

Petitioner submission of 18 July 2023

PE1812/EEE: Protect Scotland's remaining ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors

Dear Mr Carlaw and Mr Torrance

We write to thank you, your Committee members, and Jackie Baillie for continuing to support the petition. We strongly endorse your proposal for a debate in Parliament, particularly around the impacts of INNS conifers & rhododendrons, the failures by Scottish Forestry (and, according to Scottish Forestry, the Procurator Fiscal) to enforce existing protections for ancient & native woodland and, lastly, the chaotic 'management' by local authorities of Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs), where it appears there are no common standards, enforcement, or good practice across councils.

Multiple recent developments evidence that this is crunch time for Scotland's ancient and native woodlands, and our country's historic natural identity, upon which we all rely. Please see:

1. The Botanical Society of Britain & Ireland (BSBI) released results from 20 years of research (including 20 million individual plant records) - the most in-depth survey of British & Irish flora ever undertaken - in March this year.

BSBI's report states: **Peatland habitats will be essential as we strive to combat climate change, but they are being impacted by species such as Sitka Spruce, which is able to regenerate into moorlands and peatlands, reducing their ability to sequester carbon. Sitka Spruce has shown the most significant increase in range of any species recorded for Plant Atlas 2020.**

(Sources: https://bsbi.org/wp-content/uploads/dlm_uploads/2023/03/BSBI-Plant-Atlas-2020-press-release-Britain-FINAL.pdf & <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/64889032>)

2. New research just released from the University of Stirling states 56% of the highest altitude trees in Scotland are now American sitka spruce (*picea sitchensis*), which is wilding right across

Scotland's hills and mountains, as well as in temperate rainforest, ice age pine woods and other ancient & native woodland.

(Sources: <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/23591853.scotland-munros-trees-reach-record-breaking-altitudes/> and <https://www.stir.ac.uk/research/hub/publication/1911997>)

3. Cabinet Secretary Mairi Gougeon has announced a Forestry Summit, to be held in Scotland later this summer, to increase tree planting to meet scaled up afforestation targets from 2024. Scotland is already responsible for 60-80% of afforestation in the UK annually and Scotland continues to be the only country planting more INNS conifers than native broadleaf trees (**5,530 ha conifers compared to 2,660 ha broadleaf trees in 2022-23**)

(Source: <https://www.forestryjournal.co.uk/news/23590907.emergency-forestry-summit-will-held-wake-planting-rates/>)

We wondered if the Cabinet Secretary was obliquely referring to INNS conifers and associated rhododendron infestation issues when she said: **"We need to dramatically increase the level of woodland creation approvals and *improve on the quality of applications being submitted as quite frankly the current status is not acceptable*"** [emphasis added].

(Source: <https://www.forestryjournal.co.uk/news/23590542.uks-tree-planting-rates-fall-lowest-levels-five-years/>)

The full consequences of turning Scotland, in a geological blink of an eye, from a beautiful, colourful, biodiverse and life supporting home into an evergreen monoculture of spruce & rhododendron are unimaginable, but the transformation is well underway.

With kind regards,
Audrey Baird