

Photo: Fordie Estate Perthshire showing mixed woodland creation areas and inbye conservation grazing retained for wader habitat management. A significant area of the open hill is currently being planted with a diverse range of species which will be managed to deliver both conservation and production objectives.



Client management in forestry is often a challenge given the wide spectrum of woodland owners and investors. Foresters operating in Scotland in the 1980s were operating in a system where maximising financial returns was the simple objective for many forestry owners, and planting the largest area of Sitka spruce delivered this through a combination of high output and generous tax incentives. The justifiable public outcry that this provoked led to more regulation and the creation of the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS) in 1998. The general theme of the UKFS is to ensure responsible forest management delivering multiple benefits. A key element in the guidance was the introduction of minimum percentages of tree species types to ensure that all forests had an element of structural diversity. The focus of these constraints was targeted at the extremist commercial forestry tail of the bell curve.

Over the years I have found the simple and clear species composition rules within the UKFS an invaluable tool in delivering multipurpose forestry in woodland creation schemes and forest plans, often in the face of pressure from the woodland owner to maximise profits above all else. The UKFS therefore addresses many things including the power imbalance that can exist between a professional forester and his client.

Historically, at the other end of the bell curve, the environmental/rewilding extremists didn't need constraining because this was just a niche activity for a limited number of woodland owners. Enter the concept of natural capital into the situation and environmental land ownership has been quickly commodified. Ironically, it is subject to the same drivers as existed for commercial forestry in the 1980s. The objective for most corporate owners, the 'green lairds', is to make as much money as possible either directly or indirectly via Environmental Social and Governance (ESG). There is also a perceived increase in status for the 'green lairds' by following the latest fashion and purchasing a virtue signalling accessory. Powerful corporate entities often enjoy political support at both national and international level, and have all the power that enormous wealth brings. Many of these owners are driven by simple ideologies that are intolerant of the human scale, history and complexity of rural land use. There is currently

no element in the UKFS to control their often whimsical behaviour, which can have long term impacts for rural communities even after the corporate entities have left and moved on to the next lucrative financial bubble.

What is needed, perhaps, is the application of simple land use parameters along the lines of the UKFS percentage species distribution that worked effectively to reign in the commercial forestry sector. These could relate to retaining a mixed land use with farming, keeping people on the land, and productive forestry being a required element of any estate plan seeking public money to progress. As a general concept more regulation is not something to wish for, but in this instance something radical is needed to save Scotland's landscapes and rural cultures from the onslaught of green capitalism and corporate greed.

People are not the blight on the countryside that some power structures perceive them to be. Removing people from the rural landscape, ignoring traditions and dismantling a productive rural economy will not bring utopia.

The perception that there is a problem is widely appreciated and various proposals have been put forward as to how to mitigate the adverse impacts of the corporate land grab. The simplicity and effectiveness of the UKFS as a regulatory mechanism could be a template that could be extended to effectively regulate the rewilding and environmental sectors.

The village of Comrie in Perthshire feels like ground zero for the extension of corporate power into the lives of rural communities. It is an area I know well. Recently, Invergeldie Estate was purchased by a rewilding corporation and Fordie Estate was purchased by a corporate investor with an interest in commercial timber production. Two very different woodland creation and land use proposals have been advanced by the professional foresters working to meet the very different objectives of both owners. Whatever the commercial aspirations of the owners, the woodland creation on Fordie Estate has been constrained by the UKFS to deliver multiple benefits with planting currently underway to create a diverse mix of commercial Sitka spruce, mixed conifers, productive broadleaves, native woodland, and extensive areas of open ground including livestock grazing. It may be of course that the owners would have arrived at this enlightened approach regardless of the UKFS, but the existence of the UKFS would still have influenced their decision making. In contrast at Invergeldie Estate, the current rewilding proposal (which is a work in progress) involves the removal of all livestock, the planting of inbye grassland and no productive timber production, broadleaved or otherwise. Other proposals linked to rewilding Invergeldie include the creation of a 25-turbine windfarm with a height to blade tip of 220m adjacent to a National Scenic Area and prime golden eagle territory. Again, the drivers are financial as none of these activities would take place in the absence of public funding.

Obviously it is early days at Invergeldie, but at this stage the lack of an equitable framework to maintain a thriving mixed rural economy is keenly felt. People are not the blight on the countryside that some power structures perceive them to be. Removing people from the rural landscape, ignoring traditions and dismantling a productive rural economy will not bring utopia. Time to flatten the curve on rural land use diversity.



FEATURE

Lulu Sleep, National School of Forestry Alumni, University of Cumbria

CONTINUOUS COVER SILVICULTURE

IN PRACTICE

The Institute's Educational and Scientific Trust recently supported Lulu Sleep in learning about continuous cover forestry (CCF) in the Lowlands.

I have spent the past three years studying a BSc (Hons) Forest Management degree at the University of Cumbria's National School of Forestry. During this time, I became particularly interested in silviculture and methods of adapting forests for greater resilience to climate change. This is becoming more important for foresters due to an increasing risk to UK forests from abiotic factors such as storms, flooding, drought and windthrow, and biotic factors such as pests, diseases, and mammal damage.

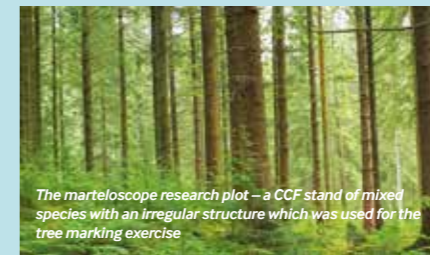
Being awarded the Institute's Educational and Scientific Trust grant enabled me to participate in a two-day course on irregular silviculture which was run by Andy Poore and David Pengelly FICFor of SelectFor. The course, which was held in Wiltshire and Dorset in May 2024, involved an in-depth exploration of irregular silviculture with a focus on lowland forests, both coniferous and broadleaved.

During the course there was a mix of presentations, case studies and site visits to continuous cover forests. Key ideas and principles of continuous cover forestry (CCF) were covered, including stand structure transformation from even aged monocultures to irregular structures of uneven aged mixed species stands. Other topics included the economics of CCF management, marketing of timber products, and tree marking – which was the practical aspect of the course.



Lulu in the marteloscope research plot marking trees with flagging tape that she selected for felling as part of the practical aspect of the course

The practical tree marking exercise was undertaken in a marteloscope which is a one-hectare permanent research plot that has been set up in a CCF stand for training purposes. Within the marteloscope, each tree over 17.5cm DBH had previously been recorded and was shown on a map.



The marteloscope research plot – a CCF stand of mixed species with an irregular structure which was used for the tree marking exercise

The species composition was Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), birch (*Betula pendula*), Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*) and larch (*Larix*). The exercise involved marking trees for selective felling using principles of CCF taught during the course which were based on the method used by the Association Futaie Irrégulière in France. Once the tree marking was completed and recorded, our selective felling decisions were integrated onto a spreadsheet that calculated a variety of statistics from our selections. This included volume and value of timber yield, timber grade, the distribution of the selections based on stem diameter, and information about the remaining trees in the stand, such as volume, standing value, and diameter class.

Undertaking the course has given me a deeper understanding of irregular silviculture. I found the CCF tree marking a good exercise to implement theoretical principles learned. A particularly useful learning opportunity was the comparison of the trees I had marked against David Pengelly FICFor's selections (and those of the others on the course) which provided an

insight into a variety of scenarios depending upon what type of trees were marked (e.g. diameter class, timber grade, spacing).

The case studies introduced by SelectFor exemplified that it can be financially feasible to use CCF for timber production in the Lowlands, and I remain inquisitive to further develop my knowledge of irregular silviculture including implementation of CCF in the uplands. I am thankful to the Institute for supporting me in this learning experience during which I have gained valuable knowledge on the transformation and management of continuous cover forests which I hope to utilise in my career.



An example of one of the CCF woodlands in Wiltshire that was visited on the course

Andy Poore and David Pengelly FICFor of SelectFor during a site visit at a CCF woodland they manage in Wiltshire



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