

From Canada to Corsewall - the story of the Scottish woodlot licence

“There are tens of thousands of acres of unmanaged woodland across Scotland’s farms, estates and local authorities. This pilot project sets out to prove that the woodlot licence holder, the woodland owner, the environment and the local economy can all win. We are not reinventing the wheel - the model has been tried and tested in British Columbia for decades.”

These words were spoken following the signing of the first woodlot licence agreement in Scotland in July 2013 - but by whom? A radical from the Reforesting Scotland end of the forestry spectrum? Or perhaps a spokesman from the Scottish Woodlot Association (SWA), which brokered the agreement? No, these are the words of Angus Carrick-Buchanan, area committee member of Scottish Land and Estates (SLE), and owner of the Corsewall Estate on which the first woodlot has been established. This landowner endorsement is hugely significant, because whilst there are doubtless some landowners who, like Angus, are motivated to support the social and rural development benefits this model of forest tenure delivers, many more will ask themselves ‘what’s in it for me?’

Scottish woodlots (not to be confused with the WoodLots business-to-business trading exchange, run by the WoodNet partnership in South East England) are modelled on the arrangement in Canada whereby the Government of British Columbia (BC) leases parcels of woodland for management by local individuals and their families. This is a proactive Government of BC policy to diversify the forestry sector, recognising the benefits that woodlot licences bring.

In Scotland, the concept has been broadened to include both private and public land, but the principle remains the same: the woodlot licence gives the holder the rights (and

indeed the responsibilities) to manage a woodland parcel, including the right to harvest timber according to an Annual Allowable Cut. In return, an annual rental is paid for the duration of the lease, which is long-term and can be renewed.

Detailed information on how Scottish woodlots work can be found on the SWA website. The significance of woodlot licences is that for the first time a model is available which enables people of ordinary means to access woodland to manage, anywhere in Scotland; the other existing model - woodland crofts (see page 13) - being available only in the traditional crofting counties, plus specific designated areas.

Also significant is the political support the model has received: South of Scotland MSP Aileen McLeod has been a staunch supporter from the outset and tabled a parliamentary motion congratulating the SWA and Angus Carrick-Buchanan on the signing of the Corsewall woodlot licence. This attracted cross-party support, leading to a debate in the Scottish Parliament at which forestry minister Paul Wheelhouse MSP expressed support.

The minister subsequently met with the SWA in January and stressed that he was in listening mode, emphasising his enthusiasm for supporting new ways to facilitate access to forest land for working families. He confirmed that he will be giving an innovative proposal from the Scottish Woodlot Association, to make such access to forests possible on State forest land, careful consideration and will be responding to the SWA in the near future.



In this ministerial endorsement, there are echoes of British Columbia, where each press release relating to woodlots is accompanied by supportive quotes from politicians. We can do no better than to end this piece with another quote, this time from BC forestry minister Steve Thompson, in a recent press release promoting a new woodlot licence: “Woodlot licences...are an effective way to support prosperous rural forest economies by improving access to forest tenures. These small-tenure opportunities bring increased economic activity to the local area and allow British Columbians to directly manage forest land”.

From now on, for ‘British Columbians’, read Scots!

scottishwoodlotassociation.co.uk

*The Scottish Woodlot Association is a non-profit distributing co-operative working to establish a network of rented woodlot licences across Scotland, and more generally, help foster a forest culture based on small-scale, local, social, and productive forestry. Contact secretary **Andy Brown**, E: andy@scottishwoodlotassociation.co.uk*

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