RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE

FORESTRY AND LAND MANAGEMENT (SCOTLAND) BILL

SUBMISSION FROM THE NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM

The National Access Forum was established by Scottish Natural Heritage to provide advice on national issues linked to the Scottish access rights that were created by Part One of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.

1. **Does the Bill achieve its aims and are you in favour overall? Is there anything else that you feel should be included or excluded from the Bill?**

Outdoor access brings a wide range of benefits for Scotland, including benefits for health and well-being, as well as economic benefits such as its contribution to the tourist industry. The importance of the national forest estate in this context is underlined by the fact that it attracts over 9 million visitors annually, supporting over 3,700 jobs and £110 million in Gross Value Added.

Accordingly, the Forum asks the Committee take full account of the implications for outdoor access when considering the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill. In particular, the Committee is asked to recognise that Forestry Commission Scotland has played a key role in actively promoting opportunities for woodland and recreation in Scotland.

The Forum also wishes to bring to the attention of the Committee the strength and importance of the current Forestry Commission Scotland ‘brand’ in encouraging participation, particularly among the less confident users and family groups. It is an instantly recognisable brand that conveys clear signals and reassurance to the public about the quality of the infrastructure, way making and experience the visitor is likely to enjoy at a site. It is important therefore that this brand identity continues.

2. **What are your views on the Bill’s statutory requirement to produce a Scottish Government Forestry Strategy based on sustainable forest management?**

The Bill explicitly states that the Scottish Forestry Strategy should include inter alia the “social benefits of forestry”; it is important that to recognise that opportunities for promoting outdoor access and recreation are amongst the most valuable of these social benefits.

3. **The Bill will provide new powers to Scottish Ministers over subjects such as tree health and the ability to conduct research. What are your views on these powers?**

Apart from recognising the importance of maintaining tree health and research, the Forum has no specific views on this.

4. **The Scottish Government’s intention is that the Bill should provide greater flexibility and wider powers in relation to land management, with a focus on sustainable development. The Bill also contains provisions regarding compulsory purchase. How do you feel this will work in practice?**

The Forum would be concerned if the proposed powers to dispose of land from the national forest estate, by sale or by lease, led to a loss of opportunities for outdoor access and
recreation. While the responsible right of access will of course continue regardless of ownership, there are examples showing how the loss of ancillary facilities (such as car parking provision) has had an adverse impact on recreation following sale of Forestry Commission land.

5. The Bill will update the regulatory regime and enforcement powers for felling and restocking trees. Do you feel it is fit for purpose?  
The Forum has no specific views on this.

6. Do you have any comments on the bill in relation to human rights or equalities?  
The Forum has no specific views on this.

National Access Forum  
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