

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: [PE01812](#)

Main Petitioner: Audrey Baird and Fiona Baker on behalf of Help Trees Help Us

Subject: Protect Scotland's remaining ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors

Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to deliver world-leading legislation giving Scotland's remaining fragments of ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors full legal protection before COP 26 (UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties) in Glasgow in November 2021.

Background

[Ancient woodland is defined](#) as land that has been continually wooded since at least 1750. Its age means that it is [especially important for biodiversity](#) and our cultural identity.¹

[The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland \(NWSS\)](#) published in 2014 found 120,305 hectares of woodland to be present on ancient woodland sites, of which 65% was native woodland. Of this, the woods that are on ancient woodland sites and are both native and highly semi-natural in composition are probably the most important category for nature conservation. These woods totalled 64,130 hectares, which was 20.6% of native woods and just 4.6% of all woodlands in Scotland.²

The petitioner seeks greater legal protection for Scotland's ancient native and semi-native woodland and woodland floors. The petitioner draws attention to the issue using an example of damage caused to ancient woodland by the construction of a new mountain bike trail. The trail was built with permission of the landowner and did not require planning permission as it was of mud and timber construction, however, the petitioner is concerned about:

- the destruction of bluebell carpets and removal of tree branches;
 - disturbance of nesting birds;
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- the trail not conforming to guidance around safe construction of mountain bike trails;
- collapse of a boundary wall that protected the woodland from intensive grazing of livestock and deer;
- wind-blown debris entering the woodland from a demolition of a large estate.

The petitioner claims that the mountain bike trail did not conform to guidance around the safe construction of mountain bike trails and suggests there is no effective legislation in place to protect ancient woodland where the landowner has given permission for its construction.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government has a number of policies aimed at protecting and enhancing ancient and native woodland.

National Biodiversity Strategy

[Scotland's Biodiversity Route to 2020](#) lists a number of 'Priority Projects' to meet international [Aichi Targets for biodiversity](#) and improve the state of nature in Scotland. It includes the following project regarding native woodland:

“Priority Project 2: Restoration of native woodland

Aim: Improve the condition and extent of existing native woodlands and further increase new woodland planting.

Target:

- Increase the amount of native woodland in good condition (upwards from 46% as identified by the *Native Woodland Survey of Scotland*).
- 3,000 to 5,000 ha of new native woodland creation per year.
- Restore approximately 10,000 ha of native woodland into satisfactory condition in partnership with private woodland owners through Deer Management Plans.

On-going work

- Provision of grants, information, promotional events and training
- Conservation management on the National Forest Estate.
- Development of deer management plans with public interest targets to contribute to the overall aim of native woodland restoration.

Planned work

- Implement *Scotland's Wild Deer: A National Approach*.
- Establish further mechanisms for lowland deer management.

- Atlantic oakwood restoration - through rhododendron removal and conservation management (LIFE funding bid in progress).
- Atlantic hazelwood conservation and management (LIFE funding bid in progress)."

National Forestry Strategy

[Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019-2029](#) contains aims and objectives for sustainable forest management. The strategy says:

"We will ensure that Scotland acts as a good 'global citizen' by upholding the international principles of sustainable forest management, ensuring harvested sites are replanted appropriately; preventing inappropriate woodland losses, particularly of ancient woodland; mitigating the risk of possible negative impacts from forestry activity; and protecting the credentials of Scottish timber as a sustainable product."

Scottish Government policy on control of woodland removal

The [Scottish Government's policy on woodland removal](#) provides the following guidance:

"There will be a strong presumption against removing the following types of woodland: ancient semi-natural woodland; woodland integral to the value of designated or special sites (Special Areas of Conservation {SACs}; Special Protection Areas {SPAs}; Sites of Special Scientific Interest {SSSIs}; Ramsar sites; National Nature Reserves {NNRs}; areas supporting priority habitats and species listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan; Scheduled Monuments; National Scenic Areas; and woodlands listed within the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes); woodlands critical to water catchment management or erosion control; or woodlands listed as 'Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites' (PAWS). There will also be a strong presumption against woodland removal where it would lead to fragmentation or disconnection of important forest habitat networks."

Scottish Parliament Action

Some recent parliamentary questions on this issue are listed below:

[Question S5W-24878: Finlay Carson, Galloway and West Dumfries, Scottish Conservative and Unionist Party, Date Lodged: 22/08/2019](#)

To ask the Scottish Government how many hectares of ancient woodland have been restored since September 2017.

[Answered by Fergus Ewing \(19/09/2019\):](#)

Restoration of ancient woodland is a long-term and ongoing activity. It can take decades to achieve the final restored state. So far, interventions aimed at restoring around 60% of ancient woodland on Scotland's national forests and land have been undertaken. This includes around 1160 hectares on which interventions have been undertaken since September 2017.

Question S4W-28752: Liam McArthur, Orkney Islands, Scottish Liberal Democrats, Date Lodged: 01/12/2015

To ask the Scottish Government what it is doing to end the loss of woodland, in light of a reported 14% loss of woodland in the last 40 years.

Answered by Aileen McLeod (10/12/2015):

The Native Woodland Survey of Scotland identified that a 14% reduction may have occurred in ancient woodland cover over a 40 year period in unenclosed upland areas. The survey also identified that the current native woodland condition is moderate overall, with 46% of the area in satisfactory conditions.

The Scottish Government is taking action to protect ancient woodland as outlined in Scotland's Biodiversity – a Route Map to 2020. The actions identified aim to improve the condition and extent of existing native and ancient woodland, through reducing browsing pressure and controlling non-native species, and new woodland planting.

In addition, the Scottish Government has implemented a policy on the control of woodland removal for all types of woodland. The policy is adopted within Scottish Planning Policy and provides guidance to planning authorities on how to minimise inappropriate woodland loss. With regards to ancient woodland, the policy places a strong presumption against removal.

Damon Davies
Researcher
30 July 2020

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