

Want nature restoration at speed and at scale?

## **Description**

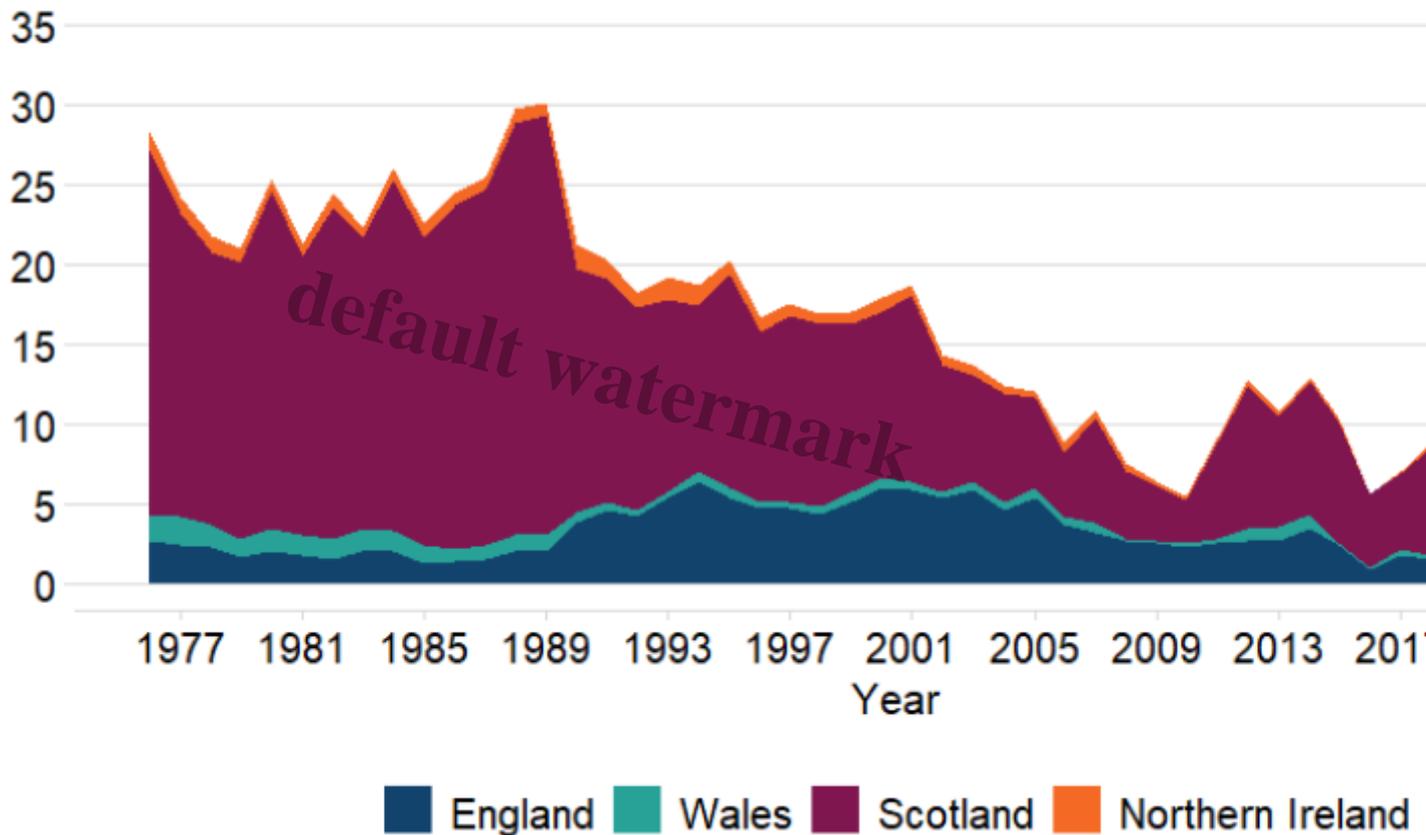
In Scotland we need to restore our native woodland cover. The Government agrees and wants to see 18,000 ha of new woodland created per annum, primarily through native woodland expansion.

Not especially ambitious for an emergency, but perhaps overly ambitious for our antiquated grant system which has, except for the year 2023/24, delivered less than 10,000 ha of new woodland per annum in the past two decade:

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## Forestry Statistics 2025: Chapter 1 Woodland Area & P

Figure 1.4: Area of new planting by country, UK, 1976 to 2024 thousand hectares



Source: Forestry Commission, Forestry England, Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland, Welsh Government, Forest Service, grant scheme

To achieve more ambitious targets we need to incentivise deer management.

Deer and woodland expansion are intimately connected. Most woodland creation schemes are essentially plantations with ground cultivation and trees planted behind a 2m wall of steel fencing.

An expensive business model which blots the landscape, kills black grouse, and destroys the right to roam. Fencing also creates an unnatural "plantation" woodland, devoid of montane scrub or habitat mosaics and concentrates deer in even greater numbers on the excluded land.

Deer control would be much better for nature, but is rarely used in the Scottish context because neighbouring land is managed for deer stalking and owners want high densities to improve the chances of a successful day on the hill (while supporting higher sporting land values thanks very much).

Sporting estates and woodland creation can coexist, but policy makers must stop hiding behind fences and create more supportive policy instruments.

My suggestion is simple: create a new designation that curates grant aid more cost-effectively: Woodland Restoration Zones (WRZ).

All landowners in a WRZ wishing to create woodland can only attract grant aid if they protect trees by hunting. WRZs might consist of 5-15 landholdings in areas where there is already a high concentration of woodland. Overtime these areas could then be enlarged to form a focus for woodland expansion at scale.

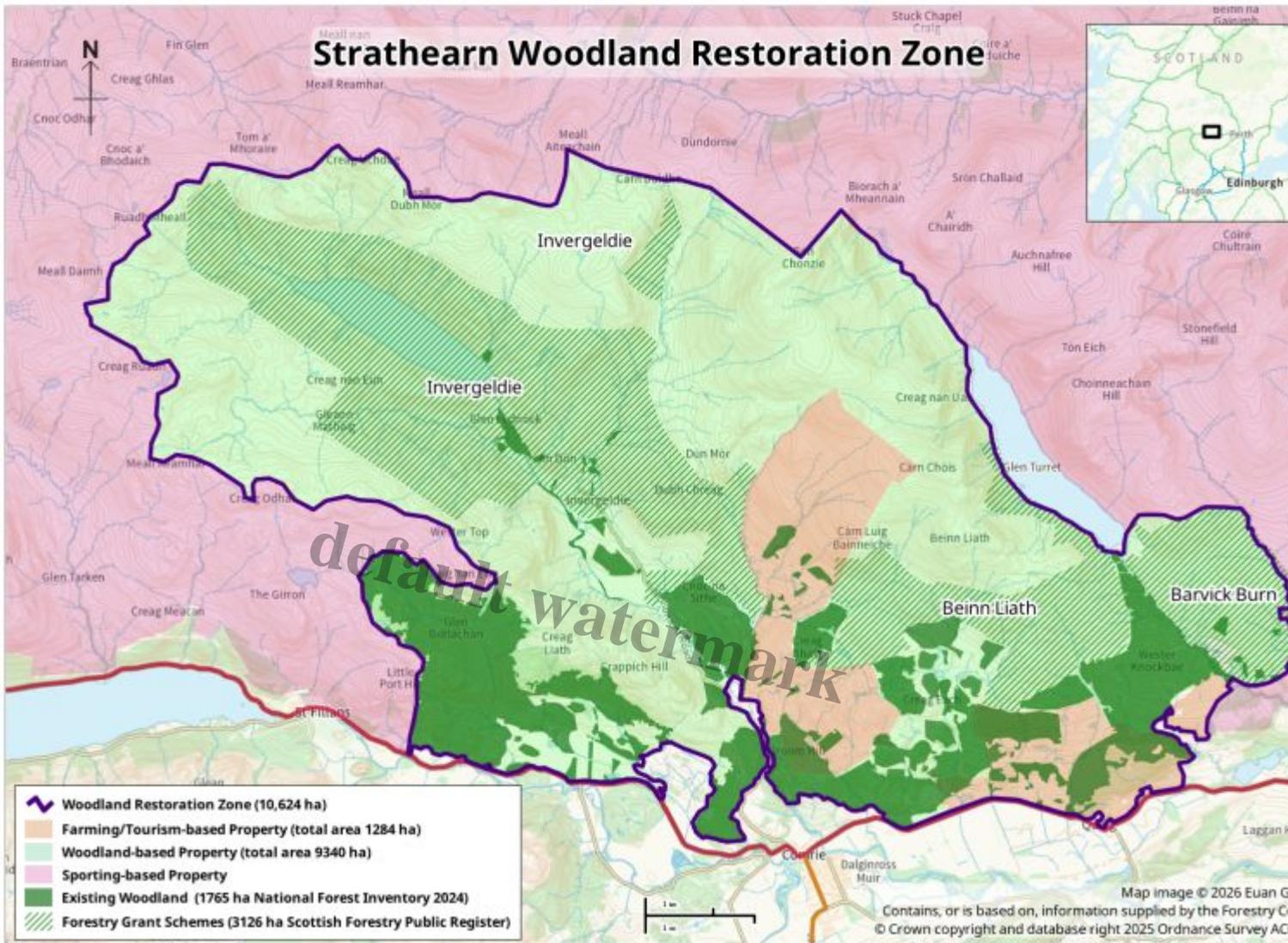
Costs saved on fencing could be diverted into annual deer management:

- Boots on the ground daily
- Permanent employment of stalkers/rangers
- Revenues and fees from venison and hunting
- Government grants levered in to support venison processing.

Adopting the WRZ approach would be transformative:

- Eradicate fencing (avoiding unnatural boundaries and grouse fatalities)
- Create more natural woodlands
- Reduce private and public costs of woodland creation per hectare
- Greatly accelerate the rate of woodland expansion
- Reduce deer pressure on adjacent owners

As an example, here is how it might work in Strathearn, where 3 large new woodlands are currently planned under the existing regime (including one by the unashamedly capitalist Oxygen Conservation [\(see here\)](#)):



### Current Regime V Woodland Restoration Zone

Woodland Created ~ 3126ha V 9340ha  
Fencing ~ 65,000 metres V 0 metres  
Grant aid ~ Â£2600/ha V Â£1200/ha

Surely this is a win-win that only requires some gumption from Scottish Forestry and NatureScot. A tall order you mutter, but this is an emergency is it not?

*[This post was first published on Dougie MacMillan's Linked In page]*

### Category

1. National Parks
2. Other parts Scotland

### Tags

1. Deer
2. forestry

3. landed estates
4. NatureScot
5. scottish forestry
6. Scottish Government

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