

How to reduce Scotland's climate emissions and damage to nature – suspend the forestry grants system

Description

Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands	2024-25 Fiscal Resource £million	2024-25 Autumn Budget Revision £million	2025-26 Scottish Budget £million	% Change 2025-26 on 2024-25	What it buys
Scottish Forestry					
Program and Running Costs	19.561	19.951	24.389	22.2%	This funding is used to deliver Scottish Government's forestry strategy and functions, including governance arrangements, forestry policy, the processing and assessment of woodland creation applications, the award of grants, compliance and regulation, the promotion of sustainable forest management and investigation and
Depreciation	-	0.607	1.011	66.6%	Depreciation of inherited assets and IFRS 16 assets, plus cross border charges are also partly classified as depreciation. Capital relates to new leases in 2025/26.
Woodland Grants	20.467	45.367	53.000	16.8%	Forestry grants support delivery of Scottish Government's climate change targets through woodland creation and tree planting, including on farms and next to rivers, and to restore and protect Scotland's Atlantic Rainforest.
Tri-party Cross Border Agreement	2.571	4.271	4.730	10.7%	This funding supports the provision of cross border forestry functions and research as set out and agreed in the Tri-party Memorandum of Understanding. The encompassed areas of shared interest include research commissioning and delivery (including inventory and statistics), Plant Health, UK Forestry Standard and Woodland Carbon Code, forestry economics advice and support for international
EC Receipts	-	-	-	N/A	No longer applicable – no further EU funding.
Total – Scottish Forestry	42.599	70.196	83.130	18.4%	
Forestry and Land Scotland					
Resource	16.494	16.494	15.600	-5.4%	The resource budget will support the sustainable management of Scotland's national forests and land.
Capital	-	15.000	11.600	-22.7%	The capital budget will support the expansion of Scotland's national forests and land, supporting landscape scale land use change, community and partnership working, woodland creation, biodiversity and peatland restoration, consistent with the Scottish Government's objectives.
Total – Forestry and Land	16.494	31.494	27.200	-13.6%	

Budgetary information from Level 4 Scottish Budget tables published 4th December showing proposed allocations for forestry in 2025-26. It is unclear why the original figure for woodland grants for 2024/25 is shown in this table as £20,467 as the next figure, £45,367, was what was allocated at the start of the year.

On 19th December 2023 the Scottish Government announced that Scottish Forestry's grant budget would be cut by £32m or 41% for the year 2024/25. Almost a year later the Scottish Government, in its budget for 2025/26 announced on 4th December, is proposing to increase spending on forestry grants next year from £45,367,000 to £53,000,000 a 16.8% increase with the specific objective of supporting delivery of "climate change targets through woodland creation and tree planting and to restore and protect Scotland's Atlantic Rainforest".

As I have been documenting on parkswatch ([see here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) the forestry grant system is achieving the opposite of what is ostensibly intended and releasing more carbon into the atmosphere through the destruction of soils. It has also been harming wildlife while pump priming financial

speculation in land. The last thing we need at present, therefore, is for the forestry grants budget to be increased before it is fundamentally reformed as this will cause more harm. It would be far better, as Dave Morris is advocating ([see here](#)), for it to be suspended for a year to enable a rethink.

For those concerned about the so-called Atlantic Rainforest, beneath the entries for forestry on the Level 4 budget tables ([see here](#) under the Rural Affairs tab) there is a section on natural resources. Besides peatland restoration that includes a budget line for Atlantic Rainforest restoration:

Natural Resources &					
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Natural Resources	0.401	2.319	5.110	120.4%	Wildlife policy and management and delivery of Atlantic Rainforest restoration.

Why there are two lines in the Scottish Government budget allocating money for Atlantic Rainforest Restoration is unclear but whatever money is currently included under Woodland Grants for this purpose could simply be moved to Natural Resources so long as it wasn't used to plant trees.

The rest of the Scottish Forestry grant money which has not been contractually committed in advance should be re-allocated for the next financial year to reducing deer numbers wherever possible to two or less per square kilometre. This would enable woodland expansion to happen naturally, stop carbon being released unnecessarily from soils and reduce the damage being done to wildlife through killer deer fences.

Part of the money could go to Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS), whose income the Scottish Government proposed to cut next year, to get deer numbers on its land under proper control. This would enable it to stop erecting new damaging deer fences as it is proposing to do in Glen Prosen (subject of a forthcoming blog), remove the need for planting trees in the Greater Trossachs Forest where it has adopted an eventual target of 5 deer per square kilometre with the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park and satisfy those landowning interests who attribute some of their difficulties in controlling deer to the numbers on FLS land.

The rest of the forestry grant money and the staff who administer it should be transferred/seconded to NatureScot to allocate to deer managers who are serious about reducing deer numbers but don't have the funds to pay for this themselves (i.e any grants should be means tested).

Should FLS and NatureScot doubt they could spend the £53m in this way for a year, there are other woodland related objectives on which the money could be spent, such as the removal of invasive non-native species, including sitka spruce, from areas of native woodland which a couple of readers have advocated in response to my most recent posts

These or similar radical proposals are achievable politically. In order to get the proposed budget for 2025/26 passed the SNP Scottish Government needs to get support from other political parties, most probably either the Greens or the LibDems. All that is needed therefore is for these two parties to commit to ending the destruction being caused by the forestry grants system – why would the Greens support expenditure that is directly and unnecessarily increasing CO2 levels in the atmosphere – and make any support for next year's budget conditional on a full review of the forestry grants scheme with a temporary re-allocation of funds until this happens.

If you are sympathetic to this argument please consider lobbying your constituency and list MSPs.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. Deer
2. FLS
3. forestry
4. NatureScot
5. scottish forestry
6. Scottish Government

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