



PE1457/B

Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee FCS and SNH views on Public Petition PE01457

Introduction

In their letter dated 9 January 2013 the Public Petitions Committee has asked that Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) consider and respond to their question:

- What are your views on what the petition seeks?

In summary, the Petition from Alex Hamilton would like to see Scottish Government proclaim the Scots pine as the National Tree of Scotland.

FCS and SNH views

Of all the trees that grow well in Scotland – both native and introduced – there are many good reasons for considering the Scots pine as a candidate tree for the proposed National Tree of Scotland accolade:

1. **The name:** although Scots Pine is found across northern Europe and Asia the name can engender an emotive response and common belief – which happens to be true – that this is a native tree that belongs to Scotland.
2. **Cultural heritage:** Scots pine is an enduring tree that was an important component of the post-glacial natural forests (the so-called Wood of Caledon) which covered perhaps some 70% of Scotland. Since then it has survived the reduction in woodland cover from the combined influences of changes to our weather patterns and demands for timber and agriculture by a growing and developing population. In part though, its survival is due to the importance that people have placed on the tree down the ages, for example:
 - **The Gaelic name for the tree was 'giubhas' or 'giuthas'** (meaning juicy tree). In Gaelic culture the Scots pine was associated with kings, chiefs and warriors, the powerful members of society, was a symbol of life and planted on warriors' graves.
 - During the Scottish Enlightenment period, which saw significant new plantings by country estates "*...for Beauty, Effect and Profit*" (4th Duke of Atholl), Scots pine was one of the trees of choice established in extensive new plantations.

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The Earl of Moray had planted some 10 million Scots pine trees on his estate between 1767 and 1810.

- The landscape designer Thomas White was renowned for his expertise in using these trees to enhance the landscapes around the new country houses. Of these new designed landscapes Daniel Defoe remarked on his approach to the Scottish capital "*You hardly see a gentleman's House, as you pass the Louthians, toward Edinburgh, but they are distinguished by Groves of Firr-trees about them.*" (Scots pine has also been known as 'Scots fir' or 'Scots firr').

3. **Landscape**; One of the most used images in the Forestry Commission Picture Library is the picture below:



Scots pine forest, Glen Affric
(FC Picture Library)

The picture contains all the elements of what many people think of as being a truly Highland, Scottish landscape. Even for some who have never visited the Highlands- this image resonates with much of what we project and promote about Scotland. Although this same image is available in wider landscape format it is this portrait format that is most popular because it emphasises the character of the landscape. It pronounces the vertical height of the mountain landforms and the scale of the mature Scots pine in the foreground. The picture also indicates a healthy, natural landscape with understorey and young trees as part of a wider pinewood flora mosaic, clothing the lower and mid slopes of the mountains down to the still water of the loch. Such natural beauty is a magnet for visitors; many

local areas benefit from people seeking leisure, recreation and sporting activities in these scenic surroundings.

4. **Nature conservation**; In Britain, Scots pine now only occurs naturally in Scotland and is a **key component of the 'Caledonian' native pinewoods**, the remnants of which are all in the Scottish Highlands. Many have been managed for centuries, with the Scots pine being favoured over the other tree species to be found in these forests – primarily birch, rowan, alder and juniper. With its associated shrub and ground flora this distinctive environment is also home to **some of Scotland's best known and treasured** creatures, such as capercaillie, pine marten, red squirrel and wild cat.

The Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS, 2006) has as a priority action to “Restore and improve the condition of native woodlands and associated open habitats in line with the UK Biodiversity Action Plan’s revised Habitat Action Plans and Species Action Plans”. Implementing the SFS has seen actions to both expand the resource and foster the sustainable management and natural regeneration of existing pinewoods.

More recently, the Scottish Governments Rationale for Woodland Expansion (2009) includes **the aspiration for an extension to the area of Scotland's** native woodlands – such as pinewoods – managed for the delivery of a mix of economic, social and environmental benefits.

To improve our understanding of **all of Scotland's native woodlands**, FCS has now completed a field-based survey of all of them all to identify their location, extent, type and condition. It is now planned to use this Native Woodland Survey of Scotland for the identified pinewoods and carry out an analysis of change in woodland cover in comparison to the Caledonian Pinewoods Inventory carried out some 25 years ago.

5. **Commercial interests**; through the centuries Scots pine has been valued for its timber and other products. Before medicines the pine resin was mixed with beeswax and pig fat as a cream for skin ailments. Also, the bark was used for fever and the buds for scurvy, an illness caused by lack of Vitamin C once common in sailors. The timber was used in construction and boat building, with the resin used in tar and paints. A light brown dye was produced from the cones.

Today, Scots pine retains its commercial significance. The timber combines good strength with light weight, is easy to work and takes fixings well. For use in exposed environments it is durable when treated against decay. Its uses include interior and exterior joinery, decking, cladding, wood-based panels and fencing. Timber that is clear of knots and shakes can also produce high quality veneer.

6. **Year of Natural Scotland 2013**

This year has been designated as the Year of Natural Scotland, the primary objective of which is to highlight Scotland's wealth of fantastic natural assets. As part of the overall objectives, the campaign looks to encourage visitors to enjoy **Scotland's** wonderful landscapes and scenery, wildlife and heritage. FCS will be focusing on the opportunities provided through the wide range of wildlife viewing opportunities across the national forest estate, such as those to be found in native pinewoods.

7. **Alternative candidate trees; of Scotland's native** woodlands four are named after the dominant tree they are composed of. Besides Pine they are Birch, Oak and Ash:

- Birch woodlands cover almost double the area of pinewoods but the Birch tree is recognised as a national emblem of both Finland and Russia.
- Oak woodlands cover almost the same area as pinewoods but the Oak tree is recognised as a national emblem of numerous countries, including the UK (Royal Oak) and England.
- Ash woodland has less than half the coverage of pinewoods. Although it is not currently known as the emblem of any country it is not commonly as well known in Scotland as the other potential candidate trees.

Conclusion

Although there are other trees – both native and introduced – that have qualities that are valued, the Scots pine appears to be a tree that has established strong associations with Scotland and its people. Not only does the mature tree with its distinctive head of evergreen foliage and topmost orange bark make it easily recognisable, but also the pinewoods and community of flora and fauna holds iconic species that are also recognisable and cherished by many.

The **remnants of the 'Caledonian Forest'** have both an historic and cultural significance, and are essential components of some **of Scotland's most scenic areas**. However, one note of caution; although Scots pine has been successfully established in appropriate conditions throughout Scotland, native pinewoods are associated solely with the Highlands.

For that reason, it may be that some individuals and communities in other parts of Scotland may not consider the Scots pine an appropriate emblem to represent their national identity.

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If there are any tensions about the selection of the Scots pine as the national tree of Scotland these **could be teased out by seeking the public's view on the proposal**. For example, consideration could be given to a national competition that invites all those who enter to put forward their choice of tree.

So, if Scotland is to have a National Tree there can be no doubt that Scots pine would certainly be a serious contender.

Nicholas Shepherd
Landscape and Culture Advisor
Forestry Commission Scotland

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