



## THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND

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Woodland Expansion Advisory Group  
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Dear Mr. Barbour

Thank you for your request for input from the Mountaineering Council of Scotland regarding woodland expansion. The Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS) is the representative body for hill walkers, climbers and ski tourers, and is the only national representative body of the sport of mountaineering in Scotland. We have 11,000 members, and are recognised by the Scottish Government as representing the interests of all mountaineers. The MCoS interest in woodland expansion lies primarily in issues of public access and conservation. The latter includes both landscape and biodiversity in mountaineering areas.

Our interest and expertise apply more to the latter two questions in your letter of 13 October, hence we have directed our response to these, although we have two general points we wish to make. Firstly, we would like to see woodland expansion used as an inclusive term. Often montane scrub / woodland is not considered despite it being a vulnerable habitat and arguably a type of woodland. We suggest that montane woodland / scrub is fully considered in expansion deliberations. Secondly, we have some concern that there is no specific representation on the large advisory group to address public access and education concerns.

**(b) Examples of where woodland expansion comes into conflict with other land management objectives.**

We would like to address the two primary conflicts that the MCoS has experience of and an interest in.

Firstly, there is the issue of public access posed by woodland expansion infrastructure such as fences, particularly as these are usually of deer fence height and may be difficult, or some impossible, to scale. Mountaineers would far prefer not to take the risk of damage by climbing fences, and use to avoid this crossing points need to be sufficiently available. For this to be achieved, all woodland expansion areas need careful consideration and a requirement to install appropriate and sufficient crossing points needs required as an integral part of planning. Consideration of access must not be restricted to where there are paths or tracks but considered, as required under the Land Reform Act, as a general duty on authorities.

Secondly, there is the challenge to landscape and visual amenity by any associated tracks and the method used for planting which can have a significant impact through technique choices such as mechanical bucket size. We consider that woodland expansion should not detract from the landscape through construction, or formed-by-use, tracks.

**(c) The way that conflicts between woodland expansion and other land management objectives could be better resolved in future.**

Public access conflicts can be at least partially averted through integral involvement of Access Officers and weight given to their concerns and advice. Also there may be a need to ensure that all involved in considerations of woodland expansion are well aware of the need to consider access. This needs to include the understanding that these considerations are not restricted to providing access infrastructure such as paths, or where there are currently paths; access includes general wider access to the land. Any good practice advice should refer to these access issues.

Landscape / visual amenity conflicts could be partially addressed by a level of impact visualisations during the planning process. Any good practice guidance should refer specifically to these considerations, and specify the types of landscape that are particularly sensitive, such as wild areas.

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

Yours sincerely

Hebe Carus (Ms)  
Access & Conservation Officer