

FC set to fall short of planting target

- Confor says FC record “not good enough”
- Target “won’t be reached until 2027”
- Planting density raises concerns

The latest Forestry Commission planting statistics suggest the UK Government will fail in its pledge to plant 11m trees in the lifetime of the 2015-2020 Parliament – and will not meet the target until 2027.

When the latest FC figures were published, Confor calculated that an average of only 75,166 trees had been planted every month during the period since the present Government came to office. At that rate, it will take 12.2 years from the May 2015 election to hit the 11m trees target frequently repeated by Government ministers.

Confor’s chief executive Stuart Goodall described the planting figures as “simply not good enough”.

He said much more needed to be done and while he welcomed the recent announcement of the £19m Woodland Carbon Fund (WCF), there was a deeper, underlying problem.

He explained: “The planting figures describe ‘a slower uptake of the new grant’ under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. Confor and others warned that the scheme would be cumbersome and unattractive and that has proved to be the case. Defra and Forestry Commission England are seeking to understand the practical barriers to planting trees and there is a strong argument to follow Scotland’s lead where a former Chief Planner Jim Mackinnon was appointed by the forestry minister to examine what those barriers are and how to overcome them.”

Mr Goodall noted that the scheme at Jerah – a new productive woodland in Scotland – was a great example of modern, mixed forestry with 69% of productive conifers, 21% of na-

tive broadleaves and amenity species and 10% open ground.

“Jerah also involved very close working with the community, local authority, archaeologists and environmentalists to ensure the cultural and natural heritage of the area was respected,” said Mr Goodall. “It is a brilliant example of modern forest planting and collaboration with all the relevant interest groups.

“It shows what can be achieved by skilled, determined forestry professionals who can build partnerships – but it also highlights the very disappointing position in England”.

Mr Goodall also said there was a chance to highlight the potential of the forestry sector and schemes like Jerah when the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs committee takes evidence as part of its inquiry into forestry.

“We need to use the inquiry to really raise our sights about what can be achieved,” he said. “Forestry across the UK is worth almost £2bn to the UK economy every year and employs almost 80,000 people – but there is a massive demand for timber and strong policy drivers to increase employment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Confor’s response to the consultation says that the English forestry sector can “deliver not only for rural employment but also on the Government’s climate change commitments, and on the wider environmental, social and recreational benefits that could flow from that”. It also highlights Confor research suggesting 7000 new jobs could be created by exploiting new markets for timber and managing our forests more effectively.

One million = plenty of trees?

Putting England’s tree planting record in perspective

ENGLAND’S DISMAL RECORD

ENGLAND

Gross total land area of 13m ha (approx) of which 1009ha planted with 1,353,000 trees (no species breakdown available). Average planting density 1341 trees per hectare. Planting period from April 2015 until end Sept 2016.

JERAH

Gross land total of 1005ha of which 583ha planted with 1.3m trees of which 69% (897,000) productive conifers and 21% (273,000) native broadleaves and (13,000) Scots Pine. Average planting density 2230 trees per hectare. Planting time 22 weeks.



A significant million: Jerah was designed over a two-year period and planted in 2015, involving 583ha of woodland creation using 1.3m trees (and 16 species). (Photo: Tilhill)



Scotland embraces 'once-in-a-generation' forestry opportunity

Confor is playing a central role in shaping the future of forestry in Scotland as full devolution presents a 'once-in-a-generation opportunity' for the sector.

The Scottish Government has pledged to introduce a new Bill, designed to replace the 1967 Forestry Act, by June 2017, with a new legislative and regulatory framework for forestry in Scotland. The proposals would create a new forestry division within the Scottish Government and a new agency to take on the work of Forest Enterprise Scotland managing the National Forest Estate.

The consultation on The Future of Forestry in Scotland ended on 09 November, with Confor submitting its evidence after a period of intense activity, including meetings with members and with Fergus Ewing, the Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity, who is taking forward the new legislation.

"Fergus Ewing has shown he is both passionate and practical in his approach to the future of forestry," said Confor chief executive Stuart Goodall. "He has already stressed that he wants to drive up planting and hit the annual 10,000 hectare target - and has taken practical action to do that by commissioning the report on barriers to planting from former Chief Planner Jim Mackinnon.

"It is also great to hear the Cabinet Secretary constantly referring to the £1 billion industry in Scotland and the 25,000 people employed by it. Not only that, Mr Ewing wants to grow the sector further by planting now to secure its future - and he has got himself out there in front of people who work in the sector, to hear their views directly and to discuss his plans openly. It's a really refreshing approach."

Mr Goodall

Fergus Ewing is 'passionate and practical in his approach to the future of forestry'

represented Confor at two forestry summits called by Fergus Ewing, in Dumfries & Galloway and the Highlands. The Confor chief executive spoke at the second summit and at a seminar which Confor helped to organise just a week before the consultation closed.

"There has been a lot of high-quality debate about the bill and what it proposes," said Mr Goodall. He said the three key questions were:

How do we help a successful industry to be even more successful?

How do we ensure we retain a strong core of forestry expertise at the heart of Government?

How do we guarantee future timber supplies from the National Forest Estate?

"If we can get it right, this really is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the sector to secure a bright long-term future."

The introduction to Confor's consultation response says: "The private sector, in particular through Confor, has found its voice and is taking a lead in developing policy for the sector and establishing how Scotland's forests, both private and public, can provide a myriad of economic, environmental and social benefits for the people of Scotland."

The Scottish Government is expected to publish the responses to the consultation by the end of November and its response by the end of February - before introducing the Bill in June.

"As well as engaging with Mr Ewing, we have been regularly speaking to his officials and advisers, and working with other MSPs to get them out to see the forestry sector at first hand," said Mr Goodall.

"We will continue to work with everyone who shares a desire to shape a positive future for forestry and for Scotland's economy, environment and communities."

Read Confor's responses to this and other consultations at www.confor.org.uk

