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Forest Planning in Private Forests in Scotland

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1 Background

Over the last one hundred years or so, the woodland cover in Scotland has increased more than four-fold, from a low of 4% in the early 1900's to around 17% by the year 2000. Figure 1 (Smith and Gilbert 2001) illustrates how much of this increase occurred during the 1970's and 1980's, when there were large planting programmes in both the public and private sectors.

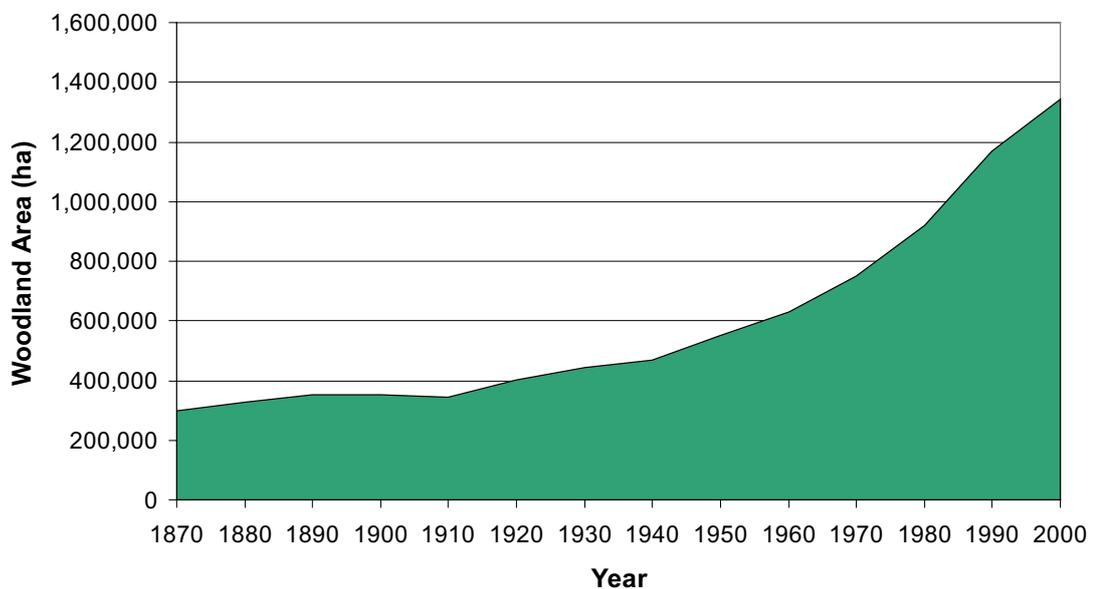


Figure 1. Scotland: change in woodland area through time (1870 – 2000)

This helps explain why there is not a strong history or culture of forest management, and hence forest planning, in the Private Sector. There are a few exceptions in some larger private estates that have been in the same ownership over long periods, but even here the interest in forestry was often a more minor factor than, for example, the sporting interests.

Another explanation is that, although there is legislation covering the felling of woodland, there is no legal requirement to actively manage, or maintain plans for privately owned woodland.

The State owned forests have dominated the production of timber over the last 30 years. However, the ownership pattern is changing, with currently around 55% of the woodland in private ownership. The production pattern is also changing, with timber production in the Private Sector due to overtake the State Sector within a decade (theoretical 'availability' already has). While softwood availability can be predicted from National Forest Inventory data (Smith and Gilbert 1999) (Figure 2), there is a need to know more of actual planned production from the Private Sector, so that the processing sector can make investment decisions.

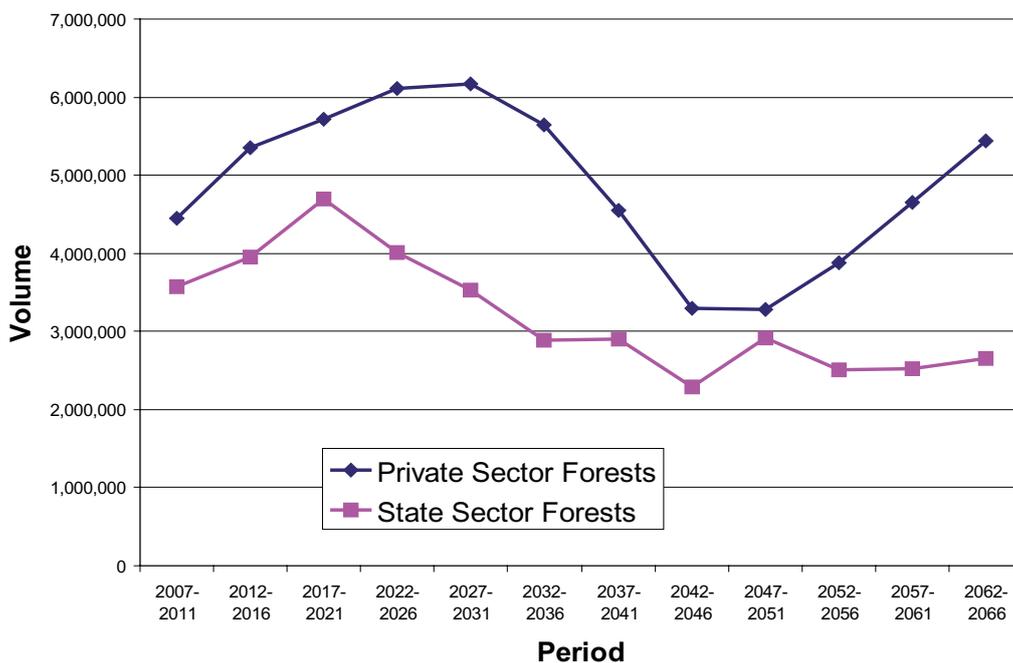


Figure 2. Scotland: softwood availability in the State and Private Forest Sectors

Private Sector forest planning is therefore of increasing relevance for the forest industry, and in general terms of being the dominant forest ownership in Scotland. In recent years, therefore, there has been a move towards linking private sector forestry grant schemes to forest plans, to increase the incentive to have a plan in place.

There can be four levels of forest planning considered that involve or affect privately owned forests: national, regional, district and the estate/forest. These are explored below.

2 National level forest planning

After the process of government devolution in 1999, forestry was an issue devolved to the Scottish Parliament. They quickly developed the Scottish Forestry Strategy, published in 2000 (Forestry Commission 2000) (Figure 3). There was a full process of forest industry and public consultation.

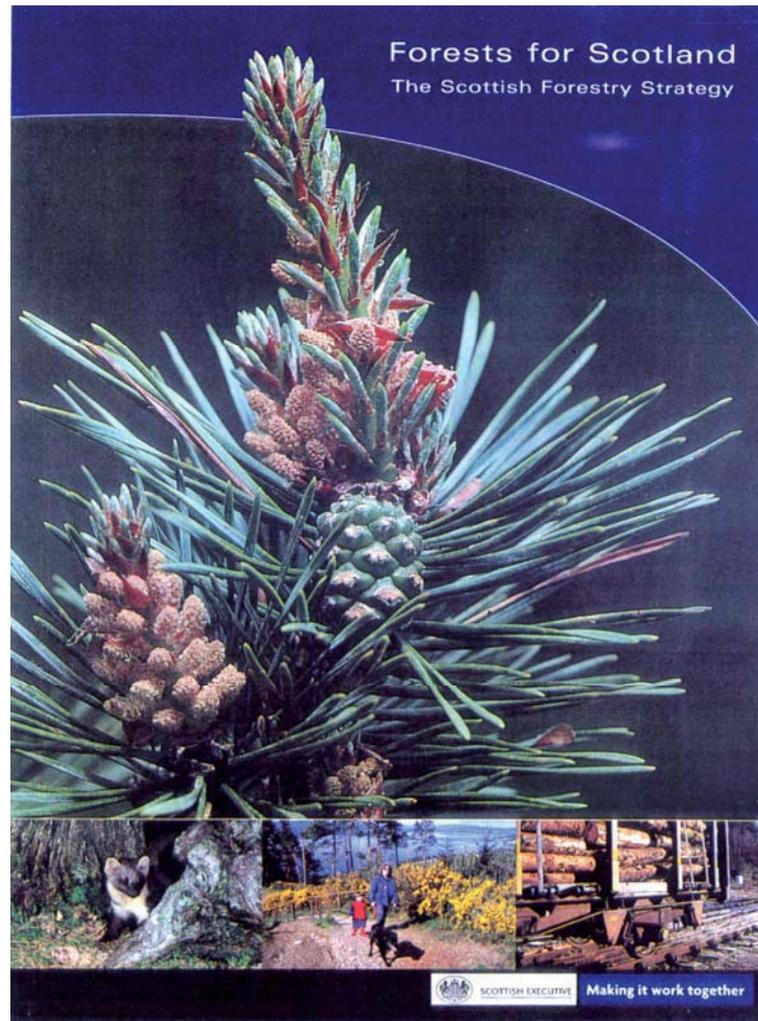


Figure 3. The Scottish Forestry Strategy

This document reviews the resources, i.e. forests, and talks about ‘activities & outputs’, e.g. timber production, recreation and conservation, and finally it defines desired ‘outcomes’, such as sustainable economic growth, improved health and wellbeing, and enhanced natural and cultural heritage.

The strategy is currently being reviewed (Forestry Commission 2005), with a new strategy to be published in later in 2006. The 2000 Strategy has as its vision: ‘Scotland will be renowned as a land of fine trees, woods and forests which strengthen the economy, which enrich the natural heritage and which people enjoy and value’

The review process is in its second phase now, with another round of public consultation on the draft 2006 strategy. This has slightly changed the emphasis of the vision to: ‘Scotland’s woodlands will benefit everyone in Scotland: promoting vibrant and healthy communities; enriching natural environments and our cultural heritage; and creating wide-ranging opportunities for economic development’

In other words it looks like people and communities are coming to the fore in the new strategy, and private forest owners will need to take this into account. In their plans they will need to demonstrate how they have taken the needs and wishes of local people into account.

- est and woodland resource in securing both local and wider socio-economic and environmental gains, expansion and development of woodlands around settlements, crofter forestry;
2. Expansion of native woodland, particularly in areas of higher natural heritage value or important areas for recreation – via development of forest habitat networks, and schemes to re-instate and expand riparian, tree-line, and coastal woodland;
3. Expansion of productive forest – establishment of new woodlands geared to timber production and improvement of the timber quality of specific species;
4. Enhancement of the region’s attractiveness for tourism and recreation via woodland development - enhancement of important tourist routes, archaeological sites, and footpaths;
5. Improvement of the infrastructure for forestry and local processing – identification of priority road and bridge improvements, opportunities for increased rail and ship usage for timber transport, and development of local processing capacity and woodfuel supply chains.

4 District Level Forest Planning

This is not an active area in forest planning related to the Private Sector in Scotland, compared, for example, to the State Sector which is divided into 14 Forest Districts, each with its own ‘strategic plan’. However, with both national and regional strategies seeking to increase community benefits from forests, and to enhance community involvement in forestry, there is a desire to find ways of bringing people into the process.

The Northern Periphery Project ELAV (Enhancing Local Activity and Values from forestland through community-led strategic planning) is seeking to develop such a model at the district level. A project area in Northern Scotland (Figure 5) containing both private and state forests has been selected, and a project officer employed – results from the project are due by late 2007.

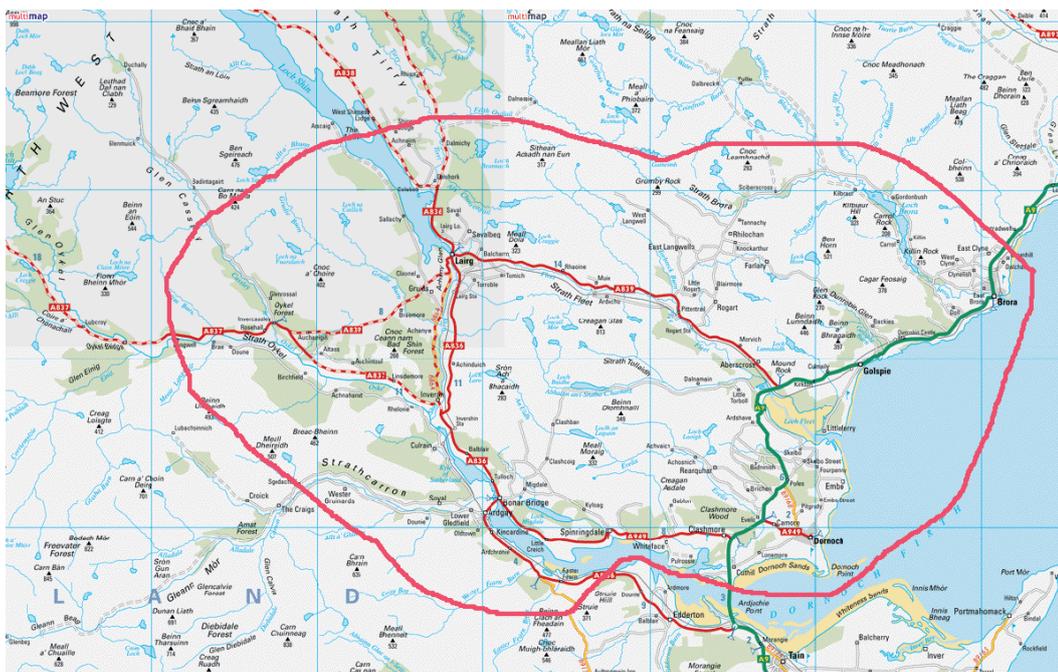


Figure 5. NPP ELAV Project Area in East Sutherland

The project will work with rural communities to identify opportunities for enhancing and sustaining local values and rural development benefits from forests and forestland. Communities will play a lead role in the development of sub-regional forest plans focussed on better integration of tourism development, exploitation of non-timber forest products and local processing with existing timber harvesting and nature conservation objectives.

It is expected that the models and processes developed at the district level will ease the burden of consultation for individual forest owners in formulating their estate/forest level plans.

5 Estate/forest level forest planning

The purpose of forest planning at this level began as primarily related to timber production. Another aim for some owners has been also for certification through the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme. However, for many owners forest planning has been aimed at having access to funding of one kind or another.

To some extent the type of forest planning undertaken in the Private Sector has reflected the spread of types of ownership. The dominant type of ownership is the private estate and (relatively) large landowner with around half of the private forests (Figure 6).

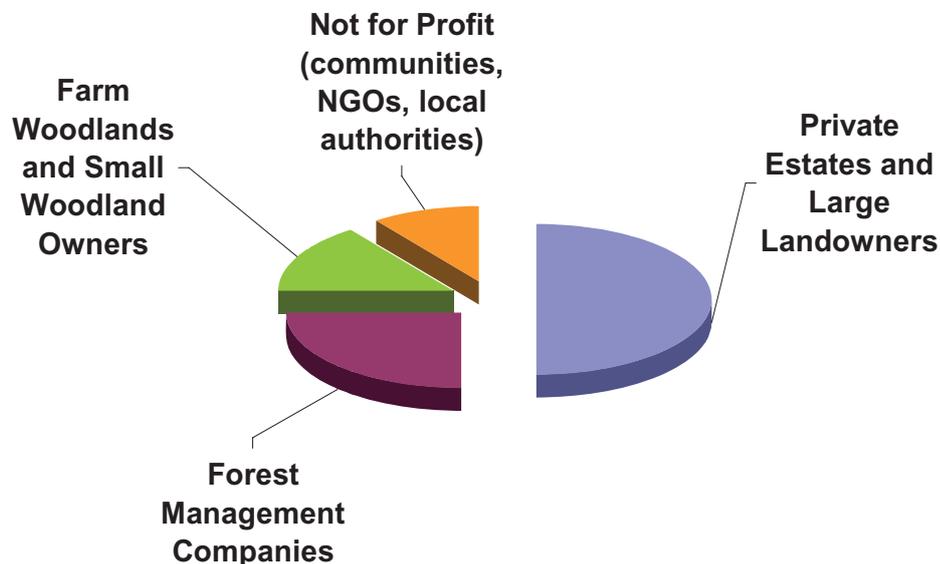


Figure 6. Private Sector Woodland Ownership (%)

Novar Estate in Easter Ross (Figure7) can be held as an example of this type, with a total land holding of around 4,000 ha, of which about 2,500 ha are woodland. Novar is slightly unusual in having a long history of woodland management, but no plans as such survive from earlier years.

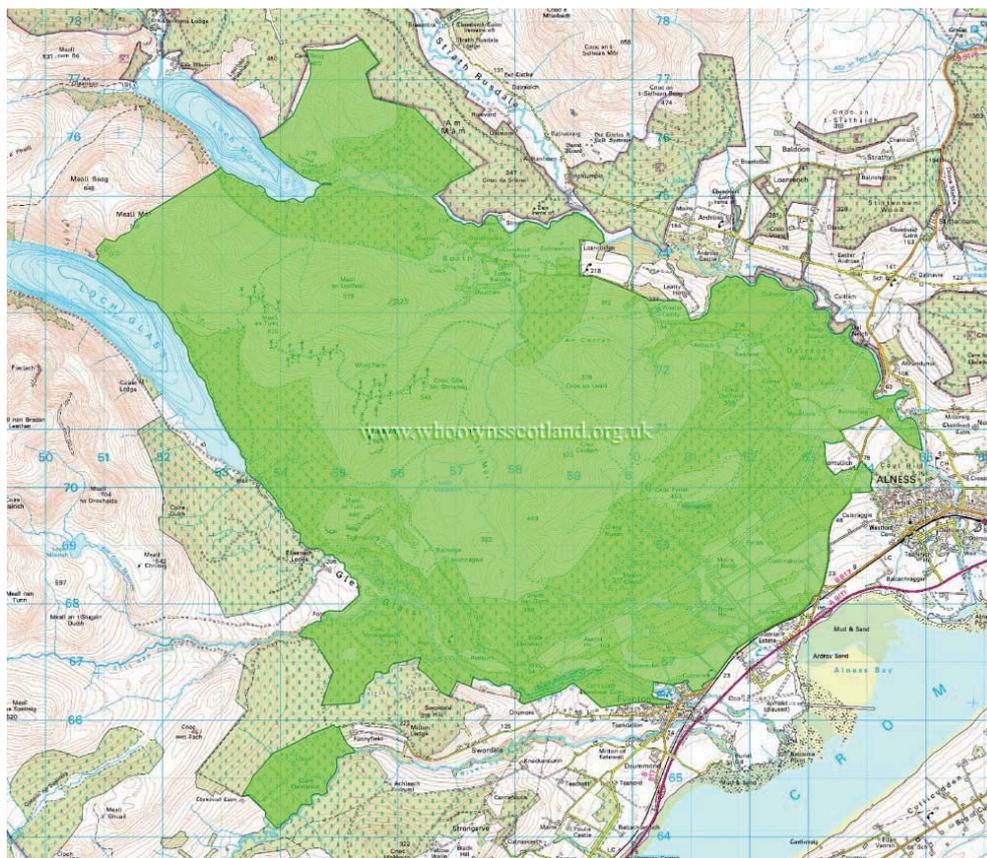


Figure 7. Map of Novar Estate in Easter Ross

The Woodland Management Plan for Novar consists of:

- A description of the woodlands.
- An evaluation of the resources.
- Aims & Objectives.
- Constraints on management.
- Management Prescriptions for:
 - Timber,
 - Conservation, and
 - Recreation.

Most privately owned woodlands are dependent to some degree or another on access to government grants and subsidies. Forestry Commission Scotland has always encouraged applications to be in the context of an overall plan. Recently it has gone further and developed a more formal context of 'Forest Plans' (Forestry Commission 2003) (Figure 8) which has the following features:

- The formulation of plans is subsidised,
- Approval of a plan implies approval of appropriate grants, and
- The procedure for accessing grants is much simplified.

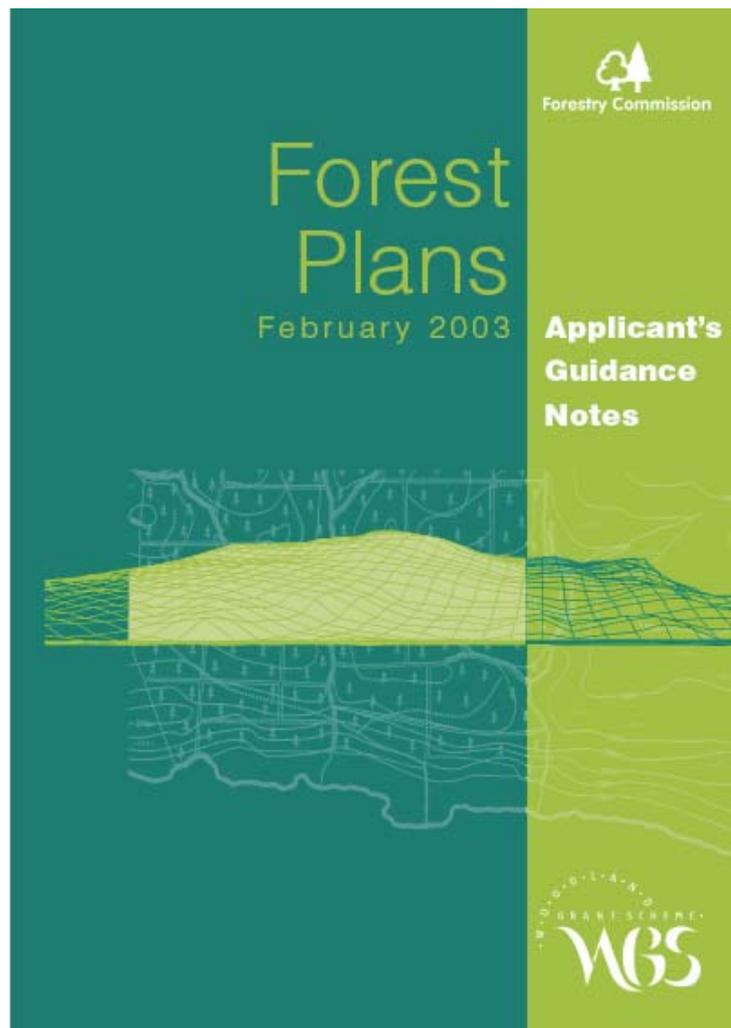


Figure 8. Forest Plans Guidance Notes

Forest Plan Components consist of:

- Property details.
- Description of Woodlands.
- Survey Data.
- Analysis, including concept maps and visual landscape analysis.
- Felling and Restocking Plans, including maps and detailed operational schedules.

The timescale of a Forest Plan is:

- The Forest Plan will outline felling, thinning and restocking over a 20 year period, and
- Forestry Commission Scotland will approve a detailed work plan for the first 10 years.

The financing of Forest Planning is through the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme, with a Plan Preparation Grant for Long-Term Forest Plans of:

- 22 Euros/ha for 1st 200 ha, and
- 7 Euros/ha for remaining area, up to maximum of 22,000 Euros.

6 The Future of Forest Planning

It is generally acknowledged that for the Private Sector to access public funding then Forest Plans must reflect the needs and desires of the public, as expressed through the national, regional and local district level strategic plans.

This will mean:

- A wider range of objectives,
- More use of Forestry Commission Long-Term Forest Plans,
- More integrated land use planning, and
- More community involvement.

Forestry Commission Scotland has committed itself to encouraging the Private Sector in this regard, but is also pursuing a programme of divesting the State of its forests to local communities where it can be demonstrated that this is in the public interest. The programme is called the National Forest Land Scheme (Figure 9).

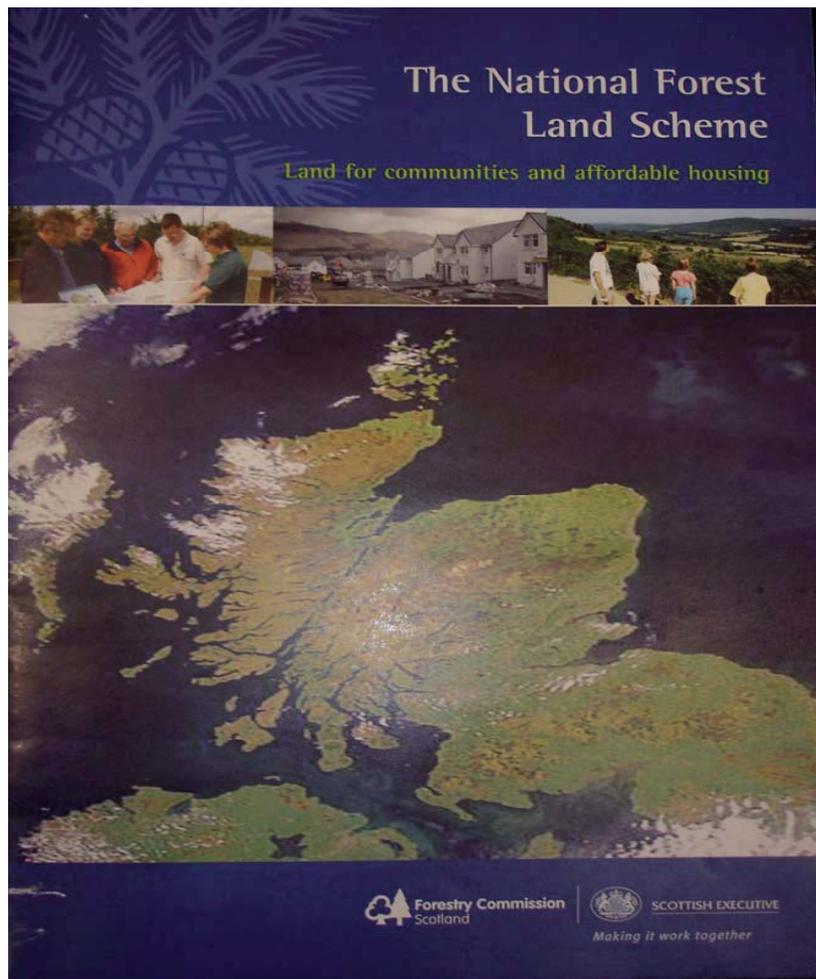


Figure 9. The National Forest Land Scheme

The National Forest Land Scheme allows for:

- Community acquisition of local forests,
- The provision of land for affordable housing, and
- The sale of surplus land to the highest bidder.

Community involvement is therefore likely to be the biggest change in forest planning in both the State and the Private Sectors over the coming years. It is hoped that this will:

- Increase opportunities for community consultation,
- Provide opportunities for greater community involvement in forest management, and
- Support community ownership where this brings local benefits.

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