



Scotland's Forestry Strategy Mountaineering Scotland briefing paper

This document is a condensed version of Mountaineering Scotland's response to the main Scottish Government draft Forestry Strategy, which provides a 10-year framework for action to achieve a 50-year vision for Scotland's woodlands and forests.

It simplifies the format of the original document, summarising the main points and Mountaineering Scotland's comments on the ambitions and objectives of the draft Strategy.

VISION & OBJECTIVES

50-year vision for forestry in Scotland

Scotland will have more forests and woodlands, which will be sustainably managed as a much greater part of the nation's natural capital, providing a resilient, high quality and growing resource that supports a strong economy, a thriving environment, and healthy and empowered communities.

This vision is based on:

- A long-term commitment to **sustainable modern forestry** as a key land-use in Scotland.
- A sustained programme of **woodland expansion**
- Increasing the already substantial economic, environmental and social benefits of forestry to Scotland **by addressing key challenges and harnessing opportunities**.
- Promoting multi-purpose forestry and the **sustainable management** of Scotland's forests and woodlands.
- A commitment to the principle of **the right tree, in the right place for the right purpose**.
- **Integrating forestry with other land-uses** and businesses.
- Supporting the delivery of the **Scottish Government's purpose** and **National Performance Framework**.

Therefore, this draft strategy focuses on **both** the sustainable management of the forests we have inherited **and** the establishment of new woodlands.

*MS: We agree with this vision of creating multipurpose, sustainable woodland resources for the future, based on the principles listed. One additional point we wish to suggest is to recognise **the value of landscape-scale conservation**. The integration with other landuses is welcome but may not address the problem of **habitat fragmentation and connectivity** that is associated with biodiversity declines, and hard-edged, single-use landscapes.*

Our objectives for the next 10 years

To support this 50-year vision, we have identified three primary objectives for this draft strategy to deliver over the next 10 years:

1. Increase the contribution of forests and woodlands to Scotland's **sustainable and inclusive economic growth**.
2. Protect and enhance Scotland's valuable natural assets, ensuring that our forests and woodlands are resilient and contribute to a **healthy and high quality environment**.
3. Use Scotland's forest and woodland resources to empower more people to **improve their health, well-being and life chances**.

MS: We suggest for your 10-year objectives that the second objective you have listed be recognised in reality as the first objective – “Protect and enhance Scotland’s valuable natural assets, ensuring that our forests and woodlands are resilient and contribute to a healthy and high-quality environment”. **Without a stable and diverse natural environment, the economic and social case is weakened.** The economic and social dimension has to exist within a high-quality environment – it is the foundation for the land we live in.

ISSUES & PRIORITIES

The Major Issues:

- Wood fibre supply and demand
- Rural land-use, productivity and integration
- Economic development: national and local
- Innovation and new technology
- Developing future foresters and upskilling the existing workforce
- Climate change
- Tree pests and diseases
- Wild deer
- Enhancing our natural assets and improving their biodiversity value
- Environmental and landscape quality
- Well-being
- Equality and empowerment
- Urban forestry

MS: Our interests lie with Mountaineering Practice and Enjoyment and what effects forestry will have on that. Of the major issues we would like to see **more emphasis on Landscape Quality, including Wild Deer, and Well-being.**

Regarding landscape the hard edge produced by fencing can be reduced with design, and we would welcome a commitment to **create more treeline woodland** in Scotland. It is a part of the natural environment that is missing in most mountain landscapes – a natural asset that can be encouraged and enhanced. It ties in with wild deer management. **Control of deer numbers** to protect trees and other vegetation **without resorting to fencing** is a point worth emphasising. This is a sustainable solution that manages the impact of wild herbivores on the landscape, and would encourage natural treeline growth, the missing woodland feature in the mountains.

Another issue we wish to see more emphasis on during planting and restructuring is the maintenance and improvement of existing paths and the creation of new paths for access, as part of Well-being. This is we believe an important part of multipurpose forestry, in both the state and private sector. We do not refer to the creation of wide forest tracks, but to **more walkers’ paths allowing access through plantations** and to the hill beyond, following desire lines and including historic and heritage routes, which are important cultural components of the landscape.

The Priorities

1. Promote and develop the concept of sustainable forest management as it applies to Scotland.
2. Sustainably expand the area of all types of woodlands and forests across Scotland and ensure harvested sites are replanted appropriately

3. Ensure wood fibre availability from Scotland's forests is predictable and increases over time
4. Protect forests and woodlands from damage caused by new or existing pests and diseases, promote the sustainable management of wild deer and build resilience to support adaptation to climate change.
5. Increase community ownership and management of forests and woodlands.
6. Increase efficiency, productivity and the value generated from forest products and services and help develop forestry's role in creating a low-carbon economy
7. Increase the natural capital value of Scotland's woodlands and forests by improving the condition of native woodlands and forests
8. Increase the use of Scotland's forests and woodlands to improve health and well-being, help people better understand forestry, and support wider Scottish Government activity to help children become confident and resilient members of Scottish society.
9. Enhance forestry's contribution to sustaining viable rural communities and increase the positive impact of forest and woodland management on other businesses, especially in agriculture and tourism
10. Increase the positive contribution that urban forestry makes in Scotland's towns and cities

*MS: From our mountaineering viewpoint Priority 1 and 2 are the basis on which to take forward forestry in the uplands of Scotland - sustainable forest management and **sensitive expansion and restocking**. **Where action is most needed** is in our opinion Priority 4 especially **wild deer management** as the impact on vegetation of current numbers of wild deer is not sustainable, and Priority 7 increasing the **natural capital** of Scotland's woodlands in the uplands, with **emphasis on natural treelines**. These two priorities will have significant effect on upland landscapes and wildlife.*

Other issues of note:

*MS: Regarding Partnership Working, we support **wide engagement to ensure all interested parties are continually involved in shaping the nation's forests**. Forestry Commission Scotland did this well in the Conservancies through the Regional Forestry Forums. With the absorption of Scottish Forestry as a Government department, we expect to see the continuation of **regional consultative forums involving a wide representation of communities of place and communities of interest**. Similar involvement with Forestry and Land Scotland would be complimentary to this collaborative process*

*The **financial support** to landowners is essential to deliver the public benefits of multi-purpose forestry. This includes the **provision of new and well-maintained paths and gates for recreational access**, to help get safely and easily through plantations to the hills beyond. It also assists with design and inclusion of native tree and scrub components, creating long lasting landscape features the can mitigate the negative impacts of commercial forestry operations – dense monocultures and extensive clearfell, and unnatural hard edges.*

*Regulation is important to **ensure that expansion and restocking do not lead to loss of recreational opportunities**, with paths and gates in the right places. It also ensures that landscape and biodiversity considerations are taken into account and delivered.*

*We think that more recognition of impacts on outdoor recreation is required. The assumption is that the regulatory regime will deal with any such issues. This may be the case, but only if the **regulatory regime recognises and advances the requirements of recreational access** through forestry and promotes good practice guidance*