4. Post-war policy: The end of the strategic reserve

The massive felling during the Second World War justified the strategic underpinning of the British forestry programme as it had been formulated in 1919. When the war broke out in 1939, almost all of the plantations created by the Forestry Commission were less than 20 years old. This resulted in the felling and depletion of many of the older forests in Britain in general and in Scotland in particular. In response, the Government asked the Forestry Commission to produce a review of forestry policy and to advise on how to deal with the loss of woodlands due to the war effort once hostilities had ceased. In 1943 the Commission published the Report on Post-War Forestry Policy, which was modelled on the Acland Report; its findings carried a strong resemblance to its 1918 predecessor.

The combination of a wartime context and a review body with a vested interest produced a predictable appeal to confirm and intensify the policy laid down in 1919. The report restated the importance of wood as a raw material and the unfavourable balance of trade as far as Britain was concerned and concluded that a renewed effort was needed to create an adequate timber reserve for ‘national safety and ... also provide a reasonable insurance against future stringency in world supplies’. The military argument was reinforced by the review but, surprisingly, no financial analysis of the necessary investment was offered. The report proposed that over two million hectares should be devoted to forestry to create a sufficiently large timber reserve and suggested, like its 1918 predecessor, that most of the ground for planting was to be found on the bare, ‘unproductive’ upland areas of Scotland. The report also emphasised the social advantages of the afforestation programme for rural communities in the uplands of Scotland (and Wales) when it stated ‘there are valuable contingent advantages associated with forests, such as the development and settlement of rural Britain’.

A new element that was introduced by the report was the idea of forestry as a valid form of business investment, included in order to attract investors to finance the proposed planting programme. The incentive for the private sector to collaborate was the introduction of a dedication scheme under which landowners could dedicate woodland for the purposes of timber production under a management plan agreed with the Forestry Commission. The Commission would provide landowners with practical advice and a subsidy for woodland management. Since the Forestry Commission would oversee the dedication scheme, this forestry incentive programme extended the norms of

2 Ibid.
state afforestation to the private sector. This was to have serious consequences for both forest policy and the shape and nature of the forests decades later, in the last quarter of the 20th century, as will be discussed in detail in subsequent chapters.

The 1943 forestry review also highlighted amenity and recreational advantages. It was proposed to reserve 400,000 hectares for recreation, amenity and conservation. This was in recognition of the mounting demand for access and recreational facilities, which led to the Forestry Commission’s belief that it had to formalise its policy with regard to amenity where the National Forestry Parks were concerned. The review therefore laid the foundations for the development of formalised environmental and conservation policies within the Forestry Commission in the decades ahead.

The Report on *Post-War Forest Policy* was the blueprint for the Forestry Act of 1945, and it was implemented to the letter, just as the Acland Report had been before it. The new Act referred to the 1919 Act in repeating that the Commission was charged with the creation and maintenance of adequate reserves of timber grown in plantations. The 1945 Act also reformed the organisational structure of the Forestry Commission, in that the Commissioners became responsible to the Minister of Agriculture and the Secretary of State for Scotland. Although it had been mentioned in the 1943 review, the 1945 Act did not include a clause on amenity, recreation or nature conservation. These were still unofficial objectives of the Forestry Commission, although the Government stated that it ‘would continue to establish and extend National Forest Parks as and when suitable opportunities occur’.

However, National Forest Parks were only a sideshow and the Commission had more important problems to deal with. In the first place, it had to cultivate land for forestry that no one had attempted to cultivate before. Before and during the war, research into cultivation techniques, complemented by improved cultivation machinery, had provided foresters with a robust set of silvicultural techniques for establishing conifer plantations on a range of sites that had been off-limits to forestry at the beginning of the 20th century. It was now possible to put these new techniques into practice, to make up for the massive war fellings, and to push large-scale monoculture forestry plantations high into the uplands.

Until 1957, the Commission’s focus was on the expansion of the forest area and to secure a large reserve of timber. It was also part of the post war aim to make Britain as self-sufficient as possible in the interests of limiting imports and the outflow of hard currency needed to recover from the war. The Forestry

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3 H.M. Steven, ‘The Forests and Forestry of Scotland’, *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 67 (1951) 2, 110-123, p. 120.

4 *Post-war Forest Policy*, section 5.

Commission felt very confident that it would be able to successfully carry out its ambitious planting programme because it felt that its policy was ‘in line with the Government’s own policy for developing native resources under state initiative’. 

In 1952 the Chancellor of the Exchequer called for the need to reduce national expenditure in order to save Britain from bankruptcy. In addition, wages of forest workers had increased over the previous year, putting a strain on the Commission’s finances. In response, the Commission reviewed its finances and the various ways in which their budget was spent. It was decided to curtail the construction of new buildings, houses and roads, and to limit the employment of new staff. However, the Commissioners were very clear that there could not be a reduction in the proposed planting programme. In 1952 the Commission stated that a reduction of the planting operations or abandonment of the goal of creating a timber reserve would be a waste of public money and labour.

This plea for not reducing Treasury funding for forestry was successful and the planting effort continued to intensify. However, the commissioners expected a future downward trend in the planting programme, caused not by financial problems but by a shortage of land available for planting. This had already been a problem before the war but in the post-war years became more serious. The problem was that the Commission had to compete with agriculture for land because a national policy for the expansion of home food production was being pursued with even greater vigour than the forestry policy, a repeat of the situation after the First World War. As a result, officials of the Department of Agriculture exercised ‘a de facto veto over the release even of land in the possession of the Forestry Commission’ for afforestation. The Forestry Commission itself did not have the power to override the Department of Agriculture if the latter thought that certain areas could be better used for the production of food. This forced the Forestry Commission to advance up hill, making use of poorer land for forestry, a development that was made possible by the introduction of new planting techniques, fertilisers and the use of hardy tree species. This had considerable consequences for the appearance of the landscape and biodiversity in large areas of Scotland.

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6 TNA: PRO T224/234 General policy. Draft joint memorandum by Minister of Agriculture and Secretary of State for Scotland to the Treasury, 1947, p. 2.
The Zuckerman Report

In the 1943 report on *Post-War Forest Policy* it was stated that ‘the post-war position will demand speedy and large-scale action’.\(^{10}\) The coincidence of the need for timber during the reconstruction period following the Second World War, and the desire to restore strategic timber reserves, created a fertile environment for the development of the ideas of the Oxford-based forestry economist W.E. Hiley on the forestry economics of shorter tree crop rotations. William Mutch, a retired lecturer in forestry at the University of Edinburgh, noted that Hiley’s ideas were very influential ‘among some of the younger people in the Forestry Commission [and] there emerged a concept of big scale forestry’.\(^{11}\) But Roger Bradley, an economist involved in these developments within the Forestry Commission, felt that the emergence of large-scale forestry in Scotland was not due to changes in the attitudes of foresters. Rather, he felt it to be the result of increased opportunities for land acquisition in the uplands.\(^{12}\)

![Figure 4.1: Even-aged high forest Scots pine plantation.](image)

Photo: Jan Oosthoek.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s forestry on an ecological basis, a practice that took local environmental and biological conditions into consideration, was still popular among foresters, as will be explained in more detail in chapter eight. However, at this point the official silvicultural practice of the Forestry

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11 Personal comment William E.S. Mutch.
12 Written comments by Roger Bradley.
Commission was that of even-aged monoculture high forestry on long rotations of clear felling and restocking, which was regarded as the ‘only practical means of exploiting the large even-aged plantations made by our ancestors’.\footnote{How Should we Grow Conifers? Forestry Meeting at Dartington Hall, Devon, June 1958', \textit{Scottish Forestry}, 12 (1958) 1, 19-29, p. 24.}

In 1957, the \textit{Report of an Enquiry into Forestry, Agriculture and Marginal Lands}, better known as the Zuckerman Report, was published and its conclusions undermined completely the basis for the existing forest policy. The Zuckerman Report suggested that it was ‘less meaningful to consider our forest policy in relation to war-time needs than in a primarily economic and social light’.\footnote{Quoted in: ‘Forest Policy Review’, \textit{Scottish Forestry}, 12 (1958) 2, 92-94, p. 92.} The more influential conclusions were that end-users for forest products had to be actively sought and that the strategic need for a three-year self-sufficiency of timber had disappeared with the advent of nuclear warfare; any future war was expected to be short. A further recommendation was that forestry and agriculture should be integrated and planned together, and that more attention should be devoted to the amenity and recreational aspects of forestry.\footnote{Pringle, \textit{The First 75 Years}, pp. 44-45; Mackay, \textit{Rural Land Use Agencies}, p. 33.}

The Commissioners welcomed the Zuckerman report, feeling that its findings were, on the whole, supportive. Although it removed the main justification for forestry as it currently existed, the report reflected on the fact that the commercial and social functions of forestry were becoming increasingly important. In recognition of this, the Forestry Commission acknowledged publicly that there was ‘evidence of a growing public demand for the recreational facilities provided by the Commission’.\footnote{Forestry Commission, \textit{Annual Report 1957} (London: HMSO, 1957), p. 56.} The response of the Commissioners was the publication of new expanded editions of forestry park guides and pamphlets about camping and facilities in the parks.

After the Zuckerman Report had removed the main justification for the existence of the Forestry Commission, an inter-departmental working party was established to review forest policy and to formulate new aims for British state forestry. The report of the working party, made public in early 1958, can be roughly divided into two sections: a section on forestry economics and a section on the social aspects of forestry including amenity and nature conservation. The opening pages of the working party report made a clear statement about the type of trees and timber deemed necessary for the future:

\textit{The growing of hardwoods on a large scale is commercially unattractive in the United Kingdom because the main species mature slowly and yield}
very little revenue in the early years. Home production of hardwoods is therefore likely to decline and need not be taken into account as a factor of major importance in the future.\textsuperscript{17}

It was expected that the demand for softwood would rise dramatically in the following decades. In 1956, 6.6 million cubic metres of softwoods were imported. Since 226,500 cubic metres were produced in Britain, imports made up 97 per cent of all softwoods and thus the question was whether timber should be produced in Britain at all. The problem was that so much had been invested in new plantations that abandoning the forestry schemes would have been seen to be a waste of money and effort. It was acknowledged that Britain’s forests were reaching maturity and that it was to be expected that the output of timber would increase. An additional concern was the question of whether the existing wood processing industry had the capacity to deal with an increased supply of home-grown timber. The working party advised creating new manufacturing capacity by means of further investment in, and the subsidisation of, pulp and chipboard mills, particularly in the remoter areas of Britain such as northern Scotland. It was expected that these domestic mills would meet heavy foreign competition for the wood resources needed to sustain them. To counter this effectively, the success of the wood processing industry would depend on further expansion of the forest area in order to create a softwood surplus that would make the mills independent of wood imports.\textsuperscript{18}

Changing attitudes towards forestry also reflected the global economic and political shifts that took place during the 1950s. In similar fashion as the Zuckerman report, the working party concluded that the division of the world into two political blocs and the introduction of the atomic bomb had undermined the objectives of forest policy in Britain. In addition, the working party believed that the economies of the western world, including Britain, were becoming more integrated. It was thought that the liberalisation of trade would have a self-regulating effect and that import restrictions would have to be abolished and government subsidies limited. The working party advised therefore:

...although a measure of subsidy may be justified on social grounds it would not be to our general advantage, or accord with our policy of increasing liberalisation of trade, to foster the production of raw materials for British industry at anything other than truly competitive prices... \textsuperscript{19}

It was further recommended that direct investment by the State, by means of the subsidisation of forestry through the Forestry Commission, could no longer

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} TNA: PRO F18/815 Cabinet Working Party on Forest Policy, Draft Report, p. 4.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 7-8.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 8.
\end{itemize}
be justified. Forestry, according to the working party, needed to become as profitable as agriculture, requiring only loans from the State. However, it was recognised that the repayment of loans would be problematic, even when the first forests started to become productive, given the long period needed for trees to mature.

The conclusions of the working party were the opening the Treasury had been looking for to cut expenditure on forestry. Before the war the Treasury had already been pressing for the adjustment of the ‘planting programme to the most economic figure’. In 1958, the minimum return of any government investment that was applied by the Treasury was 6.25 per cent, which also applied to forestry. Estimates by the working party forecasted a return of between 3 and 3.5 per cent on new planting by the Forestry Commission, which meant that state forestry did not meet the criteria set by the Treasury, which was problematic if state-funded forestry was to survive. The working party realised that a solution had to be found to this problem. The solution was to make use of a proven strategy from the past, by pointing out that economic criteria ‘are not the only grounds on which the State forestry programme must be determined’. These non-economic criteria amounted to the social benefits of forestry, which were more difficult to quantify.

The working party recognised two important social aspects of forestry: the amenity aspect and the economic and demographic problems experienced by the inhabitants of the remote upland areas of Scotland. Although the amenity section was the shortest of the report, this was the first time that amenity was explicitly mentioned in a government policy document on forestry. However, the significance of this first reference should not be overstated; according to the working party, amenity was not to be considered more than ‘a make-weight in the determining of policy’.

Nevertheless, around 1960 the issue of amenity was becoming increasingly important. Since the 1930s the Commission had opened up their plantations to walkers and established National Forest Parks. By the second half of the 1950s, the Commission had adopted as one of its objectives the need for attention to be given to the aesthetic and conservation role of the forest, calling for due regard to be paid to recreation and sporting interests, and flora and fauna. These objectives were not included in the statutory aims of the Commission but the working party thought that it was time to correct this. In doing so, it was by no means a lone voice. The National Parks Commission and the Nature Conservancy had also recommended expanding the Forestry Commission’s statutory aims in

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23 Ibid., p. 15.
order to enable them ‘to take account of the contribution which forestry can make to the conservation of soil, water, protection from exposure and erosion, nature conservation, sport and recreation and the development of a more balanced rural landscape’. However, this argument could not be justified by itself, with the result that the working party looked for ways to embed the amenity issue within the wider context of forestry. It did this by connecting amenity with the social objectives of forestry in upland areas.

Like the founding fathers of the Forestry Commission, the working party was convinced that forestry would be able to stop the decline the rural populations. It believed that ‘great weight must clearly be given to the social factor in determining forestry policy’. These social objectives, such as the provision of rural employment and the creation of new rural communities, especially in the remote parts of Britain, were copied from the 1919 Acland Report, but the rural population situation in 1958 was very different from that of 1919. Contrary to popular belief, census data relating to rural Scotland shows that the population was in slow decline prior to the Second World War. Only in the very remote north did the population decline quite rapidly between 1881 and 1921. However, following the Second World War the population in many rural areas of Scotland started to decline rapidly. Contemporary commentators warned that this would leave behind an ageing population, abandoned homesteads and villages, and a decline in the availability of social services such as schools and shops. This in turn would accelerate the drift of people away from the land, meaning that the countryside would slip into a vicious cycle of depopulation and economic decline. By the end of the 1950s, there was a much stronger case for promoting forestry in remote rural areas in the interests of economy and society then there had been during the inter-war period. In fact, by the 1960s it had become one of the main objectives to justify public money spent on forestry. In the process, the issues of amenity, recreation and nature conservation became linked to the social issue because it was believed that these would stimulate rural economies.

The Government largely accepted the findings of the Zuckerman report and the working party. A ministerial statement removed the emphasis on creating reserves of standing timber and gave greater weight to economic considerations and to the social benefits of tree planting through the diversification of employment, particularly in the upland areas of Scotland and Wales. The Government endorsed a curtailed planting programme and also announced that

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 18.
the planting programmes of the Forestry Commission would be fixed for periods of ten years and that the programme would be reviewed every five years. The first review was to be conducted in 1963, which was clearly an effort to keep the Treasury happy. With regards to the private sector, the Government moved in the opposite direction of the Working Party. A dedication scheme\(^{28}\) had been introduced after the war to encourage private landowners to dedicate their land to the production of timber. While the working party had advised the abolition of the dedication scheme, the Government, under pressure from the landowners lobby, instead increased the grants for dedicated woodlands. The system of felling licences continued, but a new statutory instrument meant that felling in dedicated woodlands no longer required a licence. The abolition of felling quotas made it possible for private landowners to control their own woodlands with a view to the most economic management of their estates. It was also announced that future planting would be further concentrated in the upland areas, particularly in Scotland and Wales, where the expansion of forestry would provide a source of employment.\(^{29}\) With all this in hand the Forestry Commission had the go-ahead to continue for another five years before having its work scrutinised again.

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\(^{28}\) The dedication scheme was a de facto subsidy to landowners to plant trees. Many landowners used this to make money out of land that was not suitable for agriculture. As a result these forests were not the most productive.