



THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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9/6/09

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Dear Sir / Madam

Thank you for the invitation to respond to the **Argyll & Bute Woodland & Forestry Strategy**.

The MCoS position statement, consulted on with our membership, reads as follows (available on www.mcofs.org.uk) and is directly relevant to the Argyll & Bute Woodland and Forestry Strategy.

The MCoS recognises the economic value of well-managed forestry, and that it can add amenity value to the local community. The MCoS supports the review of the design and landscape impacts of existing forestry, and the careful planning, design and species mix of re-planting areas after felling. Hard or straight edges, non-native monocultures, rides / wayleaves directly down the fall line and acidified run-off and sediment release affecting other habitats should be avoided. Access to the open hill through forestry and areas of felling should be carefully planned and not overly restrictive of access route as this can result in concentration of use and lead to areas suffering from erosion. In mountaineering areas, routes through dense forestry should be signposted along forest tracks, and this be maintained when felling, planting and track route changes are implemented. Commercial plantation forests should not be planned in areas remote from existing transport infrastructure where they would necessitate construction of vehicular access tracks of significant length. Track construction should be avoided unless there is no other alternative. In this case, any tracks that are constructed should take into consideration the impacts on the landscape, and follow best practice guidelines in the SNH publication *Constructed Tracks in the Scottish Uplands*, 2006.

Access & Health

26. Another weakness is that in some forestry blocks, access is only possible via the forestry infrastructure which was largely created for vehicular traffic and is not sufficient or attractive to many walkers, including hill walkers.

27. It is important to note that at some locations access is as important through woodland / forestry as within the block. This is particularly important for access to hill tops above or beyond the trees, many of which are popular for obtaining a view of the surrounding landscape.

29. Significant barriers to access can be presented by the physical problem of gaining access through dense plantations. Access can also be obstructed by forestry management, such as tree harvesting operations without adequate provision for appropriate alternative access, or operations continuing for protracted periods e.g. as happened with access through forestry to Ben Ledi. In addition to maximising opportunities, the strategy should ensure the minimisation of access disruption.

30. Access through forests can be difficult, especially when track locations change from those on maps, or are along tortuously indirect routes. As such, locations where this is an issue should have simple signposting

through the forest block as has been implemented at Glenachulish. This needs to be kept up to date when tracks change.

32. The variety of user groups with the variety of aspirations this includes should be focussed on. Provision in terms of structures, paths, etc should take into consideration any implications for the landscape and be led by demand. This is likely to be evidenced by desire lines or popular goals, including routes towards hill tops. Single routes that channel all access users to one exit point from forestry can cause serious damage and erosion. The classic example is from the Rest & Be Thankful up the shoulder/ridge to Ben Donich. A solution may be to provide a number of options through forestry, taking into consideration the sustainability of the land surface. This should alleviate the pressure in a limited number of locations through creation of pathways from numerous points to the forest edge on the more robust areas of ground, and would reduce the impact of this channelling effect.

Environmental Quality

34. The MCofS particularly supports the realisation of the opportunity to restructure and introduce riparian, and other areas, of native species as a contribution to landscape and water quality. The priority areas should be where the landscape is visible on a large scale. This is primarily true when viewpoints are above the level of the trees giving a panoramic view.

Biodiversity

39. The MCofS particularly supports natives planting and restocking as a method to achieve greater biodiversity, more natural landscape and improved water quality in the forest estate. This does, however, need to be carefully planned not to encroach on other valuable habitats such as wet heaths and bog.

Please do not hesitate to contact me to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus
Access & Conservation Officer