9. The end of monoculture forestry

By 1978 a landscape design policy had been introduced by the Forestry Commission and by 1984 the Commission had a landscape design team of three foresters with landscape design qualifications. Between 1975 and 1982 this team was able to design about 7,300 hectares of new planting and 7,100 hectares of felling and replanting, concentrated in the most beautiful and prominent landscapes in Scotland and England.\(^1\)

However, the ideas of landscape design were still not fully accepted by the Forestry Commission as being part of its role, and were regarded as rather separate from production forestry. Forestry had become so highly scientific, quantified and logical that the qualitative, multi-purpose forestry approach was difficult to accept, especially in a professional activity as fundamental as forest planning. Through the early 1980s there still existed a strong dichotomy between commercial forestry and environmental and landscape concerns and it was difficult to give up such a firmly held position after sixty years of planting monocultures in the most efficient way, i.e. geometric blocks.\(^2\) This attitude was going to change rapidly in response to a coincidence of pressures which led to significant changes in forestry policy during the 1980s with the development of the Forestry Commission's broadleaf policy, and in particular the conflict over the planting of the wetlands in the far north of Scotland.

Forestry tax breaks

Between 1977 and 1980 two influential reports on forestry policy were published: *The wood production outlook in Britain* by the Forestry Commission and the *Strategy for the UK Forest Industry* by the University of Reading’s Centre for Agricultural Strategy. Both reports advocated the continued expansion of forestry in Britain based on increasing consumption of wood products and of possible pressures on world supplies. The reports saw an equal role for the state and private sector in the expansion of Britain’s forestry. By the late 1970s sixty per cent of Scottish forests were owned by the Forestry Commission but the ability to expand state forestry was regarded as limited. In order to expand forestry, forms of partnership and cooperation between landowners, the Forestry Commission and the private sector were seen as essential. To encourage more involvement of the private sector the University of Reading’s

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Centre for Agricultural Strategy recommended in a report on forestry strategy a simplification of planning procedures for forestry and the introduction of higher grants and a favourable taxation regime.\(^3\)

The Forestry Commission and Centre for Agricultural Strategy reports were hardly radical documents and elaborated themes such as looming timber shortages and import substitution, which had been used as a justification of state involvement in forestry since the early 20th century. This did not sit well with the proponents of free trade and neo-liberal economics. In 1981 the Institute of Economic Affairs, a free market think-tank, published a report by economist Robert Miller tentatively entitled *State Forestry for the Axe*, which is a radical neo-liberal critique of 20th century forestry policy. Miller proposed the de-nationalisation of the Forestry Commission, the removal of existing planning controls on planting and felling and to ‘abolish both grants and tax exemptions’, ending all state support for forestry and leaving the industry in the hands of market forces.\(^4\)

However, a year after the coming to office of the Thatcher government in 1979, it was announced that continued forest expansion was ‘in the national interest, both to reduce our dependence on imported wood in the long term and to provide continued employment in forestry and associated industries’. In the same policy statement it was also announced that while afforestation would continue at rates similar to those in the past, it would be carried out mainly by the private sector. In order to facilitate this greater ‘opportunities for private investment’ in forest assets would be created, ‘including the sale of a proportion of the commission's woodlands and land awaiting planting’.\(^5\) A year later in 1981 this was formalised when the Conservative Government amended the 1967 Forestry Act, which shifted the emphasis of forest policy to the private sector. At the same time a simplified grant scheme was to replace dedication\(^6\) and part of the Commission's estate was to be sold off to private buyers. This showed that whatever the flavour of government, the forestry lobby would find ways of securing support for upland conifer planting, using job creation and the importance of a state-owned forestry service to appeal to the Labour party and arguing for private investment to secure Conservative support.\(^7\)

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\(^6\) A woodland owner could dedicate a woodland for the purpose of timber production under a management plan agreed with the Forestry Commission. The Commission would provide the landowner with practical advice and a subsidy for woodland management. See chapter 5.

These changes in forestry policy were only cosmetic and the real driver of forestry expansion during the early 1980s was a system of tax concessions and grants which had been available since the 1950s but only started to be used on a large scale by the 1980s. For larger conifer plantations of ten hectares or more the grant rate was £240 per hectare in the mid-1980s. This would amount to a subsidy of 24 per cent in the case of a typical establishment cost of £1000. This was a substantial subsidy, but it was the tax system that provided the real incentive, particularly for high-income earners, and made investing in forestry very attractive. These tax incentives allowed any losses incurred on forestry operations to be set against other income for tax purposes. In assessing the profits from forestry the value of growing timber was ignored and the inevitable investment, or loss, made during the establishment phase of a new plantation was off set against other income. For example, it was now possible for someone paying 60 per cent income tax to offset the cost of establishing a forest plantation against other taxable income, minus the forestry grant (Based on the example above: £760 x 0.6 = £456). After grant and tax relief, the cost of creating plantations in this example would fall to £304 or just over 30 per cent of the cost without the grant and tax relief. The value of relief depended on the tax rate: obviously it was much greater to someone in the top tax-bracket than to a base-rate taxpayer.\(^8\)

As a result of the tax breaks investors flocked to the new forestry plantations and by the mid 1980s over 90 per cent of all newly planted forests in Scotland were financed with this scheme. However, the scheme would not work on its own because the long rotations of forestry plantations meant that capital would be locked up for periods of more than fifty years, and of course by that time revenue from timber sales would be taxed. However, this tax could be avoided by selling off the land soon after the creation of the plantation. The sale would also unlock the value of the plantation for the initial investor. The new occupier was then entitled to be assessed for income tax based on the value of the land, and not the timber growing on it, and as a result having to pay very little or even no tax on the revenue from timber sales at a later date.\(^9\)

This type of investment was attractive for institutional investors, such as pension funds, who were looking for reliable future revenue streams over the long term. The initial investors moved on to invest in new plantations on even poorer and more remote land and the cycle repeated itself. In other words tax breaks for people in the highest tax bracket encouraged a rapid expansion

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of new forestry plantations in order to be able to sustain forestry as a tax shelter. This favourable tax regime had unintended consequences because it encouraged the creation of forest plantations on the cheapest land available, which was often land in remote areas that had potentially high wilderness and conservation value. In the late 1970s and early 1980s such cheap land located in the far north came on the market at a time when land available for afforestation in other parts of Scotland declined rapidly. In addition, new forestry ploughing technology allowed the cultivation of deep, wet peats for the first time, and the use of Lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta*) as a nurse crop for Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) proved to be a silvicultural breakthrough on deep peat. As a result of the favourable tax regime and technological breakthroughs the wetland areas of the ‘Flow Country’\(^\text{10}\) in northern Scotland, poorly suited to commercial forestry, were drained and planted with even-aged monocultures of non-native tree species, primarily Sitka spruce.\(^\text{11}\)

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10 It is thought that the Flow Country takes its name from the Old Norse language and it means ‘boggy ground’.

The Flow Country is the largest expanse of blanket peat in the Northern hemisphere and is of international significance because it provides a habitat for many unique and rare communities and species of specialised flora and their associated fauna, in particular birds. The cultivation of these areas for forestry was so damaging to the landscape and wetland ecosystems involved that this was going to backfire on forestry when it became clear to conservationists that the tax break system encouraged unsustainable ‘rogue forestry’ that had no regard for environmental or landscape values.

Controversies

This perception of ‘rogue forestry’ was fuelled by a condemning forest policy review jointly carried out by the Nature Conservancy and the Natural Environment Research Council in 1978. The review identified over 700 sites of biological importance, covering one million hectares, including 60,000 hectares of Forestry Commission land. The review put emphasis on the importance of broadleaf woodlands and in particular on so called ancient woodlands and concluded that the work of the Forestry Commission was particularly damaging to these woodlands. The Forestry Commission responded by stating that such sites ‘are already protected by management plans of one kind or another’. They dismissed the claim that more consideration had to be paid to broadleaves and the value of ancient woodlands was ignored.

In 1979, a House of Lords Select Committee under Lord Sherfield began an investigation into the Scientific Aspects of Forestry. The Committee made the recommendation that:

The proper objective for those woodlands and old broadleaf plantations which are not specially selected for nature conservation is to manage them productively and profitably in a way that is compatible with maintaining a value for wildlife and amenity.

The House of Lords Committee linked native broadleaves with timber production and amenity, something the Forestry Commission had done seven years earlier after the forestry policy review of 1972 but had not acted upon.

In 1982, a conference on broadleaves in Britain was held at Loughborough. It is interesting to note that the Forestry Commission and the Institute of Chartered Foresters jointly organised this conference. This event can be identified as the turning point against the dominant use of conifers in favour of native broadleaves.

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12 Ibid., p. 319.
and other trees. The Commission recognised the concern of many people over the poor state of much of Britain’s broadleaved woodland and, in particular, the loss of ancient semi-natural woodland to agriculture and other uses. Following the Loughborough conference the Commission undertook a comprehensive review, lasting two years, of all aspects that would involve a broadleaf policy. Some fifty organisations, including many major forestry and environmental bodies, were given opportunities to put their views forward. This review culminated in the Government statement on broadleaf policy in July 1985. The Government’s Broadleaves policy was aimed at:

Encouraging positively and sympathetic management of the country’s broadleaved woodland to arrest depletion, to increase the quality of timber and to expand this valuable national resource to meet the various complementary objectives.

One of these complementary objectives was:

To encourage the maintenance and greater use of broadleaves in the uplands, particularly where they will enhance the beauty of the landscape and the wildlife interest (emphasis added).

The Commission further explained in the policy description that:

... woodlands designated as areas of high landscape value require special management attention.\(^{16}\)

The objectives of the broadleaf policy were impressive. The Commission committed itself to the protection of broadleaved woodlands and trees, especially the so-called ancient woodlands and hardwood trees of high landscape value. But these intentions hardly seemed to apply north of the Scottish border where the Forestry Commission and private forestry alike continued to create large new conifer monocultures. Any criticism was countered with the argument that the work of the Forestry Commission and the industry it supported was simply carrying out forestry policy and fulfilling the government's planting target, then set at 33,000 hectares per annum. In addition it was claimed that cultivation in the far north of Scotland developed unproductive land, which would boost the local economy and provide employment, arguments used to justify state forestry since the early 20th century. In line with forestry policy developed since the 1972 review, further benefits were envisaged from the new forest habitat created, including providing a haven for rare bird species, supporting increased biodiversity and provision of new recreational opportunities.\(^{17}\)


These justifications were just a smokescreen and the Forestry Commission operated as part of a wider ‘forest-industrial complex’ made up of Scottish landowners, timber processors, private forestry companies, and investors, both private and institutional, all of whom come together to benefit from public subsidies. In the spring of 1985 the Countryside Commission for Scotland expressed its concern about the fact that this forest-industrial complex seemed to becoming increasingly unwieldy and beyond the control of any planning mechanisms. In 1985 at the presentation of its annual report Nature Conservancy Council chairman David Nickson predicted correctly ‘that forestry would be the dominating countryside issue in Scotland for the next decade’ unless forestry interests became sensitive to public opinion and took planning controls more seriously.18

These words were not as prophetic as it seems but simply reflected concerns aired by conservationists and countryside interest groups such as the Ramblers Association and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (hereafter RSPB). In 1983, Alan Mattingly, the Secretary of the Ramblers Association called in a letter published in The Times newspaper on the government and forestry interests to create mixed species plantations and pay more attention to landscape values.19 This opposition was still mild compared to what was to follow in the mid-1980s. In July 1985 in an unprecedented move, the RSPB asked the Government to suspend all grants for afforestation in the Flow Country, pending a full review carried out by the Nature Conservancy Council (hereafter NCC), the Government’s United Kingdom-wide conservation and wildlife watchdog, of the effects of afforestation of the Flow Country. The RSPB was also talking to the Forestry Commission in a bid to persuade them to stop planting subsidies to forestry companies active in the North of Scotland.20 This did not achieve the desired effect and the cultivation and planting in the peat lands of northern Scotland continued.

However, the future of forestry in the Flow Country was not as secure as it seemed and a significant change in policy resulted from a coincidence of pressures. In 1986 the existing forest policy started to unravel when the National Audit Office published a review questioning the economic justification of the Forestry Commission investing further public funds in creating new conifer forests on marginal land in the far north of Scotland. The National Audit office concluded that plantings in the future were expected to become increasingly concentrated on sites which were marginal for timber production and would be unlikely to yield an acceptable return on capital.21 The bottom line was that the

20 Anon., ‘Saving Scotland for Birds that Hate Trees’, New Scientist, 1470 (22 August 1985), p. 16.
planting grants and tax breaks were very costly for the state and in particular the ordinary tax payer, something that was difficult to sell to the general public by a Conservative government that believed in low taxation and laissez-faire. But in the face of opposition of vested interests in the forestry industry, Scottish politicians and local people, it was difficult for the Government to remove the tax scheme.

Map 9.1: Blanket peat areas and forestry in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland.


Around the same time of the Treasury report, the RSPB published a report entitled *Forestry in the Flow Country*. In this report, the RSPB drew attention to the extensive planting undertaken by Fountain Forestry in the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland and the damage it did to the local bird populations. The campaign against forestry in the Flow Country was considerably aided by the involvement of certain celebrity investors such as Terry Wogan; by a television documentary presented by the well-known environmentalist David Bellamy in February 1988 entitled *Paradise Ploughed*; and by the publication of an emotively entitled booklet *The Theft of the Hills* written by a concerned former employee of the Forestry Commission. But all this noise was not sufficient to shift the Government’s official forestry policy and end the expansion of forest plantations on the blanket peatlands aided by the taxpayer.

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However, in 1987 the NCC publicity provided the Government with a perfect opportunity to end the tax breaks for forestry when it published its own report entitled *Birds, Bogs and Forestry*, which criticised forestry in the Flow Country in unusually outspoken terms for a Government organisation. It described the tree planting in North of Scotland as Britain's ‘most massive loss of wildlife habitat since the Second World War’.

During the presentation of the report in London the Chairman of the NCC, William Wilkinson, called on the government to declare a moratorium on all forest planting and forestry grants in the Flow Country. The publication of the report was accompanied by a well orchestrated publicity campaign, for example a major article in *The New Scientist* by Desmond Thomson, moor ecologist of the NCC, entitled ‘The battle of the Bog’.

In the budget of March 1988, the Chancellor of the Exchequer Nigel Lawson, removed without any warning the tax incentives that was driving forestry investments. The move was certainly influenced by the controversy surrounding the planting of the Flow Country, in particular the NCC report, but it was also political damage limitation at a time when a large part of the electorate believed that the Government was subsidising the rich. The Forestry Commission observed properly that this was done to demolish ‘arrangements under which tax payers … had been able to shelter other income from tax by setting it against expenditure on forestry, while effectively enjoying freedom from tax on the income from the eventual sale of timber’.

The controversy ended with a ‘Solomonic judgement’ by the Secretary of State Malcolm Rifkind ‘dividing the Flows half for the forest industry and half for birds’. This was in an attempt to placate both conservationists and forestry interests, which was made explicitly by the Secretary of State for Scotland even before the budget announcement in February 1988:

> We seek to achieve two legitimate objectives: to meet the ecological criteria, which we have done on a scientific basis, and, at the same time, to take account of the livelihood of those who live in that part of Scotland and who have a legitimate interest with regard to their livelihood and the work opportunities that are available to them.

The Highland and Island Development Board was outraged by these developments and blamed the NCC for undermining forestry development in the Highlands. The chairman of the Highland and Island Development Board concluded that the

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NCC suffered from ‘distant management and policy making’. But his reaction was mild in comparison to that of some sectors of the local population, which was conveyed by headlines in the local press such as ‘Farmers fuming over NCC ‘green fascists’.

Although the NCC appeared to have won the battle over the Flow Country, the outfall of the conflict would hit the organisation very hard. The tactless press conference of the NCC in London presenting the *Birds, Bogs and Forestry* report and the noisy campaign that followed annoyed many in Scotland. It was experienced as ‘Scientific colonisation’ from London and in the ensuing months the NCC was warned in the House of Lords about the possible consequences of its actions:

Recently [the NCC] had a press conference in London to announce the freeze in the development of forestry and consequent loss of jobs in the north of Scotland. It did not consult the Highlands and Islands Development Board. That sort of behaviour provides the necessary propaganda for the Scottish Nationalists.

This warning was not unfounded because the whole Flow Country episode had angered the Scottish political and landowning establishment and they leaned upon the Conservative Government to abolish the NCC, so Scotland could get a wildlife agency of its own that would supposedly be more sensitive to Scottish interests. The Flow Country debate was one of the factors in the decision to break up the NCC and in July 1989, the Minister for the Environment, Nicholas Ridley, quite unexpectedly announced in Parliament that the NCC was to be broken up into three separate councils, one England, one for Wales and one for Scotland. As a result the NCC was dismantled and Scottish Natural Heritage (hereafter SNH) came into being as Scotland’s conservation agency in April 1991. Now nature conservation was entirely in Scottish hands and foreshadowed the political devolution by the end of the decade, which also had a bearing on forestry policy in Scotland and the Britain as a whole.

Following the 1988 budget the Forestry Commission, which had supported the tax incentives on forestry, was shaken to the core by the removal of these tax breaks and commented in its annual report that it needed ‘a period of adjustment’ to the new situation. Luckily the Forestry Commission’s period of adjustment was aided by the Government’s introduction of the Woodland Grant Scheme to replace the earlier Forestry Grant Scheme and Broadleaved Woodland

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30 Ibid.
Grant Scheme. The Woodland Grant Scheme was administered by the Forestry Commission and its objectives were to encourage good management of existing woodland, the creation of new woods for timber production and landscape improvement. Further objectives included the provision of employment through forestry, an alternative use for land in agriculture, habitat for wildlife, and opportunities for recreation and sport. In addition the new grant programme provided Establishment Grants towards the cost of planting new woods or undertaking work that encouraged natural regeneration.  

An additional development that aided the new direction in forestry was the wider problem of the surplus of agricultural land in the European Union. This was regarded as an opportunity to put excess agricultural land to use for forestry and as a result a pilot farming forestry scheme was introduced in 1988 and replaced in 1992 by the Farm Woodlands Premium Scheme. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food administered this scheme although applications to participate in the scheme had to be made to the Forestry Commission. The new grant schemes favoured forestry in more fertile parts of Scotland as well as native broadleaf species and ancient woodlands.

In addition to the new grant schemes the Forestry Commission introduced a Community Woodland Supplement for new woods within five miles of the edge of a town or a city and where there were few other woods that could be used by the local community. This was part of meeting the social objectives of forest policy, which were interpreted by the Forestry Commission to mean recreation and amenity, giving precedence to urban interests over rural needs. But this narrow interpretation was challenged by a new group of buyers of Forestry Commission land that was sold under the land disposal programme as part of the Conservative’s privatisation efforts in the early 1980s. Although the disposal programme of the FC was mainly aimed at the commercial forestry sector, in 1987 a new group of unexpected buyers of FC estates emerged: local community groups. These community land purchases, although relatively small in number, were part of a broader movement within Scotland for land reform. This development was going to have significant consequences for the development of forest policy during the 1990s.

Policy shifts of the 1990s

In 1987 the first Scottish Community forest was established with the acquisition of Wooplaw forest in the Scottish Borders. The project originated in 1985 with Tim Stead, a wood sculptor, who worked and lived in the Scottish Borders. For aesthetic reasons he had decided to use only native British wood and this led to the idea of restoring this resource as well as using it. He conceived of the idea of ‘axes for trees’ and produced hundreds of handmade hardwood axe heads, which he sold to raise money to buy land to grow native trees.37

The publicity for this scheme attracted the attention of two people involved in the native woods movement in Scotland, Donald McPhillimy and Alan Drever. They met with Tim Stead in 1987 and teamed up to create a community woodland in the Scottish Borders. In 1987 this led to the formation of Borders Community Woodlands to take the project forward and a large public meeting was organised in Melrose. Around the same time Wooplaw, a small local woodland, came on the market and within three months the Borders Community Woodlands had succeeded in securing sufficient funds to purchase the first community woodland of its type in Scotland.38

The Forestry Commission realised that community forests provided a good opportunity to polish up its tarnished image. In 1989 it launched a community forest initiative, called the Central Scotland Forestry Initiative, that was designed to transform much of the landscape between Glasgow and Edinburgh, the so-called Central Belt, into a complex of productive and amenity forests. In 1991 the Central Scotland Woodland Countryside Trust was established to lead the initiative.39 Responsible for developing Central Scotland’s Forest Strategy, its main objectives include creating new ways to finance, develop and manage new woodlands in the area of the Central Belt. The objectives of the Central Scotland Forest were wide-ranging and focused the creation of a multi-purpose woodland in which community participation, economic regeneration, countryside access, recreation, and heritage conservation played important roles. Local landowners and communities were seen as having an important stake in this forest project.40

Although the Central Scotland Forest was a successful showcase of a community focused forestry project, the Commission was reluctant to make this kind

of forestry an integral part of its policy. It was also contrary to the aims of grassroots community projects such as Wooplaw, which rejected the top down public sector led ‘community woodlands’. The community forests envisaged by the Forestry Commission had a different level of community engagement than the community woodlands created in the grassroots community movement, with the emphasis in most cases being more on provision of a resource for recreation than active engagement in forest management. In addition these objectives gave precedence to urban interests over rural needs and ignored the need for community involvement in the Highlands of Scotland.\textsuperscript{41}

However, the Laggan community challenged the Forestry Commission’s interpretation of ‘community forestry’, and forced changes to the policy on forest disposals. The village of Laggan is situated in the Central Highlands of Scotland, surrounded by the Monadhliath and Grampian mountain ranges. The Forestry Commission owned Strathmashie Forest, a woodland plantation of 1400 hectares in the vicinity of Laggan. The Laggan community began lobbying for local control of Strathmashie Forest in 1992. They believed that community management of the forest and the creation of recreational facilities would provide local employment opportunities as a means to halt the decline in population and services and to revitalise the community. The Forestry Commission had not earmarked Strathmashie for disposal and the local initiative was thus entirely spontaneous in its attempt to secure the forest for the community. In addition the Forestry Commission did not consider a community as viable buyers of its forests since these groups were not regarded as proper commercial forestry operations. It also fell outside the public sector-led creation and management of community forests, such as the Central Scotland Forestry Initiative, in which the Forestry Commission was involved.\textsuperscript{42}

In support of such expressions of interest by local communities to buy their local forests, three Scottish non-governmental organisations (NGOs), The Highland and Islands Forum, Reforesting Scotland and the Rural Forum Scotland initiated the Scottish Rural Development Forestry Program in 1994. The main aim of this programme was ‘to enable local individuals and groups to realise the potential of Forestry as a land-use with environmental, social and economic benefits’.\textsuperscript{43} The three NGOs provided information and, to a lesser extent, financial support for setting up community forest groups.

However, these initiatives were almost arrested in the middle of their development by a recession in the early 1990s when the Conservative Government under
John Major once more considered selling off large parts of the national forestry estate. For community forest initiatives this prospect was a double-edged sword because, on the one hand, it would have provided them with opportunities to buy forests. But on the other, the potential dismantling of the Forestry Commission would have meant the end of subsidies for the forestry industry and forestry initiatives not only to encourage better management of native trees but also community driven projects. In order to consider any privitisation efforts another forestry policy review was ordered in March 1993. It was less than a year after the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and it was this global event that saved the Forestry Commission and the community forest initiatives in Scotland.

In July 1992 the world’s leaders committed themselves to sustainable development at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development known as the Earth Summit. The Earth Summit was very noticeably oriented towards empowerment through participation; rejecting the notion that sustainable development had to come about just through the ‘greening’ of government policy. Thus emphasis shifted from the traditional top-down perspective on environmental policy implementation, to one of bottom-up people-led initiatives. The Earth Summit produced the first global non-binding ‘statement of principles’ on how the world’s forests should be managed sustainably, which aimed at integrating concerns for social, economic and biodiversity issues into forest policy. Earth Summit was followed by a conference in Helsinki in 1993 which was intended to take the Forestry Principles and ‘interpret them for European conditions’. The UK Government responded to these developments by publishing Sustainable Forestry: the UK Programme which brought together various elements from government policies and programmes and set them in the context of international principles and guidelines. It called for the sustainable management of existing forests, enhancing their economic value as well as seeking other gains in terms of biodiversity, to combat climate change, recreation and landscape, and for the expansion of the area of woodland in pursuit of these multiple objectives. In this document the UK Government committed the Forestry Commission to working towards the full range of forest benefits and to engaging with and empowering communities to enjoy them.

This was confirmed in the ministerial statement on forest policy following the completion of the forestry review, which ‘...places emphasis not just on wood production but on encouraging the use of our forests for amenity and

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environmental benefits’\(^{47}\) and the development of community forests in line with the Earth Summit Principles. The influence of international conventions and agreements and the development of a grassroots community woodland movement initiated shifts in policy, delivery mechanisms and organisational culture that gathered pace throughout the 1990s.\(^{48}\) The decision by the Government not to privatise forestry was a practical one because forestry and forest policy provided them with a vehicle for the implementation of the international environmental principles and agreements to which it had committed the United Kingdom.

The implementation of the international principles was in particular aided by the further development of community participation in Scotland. Although the Forestry Commission dragged their feet, the Laggan community got their community forest after an intervention of the Secretary of State, Michael Forsyth, in 1995. A year earlier in 1994, the Forestry Commission had established the Forests and People in Rural Areas initiative, an informal partnership between Rural Forum Scotland, development and countryside agencies and the World Wildlife Fund. The initiative was concerned with assessing and increasing the involvement of rural communities in local forestry and the mechanisms to enable them to do so. In January 1994, the Forests and People in Rural Areas held a meeting with representatives of government and non-government organisations and academics. A subsequent report by Robin Callander laid out a case for ‘rural development forestry’ in Scotland with a key argument that local communities should have access to the management of local forest resources, including rights to the benefits of management.\(^{49}\)

The Forestry Commission’s response to this was rapid, and in 1998 Lord John Sewell, the Scottish Office Forestry Minister, launched the first formal partnership agreement between the Forestry Commission and the local community at Laggan. The importance of giving communities the option of becoming involved in local woodlands was formally acknowledged by the Forestry Commission with the publications of ‘Forests for people working with communities – our commitment’ and ‘Forests for people working with communities – our approach’ a year later in 1999. In 2000 the Forestry for People Advisory Panel was convened by the Forestry Commission to encourage best practice in respect to community involvement in forestry. The establishment of the Forestry for People Panel further facilitated the process of increasing community involvement in forestry management.\(^{50}\)

\(^{50}\) Forestry Commission Scotland, Community Partnerships on the National Forest Estate (Edinburgh: FCS, 2005), p. 3.
Woodland restoration

An important aspect of the community woodland movement was their emphasis on native woodland, in contrast to the predominantly exotic softwood plantations of the Forestry Commission and commercial forestry sector. Most community and crofter woodland projects emphasised benefits of proper management of existing native woodland remnants, many of which are of great ecological significance, and the development of new native woodlands. Further benefits of better protected, and increased areas of native woodlands include protection of wildlife habitats, soils, water quality and other resources. The interest in restoring and expanding the native woodlands of Scotland has been particularly focused on the native pinewoods of the Scottish Highlands, an interest that was greatly stimulated by the publication of Steven and Carlisle’s seminal work *The Native Pinewoods of Scotland* in 1959. These authors mapped the remnants of the remaining ancient pinewoods and highlighted their ecological importance and that action was required to ensure pinewood conservation and regeneration. Almost two decades later, these same concerns were expressed during a symposium on the native pinewoods of Scotland at Aviemore in 1975. The objective of this symposium was to discuss the ecology of the native pinewoods and the measures needed to promote their conservation. It was suggested that not only should the conservation status of pinewood remnants be improved, but that their area should be significantly expanded. These events served to draw attention to the poor condition of the native pinewoods and helped to encourage some of the early conservation work carried out in places such as Glen Affric.

However, until the 1990s the Forestry Commission was not much interested in the protection of native woodlands but eventually it became an explicit part of forest policy through three independent developments. Firstly, the increase in the number of community forests with an emphasis on native woodland restoration and regeneration. Secondly, policy initiatives such as the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, which outlined a strategy for implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed by the British Government at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. The Biodiversity Action Plan laid out a plan to establish at least 35,000 hectares of native woodland by 2005. Thirdly, through the preparation of Forest Certification Standards system in the mid-1990s which placed an onus...
on managers to assess their Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and produce a strategy for restoration. This interest in restoration was also fuelled by the decline in the price of softwood timber during the 1990s.  

Figure 9.2: Restoration of an Atlantic oak wood in the Loch Awe area, ca. 2000.

Photo: Jan Oosthoek

As a result, the removal of non-native conifers on ancient woodland sites became a major activity in many Scottish forests as part of the Commission's Native Pinewoods Initiative launched in 1992. The aim of this initiative was to double the area of native pinewood owned by the Commission to a total of 6,000 hectares by the end of the 1990s. An additional stimulus to woodland restoration efforts by non-governmental organisations and community groups has been provided by the creation of the Millennium Forest for Scotland, which received some 11 million pounds from the National Lottery to support woodland restoration projects throughout Scotland. By the end of the 1990s eighty projects were supported by the Millennium Forest for Scotland scheme, and together they aimed to restore approximately 12,600 hectares of native woodland.

These initiatives and the work of the Forestry Commission to restore native woods resulted in a change in the composition of trees planted by the late 1990s. Whereas native species accounted for just over five per cent of trees planted in

55 Newton et al., ‘Current Approaches to Native Woodland Restoration’, p. 175.
Scotland in 1988, by 1998 this figure had risen to almost 50 per cent. This was a remarkable transformation of Scottish forestry from a single purpose approach, the production of timber, toward the adoption of broader, more inclusive philosophies of multi-purpose forestry, including community involvement, on the one hand and ‘sustainable conservation’ and restoration on the other.\(^\text{56}\)

This change was also made possible by external economic and political developments related to the collapse of communist Eastern Europe. During the same period world timber prices collapsed and this created a financial crisis within the Forestry Commission. This collapse was brought about by increased timber supplies from the Baltic States and the Russian Federation desperate to generate revenue and a strong pound which made British forestry uncompetitive.\(^\text{57}\) However, the government agreed to fund the shortfall in return for commitments by the Forestry Commission to deliver various social and environmental agendas.

When Labour came to power in 1997, it immediately placed a moratorium on further large-scale sales of forestry land. The New Labour government’s social inclusion agenda placed a much greater emphasis on social forestry than the preceding Conservative government. Environmental issues were also placed higher on the political agenda as a result of the international agreements reached at the environmental summits in Rio and Kyoto. This meant that the expectations of wider society about the role of forestry was changing significantly, which required transformational change of environmental policy, which was aided by Labour’s commitment to devolve government in Scotland and Wales.

As a result, the two smaller countries that make up the United Kingdom,\(^\text{58}\) Scotland and Wales, voted for devolution in a referendum, and in 1999, the Scottish Parliament was re-established in Edinburgh. Forest policy and management was devolved to the new national administrations, and national forest strategies were prepared for Scotland, England and Wales. The devolved structure of Forestry Commission England, Forestry Commission Scotland and Forestry Commission Wales allows the organisation to focus more clearly on delivering the policies of the individual governments while still having the ability to take a United Kingdom-wide approach to cross-border issues. Despite devolved responsibility for forest policy, the Scottish national forest estate was still managed by the centralised Forest Enterprise on behalf of the United Kingdom-wide Forestry Commission.\(^\text{59}\) This was unsatisfactory and in 2002 a

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\(^\text{58}\) The United Kingdom is made up of three countries: England, Scotland and Wales and one devolved province: Northern Ireland.

9. The end of monoculture forestry

Forestry Devolution Review of the post-devolution experience was undertaken. The review considered the post-1999 administrative arrangements for delivering sustainable forestry policies in Scotland, England and Wales and the United Kingdom’s international forestry commitments, including options for further devolution of these arrangements. The review recommended that the Forestry Commission was to be split into sub-national branches to deliver the forestry strategies in England, Scotland and Wales and a central cross-border Forestry Commission providing shared services such as finance, research and grants administration. The Forestry Commission was decentralised in April 2003 with the creation of the Forestry Commission Scotland, answerable directly to Scottish ministers. This started a process of divergence of Scottish forest policy from the rest of the United Kingdom and the development of a de facto independent Scottish Forestry Service.

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60 Forestry Commission, *Scotland Annual Reports and Accounts 01.02* (Edingburgh: FC, 2002), p. 27.