presumption against direct planting Scots pine within 600m of Caledonian Pinewood Inventory sites. Following a risk review, revised guidance (2017) now allows the planting of Scots pine where natural regeneration has been unsuccessful and where there is an agreed and urgent need for action.

### Aerial application of fungicides

Aerial application trials of copper fungicide were carried out in 2013 and 2015 to test the efficacy of fungicide treatment for Dothistroma needle blight, and assessments of any potential impacts on flora and fauna. A further trial is planned for this summer, focusing on the technical aspects of precision aerial application as part of capacity building within the wider field of contingency planning. This will not involve the application of a pesticide but will instead use just water, a food dye and an adjuvant.

### Pine tree lappet moth

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In view of the importance attached to our Caledonian pinewood remnants, following the detection of male pine tree lappet moths (Ptlm) in Glen Strathfarrar in 2014, containment action was implemented in the form of 'glue banding' (designed to trap the Ptlm caterpillars during their seasonal movements), in line with the 2014 Strategy. We are currently working with Forest Research and SNH to address concerns that have been raised about the potential negative impacts of this action on other species (e.g. invertebrates), and the visual impact of the glue.

## **Woodland Creation - Forestry Grant Scheme**

The Forestry Grant Scheme provides support for the creation of new woodland and management of existing forests and is part of Scotland's Rural Development Programme (2014-20). The 2017/18 budget for FGS has been increased to £40.9M, of which £34 million is for new planting.

**For 2016/17** – The published National statistics show 4,800 Ha of woodland creation for 2016/17. 12 out of the 165 WC schemes approved for 2016/17, totalling around 600ha, were not planted, but in all but one case (8 ha) requests for variations into 2017/18 claim year have been submitted.

## **Amendments to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Forestry regulation**

There was strong support from forestry stakeholders for the proposal to increase the threshold from 5 hectares to 20 hectares for afforestation projects out with sensitive areas in the EIA consultation. However concerns and opposition were raised by some environmental stakeholders: in particular from RSPB, Scottish Wildlife Trust and National Trust for Scotland. Initial concerns raised by Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Environmental Protection Agency and Historic and Environment Scotland were withdrawn following a meeting with FCS where data on the likely impact was discussed. A similar meeting with the environmental Non-Governmental Organisations did not change their position.

The regulation was laid before Parliament on 13 April. RSPB provided a parliamentary briefing outlining their opposition, which resulted in the lodging of a motion opposing the increase by the Greens. This motion was debated by Mr Ewing and members of the Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform Committee on the 16 May. The committee voted against the motion and recommended that the regulation should increase the thresholds. The new regulation became law on 16 May 2017.

## **Increasing the economic contribution of forestry in Scotland**

### Timber Transport

The Cabinet Secretary recently announced an additional £5 million funding for timber transport, bringing the total to £7.85 million for 2017/18. This will be split between the TimberLink Scheme (£0.8 million) and the Strategic Timber Transport Scheme (STTS)

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(£7.05 million).

To assist the development of complicated projects a new STTS Preparatory Project pilot has been launched that provides a small grants to cover some of the costs involved in pulling together multiple partners and agreements. The aim is to enable bigger projects to reach completion within the year.

At its meeting on 19 May the STTS Advisory Panel considered 29 projects seeking £10.1m worth of funding, with a total project value of £14.7m, and approved projects which committed the full £7.05M.

## Forest Machine Operators Training

FC Scotland, Scottish Enterprise and Skills Development Scotland have supported the Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies Industry Leadership Group set-up of a Forest Machine Operator's (FMO) group to "*explore and identify an option(s) to deliver a fit for purpose machine operator training scheme that is viable and meets the needs of the whole sector*". This subject is receiving increasing sector and ministerial attention.

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

### Youth employment skills training

FCS has provided 2017/18 funding for unemployed young people to gain life skills, technical training and work experience within woodland settings within the Central Scotland Green Network. Training periods are 10 weeks or more and take place on publicly owned/managed woodlands such as local authority woodlands and the National Forest Estate. Following a competitive bidding process, funding awards were made to five providers (East Ayrshire Woodlands; Barnardo's; Waterways Trust; TCV; and Living Solutions) to provide training for 164 young people.

### Natural Health Service

This multi-agency initiative complements the National Health Service and builds on the achievements of the Green Exercise Partnership (GEP). It is supported by both the environment and health portfolios in Scottish Government. Whilst the programme to improve the green environments around NHS hospitals and healthcare centres continues the focus is moving in 2017/18 towards a greater emphasis on green exercise.

### Ticks and Lyme disease campaign

Public concern is increasing around ticks and the serious and debilitating diseases that they can transmit (e.g. Lyme disease). FCS has been planning how best to inform forest recreational users about ticks without putting them off, given that the health and wellbeing benefits from visiting forests far outweighs the risks from ticks. In consultation with expert

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Dr Sarah Morton from UHI, we have developed awareness-raising resources which can be seen at [www.forestry.gov.uk/checkforticks](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/checkforticks)

## **Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES)**

Recent months have been dominated by change, particularly driven by the Scottish Government's commitment to complete the devolution of forestry in Scotland. That has resulted in increased political involvement, combined with the National Forest Estate and FES's work on it, gaining an ever higher profile. In response FES is continuing to build its corporate capacity and strengthen its business alignment across government portfolios to which it contributes.

In addition FES has established a portfolio management approach to the management of its change priorities, including the internal devolution of Central Services, FES Corporate Development, the Organisational Redesign Programme, and the formation of the Scottish Government Forestry Devolution Programme. The use of a portfolio approach will allow the Board to balance those areas of change with existing activities to ensure that the organisations capacity and those of the 'key' functions is not exceeded.

FES has worked to sustain a delivery focus, and this has been evidenced through an excellent UKWAS audit, and a number of prizes and awards. The organisation is exploring a move towards an asset-based approach to business planning to bring greater clarity on the contribution of each of the Estate's assets. This includes identifying assets for sale through the New Woodland Investment Programme, with receipts being used to acquire land and create new woodland on the Estate. To complement this, FES recently had the Ministerial launch of the new Community Asset Transfer Scheme, which has generated a significant interest in community acquisitions.

Health, Safety and Wellbeing is a continued focus from the National Committee for Scotland right through the organisation. FES has now established the new Health, Safety & Wellbeing team, with priorities managed through a Health, Safety and Wellbeing Programme. The recent results from the Safety Climate Survey reminds us that there is still a long way to go to develop our health and safety culture – whilst we compared favourably with the benchmarks, our result have moved very little from the previous survey. Further contractor felling/chainsaw accidents have occurred in recent months, which are leading us to look fundamentally at how we can reduce or eliminate chainsaw work from more of our operations.

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**June 2017**