



Forestry and  
Land Scotland  
Coilltearachd agus  
Fearann Alba

# Communities Strategy for Scotland's National Forests and Land



Scottish Government  
Riaghaltas na h-Alba  
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October 2023

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# Introduction

Forestry and Land Scotland became an executive agency of the Scottish Government on 1 April 2019 and since that time we have continued to look after the national forests and land in a way that also delivers on Scotland's Forestry Strategy, Scotland's National Outcomes and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Our mission is:

“looking after Scotland's forests and land, for the benefit of all, now and for the future”

Our vision is:

“forests and land that Scotland can be proud of”

This document sets out the purpose of the Communities Strategy and the overarching principles for Forestry and Land Scotland's work with communities.

The Communities Strategy also sets out how current legislation, standards and practice will help us set the strategic priorities for development of an Action Plan.

# Purpose and Principles

**The overarching purpose of Forestry and Land Scotland's Communities Strategy is:**

To fully realise the contribution of Scotland's National Forests and Land to building vibrant, sustainable, wealthier and resilient communities, and to sustainably manage our forests and land recognising the rights and responsibilities of all.

Three key principles will guide how we inform, engage and support sustainable and thriving rural communities.

These key principles that provide the framework to develop our strategic priorities for the Communities Strategy are:

- **Principle 1 – Supporting the transition to a fairer, greener Scotland**
- **Principle 2 – Supporting sustainable and thriving rural communities**
- **Principle 3 – Engaging and involving communities in decision making**

These principles will contribute equally to the ongoing development of land reform and community empowerment legislation, and strategies to support community wealth building, the transition to net zero and tackling the biodiversity crisis.

They also support delivery of Forestry and Land Scotland's duties and obligations under the Forestry and Land (Scotland) Act 2018, Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019 to 2029 and sustainable forest management standards, and contribute to the Scottish Government's National Outcomes, including Communities.

## Scotland's National Forests and Land

Forests now cover over 1.4 million hectares of Scotland. Much of this is privately owned but around one third of it – as well as a diversity of open land habitats – is publicly owned and looked after by the Scottish Government land management agency, Forestry and Land Scotland. These publicly owned forests are referred to as Scotland's National Forests and Land.

Much of this woodland provides a sustainable source of timber, includes some of the most biodiverse habitats in Scotland (such as the Caledonian pinewoods and Atlantic woodland), is vital for the conservation of rare and endangered species, and is an important place for recreation and for people's health and wellbeing. Many woodlands are also home to important historic and archaeological sites.

Our woodlands also contribute a great deal more. Managed sustainably and meeting the high standards set by UKWAS, which is endorsed by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), the National Forests and Land are managed in line with the guidance in Scotland's Third Land Use Strategy and the principles set out in Scotland's Land Rights and Responsibility Statement.

We also contribute to delivery of Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029, produced and overseen by Scottish Forestry, the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulation. Together, these documents seek both to make the best use of Scotland's land in the face of increasing demands made on it, while at the same time expanding, protecting and enhancing Scotland's forests and woodlands.

A key element for the success of both aims is continued engagement and collaboration with communities, public bodies, the private sector and individuals. This collaboration on the national forests and land is expanding green networks in our towns and cities, increasing the contribution of forests and woodlands to Scotland's sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and providing nature-based solutions for rural and island communities.

We manage Scotland's national forests on your behalf and we want to help you get the most of your local woodland. Whether holding events, running projects, managing or even purchasing land from us through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS), communities are involved in many ways in using, protecting and enhancing Scotland's National Forests and Land.



Approximately **one third (470,000ha)** of Scotland's forests and woodland are on public land, owned by Scottish Ministers on behalf of the nation.



Taking action to restore over **910ha of habitat and species** through peatland restoration...

...and host **enough renewable energy** infrastructure to produce over one billion watts of energy and sufficient to power **600,000 homes**.



## Scotland's National Forests and Land...



...contributes over **£1million per day** Gross Value Added (GVA)



...supports **10,255 FTE jobs**

...hosts **90 community and partnership projects**



...welcomes **10.6 million visits**

...are home to over **1,000 species, 172 of which are protected species** including **lichen, moths, capercaillie** and **red squirrels**



...helps to improve the physical, emotional and mental well-being of residents and visitors.

# Strategic Context

Forestry and Land Scotland, as Scotland's largest land manager, has a unique relationship with the many communities that live and work in and around Scotland's national forests and land, as well as the many communities of interest who use this important natural resource.

Communities are at the heart of the principles of sustainable forest management, which underpins our approach to land management. Following the vision and principles set out in the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement, the forests and land we manage are certified under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS).

Our Corporate Plan 2022-2025 sets out our responsibility to manage the national forests and land for multiple outcomes, in particular for communities:



## Outcome 1: Supporting a Sustainable Rural Economy

FLS supports a sustainable rural economy by managing the national forests and land in a way that encourages sustainable business growth, development opportunities, jobs and investments.



## Outcome 3: National forests and land for visitors and communities

Everyone can visit and enjoy Scotland's national forests and land to connect with nature, have fun, benefit their health and wellbeing and have the opportunity to engage in our community decision making.

Communities across Scotland are key to delivering these outcomes, through greater engagement in decision making on how the national forests are managed for the benefit of communities, and activities that support sustainable and thriving rural communities.

The Communities Strategy sits alongside the Visitor Strategy, which sets out how we manage services and facilities to welcome everyone to the national forests and land for recreation, health and wellbeing and education. The Communities Strategy focusses on how communities themselves can get more involved in the decisions, management and use of the national forests and land to help deliver their objectives.



## Supporting the transition to a fairer, greener Scotland

Scotland's forests and land are key in fighting the impact of the climate emergency and biodiversity loss. Our Climate Change Action Plan commits us to work with communities and other public and third sector partners to drive positive and co-ordinated action through all of our work and pursue nature-based solutions to deliver multiple benefits for climate, people and nature. Across Scotland, communities contribute to making best use of our national forests and land through community-led action on the climate crisis and biodiversity.

Forestry and Land Scotland's mission is to look after Scotland's national forests and land for the benefit of all, and it is essential that fairness and inclusivity is embedded in our work. Many local communities and communities of interest already have a strong connection to the national forests and land. But we must also continue to ensure its benefits are accessible to marginalised and under-represented groups to achieve a fair transition to a greener Scotland.

## Supporting sustainable and thriving rural communities

Scotland's national forests and land contribute not only to community wellbeing but sustainable and thriving rural communities. Every year hundreds of community events and activities take place in the national forests and our Visitor Strategy sets out the importance of Scotland's national forests and land to the rural economy, for many outdoor, wildlife and tourism businesses.

Renewables on the national forests and land are providing a new, long-term source of income for local communities. Since 2011, FLS led the way in requiring wind farm developments to pay £5,000 per MW in community benefits, and to offer communities the opportunity to own shares in projects on the national forests and land. Recent Energy Offerings have asked developers to include initiatives on local employment.

Asset transfer under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, delivered through FLS' Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS), and prior to the 2015 Act between 2005 and 2016 by the National Forest Land Scheme, gives communities the opportunity to take more control through buying or leasing assets. Forestry and Land Scotland's annual report on community empowerment 2020-21 includes case studies which demonstrate how community asset transfer can increase community wellbeing and contribute to wealth building.

## Engaging and involving communities in decision making

Communities shape how we manage the forests and land in a number of ways – through public consultation on our 10 year Land Management Plans, including woodland creation plans, as well as regular formal and informal engagement on partnership initiatives and operational activities.

Consultations can involve open days, online surveys and virtual meetings and people can contact their local Forestry and Land Scotland office directly to find out more about their Land Management Plan.



## Land management planning for communities

Land Management Plans cover large areas and many aspects of forestry and land management, and consultations must be as accessible as possible – whether in rural communities such as Mull and Gairloch, where forests have a direct impact on people’s day to day lives, or in place such as Damside where woodland creation is transforming former industrial sites into green space for people.

Over the last two years we have increased accessibility to online consultations through virtual drop in events and social media. We are also exploring more user-friendly ways to make this information available such as the use of interactive storyboards for the recent Loch Katrine Land Management Plan.

In more rural communities, drop in sessions and meetings usually take place in community halls or other local venues where people can come and talk to our staff about their local woodlands. To increase outreach in more urban areas, consultation can include staffed stands in high-footfall locations. This technique was used for the Inverness Woodlands Land Management Plan, with stands at the East Gate Mall and the two Retail Tescos in the city.

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## Place based planning

We are working with communities, and other public sector partners, on place based, community-led initiatives for local place plans. Examples include the Strathard Framework, co-designed with representatives from Strathard Community Council, Strathard Community Trust, Stirling Council and the National Park Authority, which set out a shared vision for the Strathard Area. We are engaging with Stratherrick & Foyers Community Trust Community Action Plan which identified FLS as a key partner on the delivery of the Plan including projects such as affordable housing, community resilience, flood adaptation, mitigation and management.

Masterplanning is also an important tool for managing development on the national forests and land to enable economic, environmental and social regeneration. In 2016, the award-winning North Kyle Masterplan was developed in consultation with the local coalfield communities by FLS and East Ayrshire Council. The masterplan is a framework for regeneration of 4,000 hectares of land including former opencast sites and commercial forestry. FLS is collaborating with the 9CC Group, set up by the nine community councils who will benefit from the North Kyle wind farm, and East Ayrshire Council, to ensure community aims and aspirations are centred in future plans. The Glentress Masterplan aims to deliver a well-integrated, multi-user destination, specialising in mountain biking and offering a world class visitor experience to the local community, visitors from around the world, local businesses, and support for regional tourism.

## Collaboration at a landscape scale

FLS also works at a landscape scale with neighbouring land managers to restore native woodlands and associated habitats including peatlands and wetlands, for example the Cairngorms Connect Partnership whose aims include engaging local communities with the project and the benefits it will bring. FLS is also a member of the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest and is working in partnership with stakeholders to safeguard and restore Scotland's Rainforests. Scotland's Rainforests are also great venues for outdoor learning and volunteering opportunities, and provide health and well-being benefits for local communities.

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## Community projects and activities

Under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, many community activities take place in the forests we look after. We also work with organisations delivering high profile community events such as the Enchanted Forest in Pitlochry, and many local events and festivals.

We work with communities to enable longer term projects such as Cormonochan Community Woodland and Kilsture Community Woodland. Community managed woodlands such as these are the venue for many projects delivering a wide range of community benefits and can be managed under a range of agreements best suited to meet communities' objectives.

Communities of interest also make use of the national forests for longer term projects. Examples include agreements to carry out Field Archery or to manage mountain bike trails working with the growing network of Trail Associations.

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## Biodiversity and conservation

Communities are getting involved in many different ways in restoring and preserving native woodlands, preserving habitats and wildlife from volunteering, reporting, to hands on practical work. Examples include working with Trees for Life's volunteer program in Glen Affric, and helping save Scotland's Wildcat through reporting of sightings. There also communities of interest such as the Argyll Beaver Centre who have developed the Centre as a hub for wildlife and conservation activity in Knapdale and are planning to take ownership through Community Asset Transfer to continue to develop the Centre for the benefit of the local community and visitors alike.

## Communities and renewable energy

Communities can benefit from renewable energy on the land that we manage in a number of ways:

### Community-led developments

Through our Energy Offerings communities can express interest in developing their own renewable energy projects. Over the last ten years, seven communities have taken advantage of this offer to develop community hydro projects: Callander Development Trust at Stank Glen, Callander; Dalavich Improvement Group at Loch Avich; Loch Broom Community Renewables at Lael Forest, Ullapool; MICT at Garmony on Mull; Morvern Community Development Trust's Barr River Hydro Scheme; Raasay Development Trust at Inverarish; and Lochaber Environmental Group at Glenachulish.

### Community investment

In 2010, we introduced a requirement for developers to offer local communities the opportunity to take an equity share in the project. This became part of the Scottish Government Good Practice Principles. Morvern Community Development Company and Lochgoilhead Community Trust now have community shared ownership in local hydro projects. Communities are actively involved in negotiations with large-scale wind developers, some for many years because of the very long lead times which result from the planning and consent process, grid connections, and changes to the energy market and subsidy regimes over time.

### Community benefit payments

In 2010 we introduced a standard annual community benefit of £5,000 per MW installed. This became industry standard and is also part of the Scottish Government Good Practice Principles. The payments are index linked and generate significant funds for local projects. For example:

- The Cabrach and Glass Community Associations and Huntly, Strathbogie and Tap o Noth Community Councils benefit from the Vattenfall Clashindarroch Community Fund. Since 2015/16 the fund has made 124 grants, totalling £933,989 for projects worth £77.36M. Foundation Scotland calculate that for every £1 awarded from the Fund a further £8.29 was brought in to support community regeneration in the area.
- In Argyll, the An Suidhe Wind Farm Community Fund, provided by RWE Renewables and Green Gecco, benefits the communities of Eredine, Inveraray, Furnace, and Dalavich. Annual payments have increased from £28,500 in 2011 to £36,000, and supported the Dalavich Improvement Group to develop its own community hydro scheme.

In East Ayrshire, nine community councils in the Cumnock and Doon Valley have set up a joint trust to ensure fair distribution of windfarm community benefits funds, including the recently consented North Kyle wind farm.

A full list of renewable energy projects on Scotland's national forests and land and information about how communities can benefit is available at [forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/renewables](https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/renewables)

## Community Asset Transfer

Since the 1990s there has been steady growth in community ownership, including parts of the national forests and land such as the transfer to the Abriachan Forest Trust in 1998, and the Strathnairn Community Woodlands and the Dalavich Community Centre in 2003.

Established by our predecessor, Forestry Commission Scotland, the National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS) ran from 2005 to 2016 and completed 31 transfers of ownership to 29 community groups, established 5 hydro renewable leases and 1 lease for allotments. Asset transfers under that scheme have underpinned transformational change for their communities, for example the [Kilfinan Community Forest](#), [North West Mull Community Woodland Company](#) and [Birse Community Trust](#).

The Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) replaced the NFLS in 2017, following implementation of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. To date, we have received 31 asset transfer requests, with 22 completed and 6 more in progress.

Transfers include Minginish Community Hall Association's partnership with the Outdoor Access Trust Scotland to upgrade the Fairy Pools Car Park on Skye creating new jobs and income for the community. At Dronley Community Woodland and Carron Valley Community Woodland, the woodlands provide a place for the communities to come together for recreation and volunteering. Recently completed transfers include the site for the new Scottish Crannog Centre on Loch Tay, a community woodland and hub at Muirdrochwood, Carsphairn, and Glengarry Community Woodlands woodland crofts project at Lower Ardochy, Invergarry, in partnership with the Communities Housing Trust.

Two more community hydro scheme have also been developed by the Raasay Development Trust and the Lochaber Environmental Group at Glenachulish.

## Affordable housing

During the period that the NFLS was open, 10 sites were transferred to Registered Social Landlords for affordable and social housing for over 100 homes. Projects promoted the use of sustainable timber such as the Communities Housing Trust's Ardgael development at Kincaig and self-build affordable homes in Salen, Ardnamurchan. Elsewhere in Scotland, Loreburn Housing Association provided 11 social houses at Ae Village in Dumfries and Galloway, Dunbritton Housing Association built 34 homes across sites in Lochgoilhead and Succoth, and Albyn Housing Association developed 25 homes at Smithton.

We now work directly with Registered Social Landlords supported by Scottish Government's Rural Housing Fund, and with communities where opportunities for affordable housing can be identified through CATS. In 2022, the Communities Housing Trust acquired 20 hectares of land at Lower Ardochy, Invergarry to create four affordable homes. Working in partnership with the Woodland Croft Partnership and Glengarry Community Woodland, they will also create two exemplar woodland crofts.

## Woodland crofts

Asset transfer has also been used by communities to create new woodland crofts. The North West Mull Community Woodlands now has nine new forest crofts and in 2022, the Kilfinnan Community Forest Company added seven new forest crofts to its three existing crofts. Glengarry Community Woodlands and the Communities Housing Trust plans for woodland crofts at Lower Ardochy will further help to develop viable and sustainable models, and FLS is part of the Woodland Croft Stakeholder Group coordinated by the [Woodland Croft Partnership](#).

# Strategic Priorities

## Principle 1 – Supporting the transition to a fairer, greener Scotland

### Aim:

To ensure Scotland's national forests and land contribute towards the transition towards a net zero nation in a just and fair way, delivering social, environmental and economic benefits.

### We will facilitate:

- **Regeneration:** make best use of Scotland's national forests and land to contribute to community-led plans for COVID-recovery, growing the green economy and climate change adaptation.
- **Action for the future:** strengthen relationships with communities, and other public and third sector organisations, for example through pilot Regional Land Use Partnerships, and other initiatives to help tackle climate change and biodiversity loss
- **Equality and Diversity:** prioritise community-led initiatives and activities that make use of the national forests and land to address inequalities resulting from socio-economic disadvantage, and increase diversity and participation from under-represented groups

## Principle 2 – Supporting sustainable and thriving rural communities

### Aim:

To support communities to make best use of Scotland's national forests and land to invest in their local places, support economic growth and wealth building and enable more people to improve their health, wellbeing and life chances.

### What we will do:

- **Enabling communities:** continue to provide opportunities for communities to own, lease or use forests and land which can contribute to their community's wellbeing, future development and biodiversity
- **Innovation:** explore innovative ways of working with communities to manage existing forests and land to deliver social, economic and environmental outcomes, and identify opportunities for the creation of new local woodlands
- **Increasing collaboration:** promote an inclusive and open culture that supports and enables staff to respond positively and constructively to community led initiatives to increase the social, economic and environmental benefits of Scotland's national forests and land and support sustainable economic growth

## Principle 3 – Engaging and Involving Communities in decision making

### Aim:

To promote greater community engagement in decisions about land.

### What we will do:

- **Empowering communities:** encourage greater community participation in how we plan and use the national forests and land, and understanding of the practice and value of forestry and the wider social and environmental benefits it provides.
- **Engaging and involving communities in decision making:** continue to enhance our engagement with communities on decisions relating to the management of Scotland's national forests and land through our Land Management Plans and operational activities

## What Success Looks Like

- Communities have a stronger connection to Scotland's national forests and land, and are empowered to make more use of their local resources to contribute to community-led place plans for community wealth building, regeneration and a fair transition to net zero.
- Forestry and Land Scotland is working with more communities to carry out activities and projects that help tackle the climate and biodiversity crises, and working with communities in new and innovative ways to sustainably manage the existing national forests and land and increase new woodland creation.
- Communities are increasingly involved in land use decisions through our Land Management Plans to maximise the contribution to strengthening communities and National Outcomes.

## Next steps

We are developing an Action Plan to support these principles, build on existing activities and develop actions to deliver the strategic priorities. The consultation on the Communities Strategy is helping us to identify what is working well, what challenges and barriers communities face, and how we can improve and innovate. We will also set out how we will monitor and evaluate how the Action Plan is delivering on the principles in the Communities Strategy.



## Appendix: Links to Key Documents/ Other Strategies

The principles set out in the Strategy will contribute to our statutory and public duties, and our Corporate Plan outcomes on:

- Land Rights and Responsibilities:
  - More local communities should have the opportunity to own, lease or use buildings and land which can contribute to their community's wellbeing and future development
  - There should be greater collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land
- Scotland's Forestry Strategy: Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands
- FLS Corporate outcomes:
  - Supporting a sustainable rural economy: FLS supports a sustainable rural economy by managing the national forests and land in a way that encourages sustainable business growth, development opportunities, jobs and investments
  - National forests and land for visitors and communities: Everyone can visit and enjoy Scotland's national forests and land to connect with nature, have fun, benefit their health and wellbeing and have the opportunity to engage in our community decision making
- UKWAS: management of Scotland's national forests and land is certified by the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS)
- Community Empowerment: Forestry and Land Scotland support community ownership through the exemplary Community Asset Transfer Scheme, and is continually working with communities and Scottish Government to improve processes for community ownership, taking into account reviews and updates to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Land Reform and Community Wealth Building legislation
- Climate Change: Scottish Climate Change Adaptation programme – as climate threats increase, impacts on community and action to address will become even more important e.g. flood risk, extreme events
- Scotland's Biodiversity Strategy: the Scottish Government is currently consulting on a new biodiversity strategy to seek view on how we should tackle the biodiversity crisis
- Best value and Responsible Investment in Natural Capital: to manage the assets that make up Scotland's national forests and land to achieve wider public benefits consistent with the principles of Best Value, as set out in the Scottish Public Finance Manual and FLS' Business Sustainability Principles. Decisions on investment by FLS and communities in land management should follow the Interim Principles for Responsible Investment in Natural Capital
- Diversity and inclusion: Our People understand, support and are accountable for Diversity and Inclusion
- Gaelic language plan: recognises that Gaelic is an important part of Scotland's heritage, national identity and cultural life.



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Published by – Forestry and Land Scotland – October 2023

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Designed in-house by Forestry and Land Scotland.

FLS-PDF-OCT 2023

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