



Forestry and
Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus
Fearann Alba

Visitor Strategy 2022-2032

Forestry and Land Scotland



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
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Introduction

Forestry and Land Scotland became an executive agency of the Scottish Government on 1 April 2019 and since that time has continued to look after the national forests and land in a way that also delivers on Scotland's Forestry Strategy, Scotland's National Outcomes and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Our mission is:

“looking after Scotland's forests and land, for the benefit of all, now and for the future”

Our vision is:

“forests and land that Scotland can be proud of”

Background

As the largest provider of outdoor recreation in Scotland, we welcome over ten million visitors per year, generate £110 million of tourism spend for the wider Scottish economy.

With over three hundred visitor destinations, including six forest parks, our destinations offer many different outdoor experiences, including walking, cycling, wheeling, horse riding, dog sports, water sports, wildlife watching, places of cultural and heritage significance and more.

The forests and land we look after also play a key part in Scotland's 'natural health service', providing spaces where people of all ages can spend time enhancing their physical and mental health through play, exploration and relaxation.

We want to do what we can to make sure that as many people as possible, from all backgrounds and all parts of the country, can find something they would like to do in one of our forests. We want all visitors to have fun and enjoy their visit.

This Strategy is a guiding framework to help prioritise our visitor work and set a clear direction for staff and partners. The strategy will have a ten year life from publication until 2032. A review will be completed every three years in line with the FLS Corporate Plan publication. The associated Action Plan will be reviewed annually.

Strategic Context

Forestry and Land Scotland, as Scotland's largest land manager, has a unique relationship with the many communities who live and work in and around Scotland's national forests and land, as well as the many communities of interest who use this important natural resource.

Communities are at the heart of the principles of sustainable forest management, which underpins our approach to land management. Scotland's national forests and land are certified under the UK Woodland Assurance Scheme (UKWAS), an independent certification standard for verifying sustainable woodland management in the UK, and follows the vision and principles set out in the Scottish Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement.

Forestry and Land Scotland's Corporate Plan 2022-2025 set out our responsibility to manage the national forests and land for multiple outcomes, in particular for visitors and communities:



Outcome 1: Supporting a Sustainable Rural Economy

FLS supports a sustainable rural economy by managing the national forests and land in a way that encourages sustainable business growth, development opportunities, jobs and investments.



Outcome 3: National forests and land for visitors and communities

Everyone can visit and enjoy Scotland's national forests and land to connect with nature, have fun, benefit their health and wellbeing and have the opportunity to engage in our community decision making.

Communities across Scotland are key to delivering these outcomes, through greater engagement in decision making on how the national forests are managed for the benefit of communities and activities that support sustainable and thriving rural communities.

The annex sets out a range of key strategic drivers that have informed the development of this strategy including Scotland's forest strategy, Scotland Outlook 2020, FLS Climate Change Plan and the national walking and mountain biking strategies.

What Success Looks Like

- Scotland's forest and land are valued by all sections of the community and visitors because they provide beautiful, safe and well-managed locations where people can enjoy themselves whilst improving their connection to the environment and their mental and physical health.
- Through a combination of imaginative commercial recreation and wider partnership funding, the forests and land we look after are delivering benefits to Scotland on a long-term sustainable financial basis and are supporting the recovery of the tourism industry.
- Our staff are respected for their ability to support and enhance the work of others using the land.

How the Visitor Strategy sits with the Community Strategy

The Visitor Strategy sets out how Forestry and Land Scotland manages services and facilities to welcome everyone to the national forests and land for recreation, health and wellbeing and education. Given the importance of these topics to communities, there is a community priority within the Visitor Strategy.

The Visitor Strategy will sit alongside the Forestry and Land Scotland Communities Strategy. The Communities Strategy focusses on how communities can get more involved in the decisions, management and use of the national forests and land to help deliver their objectives.

Guiding Principles

We will use six key principles to guide all projects and visitor services developed from this visitor strategy.

Principle 1 – We will be inclusive and fun

Scotland's forests and land are for everyone to have fun and enjoyment. Diversity and inclusion are important in all that we do and we are committed to fulfilling and promoting the Scottish Government's public sector equality duties. We want to create an environment that is accessible, open, welcoming and enjoyable to people from all backgrounds and communities across Scotland. We will continue to identify and remove barriers so that we can build a more inclusive organisation, services and facilities.

Principle 2 – A positive safety culture

We want everyone who visits any of our destinations to have a rewarding and safe experience. We will provide good safety information on our promoted facilities and will design, construct, inspect and maintain our visitor facilities with safety in mind. We will conduct 'benefit-of-risk' assessments for activities where the benefits outweigh the risks of injury and will learn from incidents and accidents to improve the safety of our sites and services. We will take an industry wide approach to visitor safety, by working with the Visitor Safety Group.

Principle 3 – Promote responsible access

We will work with others to support Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and to promote responsible access and care for the environment to visitors.

Principle 4 – Work in partnership

To make meaningful progress to deliver Scotland's National Outcomes, we will work in partnership with other parts of local and national government, communities and Non-Government Organisations. This will help us deliver significantly more outcomes and/or use fewer resources than if we were working alone.



Principle 5 – Long-term financial sustainability

Everything we manage and do has an impact on our income and therefore on our ability to financially support and deliver our visitor outcomes. We want to become less reliant on external funding sources and be financially self-sustainable.

Not every destination or activity that we offer, can – or will – provide us with enough income to pay for itself. For these destinations and activities, we will need to invest to an appropriate level to reduce safety liabilities, realise potential and develop opportunities over time, so that we can get the best possible outcome for us, the destination, our visitors and local communities.

To do this, we need to invest in visitor destinations that achieve best value in terms of visitor experience, community benefit, financial sustainability, and the rural economy. We need to be more innovative in terms of income and models of delivery, including working more effectively with communities and other stakeholders.

Principle 6 – Data and research led decision making

Where possible we will collect and analyse data on our visitor sites to make informed management decisions. For key projects, we will conduct research into visitor behaviour and visitor trends. We will work in partnership with others to share data and research to help us deliver this strategy.

Strategic Priorities

The following sets out our four strategic Priorities – Climate Change, Community, Rural Economy and Health & Education – as well as a number of strategic aims and higher level actions that we will carry out within the life of the strategy.

Priority 1 – Climate Change: We will ensure the FLS visitor offer makes a full contribution to our national ambitions to become a Net Zero society by 2045

Aim:

Reduce emissions and waste

What we will do:

- We will work with others to look at sustainable transport and active travel options for our key visitor sites.
- We will develop an urban recreation offer close to where people live.
- We and the businesses we work with will develop sustainable tourism solutions.

Aim:

Adapt to change

What we will do:

- We will work to protect, maintain and enhance areas of high conservation value near visitor sites.
- We will continue to invest in key adaptation actions to build the resilience of Scotland's national forests and land's recreation trail network.

Priority 2 – Community: We will ensure our recreation and tourism offering nurtures thriving places in Scotland and improves community wellbeing

Aim:

Community involvement in our decisions

What we will do:

- We will involve communities in planning and decisions we make around new services for tourism and recreation, to manage impacts of development and maximise benefit to communities and local businesses.

Aim:

Community collaboration

What we will do:

- We will engage with communities on how we can support their health and tourism ambitions.
- We will support communities being more actively involved with managing trails.

Aim:

Volunteering

What we will do:

- We will develop a volunteering strategy.
- We will work in partnership with others to deliver volunteering activity.



Priority 3 – Rural Economy: We will work with others to maximise the contribution made to the wider economy from the land we manage

Aim:

Support the recovery of Scotland's tourism industry

What we will do:

- Working with others, including the Scottish Government Visitor Management Strategy groups, we will work flexibly and adapt to changing visitor and tourism requirements.
- We will work with tenants and commercial operators to help them to re-establish their businesses during recovery.
- We will enable people to responsibly access and enjoy Scotland's national forests and land.

Aim:

Increase the economic benefits of recreation and tourism to Scotland

What we will do:

- We will provide quality visitor destinations and opportunities that contribute to the local/national tourism economy.
- We will host organised events that support the local/national economy.
- We will work in wider partnership with others around tourism destination planning.

Aim:

Financially sustainable key visitor destinations

What we will do:

- We will focus our management of trails and visitor destinations to deliver products that give meaningful visitor experiences and are affordable and financially sustainable.
- We will seek to improve financial sustainability, through the provision of additional services such as car parking, cafés, retail, accommodation and experiences.
- We will investigate new models of managing visitor trails and destinations to improve financial sustainability.

Priority 4 – Health and Education: We will work with others to improve the health and education of Scotland

Aim:

Encourage new visitors to have fun and enjoyment on Scotland's national forests and land

What we will do:

- We will look to remove barriers to visitor access, where this will have the greatest impact.
- We will encourage and support events and opportunities that bring new groups into activities.

Aim:

Scotland's national forests and land improve health and wellbeing

What we will do:

- We will build strategic relationships with key health service providers, to identify how FLS can facilitate others to make best use of the national forests and land.

Aim:

Scotland's forests and land support outdoor education and learning

What we will do:

- We will engage with and encourage outdoor learning partnerships and projects to make use of the national forests and land, through appropriate mechanisms and value added opportunities.
- We will enable others to use the national forest and land for activities that have positive education and learning benefits.



Monitoring & Evaluation

This Visitor Strategy is supported by an action plan that sets out in more detail what we want to do, who we will work with and when we want to do it. The Strategy will be reviewed in 2032, whereas the action plan will be reviewed annually, to ensure it continues to deliver best value for Scotland's forests and land.

All Forests Survey

Within the life of the strategy, we will calculate a new annual visitor number figure for all Scotland's forests and land and develop a profile of visitors.

The four strategic priorities will be monitored annually with the following:

Climate Change

1. Number of destinations with sustainable transport solutions or active travel.
2. Area of FLS land within boundary of urban area.
3. Percentage of visitor waste recycled – litter and commercial waste
4. Number of projects to protect environment or wildlife on visitor sites delivered
5. Number of projects to improve resilience of recreation infrastructure to storm damage delivered

Community

6. Number of Community Engagement Plans on visitor projects/services
7. Km of trails managed by communities on FLS land
8. Number of Health and Tourism projects FLS is supporting with Communities
9. Volunteering days on FLS land

Rural Economy

10. FLS visitor income
11. FLS visitor expenditure
12. Value of projects FLS is delivered to support rural tourism
13. Estimate of economic impact of projects FLS or partners delivered on Scotland's forests and land
14. Number of projects to improve FLS sustainable finance

Health and Education

15. Number of physical barriers to access removed
16. Number of new visitors attending events
17. Number of health projects
18. Number of education projects

Annex: Key Policies and Strategies

Several national policies and strategies have contributed the development of this Visitor Strategy and the associated action plan.

The principle policies and strategies

- Scotland's Forestry Strategy – sets the direction for forestry in Scotland as a whole, including the priority of “Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands”.
- FLS Corporate Plan – sets the direction for FLS as an organisation, including the visitor offer.
- Scotland Outlook 2030 – Responsible Tourism for a Sustainable Future – sets out four tourism priorities that are all relevant to the Visitor Strategy: Our Passionate People, Our Thriving Places, Our Memorable Experiences, Our Diverse Business.
- FLS Climate Change Plan – sets a climate change ambition for FLS and the key next steps to reducing emissions, capturing carbon and adapting to change.
- Scottish Outdoor Access Code – outlines where you can go and what you can do – as well as the few places you can't go and the few activities you can't do.
- The Strategy for Scottish Mountain Biking – aims to see Scotland recognised as the leader of European mountain biking.
- Let's Get Scotland Walking – The National Walking Strategy – which looks to see everyone benefit from and enjoy walking as part of their everyday journeys and in well-designed places.

Supporting strategies and policies

The following documents help support both the Visitor Strategy and the Action Plan.

- Community Empowerment Act
- Community Wealth Building
- A Scotland where everybody thrives: Public Health Scotland's Strategic Plan
- Visitor Safety Group guiding principles
- National Strategy for Economic Transformation
- Climate Ready Scotland: climate change adaptation programme
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy
- National Transport Strategy: Protecting our Climate and Improving Lives
- Our Place In Time: The Historic Environment Strategy for Scotland
- Designation Net Zero: Scottish Tourism Journey
- A More Active Scotland: Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan
- A Culture Strategy for Scotland
- Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming: Report
- The Fair Work Convention
- Fourth National Planning Framework
- Blue Economy Vision
- National Gaelic Language Plan
- Part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act



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