

THE FUTURE for FORESTRY

THE URGENT NEED FOR A NEW POLICY



BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF NATURE CONSERVATIONISTS

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Contents

1.	The Future for Forestry	1
1.1	Introduction	1
2.	The Historical Roots of Present day Forestry Practice	3
2.1	Afforestation for Job Creation	4
2.2	Second War Felling	5
2.3	The Environmental Pressures	6
2.4	Reaction to the 1972 Review	7
3.	The Economics of Forestry	8
3.1	The CAS Study	11
3.2	The Implications for Future FC Policy	14
3.3	Why Forestry May Continue To Operate Relatively Unchanged	15
3.4	Forestry and Tax Manipulation	16
3.5	The Consequences of the Recent Forestry Sales	20
3.6	The Employment Issue	22
3.7	Timber Production in Britain	24
4.	The Relationship Between Forestry And Conservation	27
4.1	A Conflict of Approach	27
4.2	The Ecological Impact of Expansion in the Uplands	35
4.3	The Impact on Bird Populations	37
4.4	Upland Conifers and Landscape	40
4.5	Disease	40
4.6	The Threat to Semi Natural and Ancient Woodlands	41
4.7	Destruction Rates	41
4.8	Coniferisation	42
4.9	The Institutional Mechanism Behind Clearance	48
4.10	Grant Aid	49
4.11	Prospects for Effective Conservation of Ancient Woodlands	51
4.12	The Loughborough Symposium	53
4.13	Forestry, Government and Landowner	54

5.	Future Policy	56
5.1	Recommendations for a Future Forestry Policy	57
5.2	Immediate Changes Needed	57
5.3	Long Term Changes Needed in Forestry Policy	59
5.4	Forestry Policy and the Uplands; the future	61
6.	Summary of Findings and Recommendations	63
Appendices		
1	Table 1: Destruction of ancient/semi-natural woodland	66
2	Table 2: Ancient woods in Northamptonshire	66
3	Table 3: Recent Woodland Clearance in Northamptonshire	68
Diagrams		
	Diagram 1: Forestry purchase grant merrygoround	22
	Diagram 2: Decline in the Forestry Commission's staff numbers	23
	Diagram 3: Windthrow hazard	26
Plates		
	Plate 1: Experimental high level forestry plot	28
	Plate 2: Stand of Lodgepole Pine, killed by Pine Beauty Moth	29
	Plate 3: Mature Norway Spruce plantation in Galloway	30
	Plate 4: Coniferised ancient woodland in Devon	31
	Plate 5: Destruction of Salcey Forest for plantation/construction	32
	Plate 6: Grubbing-up of Collyweston Great Wood for mineral working	33

1. The Future for Forestry

1.1 Introduction

The relationship between forestry and nature conservation in Britain has been an uneasy one. Recent developments mean that there is now an opportunity for constructive changes in the relationship to take place particularly in the face of increasingly adverse economic conditions for forestry. It is probable that over the next year or so decisions will be made that may have profound effects for the future of both coniferous and broadleaved woodland in Britain. Recent developments affecting the present status of forestry in Britain have been the 1980 and 1982 reports of the House of Lords Select Committee¹ on Science and Technology on the Scientific Aspects of Forestry, and the decision to sell off of part of the Forestry Commission estate under the policies of the present Government. The recent recommendations of the Centre for Agricultural Strategy² and the Forestry Commission report³ proposing increases in the present amount of forest cover have also received much attention.

In a small highly populated country such as Britain, major changes in land-use and in the appearance of the countryside have caused public as well as professional concern. Modern forestry practice and afforestation has been a major cause of such changes, particularly in the uplands. A primary conflict lies between the objectives of those who own or occupy the land and depend upon it for their income and livelihood and those who, in ever increasing numbers, use it as a leisure time and recreational or aesthetic resource. The present very highly valued status of the countryside to the predominantly urban population means that non-economic arguments carry considerable weight on all sides of the debate.

Much controversy has surrounded the question of how far forestry constitutes a justifiable land-use in modern Britain. Whatever viewpoint one has in this discussion there is no doubt that the economic case for state-subsidised forestry has been in dispute more than in other forms of land-use activity.

One of the problems in forestry is that the long delay in production in relation to the size of the initial investment has allowed economists to argue quite rationally for or against the promotion of forestry in Britain

1. House of Lords Select Committee Report on Science and Technology; *Scientific Aspects of Forestry* 1980; and Supplementary Report, 1982.
2. Centre for Agricultural Strategy, 1980, Report no. 6 *Strategy for the UK Forestry Industry*, University of Reading.
3. *The Wood Production Outlook in Great Britain*, 1977.