CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK FOREST STRATEGY

(Consultation DRAFT)

NOTE: THIS IS A TEXT-ONLY CONSULTATION DRAFT

The final strategy will include high quality photographs and case-studies to illustrate the setting and exceptional opportunities to expand the outstanding forest and woodland resource in the Cairngorms National Park.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Strategy purpose

The Cairngorms Forest Strategy is the key document providing strategic direction on future forest management and the restoration of woodlands in the Cairngorms National Park over the next two decades.

Specifically the Forest Strategy will:

- Help to deliver the forest related elements of the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan
- Encourage new woodland creation that compliments other landuses and the landscapes of the National Park
- Identify key issues and opportunities affecting forests and woodlands in the National Park and provide policy guidance
- Assist in the appraisal of funding applications for woodland creation
- Promote awareness of the value of encouraging more woodland creation in the National Park and encourage greater collaboration between agencies, the forest industry, landowners, land managers and communities

1.2 Policy context

The Cairngorms Forest Strategy supports and builds upon a wide range of International and National Policies relating to the environment, forestry, climate change, economic development and community development.

In the current Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan, the aspiration to enhance habitats on a landscape scale is strengthened by:

- Improving the condition of existing woodland and creating a more extensive, connected forest network, resilient to changing climate, pest and disease risks, including restoring the largely missing montane woodland habitat.
- Enhancing the special landscape qualities of the National Park.
- Delivering and recognising good practice in moorland management
- Managing grazing by deer and other herbivores to allow woodland regeneration

Alongside the National Park Partnership Plan the Cairngorms Forest Strategy is guided by other key policy documents, including the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan, Active Cairngorms, the Cairngorms Economic Strategy, Local Development Strategy and the Local Development Plan.

Of most relevance in a national context is the Scottish Forestry Strategy which addresses seven themes:

- climate change
- timber
- business development
- community development

- access and health
- environmental quality
- biodiversity

The UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) is the reference standard for sustainable forest management in the UK and defines the standards and requirements for forestry regulation and grant aid administered by FCS. In the Cairngorms National Park there is a public expectation that forest management will be of a particularly high standard with a strong emphasis on environmental enhancement. This strategy aims not to duplicate existing policies but to provide guidance appropriate for a National Park.

Table 1. Summary of International, National and National Park Policies the Cairngorms Forest Strategy supports and helps to deliver.

INTERNATIONAL		
United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change European Landscapes Convention Habitats Directive Water Framework Directive		
NATIONAL		
SCOTTISH FORESTRY STRATEGY ***The forest resource has become a central part of our culture, economy and environment***		
High quality, robust and adaptable environment	**Improved health and wellbeing of people and their communities**	**Competitive and innovative business contributing to the growth of the Scottish economy**
UK Forestry Standard UK Woodland Assurance Standard Forestry Commission Scotland Advice and Guidance Forestry EIA regulations 2017 Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Scottish Land Use Strategy Scotland's Code of Practice on Deer Management Scotland's Climate Change Plan (draft)		

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK		
NATIONAL PARK PARTNERSHIP PLAN ***An outstanding National Park enjoyed and valued by everyone, where nature and people thrive together***		
CONSERVATION A special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced	**VISITOR EXPERIENCE** People enjoying the Park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences	**RURAL DEVELOPMENT** A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities
Cairngorms Local Development Plan, Cairngorms Nature Action Plan, Cairngorms Economic Strategy, Active Cairngorms, Catchment Management Plans, Deer Management Plans,		

1.3 Current resource

Table 2 provides a summary of forest cover by the main tree species in the Cairngorms National Park. 81% of the area of tree cover is coniferous with three quarters of that being native Scots pine. By far the most dominant broadleaf species is birch (16%) with other species eg rowan and aspen making up only 3% of the tree cover.

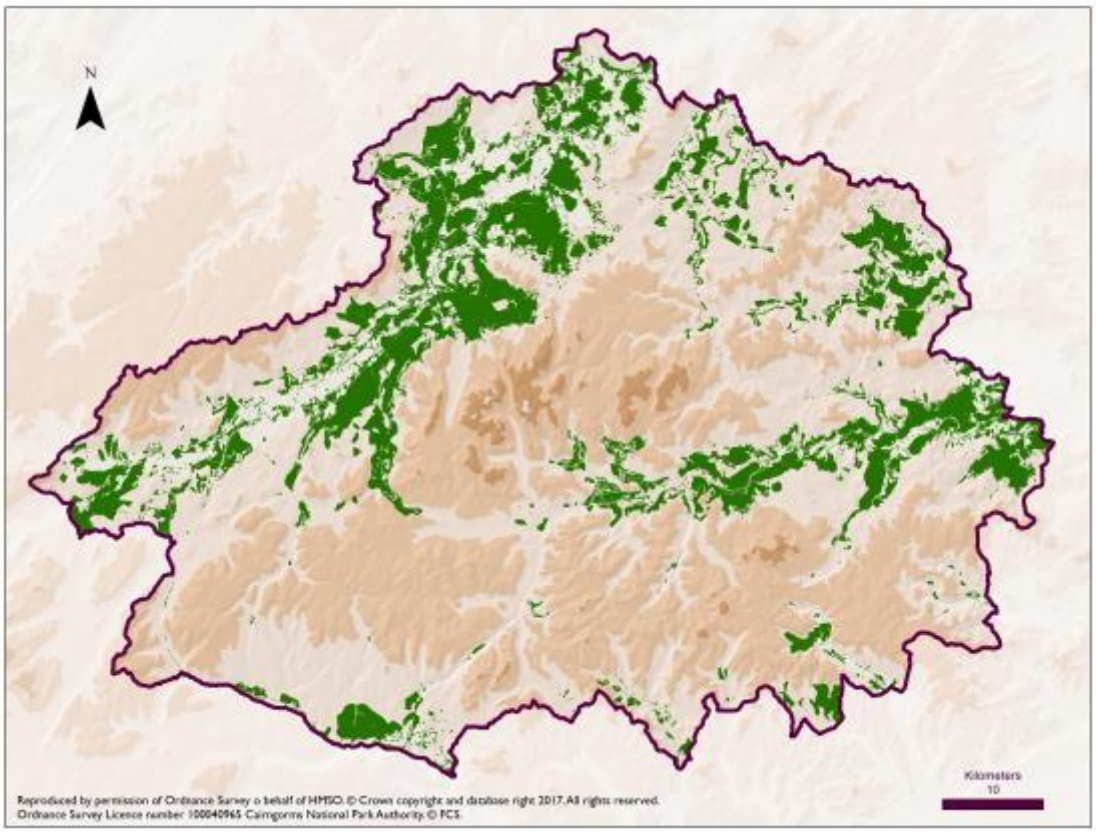
Table 2: Provisional estimates of forest cover (Area, Volume and Carbon storage) in the Cairngorms National Park (National Forest Inventory, 2015)

	Total area (ha)	Total Area (%)	Total Volume (K m3 obs)	Total Carbon (K t)
Scots pine	36,900	60	7,204	2,577
Sitka spruce	5,600	9	1,843	549
Lodgepole pine	3,000	5	743	257
Larches	2,600	4	644	201
Other conifers	1,600	3	552	154
All conifers	**49,800**	**81**	**11,040**	**3,758**
Birch	10,200	16	858	454
Other broadleaves	1,900	3	220	104
All broadleaves	**12,100**	**19**	**1,082**	**560**
All species	**62,300**	**100**	**12,126**	**4,318**

The woodlands of the Cairngorms National Park are a distinctive feature of the landscape, ecology, economy and cultural heritage. Part of the reason for their importance and distinctiveness stems from the unusually high proportion of native tree species they contain (even commercial woodlands are predominantly Scots pine). While the average proportion of native woodland across all Scottish local authority areas is 22.5%, the Cairngorms National Park boasts 69%, making it the only area in Scotland where native woodland forms the majority of the woodland resource.

Of the native woodland resource, 67% consists of native pinewoods, which are a mixture of ancient forest and woods of plantation origin. 63% of native woodland is in good health for biodiversity, based on analysis of four key condition measures.

Map 1. Current forest resource in the Cairngorms National Park

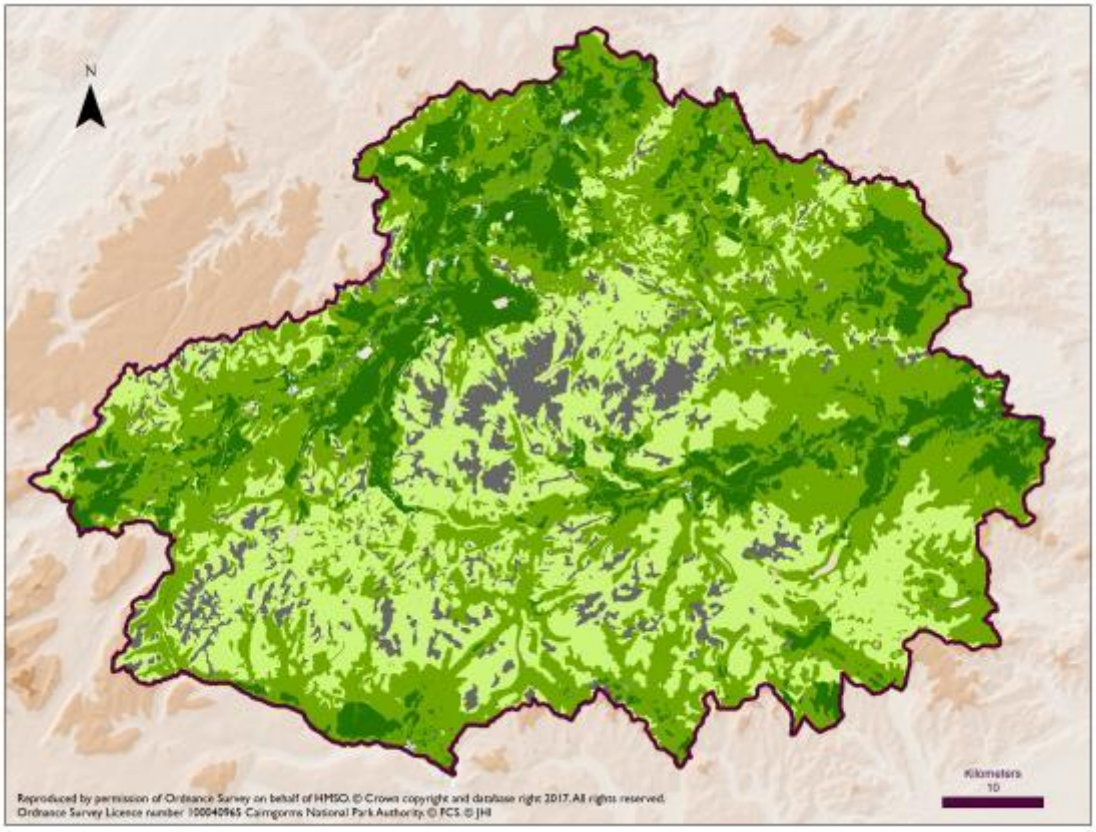


Almost all of the Caledonian Forest resource of the National Park is internationally significant and protected through SAC designation. In the Cairngorms National Park, forest cover is just 16.4% (Map 1), whilst in Scotland as a whole it is 18%. Nevertheless the Cairngorms Forests are disproportionately significant for rare flora and fauna. Scottish Natural Heritage has identified 223 species for which the Park as 'highly significant' (i.e. supporting between 75 - 100%, of the UK population). Of these 223 species, 100 are dependent on woodland whilst, by comparison, wetland hosts 12, grassland 8 and moorland only one.

A significant proportion of the National Park forests are managed for timber production, providing employment through all stages of forest management from forest planning to tree nurseries through to planting, felling and providing the raw materials for the sawmills. We are fortunate to have two major sawmills within and on the edge of the National Park and several small-scale saw millers in and around the National Park.

This strategy seeks to build upon this resource and infrastructure, creating a sense of optimism and growing forest culture in the National Park.

Map 2. Native woodland potential in the Cairngorms National Park (Native Woodland Model, 2004).



Map key: Dark green: existing forest; mid green: potential forest; pale green: potential scrub and scattered trees; grey: very limited potential tree growth.

2. VISION

Map 2 indicates the ecological scope and vast potential for woodland expansion in the National Park. This strategy aims to demonstrate where this can be realistically achieved to help deliver National Park Partnership Plan objectives and complement other landuses.

The National Park hosts a wide range of other open habitats important for the wildlife they support, the jobs they provide and the wider ecosystem services they deliver. These include farmland providing habitat for wading birds; peatlands, essential for storing carbon; moorlands and species-rich grasslands hosting a broad diversity of flora and fauna. If carried out sensitively, new woodland creation and management will compliment and not conflict with these other important landuses.

We wish to strengthen and further develop a forest habitat network across the Cairngorms, including between river catchments. This would allow a wide range of woodland species to disperse, recolonise and migrate more easily, while delivering a range of wider benefits such as locally sourced timber and other wood products, improved 'natural flood management', water quality improvements and carbon sequestration. We need to do this with care to minimise the potential risks of the spread of disease, invasive species and wildfire.

Our vision is for the forests of the Cairngorms National Park to flourish and to expand, providing us and future generations with:

- **enhanced and better connected forest habitats;**
- **more diverse and enhanced landscapes;**
- **greater capacity to store carbon;**
- **more high quality timber;**
- **outstanding recreation experiences;**
- **greater opportunities for local business development.**

The Cairngorms Forests in 20 and 100 years' time?

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There is an increased appreciation of the value of native forests and the potential benefits of enhancing and expanding the existing forest resources. A forest culture is growing in the communities living in and around the National Park, with more people employed in forestry, more people enjoying the forests and more people actively involved in their management.

Habitat networks are enhanced and linkages between catchments are stronger. Grazing and muirburn management has enabled forest fringes to expand and naturally regenerate along forest edges, into gullies, along river edges and to higher altitudes. Montane tree species are protected and recovering in key locations throughout the National Park. Declines in forest species of critical conservation concern, like the capercaillie and the downy willow, have been reversed as they benefit from habitat enhancement and woodland expansion.

Productive forests contain a higher proportion of native species and are more structurally diverse rendering them more resilient to risks from disease and invasive species. Landscapes are improved with more integrated landuse and fewer hard forest edges. Biosecurity and wildfire management is improved.

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Forests that were in decline in the early 21st Century have fully recovered and are in balance with their surrounding landuse. The central core of the National Park is ringed by forests reaching their natural tree line. Co-operative deer management has enabled deer numbers to increase again now that the forests are more resilient. Cattle and sheep benefit from increased shelter and a broader diversity of species to forage.

Sawmills have adapted to growing demand for wide variety of locally sourced native timbers. Birch has become an increasingly important local resource for firewood businesses and for bespoke woodland crafts.

Tourism in the Cairngorms National Park is boosted by the dramatic forested landscapes that have a more natural treeline and fit well alongside more open moorland and farmland landscapes. Communities benefit from increased employment and pride in the international acclaim that is given to the landscapes of the National Park.

The CNP is home to strong, self- sustaining populations of capercaillie in the forests of Speyside and Deeside, ring-ouzels are common in the montane woodlands of the Park and blue -throats are frequently heard singing in high altitude forest and willow scrub.

QUESTION 1

Do you think this vision sufficiently captures the opportunities for forestry over the next 20 to 100 years?

If not how could it be improved?

3. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The following strategic objectives summarise how we aim to achieve our vision for a flourishing and expanding forest resource in the National Park.

- **Promote the creation of new woodlands that complement other landuse**
- **Enhance the condition of existing forests**
- **Restore lost or vulnerable forest ecosystems**
- **Encourage natural regeneration of native forests**
- **Promote the creation and enhancement of productive forests**
- **Protect forests from disease and invasive species**
- **Increase employment in the forestry sector**
- **Encourage innovation in the use and marketing of native forest products**
- **Promote responsible access and active enjoyment of forests**
- **Promote community involvement in forest management.**

3.1 Rationale

This section explains why the strategic objectives are important in the National Park along with a succinct summary of how we aim to achieve them.

a) Promote the creation of new woodlands that complement other landuse

The current national target is to increase the area of woodland in Scotland by more than 10,000 hectares per year; in the National Park we are aiming for on average 1,000 hectares per year until further review.

In the National Park we aim to encourage woodland creation by highlighting the opportunities that brings and to show how new and inspiring woodlands can complement agriculture, moorland management and peatland restoration.

b) Enhance the condition of existing forests

All forests and woods require some form of management. This may be to improve the habitat for rare and vulnerable forest dependent species such as capercaillie and pine hoverfly, to enhance landscape or to improve timber quality.

In the National Park we aim for all woodland and forests to be of the highest quality for both wildlife and people by promoting the wider benefits of sensitive forest management.

c) Restore lost or vulnerable forest ecosystems

This includes the tiny fragments of montane willows that are clinging to remote and inaccessible crags, native trees and woodland remnants hidden within plantations or in remote, isolated gullies within open landscapes that unless protected will die and not be replaced.

In the National Park we aim to retrieve our native woodland heritage by increasing understanding of its value and finding innovative ways to ensure it is fully restored.

d) Encourage natural regeneration of native forests

Woodland regeneration is preferable to new planting in some areas. It avoids disturbance of vulnerable soils and can provide a more varied forest structure which has wildlife and landscape benefits. Already there are some impressive large scale and valuable small-scale examples of native woodland regeneration in the National Park which have been achieved chiefly through improved grazing management.

In the National Park we aim to encourage significant areas of natural woodland regeneration by promoting and supporting collaboration in habitat monitoring, grazing management and muirburn.

e) Promote the creation and enhancement of productive forests

Many of the forests in the National Park that are of commercial value for timber production are also important for wildlife and recreation. By contrast some productive forests are almost entirely made up of densely planted, un-thinned, non-native species. There are opportunities over the long-term to improve the structural diversity of existing forests and to create new commercial forests that provide a wider range of benefits.

In the National Park we aim to support the continuation of timber production and processing and to ensure all new and existing productive forests provide a wider range of benefits by ensuring they are structurally diverse and include a wide range of tree species.

f) Protect forests from disease and invasive species

The threat to our trees from pests and diseases is growing. Climate change, global travel and imported plants and wood can increase pests and diseases and their impacts. Pests and diseases can spread rapidly, damaging or even killing trees; this can have a knock-on effect on wildlife, landscape and forest industries.

In the National Park we aim to increase awareness of the threats of disease and invasive species to forests and to reduce the threat by encouraging biosecurity and increased tree structural and species diversity.

g) Increase employment in the forestry sector

Forestry is one of four economic drivers in the National Park prioritised for growth. If other strategic objectives are met, we anticipate increased opportunities for employment and in particular recognise the need to encourage young people and women to enter into the forestry sector.

In the National Park we aim to increase employment in the forestry sector by capitalising on the growing momentum for woodland creation; promoting sustainable forest management, timber production and increased processing/value adding to timber.

h) Encourage innovation in the use and marketing of native forest products

This strategic objective applies to all forest products, but particularly relates to the potential for innovation in the use of 'native' woods. With marketing linked to the National Park Brand, there is potential for native wood products to be promoted more effectively and for small businesses to capitalise on an increased woodland resource.

In the National Park we aim to help local forest related businesses by promoting the sustainable management and processing of a wide variety of native species.

i) Promote responsible access and active enjoyment of forests

Well managed forests are vital for wildlife and are good for people. 44% of the 1.8 million visitors to the National Park each year enjoy low level walks, most of which are in and around forests. We have two internationally recognised mountain biking facilities both of which run through forests. It is important people are both able to enjoy being in the forests and that they too play a part in taking responsibility to care for them.

In the National Park we aim to support forest managers in ensuring people enjoy the many benefits forests provide by promoting the value and health benefits of recreation in forests.

j) Promote community involvement in forest management.

Local communities engaged in the management and enjoyment of their local forests inevitably gain a greater sense of ownership and personal responsibility for their local resources. Collaboration and dialogue between forest managers and local people can lead to improved forest management and to improved understanding of the complexities and timescales involved.

In the National Park we aim to increase involvement and understanding of forest management by encouraging forest managers to develop their plans openly with local communities and to encourage communities to take an active interest.

QUESTION 2

Do you agree with the ten strategic objectives and their rationale?

If not how could they be improved?

4. POLICY GUIDANCE

The following guidance reflects National Policy and supports the outcomes of the National Park Partnership Plan. Each bullet point indicates how we can plan new woodlands and manage existing woodlands in ways that are appropriate for an outstanding National Park… enjoyed and valued by everyone, where nature and people thrive together.

4.1 Integrating woodland creation with other land use

Managed moorland

Moorland, managed for grouse-shooting, covers approximately 40% of the National Park (c200,000 ha). It is a significant element of the National Park landscape that is managed through a combination of techniques, but most significantly by muirburn, cutting and grazing. Deer reductions, mountain hare control and stock fencing for livestock on grouse moors has resulted in some significant areas of natural regeneration, particularly along roadsides.

If sensitively designed and located, the aspiration to expand native woodland in the National Park, is compatible with open managed moorland and grouse moor management. Increased broadleaved woodland and scrub on moorland edges would provide an increase in habitat diversity and woodland connectivity for a wide variety of species.

- **Natural regeneration of native tree species should be encouraged on the forest-moorland margins to provide an increase in habitat diversity and woodland connectivity to benefit a wide variety of species**
- **Supplementing natural regeneration where necessary by planting a variety of native species is encouraged**
- **Low density broadleaf woodland creation should be targeted in gullies and alongside burns to improve water quality and to provide additional alternative foraging and shelter for gamebirds, livestock and other wildlife**
- **Woodland fragments (often only a few senescent birch or Scots pine trees) indicating previously more extensive native woodland on moorland must be protected from further decay and encouraged to regenerate naturally**
- **The new muirburn code for Scotland indicates that muirburn can be both a source and a moderator of wildfire. Changes in landuse from managed moorland to a more wooded landscape need to take account of the effect of changes in the muirburn regime on the relative risk of wildfire**

In-bye agricultural land

The association of farmland with forest and mountain is a key ingredient of the National Park landscapes, in some places the dominant ingredient. Change to these landscapes as a consequence of declining farm management could in some places have a significant effect on the special landscape qualities of the Park.

High-nature-value, low-intensity agriculture including wood pasture and agro-forestry contribute significantly to landscape character of the National Park. The combination of wetlands, wet grasslands and low-intensity mixed farming host one of the most important UK mainland sites for breeding wading birds. Combined with careful seasonal grazing rare habitats depend on farming and crofting eg species-rich grasslands and aspen woodlands containing the dark bordered beauty moth (a key species in the Cairngorms Nature Action Plan).

Post Brexit, the future of agriculture is uncertain; we must ensure that the Forest Strategy helps to reduce conflicting objectives of securing the future of farming in the National Park alongside new woodland creation. We must maintain the culture of crofting and farming in the National Park alongside retaining the potential to market local, fresh, healthy and environmentally sustainable farm produce.

- **Well-designed small scale woodlands on crofts and farms should be created to enable new forms of agro-forestry, complement livestock management, enhance habitat diversity and provide a possible income source eg woodfuel**
- **New planting schemes on agricultural land should give full consideration to the quality of the land in a local context to ensure they do not adversely impact on local patterns of agriculture and landscape**
- **New woodland creation schemes should avoid priority sites for wading birds**
- **The wholesale conversion of large areas of enclosed, inbye agricultural land to forestry is not supported**

Peatlands

Alongside ambitious national targets for woodland expansion, there are similar peatland restoration targets: currently 20,000 ha per year across Scotland. The National Park Partnership Plan target is to achieve 5,000ha of peatland restoration in five years. Conservation and enhancement of peatlands is covered by the UKFS. Tree planting on peat deeper than 0.5m or on sites that would compromise the hydrology of adjacent bog habitats will not be approved under the EIA regulations by FCS for grant funding. Natural tree regeneration on near-natural peatland habitats is achievable in some circumstances.

- **New woodland creation schemes must be designed to avoid damaging the adjoining peatland hydrology**

- **Encourage peatland restoration within woodlands and bog woodlands in appropriate locations**

Deer management

Deer management to ensure deer densities are compatible with the need to allow woodland regeneration is a conservation priority in the current National Park Partnership Plan. Deer densities vary considerably across the National Park and in some areas remain too high to enable the recovery of fragile woodlands. There are large areas where red deer and roe deer numbers have been significantly reduced to enable natural regeneration of woodland without the need for fences eg in Speyside and in Deeside where native Pinewoods are now recovering after centuries of decline. In some areas where native woodlands have become re-established through deer management, the habitat can now support higher numbers of deer in a markedly improved habitat. This is an inspiring story and one we wish to see emulated more widely.

The management of deer is controlled by individual landowners who work collaboratively within Deer Management Groups (DMGs). National Park policy and co-ordination between DMGs should help to facilitate deer management to enable further woodland regeneration.

- **Collaboration between neighbouring deer managers to achieve deer densities compatible with woodland regeneration is encouraged**

Deer fencing

In some areas where it is impractical to reduce grazing pressure to enable tree establishment or natural regeneration, deer fencing is required as a short term management tool. In some locations, especially remote wild land areas, fencing can impact negatively on landscape and access. If grazing outside fences is not limited, fencing exclosures can exacerbate erosion and habitat damage.

The use of fencing and tree planting up to the fence line creates hard edges that often do not sit well in the landscape and are of less value for wildlife.

- **Fencing is an important tool for woodland creation, but can have negative impacts and so its use needs to be carefully considered and any impacts mitigated as part of the design process**
- **If fencing is necessary, it is important to allow space for open ground and a more 'feathered' or 'fuzzy' woodland edge within the fence line.**
- **Any fencing in or near existing woodland must conform to guidance on avoiding bird strikes by capercaillie and black grouse.**

Landscape and wild land

There is much greater awareness today of the potential landscape benefits of well-designed woodland and potential impacts of poorly designed schemes. Well-designed woodland over the long term can enhance the landscape and increase a sense of naturalness and wildness.

Even predominantly open landscapes can be enhanced by the increased diversity that sensitively planned woodland creation schemes provide. Careful planning to achieve a good fit with the surrounding topography and pre-existing land uses is important to maximise landscape benefits.

Landscape and wild land impacts need to be considered at all stages of new woodland creation. There are potentially negative visual impacts from woodland creation operations such as fencing, tubes and forest tracks. They can have short term, but significant, adverse effects in the most sensitive areas and should be kept to a minimum. CNPA has developed a web-based **landscape toolkit** which provides further advice on the siting and design of woodland creation and deer fencing.

- **Early and thorough consideration should be given to the positive and negative landscape impact of new woodland, especially in wild land and other sensitive areas**
- **New woodland should be designed to enhance perceptions of naturalness and wildness in the landscape in the long term and to keep short term negative visual impacts to a minimum**

Designated sites

Extra caution is required when considering woodland creation in any designated site (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes), however the wider benefits of woodland creation, encouraging natural processes and the enhancement of landscape-scale habitat networks must be also be fully considered and implemented where possible.

Designated sites play an important role in ensuring conservation is at the heart of landuse decision making. In the National Park we are developing a regional approach to managing designated habitats that takes account of all the 'qualifying features' across all sites.

- **Proposed woodland creation within SACs or SPAs, or with the potential to affect SACs or SPAs in the surrounding area, will require consultation with SNH and may require a Habitats Regulations Appraisal**

QUESTION 3.

Do you agree with the above policy guidance on integrating woodland creation with other land use?

If not how could they be improved?

4.2 Habitat enhancement

Forest habitat networks

Woodland creation will be of most value for wildlife if it is designed to expand habitat networks by linking existing areas of forest via 'corridors' or 'stepping stones'. This is particularly important for species of conservation concern such as the Capercaillie which require extensive areas of native pinewood.

Improved habitat linkages are undoubtedly beneficial for wildlife but forest design also needs to take account of the potential for increasing the risk of the spread of disease and invasive species.

- **Woodland planting and regeneration that supports the enhancement of 'landscape-scale' habitat networks is strongly encouraged especially where this improves connections between river catchments.**

Montane woodland

In nature, tree cover gradually thins with altitude, exposure and as soil conditions change. There are some excellent examples of re-emerging natural treelines in the National Park resulting from a reduction in grazing pressure, but they are isolated and few.

Many bird species including black grouse, red grouse and ring ouzel benefit from the cover and foraging provided by a more natural tree line. In higher altitudes and on moorland edge it is particularly important that new woodland creation schemes include soft edges and a diverse array of native tree species.

Dwarf birch habitat is extremely sparse and, at the upper altitudinal limit, the very rare montane willow woodland is virtually non-existent in the UK as a result of past landuse. Montane willows are limited to the most inaccessible of ledges and unless action is taken to halt decline it is on the brink of disappearing.

- **The restoration of montane woodland including re-establishing the missing 'birch zone', dwarf birch and montane willows is a priority**
- **As new and restored montane woodlands are likely to be in highly sensitive, remote locations, careful attention should be given to design to achieve the best possible ecological and landscape benefits**

Riparian woodland

Riparian woodland is defined as any woodland on the edge of a watercourse or waterbody. The main benefits of riparian woodland are improvements to water quality, shading to reduce summer temperatures for salmon and freshwater pearl mussel, bank stabilisation and an increase in habitat diversity.

Rivers and burns are natural corridors along which riparian woodland can create woodland habitat linkages within and between river catchments. Gullies formed by upland burns can be refuges for woodland remnants, also containing associated understory species.

Although gradually getting less common, there are still sites in the National Park where watercourses are bordered by dense stands of conifers which can be detrimental to water quality and can cause harmful winter shading of rare invertebrate breeding grounds.

There are currently Eurasian beaver established close to the National Park. It is possible that beaver may return to the National Park in the future. A significant increase in riparian woodland is needed to ensure sufficient habitat to minimise potential impacts of future beaver populations.

- **Woodland expansion is targeted along gullies, burns and rivers to help connect habitats and restore dwindling woodland remnants**
- **Planting of riparian woodlands on farmland is encouraged to create nutrient and sediment buffer zones, and to help ensure that watercourses on farms and crofts are in good ecological condition**
- **Dense conifer stands in close proximity to watercourses should be gradually replaced by native broadleaved species**

Aspen

The Cairngorms National Park contains some of the best examples of Aspen woodlands in the country. Aspen is vital to the survival of a variety of nationally rare invertebrates, lichens and fungi that live in association with aspen and no other species of tree. Many aspen stands in the park are over mature and have no young trees to replace them. Although widespread in the straths of the Park, large stands of pure aspen are relatively uncommon.

- **The creation of new aspen stands and to the protection of existing stands is strongly encouraged**

Woodland remnants

Scattered woodland remnants are usually indicative of a past greater expanse of woodland in the National Park. They typically consist of senescent native trees (most often birch or scots pine) barely capable of producing seeds, often in isolated locations with little or no evidence of young trees emerging to replace them.

In some locations isolated native trees have been deliberately and systematically removed to expand moorland habitat.

- **All existing unmapped native woodland remnants should be mapped and opportunities developed for their protection and enhancement**

Ancient and semi natural woodlands

The Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI) indicates where there is evidence of a long history of woodland cover. These sites are important because they sometimes harbour a range of other native woodland species including invertebrates, bryophytes and fungi. The AWI is not 100% accurate and is known to have missed some important sites and included others that are less significant.

- **Seek to improve information and records of ancient and semi-natural woodlands in the National Park**
- **Continue to protect ancient and semi-natural woodlands from further damage and fragmentation**
- **Continue to promote the restoration of plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS)**

Harvesting

Forestry is a long term business and timber production from thinning and felling is a crucial part of sustainable forest management. Such management can also bring significant biodiversity and recreational benefits. However harvesting needs to be carefully planned and managed to avoid or minimise conflicts and negative impacts. It is important that in planning harvesting, foresters are sensitive about access and recreation needs, species and habitat conservation. It is equally important for others not directly involved in forestry to gain a greater understanding of the need for management, including harvesting.

Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) help increase species and structural diversity in forests. LISS also generally cause less rapid change to the landscape and to the physical environment than clear-felling systems and so can contribute to multi-purpose objectives. The use of LISS is based upon limiting the size of areas to be clear-felled and the use of natural regeneration and the creation of a varied forest structure containing a range of species.

- **Encourage the preparation of long term forest plans, highlighting biodiversity and recreational issues and opportunities to ensure harvesting is carefully planned**
- **Encourage the expansion of the forest area managed under LISS**
- **Clear-felling should be minimised, and seed bearing native trees retained on clearfell sites where possible to ensure some continuous forest cover.**
- **The presumption against woodland removal as per national forestry guidance should be followed.**
- **Encourage low impact extraction methods in sensitive sites through eg horse logging**

Biosecurity, invasive species and wildfire

Improved habitat connectivity can potentially lead to an increased threat from disease, invasive species and the spread of wildfire. The benefits of improved forest connectivity for wildlife are highly significant and remain a priority, but it is important that these potential threats are also always taken into account.

The threat to our trees and forests from pests and diseases is growing. Climate change, global travel and imported plants and wood can increase the risk of the spread of pests and diseases which can spread rapidly, damaging different parts of the tree and affecting timber quality.

The management of non-native species such as grey squirrel and rhododendron is guided by the internationally recognised three stage hierarchical approach, the key principles of which are prevention, rapid response (eradication) and control and containment.

- **Forest managers should keep up to date by subscribing to Forestry Commission Scotland's tree health updates**
- **Biosecurity procedures should be followed and the 'Keep it Clean' biosecurity campaign promoted**
- **Promote the removal of Lodgepole pine stands from within Caledonian Scots pine woods to reduce the threat if Dothistroma, red-band needle blight to Scots pine**
- **Follow Forestry Commission Guidance on managing invasive and non-native forestry species**
- **Follow Forestry Commission guidance on building wildfire resilience into forest management planning**
- **Support wildfire groups across the National Park**

QUESTION 4.

Do you agree with the above policy guidance on habitat enhancement?

If not how could they be improved?

4.3 Rural development

Employment

The internationally recognised National Park status of the Cairngorms brings opportunities for inspirational landscape-scale woodland creation, business innovation, marketing of local forest products and employment.

The Cairngorms Economic Strategy strives for a 'more valuable and resilient forestry sector with increased profitability and local prosperity'. We want to build on the optimism presented by national targets for woodland creation and encourage more opportunities people to become employed in the forestry sector.

This strategy encourages employment in everything from site surveying and planning; from the tree nursery to ground preparation; planting, fencing, deer control, maintenance and monitoring; through to thinning, felling and milling. The sawmills in and around the National Park have invested millions of pound in the local economy and depend upon further investment in our forestry sector.

- **Training and skills development needs to be directed towards equipping young people for employment in the forestry sector**
- **Local community engagement in woodlands and community owned woods is encouraged to bring new opportunities for social enterprise**
- **New tourism initiatives related to selling the health benefits of forest recreation should be developed**
- **Small businesses using local native woods and employed in eg wood fuel, furniture making and green woodworking should be supported to develop and grow**
- **Support the exploration of new employment opportunities through development of existing saw mills**

Productive woodland

Driven by national targets we have the opportunity to create new woodlands, restore lost habitat, enhance landscape and provide a future timber resource in new and inspiring ways. In the 1970s-80s large areas of Scotland were planted up with single species conifer plantations in regular shaped blocks that completely changed the landscape. Today we have the opportunity to restructure existing species-poor forests and make them more diverse and attractive.

The dominant species in productive forests in the National Park is native Scots pine; bringing considerable scope to manage forests commercially and also for wildlife and recreation. There is huge potential in the National Park to invest in a forest resource that will provide local employment and increase opportunities for future enterprise from marketing and refining local forest products.

- **Encourage timber production, particularly through thinning that brings a wide range of biodiversity and landscape benefits**
- **Support increased processing/value adding to timber in the Park**
- **The use of native species in productive forests for timber and woodfuel, especially birch, is strongly encouraged**
- **In some situations modest proportions of non-native European species may be planted to increase species and structural diversity, reduce disease risk and increase future economic options**
- **Where non-native species are required, European species are preferred**
- **Existing productive forests containing large, even-aged non-native coniferous species should be managed to increase species and structural diversity**
- **The planting of forests designed with future timber extraction in mind is preferred in areas where there is already existing good road access**
- **Ancient Woodland Sites planted with non-native conifers should be managed to improve the condition of the ancient woodland**

Natural flood management

Land management has a significant impact on the rate at which water flows over the landscape. Heavily grazed and trampled ground sheds water faster than 'softer' ground with thick layers of vegetation. The benefit of woodland in river catchments is that it intercepts rainfall, increases water absorption into the soil and reduces surface flow rates, resulting in a slowing of movement of water into rivers.

Woodland creation is one of many techniques being used to assist natural flood management. It is likely to be most effective if targeted in locations where a range of natural flood management measures are being used in a large scale approach. This requires vision, ambition and drive. The Catchments Partnerships in the National Park are ideally placed to develop the landscape-scale approach required for natural flood management through woodland creation.

- **Mapping techniques need to be developed to help target woodland creation in areas that will provide the greatest contribution to Natural Flood Management**
- **large scale woodland creation to assist in Natural Flood Management is widely encouraged.**

Low carbon and carbon trading

The low-carbon agenda is directing more and more people to using woodfuel to heat their homes; this is a real opportunity for business development provided the resources are sustainable and managed appropriately.

Developments in carbon trading have the potential to become increasingly important sources of income for woodland creation in the future.

- **Creation of woodland that will help provide future woodfuel supplies is encouraged.**
- **New opportunities for carbon trading to fund woodland creation should be explored and promoted**

QUESTION 5.

Do you agree with the above policy guidance on rural development?

If not how could they be improved?

4.4 Forests and people

Forests and woodlands provide wide-ranging and diverse benefits to people in the National Park - both residents and visitors. In addition to supporting livelihoods and employment, sustainably managed forests deliver a variety of environmental and public health services. Increasingly, visits to forests and woodlands are recognised for their value in promoting and sustaining good mental health.

Visitors contribute 43% towards the economy of the National Park and as such creating, improving and maintaining opportunities to enjoy the area is vital to securing the economic future of the Park. Surveys have also shown that the most popular activities undertaken by visitors are sightseeing (56%) and low level walking (44%). The majority of low level paths promoted to visitors and residents by 17 communities in the Park are located in and around woodland and forest, as is much of the 666 miles of core paths. Woodland paths are also specifically promoted by many forest owners in the National Park.

As required in the UK Forestry Standard we want to:

- Make access to woodlands easier for all sectors of society
- Use woodland access to help improve physical and mental health
- Provide a greater range of ways for people to enjoy woodlands
- Enhance forestry's engagement with communities
- Promote community management and ownership of forests

Responsible access

A significant proportion of the established forest and woodland in the National Park is managed with access for the public as a prime function. For example, all nine of the National Nature Reserves in the Cairngorms encourage visitors to enjoy the outstanding forests contained within them whilst there are numerous other smaller but none the less important forests and woodlands where informal recreation takes place.

The right of responsible access to forests and woodlands is essential in maintaining existing levels of recreational visits.

- **Encourage use of recreational access management plans to help inform forest management which balances the needs of timber producers, visitors, conservation, and sporting interests.**

Health

Scotland has an outstanding natural environment, which benefits our society and the economy, but it is currently an under-used asset for improving public health. In particular, the woodlands and countryside close to where people live, work and go to school, can provide the setting and inspiration for people's 'daily dose' of physical activity, bringing physical, mental and social health benefits.

The positive links between the natural environment and human health are now well proven, supported by research from around the world and reflected in a range of Scottish policies.

The opportunities to improve public health through outdoor access and recreation are recognised in the current National Park Partnership Plan: 'encouraging residents and visitors to responsibly enjoy and use the National Park for physical activity as part of daily life.'

In order to help deliver the Active Cairngorms Strategy and contribute to delivery of the 'Our Natural Health Service' initiative led by Scottish National Heritage we will seek opportunities to influence and shape forest and woodland management and development.

- **Promote the provision of welcoming and well managed woodlands - in and around communities - that contribute to quality of life and provide opportunities for exercise, learning, relaxation and enjoyment.**
- **Seek to deliver improvement in provision for recreation in forests and woodlands including development of the local and Core Path networks.**

QUESTION 6.

Do you agree with the above policy guidance on forests and people?

If not how could they be improved?

5. TARGETING WOODLAND CREATION

This strategy aims to strongly encourage landowners to consider more woodland creation and regeneration in the National Park where it will enhance the landscape and wildland qualities and provide the most environmental, social and economic benefits.

To achieve woodland creation objectives in the National Park it is important to incentivise through the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme. The grant scheme operates across Scotland but in the National Park we aim to encourage uptake and direct the limited funds in the scheme where they are needed most.

The intention of the target areas is to improve forest habitat networks at a local and catchment scale, increase riparian woodland and highlight opportunities for restoring montane woodlands and to promote opportunities for more timber production.

The current five year target for woodland expansion in the National Park is 5,000ha. The mapped target area categories cover a substantially greater area (approximately 100,000ha) to encourage landowners to apply for enhanced grant funding and to ensure opportunities to achieve woodland expansion, however big or small, are optimised.

Map 3 showing the extensive target areas is categorised into:

a) Existing forests and woodlands
b) Preferred Areas
c) Preferred Areas (with known sensitivities)
d) Potential Montane Woodlands
e) Non-target Areas

Table 3 provides an explanation of each the categories and the GIS datasets used for their selection.

Important notes

All of the mapped categories (even Preferred Areas) may contain significant sensitivities to woodland creation that are currently difficult to map. Sensitivities may include:

- Designated land
- Archaeology
- Designed landscapes
- Key landscape views
- Peatlands/carbon storage
- Inbye agricultural land
- Protected open moorland
- Species rich grasslands
- Upland sites with thin soils and bare rock
- Wading bird habitat

The target areas are indicative. Mapping of habitats in the National Park relies on existing GIS datasets and is imprecise. For this reason any spatial targeting of woodland needs to be treated with caution.

Woodland Creation schemes within target areas are not guaranteed grant funding. Suitability for planting would need to be confirmed at a site level and may require surveys to identify potential negative impacts on eg designated sites, deep peat, upland waders, other landuse, landscape and archaeology.

Proposed woodland creation within SACs or SPAs, or with the potential to affect SACs or SPAs in the surrounding area, will require consultation with SNH and may require a Habitats Regulations Appraisal.

Map 3. Target areas for funding woodland creation in the Cairngorms National Park.

The target areas are indicative and do not guarantee grant funding. Suitability for planting would need to be confirmed at a site level and may require surveys to identify potential negative impacts on eg designated sites, deep peat, upland waders, other landuse, landscape and archaeology. For map key, see Table 3.

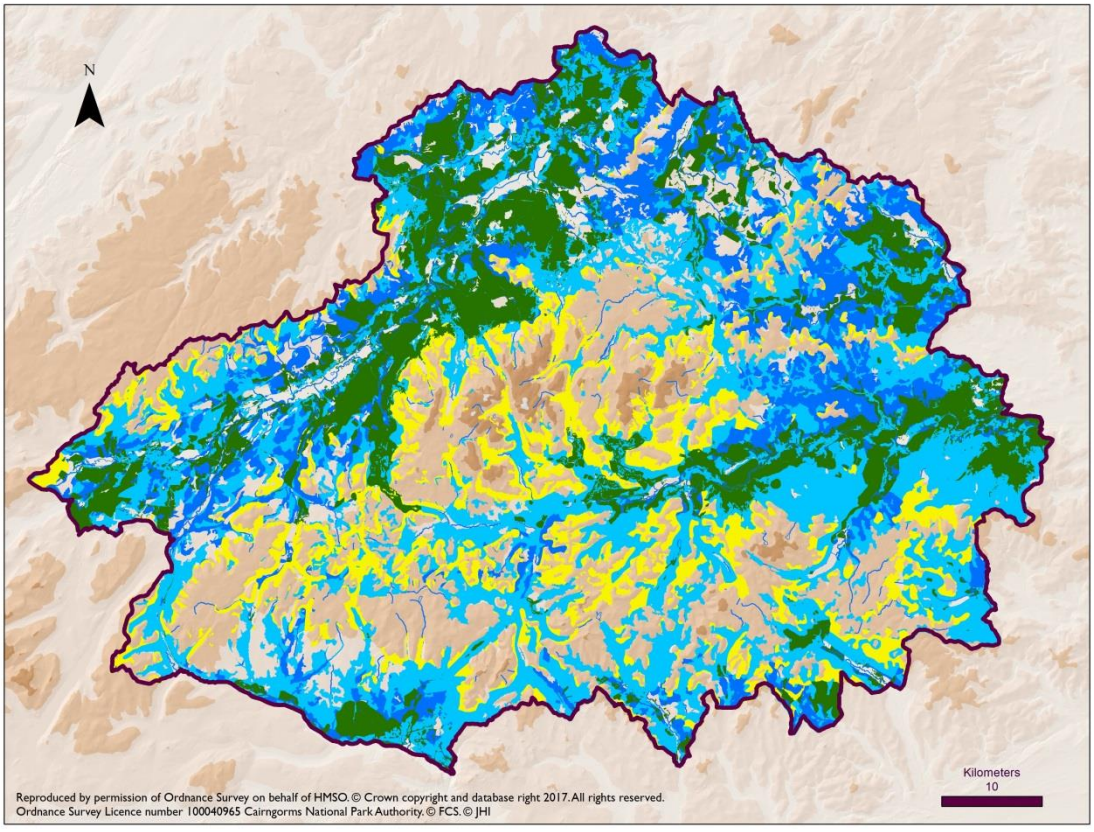

Table 3. Key to Map 3 and details of GIS information layers used

Woodland Creation schemes within target areas are not guaranteed grant funding. Suitability for planting would need to be confirmed at a site level and may require surveys to identify potential negative impacts on eg designated sites, deep peat, upland waders, other landuse, landscape and archaeology.

Category	Description	GIS Information layer
Existing Forests and Woodlands	All existing woodlands and forests	National Forest Inventory Scotland (2015)
Preferred Areas	Areas within which woodland creation of a range of woodland types would achieve multiple benefits. **Suitability for planting would need to be confirmed at a site level and may require surveys.**	Native Woodland Model: Polygons with soil potential for the following native woodland types and outwith areas with known, mapable sensitivities on the Land Cover Scotland dataset: • W6 (Alder with stinging nettle) • W7 (Alder–ash with yellow pimpernel) • W8 (Lowland mixed broadleaf with dog's mercury) • W9 (Upland mixed broadleaf with dog's mercury) • W10 (Lowland mixed broadleaves with bluebell/wild hyacinth) • W11 (Upland oak-birch with bluebell/wild hyacinth) • W17 (Upland oak-birch with blaeberry) • W18 (Scots pine with heather) In addition, areas within 50m buffer of main watercourses where it coincides with Native Woodland Model scrub woodland categories (Sc1 to Sc4 and Sc7 and Sc8) but outside Natura sites.
Preferred Areas (with known sensitivities)	Areas within which native woodland creation would achieve multiple benefits through restoration, enhancement and expansion of the existing woodland resources, but where there are known sensitivities eg Natura designation, peatland habitat, and arable and improved grassland. **Suitability for planting would need to be confirmed at a site level and may require surveys.**	Native Woodland Model: Polygons with soil potential for the following native woodland types and <u>within:</u> Natura sites, SSSIs and areas identified as 'Arable' or 'Improved Grassland' on the Land Cover Scotland dataset: • W6 (Alder with stinging nettle) • W7 (Alder–ash with yellow pimpernel) • W8 (Lowland mixed broadleaf with dog's mercury) • W9 (Upland mixed broadleaf with dog's mercury) • W10 (Lowland mixed broadleaves with bluebell/wild hyacinth) • W11 (Upland oak-birch with bluebell/wild hyacinth) • W17 (Upland oak-birch with blaeberry) • W18 (Scots pine with heather) Native Woodland Model: Polygons with soil potential for the following: • W4 (Birch with purple moor grass and open ground) • Any of above woodland NVC types in *mosaic* with 'Peatland with scattered trees/scrub' (Sc5)

		• Any of above woodland NVC types in mosaic with 'Basin bog woodland/scrub' (Sc6) • Montane scrub category Sc1 (juniper) • Montane scrub category Sc3 (birch/willow) • Montane scrub category Sc7 (mixed montane scrub) In addition, areas within 50m buffer of main watercourses where it coincides with Native Woodland Model scrub woodland categories (Sc1 to Sc4 and Sc7 and Sc8) inside Natura sites.
Montane Woodlands	Areas where there is potential for higher altitude woodlands consisting largely of low density birch, dwarf birch, montane willows and juniper. **Suitability for planting would need to be confirmed at a site level and may require surveys.**	Native Woodland Model: Polygons with soil potential for the following native woodland types and outside designated Special Areas of Conservation: • Sc1 (Juniper) • Sc3 (Birch/willow) • Sc7 (Mixed montane scrub)
Non-target Areas	Areas where woodland creation is of lower priority, highly sensitive, inappropriate or impractical. However even in non-target areas some small scale woodland planting may be appropriate.	Native Woodland Model: Polygons with soil potential for the following native woodland types: • Sc2 (Scattered juniper) • Sc4 (Scattered birch/willow) • Sc5 (Peatland with scattered trees/scrub) • Sc6 (Basin bog woodland/scrub) • Sc8 (Scattered mixed montane scrub) Also not includes the following: • Priority wader sites in CNP (RSPB) • Wetlands • Golf courses • Lochs • Settlements • >5km from existing woodlands • Bare rock

6. CONCLUSIONS

6.1 How to respond to the consultation

This document is available in large print and other formats, on request. Please contact the Cairngorms National Park Authority on 01479 873535. It is also available to view at www.cairngorms.co.uk

Thank you for reading the draft Forest Strategy for the Cairngorms National Park. Our aim is to create a strategy that gives a strong sense of the great potential that forestry and woodland management brings for the future. Every reader will have views on whether different aspects of the strategy should have more or less emphasis. We welcome your views and strongly encourage you to give us your feedback.

It will be most helpful if you could respond to the consultation by completing our online survey on www.cairngorms.co.uk

6.2 What happens next

Consultation responses will be collated and a report of the consultation published on www.cairngorms.co.uk. The final Cairngorms Forest Strategy will be submitted to the CNPA Board in September 2018.

Data Protection

Details provided in response to the consultation will only be used for purposes associated with the Cairngorms Forest Strategy. You may request to see personal information held by the CNPA at any time.

6.3 Summary list of consultation questions

QUESTION 1

Do you think this vision sufficiently captures the opportunities for forestry over the next 20 to 100 years?

If not how could it be improved?

QUESTION 2

Do you agree with the ten strategic objectives and their rationale?

If not how could they be improved?

QUESTION 3.

Do you agree with the above policy guidance on integrating woodland creation with other land use?

If not how could they be improved?

QUESTION 4.

Do you agree with the above policy guidance on habitat enhancement?

If not how could they be improved?

QUESTION 5.

Do you agree with the above policy guidance on rural development"?

If not how could they be improved?

QUESTION 6.

Do you agree with the above policy statements on forests and people?

If not how could they be improved?

7. APPENDICES

7.1 Policy fit with strategic objectives

Strategic Objectives: / Policy statements:	Woodland creation	enhance existing woods	Restore lost woods	Encourage natural regen	Productive forests	Disease and invasive species	Employment	Innovation & Marketing	Access & Enjoyment	Community Involvement
Managed moorland	X		X	X			X		X	X
In-bye agricultural land	X	X	X		X		X		X	X
Peatlands	X		X				X			X
Deer Management	X	X	X	X			X			X
Deer Fencing	X	X	X	X			X			X
Landscape and wild land	X	X	X	X						X
Designated sites	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Forest Habitat Networks	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Montane woodland	X	X	X				X		X	X
Riparian Woodland	X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X
Aspen	X	X	X						X	X
Woodland Remnants	X	X	X	X			X		X	X
Ancient and semi-natural woodland		X	X	X	X	X			X	X
Harvesting		X		X	X	X	X		X	X
Biosecurity, invasive species & wildfire	X	X			X	X			X	X
Employment	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Productive woodland	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Natural Flood Management	X	X	X	X	X		X	X		X
Low Carbon and Carbon trading					X		X	X		X
Responsible Access		X			X	X			X	X
Health	X	X	X	X	X				X	X

7.2 Photos and case studies

List of illustrative case studies that may be included in the strategy

- Farming and forestry
- Pearls in Peril.
- Local Sawmills
- Cairngorms Connect
- Linking catchments
- Small forestry business / crafts
- Woodland health – wild things, branching out

List of photos that may be used to illustrate key points in text:

- Several Inspiring landscapes showing characteristic Cairngorms native woodlands
- People enjoying forests
- Regeneration resulting from deer management
- Good productive/commercial forest with wildlife
- Timber production - sawmills
- Forest crafts/small businesses
- Small business eg woodwork, woodfuel
- Forest species – eg tooth fungi, aspen hoverfly, capercaillie, red squirrel,
- Riparian woodland / pearls in peril project
- Farming and forestry - integrated
- Gullies in moorland filled with trees
- Dying trees/granny pines – isolated/forest edge
- Tree loss on moorland
- Montane woodland/scrub
- Gordon's Map and today's situation
- European forest cover map