

**Forest Policy Group
Annual Report 2012-13
April 2013**

Forest Policy Group

The Forest Policy Group seeks to further the development of sustainable forestry in Scotland, by contributing informed inputs to the policy debate. Its 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 treated as core parts of forestry on an equal footing with timber-related economic interests; and
- diversity is actively fostered – diversity of tree species and woodland types, woodland ownership, management approaches, timber production and processing and wider economic opportunities.

FPG is funded by Borders Forest Trust, Community Woodlands Association, Dynamic Woods, Native Woodlands Discussion Group, Reforesting Scotland (all represented on the membership), and the Patsy Wood Trust.

ACTIVITY 2012 - 2013

1 Meetings and membership

Over the year we have had 2 full meetings, and various sub-group collaborations have gone on in the interim to progress work detailed below. Forest ownership has remained a major topic, and Andrew Midgley (Scottish Land & Estates) joined the discussions in May and Peter Peacock (Community Land Scotland) in October.

Our October meeting was hosted at Scottish Wood (www.scottishwood.co.uk), Maggie and Jim Birley's inspirational small sawmill at Oakley in Fife. The story here is of a highly sustainable small business which grew from the tiniest of kernels, processes timber which bigger mills can't handle and might otherwise go to waste (mostly locally sourced), trains and employs people once thought unemployable, all of which taking place on a few hectares of previously neglected woodland. Delightfully, part of Scottish Wood's forward plan is to not grow bigger – they prefer to remain small and pass excess work on to foster other small timber-related businesses – a virtuous model indeed.

Thanks to Simon Pepper for capable chairing while Rick Worrell was away on sabbatical. Rick is now back in that role. FPG membership now includes Jane Rosegrant, new Director of Borders Forest Trust, and Andy Brown of the Scottish Woodlot Association (www.scottishwoodlotassociation.co.uk), which is aiming to set up a network of tenanted small woodlots in Scotland, as a not-for-profit cooperative, to empower people to manage woodlots for timber production and environment. At the Big Tent festival in July 2012, Andy joined Jamie McIntyre to present an FPG session in the oak yurt on forest crofts and woodlots.

2 Forest Ownership, Public Benefit and Forestry Reform

Andy Wightman's paper for FPG, "Forest Ownership in Scotland- A Scoping Study", (the only paper to have tackled this issue for many years), was published last spring and is on the FPG website (www.forestpolicygroup.org). 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 in Scotland is dominated by large land holdings with high purchase prices, and we have by far the most concentrated pattern of private forest ownership in Europe, with by far the lowest proportion of the population involved in owning forests .

This paper, along with the "Woods for People" set published 2011, formed the basis for an FPG submission to the Land Reform Review Group this spring, entitled "Forestry Reform" (also on the website), which looks at forest ownership, the forest economy and diversifying our forest culture with reference to public benefit and the Scottish Forestry Strategy.

3 Deer Management

A second submission to the Land Reform Review Group was a proposal for "A New Licensing System for Wild Deer Management". This 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 the wider public interest in serious jeopardy. The paper proposes that the 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.

4 Species composition of Scottish forests

Rick Worrell's paper for FPG, analysing progress towards diversification of the forest resource, was published in Scottish Forestry in autumn 2012. FPG also held a brainstorming session and field day with HQ and District planning staff from FE. This was to develop ideas around how best to set targets for 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. FE 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.

5 Consultation Responses

As well as the two submissions to the Land Reform Review Group, FPG also submitted a response to the consultation 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.

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.

LOOKING AHEAD

FPG's fairly modest means have always implied limits to the number of topics we can tackle at any one time. They also limit our capacities to disseminate, promote and otherwise follow up the work we do produce. This is not helped by the fact that the rural scene in Scotland is so highly sectoralised. Forestry interests speak to forestry interests, farming to farming, etc, and this is reflected in the way in which policy is developed. But as we all know, the major influences, concerns and opportunities often cross the boundaries between sectors (like deer!), or come from somewhere more stratospheric (like climate change and energy). So a major theme for FPG in the coming months will be to investigate the potential for more combined efforts, to reach out to and hopefully work with other groups in the wider land use scene (sustainable farming, communities, energy, climate change and more), so many of which seem to share similar thinking on sustainability.

Enquiries and suggestions to:

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All papers mentioned are on our website at www.forestpolicygroup.org