

Rural Affairs Committee
Wednesday 23 September 2026
5th Meeting, 2026 (Session 7)

Forestry

Introduction

1. In June 2026, the Committee agreed to undertake a series of introductory evidence sessions with stakeholders on topics within its remit, including forestry. The purpose of these sessions is to give members a broad understanding of the key issues and challenges relevant to the Committee's work and to assist with the development of the Committee's work programme. The session also will assist the Committee's pre-budget scrutiny by providing an opportunity to explore forestry funding issues.
2. The Session 6 Rural Affairs and Islands Committee held a [roundtable on forestry on 15 January 2025](#) and [on 7 January 2026 it held a session with land use stakeholders](#) on the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry chapter of the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan.

Background

3. Forests and woodlands account for 19% of Scotland's land area. This represents just under half of the UK's forests and woodlands and is higher than the UK average of 14%, although [it remains lower than in most EU countries](#).
4. Forestry is devolved. Following the [Forestry and Land Management \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#), the powers and duties of the Forestry Commissioners were transferred to Scottish Ministers, where they relate to Scotland. Two new organisations were established: [Forestry and Land Scotland](#), which manages the Scottish forest estate, and [Scottish Forestry](#), which is responsible for forestry policy, regulation, advice and grant payments.

Tree planting

5. Tree planting rates have increased over the last two decades but have not consistently kept pace with climate change targets. [The most recent figures were published by Scottish Forestry in June 2026](#).
6. [The Forestry Grant Scheme](#) has supported the delivery of woodland creation targets since 2015. The 2026-27 budget for the scheme is £58.6 million, following recent fluctuations from around £77 million in 2023-24 to around £45

million in 2024-25. A Future Forestry Support Programme is underway and is expected to run until 2028.

7. The Scottish Government's latest [Climate Change Plan](#) commits to increasing woodland cover to 21% by 2032 and 23% by 2040. It also commits to planting 12,000 hectares in 2026-27, rising by 2,000 hectares each year to reach 18,000 hectares annually by 2029-30.

Protected woodlands

8. The condition of protected woodlands is a key issue. [NatureScot noted in its most recent annual report](#) that 31% of protected woodland features are in favourable condition, down from 33% in the previous year and from 36% in 2017-18. Key pressures include high grazing impacts, primarily from deer, invasive species such as Rhododendron, and tree disease.
9. [The Scottish Forestry Strategy](#), published in 2019, sets out a 50-year vision for forests and woodlands that are sustainably managed and support economic, environmental and community outcomes. A replacement strategy is expected during Session 7, ahead of the current strategy expiring in 2029.

Public service reform

10. Major public service reform proposals were announced [in the 2026 Programme for Government](#). These include a commitment to bring national environment public bodies - SEPA, NatureScot, Zero Waste Scotland and potentially Scottish Forestry - into a single overarching environment body. [Forestry stakeholders have raised concerns](#) about the possible inclusion of Scottish Forestry, including the risk of losing specialist forestry expertise and delaying progress towards planting targets.

Meeting on 23 September

On 23 September, the Committee will take evidence from the following stakeholders:

- Stuart Goodall, Chief Executive, Confor (the Confederation of Forest Industries)
- Paul Lowe, Chief Executive, Scottish Forestry
- Simon Ritchie, Policy and Advocacy Manager, Woodland Trust Scotland
- Andy Rockall, Chief Executive, Community Woodlands Association

Clerks to the Committee
September 2026