

To: All FCS Staff

THE ROLE OF FORESTS IN CLIMATE CHANGE

Forests have an important role in the fight against climate change and our Minister, Michael Russell, wants to ensure that we make full use of the potential of the national forest estate and is today launching a consultation paper, that could have important consequences for us.

CONSULTATION PAPER

The consultation paper relates to forestry provisions in the Scottish Climate Change Bill that would give Ministers the powers to modify our functions where this is necessary to help us tackle climate change more effectively.

It explains that this could provide greater flexibility in the use of the national forest estate by allowing us to enter into joint ventures for renewable energy programmes or to lease "cutting rights" over the more commercial parts of the estate in order to raise funds for creation of more woodland.

The consultation paper also seek views on using a specially established not-for-profit trust to hold the funds raised from the lease of cutting rights and invest them in woodland creation; and on this trust acting to safeguard the public interest in the land.

While the consultation paper focuses on the legislative aspects, Michael Russell has also asked us to undertake a wider options review on maximising the potential of the national forest estate to support the Scottish Government's climate change objectives, while safeguarding its other important public benefits.

TIMESCALES

The consultation closes at the end of January, and we can expect Ministers to make their decisions about the way forward, probably in the spring.

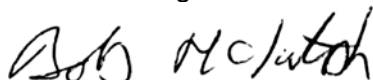
KEEPING YOU UPDATED

In the meantime, I want to make sure that we have effective communications on this important subject and that you have every opportunity to come forward with suggestions. Michael Russell is meeting TUS representatives to initiate this process and we will be setting up other meetings with staff during the autumn to gather ideas and consider options.

To ensure that we keep everyone fully updated, we have established a section on the FCS Intranet site: http://alpacorn.forestry.gov.uk:7777/portal/page?_pageid=33,1343182&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL. You can also access the consultation paper on the FCS website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/fcsclimateconsultation. As individuals, you are of course free to respond to the consultation exercise.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

The Intranet will contain an ongoing log of your Questions along with Answers, and, attached here, is a short note that hopefully addresses some of the questions that immediately spring to mind. If you have any concerns or further questions, please talk to your line manager or else you can submit your questions to me for response at the following e-mail address: climate.change@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.



Bob McIntosh
4 November 2008

USING FORESTS TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE – Questions & Answers

4 November 2008

Q: Why is the national forest estate so important for climate change?

The national forest estate is nearly 10% of Scotland's total land area, and over a third of Scotland's forest area.

Globally, emissions from deforestation account for 18% of green house gas emissions. We must be sure that Scotland's national forest estate is an exemplar in terms of sustainable management of existing forests.

The Scottish Government has ambitious targets for renewable energy and a recent evaluation suggests that there is considerable potential for more renewable energy developments on national forest estate

New woodlands can help mitigate climate change through long-term storage of carbon.

Q: Isn't there a lot happening anyway?

Yes. However, the danger is that some opportunities are being missed. For example:

- A more strategic approach to renewable energy developments could accelerate progress and increase financial returns to the taxpayer.
- We are currently falling behind the 10,000 hectare per year target for woodland creation – this is serious because this programme aims to store an additional 1.2 million tonnes per year of carbon by 2050. The scope for woodland creation on the national forest estate is constrained by lack of funding – and so current progress is heavily dependent on uptake of the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) grants.

Q: What are the new opportunities/options?

The Minister will be looking for ideas, but these could include:

- Using joint ventures as a basis for a strategic approach to renewable energy development on the national forest estate.
- Looking for innovative ways to stimulate, and pay for, further creation of new woodlands, including leasing out of management rights.

Q: Won't forestry expansion cause other problems?

No – as long as it is done properly.

FC Scotland has recently published a discussion paper on woodland expansion in Scotland suggesting that, after taking account of constraints (eg the need to avoid soils with high carbon content, important conservation habitats or prime agricultural land) 650,000 hectares is achievable.

There are also tried and tested ways to ensure that we plant "the right trees in the right places" (eg indicative forestry strategies and consultation on individual proposals).

Q: How is the review being undertaken? Will there be a consultation?

A consultation paper is issued today (4 November 2008) and welcomes new suggestions, as well as comments on specific proposals. The closing date is 27 January 2009. FC Scotland staff will be encouraged to contribute ideas. (You can access the consultation paper on the FCS website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/fcsclimateconsultation)

In making decisions on the way forward, Ministers will have the benefit of consultation responses as well as advice from officials.

Q: Why do we need specific provisions in the Climate Change Bill?

There are constraints in the current forestry legislation. For example, the Forestry Commission is unable to enter into joint ventures, delegate management functions to third parties, or lease land for forestry purposes. Making provisions in the forthcoming Climate Change Bill could allow these constraints to be overcome.

Q: Why can't we use the SRPD Rural Priorities grants to promote woodland expansion?

This is an important incentive – and the SRDP has allocated over £23 million per year for woodland expansion. But the level of activity depends upon uptake – and this is slow.

Q: Will there be new money?

No, but we will examine ways to release some of the capital tied up in the national forest estate (around £850 million), while safeguarding public benefits that people throughout Scotland enjoy so enthusiastically.

Q: Why has Climate Change suddenly become so urgent?

There is a growing awareness that we must pursue every possibility in the fight against climate change – and the national forest estate is a significant resource available to us.

Q: What will be the impact on timber production?

In the long run, woodland creation will increase timber production. Meanwhile, it will be important to ensure continuity of raw material supply to the wood processing industries.

Q: What will be the impact on recreation?

It is important to safeguard existing recreational opportunities and – where it makes sense – create new ones.

Q: What will be the impact on conservation?

Any renewable energy development proposals will be subject to Environmental Impact Assessment and planning procedures, in the normal way. More generally, it will be important that the national forest estate continues to meet the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard (and of course legal requirements).

Q: What will be the impact on Forestry Commission staff?

It is too soon to say what (if any) impact there will be, although some of the options to be looked at may have implications for staff. If that proves to be the case, we will operate in accordance with the Forestry Commission's [People Strategy](#) and associated corporate policies and TUS will be consulted as appropriate.

Q: Will this have an impact on the Forest District Review?

The FD Review will continue, as its focus is on increasing operational efficiency. This Climate Change consultation is part of a continuing process to secure value for money from public assets and will help to make the most of the capital value of the national forest estate.

Q: Are the unions involved?

Yes, the Minister is meeting the TUS on 4 November to discuss the announcement.

Q: Who can I talk to?

Please talk to your line manager, in the first instance. If he or she cannot provide answers, please send your questions to: climate.change@forestry.gsi.gov.uk.

We will publish regular updates of Questions and Answers on the FCS Intranet and also for notice boards.

Q: How can I get more involved?

As an individual you can participate in the consultation process by sharing your views on the proposals. It is important to hear as many views as possible and to encourage new ideas. The consultation is on the FCS website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/fcsclimateconsultation and you are invited to respond by 27 January 2009.

Q: What happens next?

We will be setting up further meetings throughout the autumn to gather your views and respond to questions, so watch out for further details. In terms of the consultation, once they have considered the results, including the wider options review, Ministers will make an announcement about the way forward (probably in spring 2009).

RAFT
THE NATIONAL FOREST - THE KEY TO A WEALTHIER AND GREENER SCOTLAND

Major new plans to use Scotland's forests to boost economic growth and increase renewable energy capacity were unveiled by Minister for Environment Michael Russell today.

A consultation paper – Climate Change and the National Forest Estate in Scotland – outlines proposals to:

- Develop renewable energy projects to help the Scottish Government meet its ambitious greener energy targets
- Plant more trees as part of plans to increase the area of Scotland covered in woodland by the second half of this century

The consultation – part of the Scottish Recovery Plan for the economy - urges local communities, the forestry sector and private landowners to help identify new ideas and opportunities for making the national forest estate work harder.

Worth around £850 million and currently covering nearly 10 per cent of Scotland's land area, the national forest estate has the potential to be at the forefront of Scotland's drive towards a carbon lean future.

Visiting Scottish Woodland's Annandale Estate planting site, Mr Russell, said:

"As part of the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling climate change, we have undertaken to implement a world-leading 80 per cent reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2050. We also want to see 50% of all Scotland's energy produced from renewable sources by 2020.

"Scotland's forests are one of our greatest natural assets and also hold huge potential for greener energy. This consultation holds the key to unlocking that potential.

"It also holds the key to more investment in industry and more jobs. In the current economic climate, we must do all we can to support the industries that are the lifeblood of the rural economy and rural communities.

"The national forest estate has a crucial contribution to make towards a greener and a wealthier Scotland. Today is a major step towards both and crucially will give local people a real say in how we get there.

"We are looking for creative ideas and solutions to take this forward, so it's important that we hear as many views as possible. This is the first step in developing a new approach to forestry in Scotland."

The consultation invites comments on innovative suggestions including:

- establishing joint ventures with communities or the private sector to develop renewable sources of energy on the national forest estate.
- how best the national forest estate can contribute to achieving a total of 10,000 hectares of new woodland per year - woodland that will lock up 1.2m tonnes of carbon per year by 2050 and also help to create new jobs.
- the possible creation of a not for profit Trust that will bring renewed vigour to the task of woodland creation.

Comments can be submitted until 27 January 2009 and a copy of the paper is available at: www.forestry.gov.uk/fcsclimateconsultation.

Notes to Editors

1) Forestry Commission Scotland serves as the Scottish Government's forestry department. For more information log on to: www.forestry.gov.uk/aboutfcs.

2) The important role of forests in helping to mitigate climate change was highlighted in the 2006 Stern Report on the Economics of Climate Change.

3) Forestry Commission Scotland's draft Climate Change Action Plan (2008) identifying opportunities for Scotland, is available at: www.forestry.gov.uk/ccapscotland.

Media Enquiries:

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