Forests for People
Access, recreation & tourism
on the national forest estate
A place for all types of activity from quiet reflection, or a family picnic, to an international sporting competition
Access, recreation and tourism on the national forest estate

Setting the scene

Everyone has a right of responsible access to the Scottish countryside. This includes the woodlands and forests that cover one-sixth of Scotland. The publicly-owned national forest estate managed by Forestry Commission Scotland makes up about a third of this woodland. We welcome visitors year-round. Over several decades, we have developed Scotland’s largest single suite of outdoor recreation infrastructure. The national forest estate is a place for all types of recreation from quiet reflection to an international sporting competition. It contributes to active lifestyles and improved wellbeing and provides opportunities for others to develop businesses. Today, the estate hosts over ten million visitors each year. It plays a part in generating £165 million of forest-related tourism and around £94 million of expenditure on day visits each year.

Recreation takes place in sustainably managed multi-functional forests. The design plan for each forest shows recreation, tourism and local access opportunities, and is the basis for engaging with stakeholders.

This document lays out a framework of national priorities for the management of access, recreation and tourism infrastructure for the next 10 years. It details what we need to do to meet new circumstances, to modernise and to reach new audiences.

Recreation is not an end in itself. This framework shows how we will manage recreation, access and tourism on the national forest estate so that it helps to deliver the Scottish Government’s social, economic and environmental objectives, as set out in the Scottish Forestry Strategy. It sets the context for implementing recommendations from the review of the national forest estate and for developing activity-specific and local strategies.
Success will be measured not simply by total numbers of visitors, but by delivery of changes in the real world:

- Economic benefits to communities, particularly fragile rural communities.
- Easier access to and through woodlands for all sectors of society.
- Physical and mental health improvements for the people of Scotland.
- Better quality of life.
- Urban and rural regeneration.

The range of recreation activities undertaken on the national forest estate is wide. Most activities require no special permission under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, others are undertaken as part of organised events or via permissions.

### One provider among many

The demand for recreation applies to all woodlands and forests. We are the nation’s most significant provider of opportunities for outdoor recreation. But we recognise that there are many other state, public, and charitable providers, such as Scottish Natural Heritage, local authorities and the National Trust for Scotland. We will provide opportunities that are not provided through other means. We will do this in ways that complement other provision and encourage business opportunities for the private sector.
What we provide

Most of the recreation infrastructure provided by Forestry Commission Scotland is designed to facilitate outdoor access, rather than to be the attraction in its own right. The infrastructure extends to over 370 waymarked paths totalling over 1200 km, 130 routes for cycling, totalling over 1300 km, four Forest Drives, six Forest Parks, five Woodland Parks, four National Nature Reserves, two Nature Reserves, and seven staffed Visitor Centres. Managing this infrastructure, meeting visitors and working with local communities requires around 100 FCS staff: managers, rangers and wardens. The estate and its infrastructure provide the backdrop for our staff and also other partners to engage with the public. They provide a wide variety of services, from health walks to bug hunts, guided tours to arts events, forest schools to mountain biking tours, and wildlife watching to opportunities for volunteering. They are encouraging a new and more diverse audience to participate in the outdoors. In 2006-07, we invested a total of £8.3m and received income of £2.1m leaving a net cost of £6.2m on delivering our recreation, tourism and access work. This framework sets out our priorities and focus for these resources to ensure they meet Scotland’s needs both now and in the future.

Forest Tourism Initiative

The Forest Tourism Initiative is a partnership between Forestry Commission Scotland, VisitScotland, Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise that aims to expand and enhance the visitor experience of Scotland’s national forests. It provides a valuable link between the four public agencies and between Forestry Commission Scotland and private tourism businesses in promoting increased use of the national forest estate and the chance to develop new and innovative products on or around the estate.

Embracing diversity

One of our Community and Environment Rangers in Glasgow, in partnership with BTCV, has been delivering guided walks in Greater Glasgow for a Greater Glasgow people from an ethnic minority group as part of their summer walking programme. Volunteers make an important contribution in our work with communities and it was a local volunteer who led the walk. We are learning how to adapt our approach to be more inclusive. After taking the first steps, we have been asked to continue introducing the group to new walking experiences.
Play

We provide places for children of all ages to play. Many of these are traditional, professionally-constructed play structures set in a forest. We are also exploring the potential to pilot ‘natural play’ sites. These use landscape features such as mounds and dips, trees and bushes, logs for climbing and boulders for balancing, and safe sand surfaces. It is about getting back to basics and enabling children to play and have fun in natural outdoor settings while learning to value greenspace and woodland for themselves.

Windows on wildlife

We have established a number of wildlife watching opportunities to bring people closer to Scottish forest wildlife. The Tweed Valley has two sites at Glentress and Kailzie where there are cameras at the ready in a range of nesting sites. There is live and recorded footage screened in the Osprey Watch centres showing every aspect of the bird’s life.

Awards for customer service

Having independent recognition of our recreation service and facilities is important for our staff and the businesses we work with. The Huntly Peregrine Wild Watch won VisitScotland’s Thistle Award for Customer Care in 2006. The efforts of wardens, partners, community representatives and volunteers all helped us achieve this accolade. We also have six visitor centres with VisitScotland star ratings and three with a green tourism business award. Glenmore Visitor Centre, for example, has achieved a 4 Star VisitScotland quality assurance rating and a Silver level green tourism award.
Our vision, priorities and focus

Our vision

Access, recreation and tourism on the national forest estate and our management of it will have a strong and established reputation for deriving quality and value for money public benefits. The provision will be widely regarded as a model of best practice and a core part of sustainable forest management.

Our principal recreation priorities

Local health and well-being  Provide informal outdoor recreation in well-managed countryside, particularly where other opportunities are lacking, and for communities with high levels of social exclusion and low levels of physical activity.

Local economic development  Provide facilities to enhance outdoor recreation and tourism that support local economic development in economically fragile areas and that will enhance Scotland as a tourism destination.

What we mean by ‘local health and wellbeing’:

Bishops Estate Project, Greater Easterhouse, Glasgow

A Forestry Commission Scotland and Glasgow City Council partnership based around six woodlands in Easterhouse. We have employed a Community and Environment Ranger to engage with the local community, and a new and upgraded network of paths and tracks has been created. With Paths to Health, a leaflet has been produced with a map of waymarked trails. Signage encourages people to use the trails and targeted woodland management gives better lines of sight to increase the feeling of safety. The project has engaged local schools and a group of volunteers work in the woodlands one morning a week. One of these volunteers now acts as an assistant to the Ranger several days a week. Half of the people who attended had never ventured into the woodland before and felt they would be comfortable to use the woodland again after following the trail.
What we mean by ‘supports local economic development’:

Galloway Forest Park tourism strategy ‘Thinking strategically ... acting locally’

Galloway Forest Park is one of the key tourism products in Dumfries and Galloway. Our tourism strategy for the park was developed in consultation with local businesses and public sector bodies and now lays the foundations for partnerships and business collaboration. More importantly, this has focused attention on the opportunities that exist for the region as a whole to benefit from the forest resource.

Scotland – international mountain bike destination

We manage the largest number of mountain bike trails in Scotland. This network has meant Scotland has twice been voted ‘best place for mountain biking in the world’ by the International Mountain Bicycling Association. With this infrastructure in place, we have been developing a role hosting major forest-based events at Fort William, such as the Union Cycliste International (UCI) Mountain Biking World Cup events and UCI Mountain Bike and Trials World Championships.
Our focus is on

Accessible woodland close to communities with an emphasis on access for all, embracing a diversity of visitors and encouraging people to build exercise into their daily lives.

Low-key, well-designed, high quality, welcoming facilities that lead the visitor into the natural environment.

Opportunities to learn about the natural and cultural heritage.

Robust locations for physical activity and adrenaline sports.

Iconic places that are part of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage.

Access through woodlands as part of daily journeys, longer distance routes or mountain access.

What we mean by ‘accessible woodland close to communities’:

Making woodland more accessible

We have developed facilities for people with physical or mental impairments. In November 2004, we won the Leonard Cheshire Scotland Business Awards for our work in promoting equality for disabled employees and customers in Galloway.

We work with a number of associations for disabled ramblers. At Glenmore Forest Park near Aviemore, for example, two mobility scooters suitable for forest tracks are available for hire free of charge from the visitor centre, thanks to support from the former Cairngorms Partnership.

Our Cycling Development Officer at 7stanes has been working with wheelchair users to improve some of the mountain bike routes for use by adapted bikes.

We are undertaking research to understand forestry’s role in inclusive access. We are developing training to better equip our staff and the forest sector in providing an inclusive welcome.

What we mean by ‘low-key, well-designed, high quality welcoming facilities’:

A national infrastructure with local importance

With over 370 waymarked paths, totalling over 1200 km, there are many opportunities to walk, ride or cycle on the national forest. Typical of the projects we aim to engage in with partners is the Cowal local access project. We recently completed the investment of £120K in forest walks and car parks, with a major contribution from Argyll and the Isles Enterprise. These additional facilities not only benefit the local people, but also enhance Dunoon’s tourism potential.
What we mean by ‘opportunities to learn’:

The importance of woodland in Culture
To celebrate Highland culture in 2007, we developed with our partners ‘Touchwood’ an innovative cultural initiative with six flagship projects leaving a lasting legacy. This included a two-day festival in Dingwall, an oral history project and the ‘green machine’ mobile educational facility. We will continue our supporting role in the Homecoming 2009 year-long celebration offering an international opportunity for Scotland to showcase what it has given to the world. We will be working with partners to ensure that Scotland’s woodland heritage plays its role in this celebration.

Showing the next generation the forest skills of today
We have teamed up with local high schools in Balfron, Blairgowrie, Kingussie, Glen Urquhart and Lochaber to provide a rural skills course for pupils as part of their school curriculum. This ‘Skills for Work’ course is supported by the Scottish Qualifications Authority. It provides an opportunity for young people to explore rural employment and careers prospects, and learn skills such as planting, path construction, fencing and drainage.

What we mean by ‘robust places’:

Tree top adventure
We have identified a new business opportunity and something for the visitor who likes adrenaline activities with the award-winning Go Ape High Wire Forest Adventure at Queen Elizabeth Forest Park, near Aberfoyle, Stirlingshire. Adventurers can climb rope ladders up into the treetops and experience the thrills of trekking from tree to tree, some 12 metres above the forest floor! Children and adults alike have enjoyed the excitement of taking to the trees and weaving their way through a series of rope ladders, bridges, Tarzan swings, trapezes, stirrup crossings and, at 426 metres, the longest zip wire in Great Britain.
What we mean by ‘iconic places’: 

**Natural landscapes**

We make many landscape improvements from small-scale changes around a car park, viewpoint or path, to large-scale forest restructuring. The next half-century will see one of these large-scale projects implemented at the north end of Glen Coe. People say that woodlands are a key reason for visiting Scotland and this woodland is seen by the occupants of 1.5 million vehicles that pass along the A82 each year.

What we mean by ‘access through woodlands’: 

**Walking for health**

In Aberdeenshire, people can take part in a series of introductory walks in the woods, led by the local ranger. The four walks get more challenging as participants improve their fitness. They also gain in confidence and meet new people. This is key to encouraging them to keep on using the woods.

**Mountain path project**

Mountain access is vital for enjoyment of the outdoors and forms a significant part of the Scottish tourist economy. Working with the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and other stakeholders, we have invested £1 million on maintenance and ground repair for popular routes in Glenmore, Ballachulish, Glenorchy and Ben Wyvis.

**Great places to be active, everyday!**

Woodlands are not just places to visit, they are places through which we take daily journeys on our way to school, work, or the shops. We are contributing to local green networks, such as the ‘safe routes to schools’ initiative.
Rising to the challenges

Getting closer to people

Increasing our presence in Scotland’s urban areas  We have recently acquired over 1000ha of land close to towns and are increasing access opportunities in these areas.

• We will continue to develop an urban presence with a focus on deprived communities and places where there is the greatest deficit of outdoor access opportunities.

• We will continue to acquire sites and provide access opportunities near to where people live.

• We will continue to pilot new forms of lease and partnership arrangements that enable us to manage local authority woodlands to encourage access.

Overcoming the barriers to access  Physical proximity is only one of the barriers to accessing woodlands and greenspace.

• We are also committed to overcoming physical, perceptual or cultural barriers to access and to exploring ways to encourage woodland use for exercise and enjoyment.

• We will improve accessibility of our facilities to the less able through careful design, regular maintenance and appropriate interpretation.

• We will provide facilities suitable for families and young people, including natural play sites.

• We will employ appropriately-trained recreation rangers to support activities to engage with the full diversity of local people.

• We will engage with people from groups under-represented as users of the national forest estate to promote use by the full diversity of the Scottish population.

• We will work with partners to encourage the use of public and non-motorised transport to our sites.
Promoting healthier lifestyles  Working closely with health sector partners, we will increase our effort to encourage the physically inactive into moderate regular activity as part of a healthier lifestyle.

- We will produce a health and well-being programme for the national forest estate.
- We will encourage the use of woodlands and greenspace for mental health and well-being benefits.
- We will contribute to networks of green space that provide opportunities for people to build exercise into their daily routines.

User focus

- We will aim to provide a quality experience, with accurate and helpful information, by ensuring that our staff are friendly, helpful and motivated.
- We will add value to the visitor experience through interpretation. We will improve our sharing of information between facilities on the estate and with other providers.
- We will review the recreation and tourism content of the Forestry Commission website from the customer point of view.

Making the most of our resources

The need for prioritisation  Demand for recreation facilities is growing over time and we need to focus our finite resources in the highest priority areas. The focus will be on increasing low-key access to woodlands and greenspace, and not on built infrastructure.

- We will provide the minimum of built infrastructure needed to meet our priorities and focus.
- We will maintain all our infrastructure to a baseline standard across the estate.
Working in partnership  We are positive about working in partnership, both to provide recreation opportunities on the national forest estate and joined-up recreation and tourism networks with other providers. Partnership working and funding can help unlock the recreation potential of national forests.

- We will always address running and legacy costs as part of any new facilities or service.
- Where appropriate we will help partnerships evolve so that others build the capacity to continue without our direct involvement.

Charging  Access to the national forest estate is free of charge in accordance with the ‘responsible right of access’.

- We make a reasonable charge for use of additional facilities, such as car parking and mountain biking uplift, where this is consistent with our principal recreation priorities.
- We will use the income from charging to contribute to the cost of developing and running recreation facilities on the national forest estate.
- Provision of free facilities on the national forest estate can make it harder for private landowners to charge for similar facilities on their land. This risks reducing their ability to develop business opportunities. We will take this into account when deciding whether to provide facilities free of charge.

Research  We will undertake research to help us to better understand existing and priority new user groups.

- We will develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for this strategy.
- We will develop the use of Geographical Information System mapping and other tools to help improve delivery.

Releasing economic potential

Contributing to urban regeneration  We recognise that greenspace is a vital ingredient of successful urban communities and that woodland has unique characteristics as a landscape and recreation resource.

- We will continue to work in partnership to increase the contribution of woodlands to the quality and prosperity of Scotland’s towns and city regions.
The wider rural economy  Where this strategy points to recreation provision for local economic development, we want to maximise opportunities for local businesses. Much of the benefit comes from overnight visitors who use local accommodation and services. We also recognise the economic importance of day trips.

- We will work with local tourism bodies in priority areas to configure recreation facilities in a way that brings maximum added value to the local economy.
- We will identify opportunities to extend the visitor season through development of wildlife viewing, sport and cultural heritage opportunities.
- We will seek to ensure that our strategy for investing in recreation and tourism achieves maximum economic gain and avoids displacement from other parts of Scotland.
- In developing recreation on the national forest estate, we will be mindful of the opportunities for local private woodland owners to develop commercial tourism facilities.
- The national forest estate has pioneered growing segments of the tourism market, such as mountain biking and we will share our knowledge to facilitate local economic development in the private sector.

On site  Our principal role is to encourage and facilitate access to and through the natural environment. Developments beyond a basic provision can provide new business opportunities.

- Where our sites provide opportunities for further development of tourism services, we will look to local tourism businesses to develop the opportunities.
- Where appropriate, we will work with local community groups who wish to develop facilities, or offer franchises or agreements for on-site tourism infrastructure developments.

Innovation  We seek continuous improvement and an innovative approach to recreation and tourism, particularly in adventure, culture and wildlife product development.

- Through the Forest Tourism Initiative partnership project, we will work closely with local leisure and tourism businesses to facilitate the start-up of new tourism businesses related to the estate.
- We will also work through our groundbreaking Woods In and Around Towns initiative to develop and deliver recreation opportunities suited to local people and their needs.
- We will showcase timber and procure local and Scottish products and services whenever possible.
Skills and standards

Health and safety  Core to our corporate standards is ensuring that facilities and services are safe, appropriate to the target user group and accompanied by the right information. The rapid rise in popularity of adrenaline sports like downhill mountain biking brings additional health and safety challenges.

- We will keep our facility design and management procedures constantly under review to ensure proper risk management.
- We will ensure the recreation access and tourism services we run are safe.
- Other service providers who have specific permission to use the national forest estate or are contracted by us will be required to demonstrate full competence in health and safety management.

Developing our skills for recreation delivery  We are increasingly differentiating our provision of recreation services according to local objectives and principal user groups. This means we need staff with a wider range of specialist skills and experience in designing and maintaining woods and facilities, and in engaging with different sectors of society. Some of our recreation initiatives involve major new facilities. Many of our specialist recreation staff are employed on fixed-term contracts as we seek to evolve our skills base.

- We will continue to increase our capability to manage large, complex projects.
- Over the next few years we will be using opportunities to draw specialist skills further and more permanently into our teams, particularly those that enable us to engage with a more diverse audience.
- We will encourage the businesses we work with to have appropriately trained and skilled staff.

Maintaining corporate standards  As an organisation we take a bottom-up approach to local provision. Furthermore, delivery through local partnerships is a key principle for Forestry Commission Scotland and this is often the best way to provide for the full range of recreation users.

- Within the resulting diversity of approach, we think it is important to provide a corporate framework to ensure all of our facilities consistently meet minimum quality and public recognition standards.
A framework for change

This framework requires us to develop local and specialist strategies to complete the transition for change.

- By the end of 2008, each forest district strategic plan will explain how this framework will be delivered in their area.
- All significant local developments will be subject to a formal business case and project development process that will consider and address the ‘life-time’ costs and benefits of the proposed development.

Around Scotland, the main desired outcome and focus for delivery will differ according to local need:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Forest District</th>
<th>Outcome emphasis</th>
<th>Delivery focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dornoch</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Cultural heritage tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inverness</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Existing well-used facilities and focus on the National Park In and around Inverness &amp; Moray Firth towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Augustus</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Tourism around Great Glen and Glen Affric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lochaber</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Tourism around Great Glen and Glen Nevis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorne</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Natural heritage tourism and mountain access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Argyll</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Cultural heritage tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moray</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td>Existing well-used facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aberdeenshire</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td>Near-urban opportunities Existing well-used facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tay</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td>Near-urban opportunities In the National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowal &amp; Trossachs</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Tourism in the National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Lowlands</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
<td>Near-urban opportunities On Arran</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scottish Borders</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Existing well-used facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ae</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Existing well-used facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galloway</td>
<td>Economic development</td>
<td>Tourism in the Forest Park</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Monitoring and evaluation

Implementation planning  This will be a key part of delivering this framework.

- We will develop an implementation plan by the end of 2008 with additional guidance for our staff. This will include a planned approach to evaluation that clearly identifies the desired outcomes of recreation provision, establishes the baseline situation and monitors progress towards the desired outcomes.
- We will develop a suite of simple indicators of outcomes with associated standard assessment methodologies.
- We will undertake more detailed case studies in a representative selection of projects to underpin our wider evaluation.
- Data from monitoring and evaluation will be managed to build our understanding of what works best in terms of delivery of outcomes. This understanding will be fed back into informing future decisions, operational guidance and performance assessments.
- We will share the results of our findings with partners and businesses.

Understanding our customers  It is important to understand our customers.

- We will publish the number and nature of visits and visitors to the national forest estate using the ‘All Forests’ methodology.
- We will also maintain car and people counters at key locations, analyse the data and publish the results.
- We will seek to determine the benefits derived from these visits and also visitor satisfaction through public opinion surveys and customer satisfaction surveys, including a ‘mystery visitor’ survey.
- We will also undertake specialist surveys, including sector-specific surveys (e.g. walkers and wildlife-watchers) and also monitor numbers and types of complaints.
- We will establish a baseline for the diversity of visitors to the estate and undertake research to better understand their requirements.

Economic evaluation

- We will seek to gain access to and also commission economic research to evaluate the estate’s contribution to the tourism economy through secondary spend and contribution per visitor.
- We will evaluate forest-based events and monitor the development of existing and new forest tourism-based businesses.

Sustainable development

- We will collaborate in research on the social, environmental and economic benefits of recreation and tourism activities to ensure that they are sustainable. When available, we will use independent accreditation of recreation and tourism activities.
Forestry Commission Scotland serves as the forestry department of the Scottish Government and is responsible to Scottish Ministers.

You can get this publication on tape, in large print and various other formats (e.g. Braille, audio-tape etc) by contacting us at the address below. In addition, contact the address below for information on language translations, additional copies or to discuss any area of the publication that you would like clarified.

Contact

Forestry Commission Scotland
National Office
Silvan House
231 Corstorphine Road
Edinburgh
EH12 7AT

Tel: 0131 334 0303
Fax: 0131 316 6152
E-mail: fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Web: www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland