



Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE1457](#)

Main Petitioner: Alex Hamilton

Subject:

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government, as a symbolic commitment to our woodlands and natural heritage, to proclaim the Scots Pine as the National Tree of Scotland.

Background

The Scots Pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) is one of three conifer species native to Scotland, the others being the juniper and the yew.

It is widely distributed through Eurasia, its range extending from the Iberian peninsula, Turkey and the Caucasus in the South, to the Arctic circle, and from the Atlantic coasts of Scotland and Portugal in the West, into Siberia in the East.

The Scots pine is one of the main constituent trees of the Great Wood of Caledon which once covered large parts of Scotland. Today, native Caledonian pinewoods are found at 84 sites in the north and west of Scotland, covering around 18,000 ha. Estimates suggest this may be as little as 1% of the forests former extent. Clearance for agriculture, fire, felling for timber, underplanting with other species, and grazing by sheep and deer all contributed to the forest's decline.

Caldeonian pine forests are home to a range of specialised wildlife: plants such as the Twinflower and One-flowered wintergreen; birds like the capercaillie, Scottish crossbill (the only endemic¹ bird species found in the UK), and Crested tit; and mammals such as the Pine marten and Red squirrel.

Recognition of the conservation value of these forests have led to efforts to conserve them, and from a low point in the 1960s, the area of Caledonian Pine Forest is now increasing. Conservation charities such as the RSPB at its Abernethy Reserve, private landowners such as Glen Feshie estate, and public bodies including Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forestry

¹ Endemic means only found in a particular area

Commission are all engaged in efforts to regenerate and expand native pine forests.

Scots pine is also grown widely as a commercial species for its timber. It is the second most widely grown conifer in Scotland after the Sitka spruce, covering 140,000 ha, which is 11% of Scotland's total wood and forest area.²

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Forest Strategy was published in 2006. It sets the overall direction for forestry policy and directs the work of the Forestry Commission Scotland, the public body charged with protecting and expanding Scotland's forests and woodlands. The strategy set a target of increasing Scotland's forest cover from the current level of c.18% to 25% by 2050. The rates of new woodland planting necessary to achieve this have not been achieved.

An attempt has been made to address the difficulties in balancing different land uses in Scotland through the Land Use Strategy³. As part of this, an expert group – the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group⁴ – made recommendations about future planting including replacement of the aspirational target by the shorter term aim to create 100,000 hectares of new woodland over the period 2012-2022. The Scottish Government accepted the group's advice on how to express the target⁵.

Funding for new woodland creation and woodland management is available under the Scotland Rural Development Programme's Rural Priorities Scheme. This includes grant assistance for establishing new native woodlands, naturally regenerating existing native woodlands and establishing new productive coniferous plantations. From 2007 to March 2012 a total of 942 applications for new native woodland plantings were awarded a total of £74m and 76 projects for native woodland regeneration received funding of £2m. Just under £12.5m was spent supporting 82 applications for new coniferous woodland plantings. Detailed information on the tree species involved is not routinely published by the Scottish Government but many of these projects will have used Scots pine.

Native pine woodlands are a priority habitat in the Scottish Biodiversity strategy and in the European Habitats Directive, and some remnants have been designed as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) under the Directive. These remnants are also designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) under the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004, which protects them from deliberate damage and development. Some of the larger remnants

²

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forstats2012.nsf/LUCContents/BF32BD6C9B18DD3680257360004FE23E>

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Countryside/Landusestrategy>

⁴ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/WEAGFinalReport.pdf/\\$FILE/WEAGFinalReport.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/WEAGFinalReport.pdf/$FILE/WEAGFinalReport.pdf)

⁵ [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FinalResponse_WEAG.pdf/\\$FILE/FinalResponse_WEAG.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FinalResponse_WEAG.pdf/$FILE/FinalResponse_WEAG.pdf)

such as Beinn Eighe, Abernethy and Glen Tanar have been designated as National Nature Reserves.

Scottish Parliament Action

In August 2012 Alison Johnstone MSP asked the Scottish Government a series of questions related to a fungal disease of pine trees, commonly known as Red band needle blight (See questions S4W 08984-91).

In Session 3 the Scottish Government was also asked questions about native woodland planting and regeneration by John Scott MSP (S3W-38234) and Liam MacArthur MSP (S3W – 34935).

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15 November 2012

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