The Scottish Association for Country Sports is Scotland’s largest fieldsports advocacy body, being a membership association run by members, for members; our remit is the protection and promotion of our members’ rights and culture.

As fieldsports advocates, we limit our comments on the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Bill [as introduced] to those matters directly relevant to our members:

- We are supportive of the focus on sustainable forest management (SFM), on the basis that this seeks to achieve a balance between economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives; therefore, we agree with the proposal to place a statutory duty on the Scottish Ministers (SM) to promote sustainable forest management.

- We are supportive of the Bill’s statutory requirement to produce a Scottish Government Forestry Strategy based on the principles of SFM. We are particularly interested that the Forestry Strategy must include the Scottish Ministers’ objectives, priorities and policies with respect to the conservation and enhancement of the environment by means of SFM, as well as the realisation of the social benefits of forestry. Fulfilment of genuinely sustainable forest management will require proper engagement with the fieldsports community.

- We agree that “forestry can deliver more in the future” and that there should be “more effective use of Scotland’s publicly-owned land” (quotations taken from the accompanying explanatory notes to the Bill). The recent publication of the SNH Commissioned Report No.942 ‘A Review of Game Bird Law and Licensing in Selected European Countries’ highlighted that, in many of the countries examined in the report, hunters have better access to public land than do Scottish hunters. We have communicated our views on this issue to the Scottish Government and its agencies many times previously; in this context, the modernisation of Scottish forestry legislation is the best opportunity to date for Ministers to establish equitable access to public land for the fieldsports community. The delivery of the principles of sustainable forest management – a balance of economic, environmental and socio-cultural objectives – can be demonstrably assisted by our members through fieldsports land management and adherence to established hunting-conservation models that deliver proven, positive results for biodiversity, natural resources, local economies and social/cultural wellness. It should be remembered that the cost of land management carried out by the fieldsports community is generally borne by private individuals, who should be recognised as a valuable operational resource by the Scottish Government and by the general public.
- The wild deer populations inhabiting the National Forest Estate, and elsewhere, are a natural resource. To date, engagement by Forest Enterprise with the fieldsports community on a local basis to access this natural resource has been poor. The apparent presumption in favour of deer management contractors from outwith local communities cannot be called sustainable when viewed in the context of our statements above. We trust that, in the spirit of the new Bill, this situation will now be rectified.

- We are interested in the commitment to enter into agreements with, and/or delegate SM functions to community bodies. We are supportive of this if our members are able to participate and are not actively or tacitly excluded.

- We agree that “forestry has much to contribute to supporting integrated land use”, which we understand to include multi-layered usage where fieldsports activities work alongside other productive land uses.

- We are concerned by paragraph 37 of the Policy Memorandum, which describes the proposal to set up a ‘land agency for Scotland’ using Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) expertise. FES is demonstrably poor at fieldsports-related land management, so we are concerned that this new land agency would be poorly equipped for our community given the intention to “…guide the use of the land in question and the activities undertaken on it.” We seek assurance that poor decisions impacting our community will not result from this proposal, and that this new land agency will engage appropriately with us and our members.

- We are hopeful that the modernisation of Scottish forestry policy will indeed contribute “…to the community empowerment policy agenda”, as in order to be sustainable and fair, our community must be involved.

Scottish Association for Country Sports
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