

**Forest Policy Group
Annual Report 2011-12
Dec 2012**

Forest Policy Group

The Forest Policy Group will further the development of sustainable forestry in Scotland by contributing informed inputs to the development and implementation of forestry policy. It acts by:

- providing an independent forum for analysing policy;
- producing policy-related research and developing policy proposals;
- targeting its outputs towards ensuring more effective policy implementation;
- facilitating networking amongst its members and collaborating on policy work with like-minded individuals and organisations.

Membership

FPG membership is drawn from forestry and land use professionals, policy advisors, timber processors and users, woodland owners, community woodland organisations and woodland NGOs. Members subscribe to a view of forestry in which:

- environmental and social issues are core elements of forestry on an equal footing with timber-related economic interests.
- diversity is actively fostered – diversity of tree species and woodland types, woodland tenure, management approaches, timber production and processing, and wider economic opportunities.

FPG is funded by its membership, Dynamic Woods and the Patsy Wood Trust.

ACTIVITY 2011 - 2012

1 Forestry Involving Communities – FPG position paper

In 2011 FPG published "Woods for People" - a plea for a new emphasis in public support for forestry based around the concept of 'forestry with a belief in people'. This was accompanied by a suite of briefing papers covering rural development, grants, forest ownership, the National Forest Land Scheme, restocking, deer, & quality broadleaves. These papers were used as the basis for a meeting with the Scottish Minister for the Environment.

2 Forest ownership and land tenure

In 2012 FPG published a review of forest ownership in Scotland called "Forest Ownership in Scotland- A Scoping Study"; by Andy Wightman (author of the books "Who Owns Scotland" and "The Poor had No Lawyers") - and the only paper to have tackled this issue for many years. The research revealed that, of privately owned forests in Scotland:

- 91% of the area is owned either by landed estates or by investment owners; leaving only 9 % for all other ownership types;
- 55% of the area is owned by absentees;
- amongst private owners, 32% live outside Scotland;
- over 93% of Scotland's privately owned forest area is in holdings of more than 100ha.

Thus forest ownership is dominated by large land holdings with very high purchase prices. In comparison to the rest of Europe, Scotland has by far the most concentrated pattern of private forest ownership, with by far the lowest proportion of the population involved in owning forests. A detailed comparison of the sizes of individual forest ownerships showed the astonishing disparity between the ownership patterns in Scotland compared with European continental countries (see Figure below).

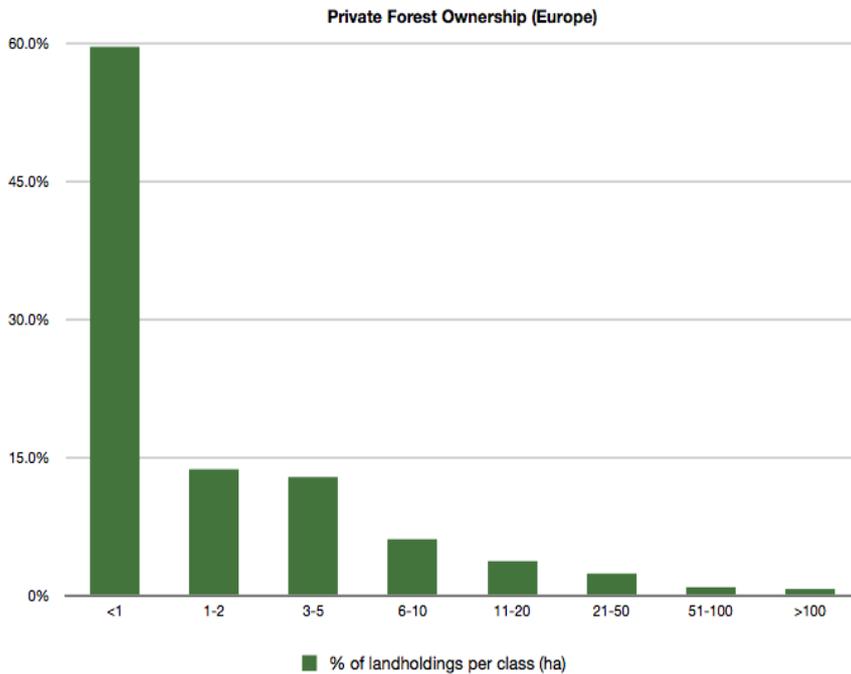
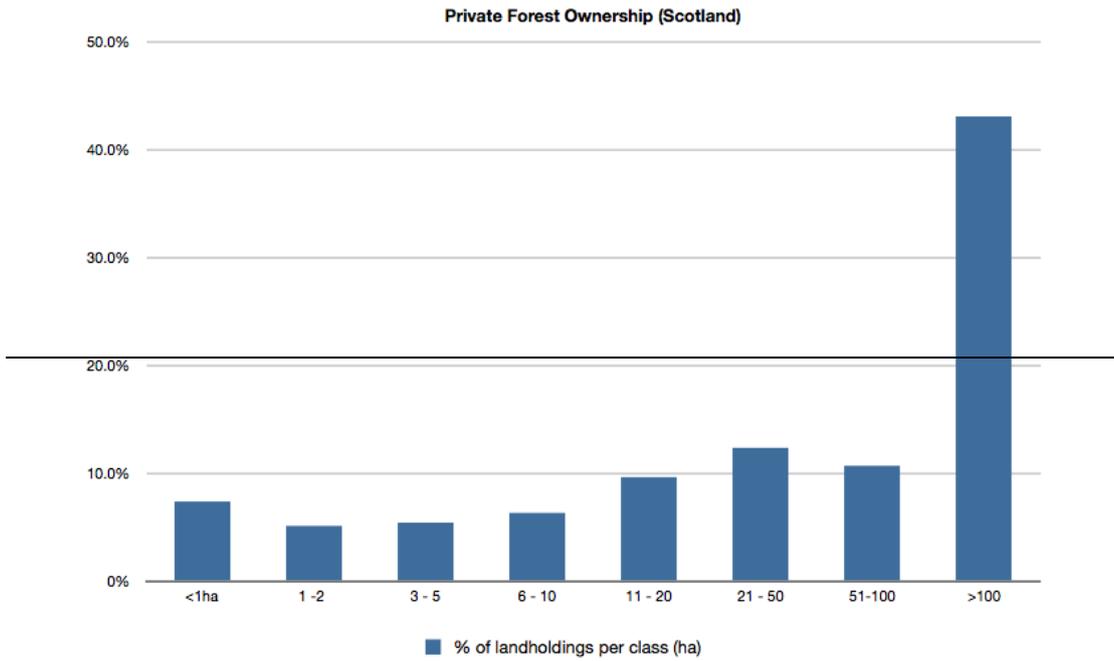


Figure 1 The percentages of forest area in different ownership sizes (ha) for Scotland (blue) and Europe (green).

The report gives an account of the advantages and disadvantages of different ownership patterns. FPG does not propose the European continental experience as a model, but suggests that capturing some of the advantages of a smaller scale ownership pattern can

only be achieved if we are willing to consider ways of diversifying ownership. The report sets out the measures which could be taken to start on the process of diversifying ownership.

The report was used as a basis for discussions with Forestry Commission and Scottish Land and Estates, and received some newspaper coverage. We are currently using the report to prepare a submission to the Land Reform Review Group set up recently by the Scottish Government.

3 Species composition of Scottish forests

FPG held a joint meeting and field day with planning staff from Forest Enterprise Scotland, including their HQ planning team and planning officers from several Forest Districts. This was a brainstorming session to develop ideas around how best to set targets for tree species composition in public forests (nationally, regionally and locally) that reflect both aspirations to diversify the range of species planted, and the realities on the ground which often constrain this. The FES staff made clear the enormity of the planning issues involved in this and FPG has undertaken to follow up with joint working to help overcome some of the problems.

4 Deer management and forestry

FPG produced a paper: Proposal – A New Licensing System for Wild Deer Management. The paper sets out the case that the current system for the regulation of deer management in Scotland reflects long-outdated assumptions about the balance of land use interests most suited to the nation's needs, and is no longer fit for purpose in the 21st Century. Its reliance on voluntary participation places many aspects of wider public interest in serious jeopardy. The paper proposes that time has come to consider a system of licensing which obliges owners of land either to participate themselves in meeting acceptable standards of deer control, or to allow other qualified persons to do so on their behalf. The paper is being used as a basis for a submission to Land Reform Review Group. During 2011-12 FPG also sent a representative to the Deer Roundtable, but we have found these meetings not sufficiently productive and have currently withdrawn, but remain on the mailing list.

5 Consultation Responses

FPG submitted responses to consultations on the "Strategic Directions for the National Forest Estate" emphasising our core values of diversity of the resource, greater local ownership and control, and a wider range of wood products and other economic opportunities. We are currently preparing 2 responses to the Land Reform Review Group.

6 FPG Website

FPG commissioned a consultant to produce a new format for the FPG website. A version of this is now functional, but not yet available publicly. We are currently ensuring that FPG will have the capacity to service the new website once it goes public.

ENQUIRIES

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