

Communities & Sustainability Committee

Moray & Aberdeenshire Forest District as part of Forest Enterprise Scotland are responsible for the management of the forest land owned by Scottish Ministers in the administrative areas of Moray, Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and part of the Cairngorms National Park. The estate extends to approximately 58,000 hectares of which some 6,500 hectares are open land.

All of the land managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland is subject to the UK Woodland Assurance Standard (UWKAS) with sustainable forest management at its core. The forest districts are independently audited as part of a rigorous quality assurance programme. This is extremely onerous as a loss of Forestry Stewardship Council certification would make it extremely difficult for us to sell timber a financially essential component of the business. In late 2015 Moray & Aberdeenshire FD were the subject of the five yearly audit cycle and received an unprecedented audit report which required no Corrective Action Requirements.

The management of the Forest District is subject to a hierarchy of planning. The Scottish Forestry Strategy is at the highest level and is underpinned within Forest Enterprise Scotland by "The Role of Scotland's National Forest Estate and strategic directions". This identifies 6 aspirations which then translate to a number of key priorities. Each of the 10 Forest Districts prepares a Forest District Strategic Plan (FDSP) to align local commitments to contribute to the overarching strategic directions document and in turn deliver the Scottish Forestry Strategy.

The FDSP is the subject of wide ranging consultation and is published on the internet. Once agreed the FDSP is used to develop Land Management Plans for each individual forest block – again this is subject to a long established consultation protocol. The Land Management Plan is then delivered through Work Plans which are in place prior to each silvicultural, recreational or environmental operation. Site specific checks are undertaken for every operation prior to implementation to consider the environmental implications and programmes are routinely adjusted to accommodate habitats or species impacts.

The attached spreadsheet is an extract from the FDSP which teases out those elements which relate to the Communities & Sustainability remit within the geographical locus of the Moray component of the District.

The term "Sustainability" is for us an absolutely integral component of all that we do and as a result this submission does not relate solely to Biodiversity but of which biodiversity is but one component. Consequently biodiversity is included in all aspects of our delivery whether this is for example to improve habitats for Capercaillie through sensitive thinning regimes, adjust the timing of operations to avoid disturbance to raptors or badgers or work with conservation specialists on sand dune restoration schemes or Scottish Wildcat monitoring. Designated sites are managed in accordance with management plans agreed with Scottish Natural Heritage with an emphasis on trying to secure favourable condition where feasible to do so. All work undertaken on the estate requires to be compliant with the Wildlife & Countryside Act, Wildlife and Natural Environment Act or Conservation Regulations and in particular the Forest & Water Guidance and associated Soils Guidance. Forestry in Scotland is subject to long standing and very rigorous regulation and as stewards of the land owned by Scottish Ministers our aspiration within the available resources is to strive at all times to be exemplars of best practice.

Sustainability is also important in silvicultural terms nurturing the forest resource to provide a stable timber yield important both nationally and locally in economic terms maintaining downstream processing jobs and providing work for skilled staff and contractors. The forest resource also contributes substantially to tourism and provides a highly valued recreational resource accommodating high profile recreational events and opportunities for exercise and learning of benefit to both mental and physical wellbeing.

John D Thomson

Forest District Manager

Moray & Aberdeenshire Forest District