Moray Woodland and Forestry Strategy 2025

Contents

This Woodland and Forestry Strategy has been prepared by **Carol Anderson Landscape Associates** with assistance from **Biggar Economics** and **Ian Thomas** Forester and Land Manager and with valuable input from a Steering Group comprising **Moray Council, Scottish Forestry** and **Highlands and Islands Enterprise**

1 Introduction

1.1 Moray's woodlands and forests

34%
woodland cover in Moray

Moray is one of the most wooded regions in Scotland with 34% of the area covered with woodland. This compares with the national average of 19% woodland cover in Scotland.

Woodlands and forests form an integral part of the high-quality environment of Moray valued by residents and visitors and are important to the health and well-being of communities. They are also vital in helping to reduce the effects of climate change and in their contribution to biodiversity.

Woodlands and forests in Moray also form part of a mature and well-developed economic forestry sector with a range of related businesses spanning the full forest life cycle. This encompasses the planning of new woodlands, nursery growing of young trees, management of maturing woodlands, harvesting, transportation, sawmilling and the manufacture and end-use of timber products. Forestry forms a key part of Moray's economy generating £39 million annually and providing direct employment for almost 1000 people.

1.2 The purpose of the strategy

The purpose of the strategy is to help deliver Scotland's transition to a net-zero future and the Scottish Government's commitments on:

- **Sustainable development and economic growth**
  Moray's productive forests form a significant part of the local economy supporting jobs in nursery growing, forest management, timber manufacture and tourism. This strategy explores ways of increasing sustainable growth in forestry-related industries in Moray.
- **Mitigating the global climate emergency**
  Moray's extensive woodland and forest cover already plays an important role in mitigating and adapting to climate change by storing carbon. Expansion of woodland will further contribute to meeting national woodland creation targets and to enhancing the production of a sustainable substitute for carbon intensive building materials.
- **Reversing biodiversity loss**
  Moray's woodlands are important for their biodiversity value. Expansion of well-placed and managed woodlands, creating connective habitat networks and the enhancement of existing woodlands will help to reverse biodiversity loss.
- **Increasing community health and well-being**
  Some of Moray's woodlands lie close to settlements and are well-used by local residents, contributing to their health and well-being and the quality of their living environment. Exploring ways of increasing people's use of the woodland and forest resource to improve health and well-being is one of the key objectives of this strategy.

The strategy will assist in realising the more detailed objectives set out in *Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029* and accords with the guidance set out in *Right Tree in the Right Place – Planning for Forestry and Woodlands 2010*. It will contribute to the Moray Local Outcome Improvement Plan of a growing and sustainable economy and will also help inform the Moray Regional Spatial Strategy.

The strategy will be principally used by landowners and managers, Scottish Forestry, Moray Council and stakeholders when considering woodland creation schemes, felling applications and Long-Term Forest Plans. It will also be of interest for communities as it provides information on the types of woodland creation and management envisioned for Moray and considers a range of initiatives, for example improving skills in forestry and related industries and increasing people's use of woodlands and forests.

1.3 The 2018 Moray Woodland and Forestry Strategy

Moray Council produced a Woodland and Forestry Strategy in 2018. This 2025 revised strategy refreshes the 2018 strategy and further updates and develops objectives, considering the delivery of initiatives set out in this earlier work in more detail.

A small increase in woodland cover has occurred in Moray since 2018 and progress has also been made on some of the recreational aspirations set out in the 2018 strategy.

This updated strategy has been developed by a partnership comprising Moray Council, Scottish Forestry and Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Where the term 'we' is used to describe the actions set out in the strategy, this relates to this partnership.

A wide-reaching consultation exercise has been undertaken, garnering the views of landowners and managers, representatives from forestry-related industries and member organisations, people involved with education and training, tourism and recreation and community groups managing and using woodlands and forests.

1.4 The Local Development Plan and related council strategies

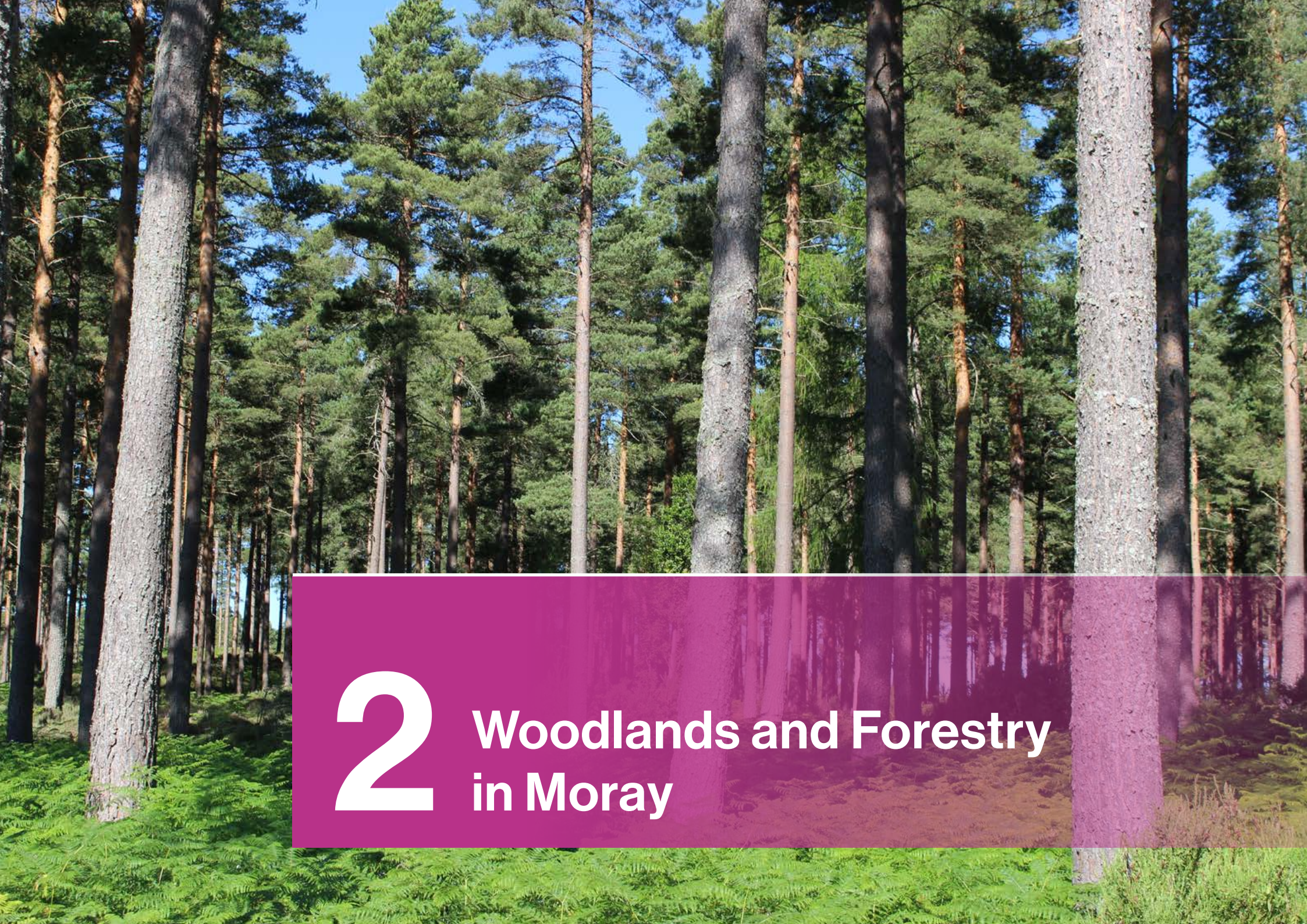
This strategy will form part of the Moray Local Development Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy.

There are a number of related Moray Council strategies which provide useful background to this strategy. These include the *Moray Climate Change Strategy 2020–2030*, the *Natural Capital Investment and Carbon Offsetting Study* (2023) and the *Moray Economic Strategy* (2022) and *Nature Network Opportunity Mapping (draft)*. Other relevant Council documents are referenced within the detailed guidance set out in this strategy.

1.5 Woodland and Forestry Strategies in adjoining authorities

Woodland and Forestry Strategies are in place for the Cairngorms National Park, Aberdeenshire and Highland Councils which border Moray.

These strategies have been considered in relation to potential cross-boundary initiatives on woodland creation and enhancement where relevant.



2 Woodlands and Forestry in Moray

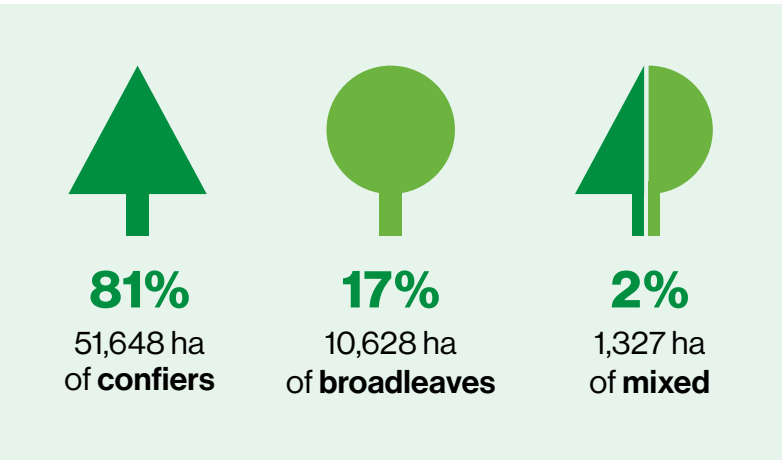
This section of the strategy describes the character of existing woodlands and forests in Moray, the range of industries they support, their contribution to biodiversity and the landscape character and health and well-being benefits associated with them.

2.1 Existing woodlands and forests

Existing woodlands and forests cover over a third of the land area of Moray. They comprise a diverse mix of productive and native woodlands which make a strong contribution to biodiversity and to the distinctiveness of the landscape.

Existing woodlands and forests in Moray and their broad species composition are shown on Map 1 with the species breakdown in area shown below.

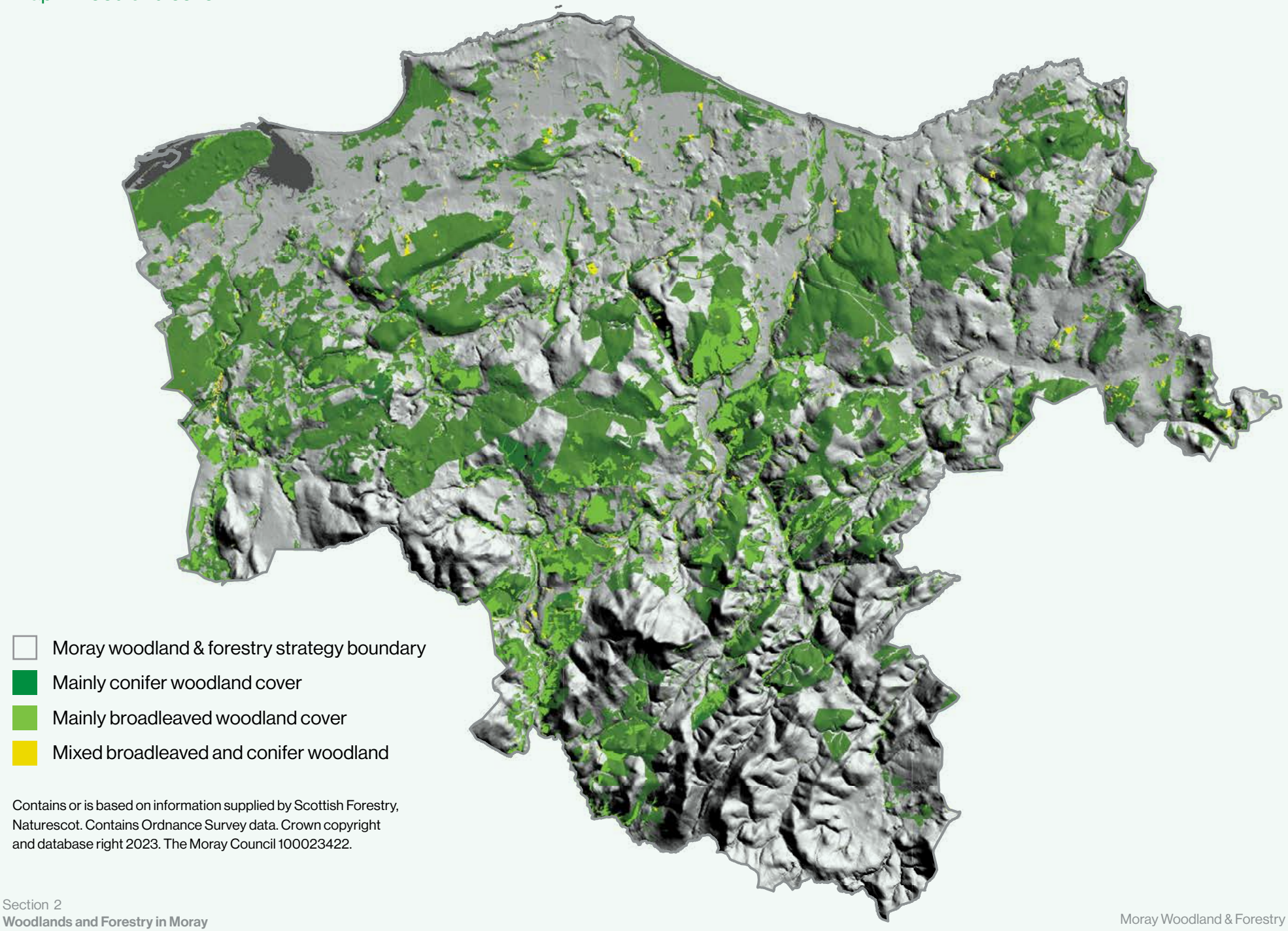
Woodland type



Extensive productive Scots pine dominated forests cover the **western part of Moray**. Many of these woodlands lie within the estates of Moray, Altyre and Logie which are located close to the Findhorn valley. These woodlands are largely managed under continuous cover whereby trees are managed on long retentions with regular thinning and regeneration by natural processes. This management method increases biodiversity value as a varied ground flora and diverse age class of trees is established. Woodlands of national value for their nature conservation interest are present within the Findhorn valley and within the Darnaway and Lethen Forest area.

Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) owned productive forests are present along the **Moray Coast**. These largely comprise Scots and Corsican pine. Culbin Forest is the largest of the coastal forests, extending westwards into Highland Council area.

Map 1 **Woodland cover**



This forest was planted from the 1920s onwards to stabilise sand dunes and prevent damage to adjacent farmland. Culbin Forest is nationally important, in part because of its rich ecosystem of lichens and other plants. Moray's coastal forests are popular for recreation with promoted facilities for walking and cycling and their proximity to attractive sandy beaches, an unusual and winning combination for attracting visitors such as at Roseisle Forest. Continuous cover management is undertaken for many FLS forests in this area and elsewhere across Moray.

Extensive productive woodlands are located on the ridges containing the **Pluscarden and upper Lossie valleys**. These woodlands are principally owned by private estates and FLS and they comprise a greater mix of conifers than found in the productive forests of western Moray including stands of Sitka spruce and Douglas fir.

Productive Sitka spruce and pine forests are located on the **eastern side of the lower Spey valley** and include the FLS owned Whiteash Hill Wood, Ben Aigan and Wood of Ordiequish. Whiteash and Ordiequish Forests accommodate the popular Moray Monster Trails for mountain biking.

Similarly extensive forests are located on the uplands lying to the **north-west of the Spey valley** and these predominantly comprise Sitka spruce and are principally managed for timber production. These forests have few promoted recreational facilities and are relatively hidden from main roads and settlement.

A mix of native broadleaves and coniferous plantations are associated with the **Spey and Deveron valleys**. Many of these woodlands comprise estate policies, such as those associated with Ballindalloch and Gordon Castles on the Spey. Woodlands valued nationally for their nature conservation interest include those within lower Strathavon and the lower Spey valley.

Eastern Moray is generally less extensively wooded than the west of the region although productive forests owned by FLS are located on low hills in the Aultmore, Hill of Towie, Bin of Cullen and Meikle Balloch areas.

Smaller coniferous woodlands are located on **farmland across Moray**. These include coniferous shelterwoods in the upper Deveron valley, Glen Rinnes and Glenlivet. Mixed woodlands are also present on the farmed coastal plain with some of these comprising policies, such as those associated with the Westfield and Pitgaveny estates.

Woodlands lying close to settlements form part of the attractive natural setting of towns such as Forres, Dufftown, Elgin and Fochabers and they provide health and well-being benefits for residents. These woodlands commonly comprise former estate policies and feature a mix of trees, areas of semi-natural woodland or plantation woodlands of Scots pine.

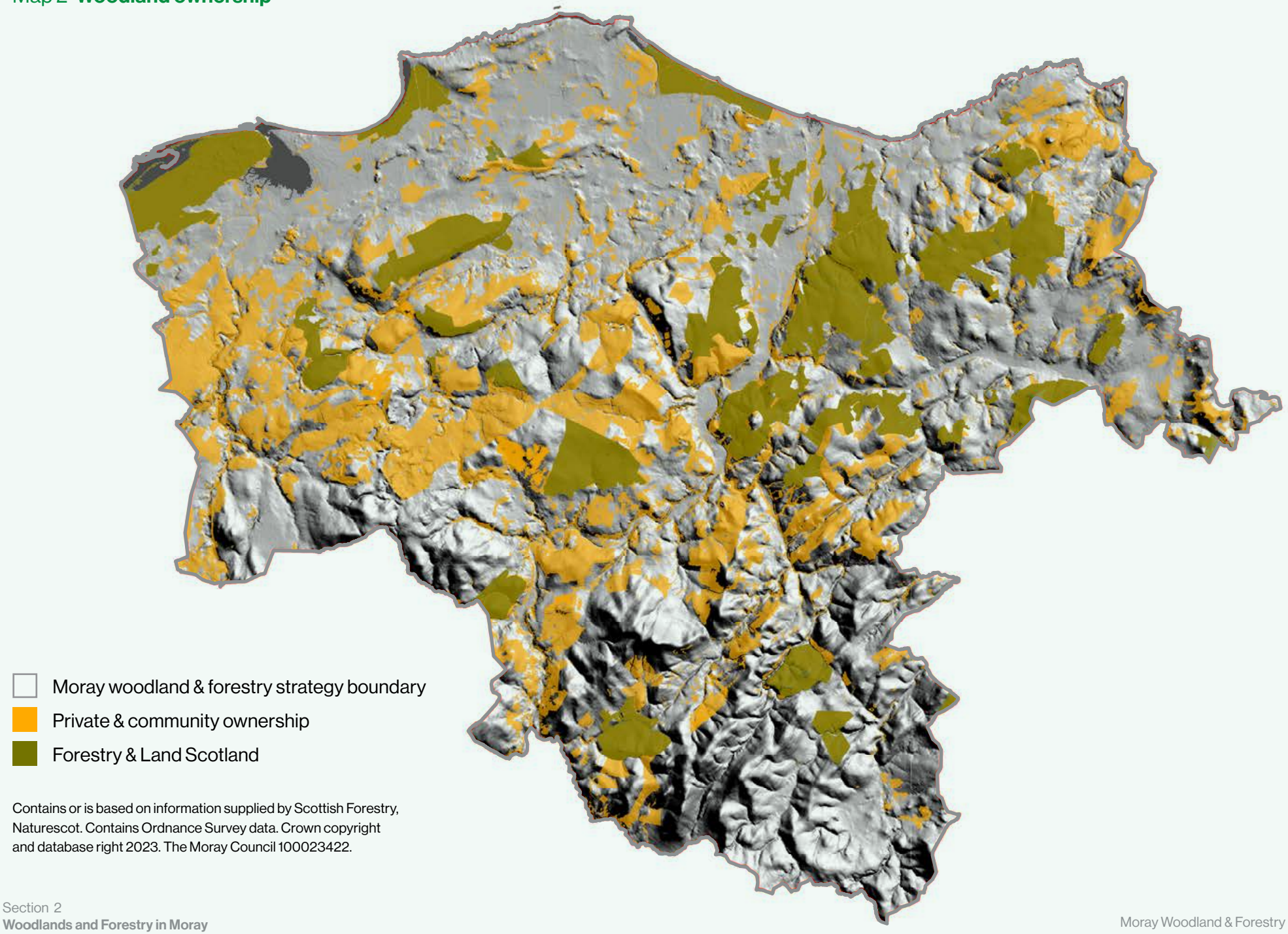
Some woodlands close to settlements are community owned and/or managed. Mature trees are also an important feature within many urban areas and these include trees in public parks and private gardens as well as street trees.

The ownership of Moray's forests is shown on Map 2 with the area breakdown set out in the graphic below. This excludes woodlands owned by Moray Council which comprise approximately 285 hectares and therefore a small percentage of overall cover.

Woodland ownership

Private/community	Forestry and Land Scotland
40,186 ha	23,418 ha

Map 2 **Woodland ownership**



2.2 The economic benefits of forestry in Moray

1000
people are employed in forestry in Moray

Forestry is an important source of comparative advantage for the Moray economy generating more than £39 million per year and providing direct employment for almost 1000 people.

Forestry in Moray is a mature sector of the economy comprised of the following inter-linked areas of activity:

Primary forestry and timber extraction

Processing of timber and manufacturing of woodland based products

Services provided to support forest operations

Tourism-related activity based around visits to Moray's forests and woodlands

The primary source of data on employment for different sectors of the Scottish Economy is the Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). According to the 2023 survey around 350 people were employed in primary forestry and logging related activities in Moray in 2021 and a further 460 people were employed in wood related manufacturing jobs (including around 10 in jobs related to the manufacture of forest and agricultural machinery).

Together these jobs account for around 2% of all employment in the region; however this is likely to be an underestimate of the true importance of the sector to the region's economy because the BRES does not provide a breakdown of important components of the sector such as haulage, tourism and public administration. Estimates for these components of the sector were therefore derived independently from other sources to provide a more complete picture as follows:

Timber Haulage

Research published by the Scottish Government in 2015[1] suggested that around 810 people were employed in timber haulage across Scotland. Since then, deliveries of green timber across the UK[2] have increased by around 8%. It is reasonable to assume that employment in timber haulage has increased proportionately. Moray accounts for approximately 4% of total forest cover in Scotland so assuming haulage related employment is proportionate to this it can be estimated that around 40 people may be directly employed in this sub-sector in the region.

1 Economic contribution of the forestry sector in Scotland (September 2015), CJC Consulting.
2 Forest Research (2022), Forestry Statistics 2022, chapter 2.

Almost

400K

estimated visitors to Moray per year

Tourism

According to research undertaken by NatureScot[3] (then Scottish Natural Heritage), 360,000 people visited Moray forests and woodlands in 2010. Assuming an increase in visitor numbers of 5% every five years [4], it was estimated that this figure could now be around 393,900 visits per year.

Forests and woodlands attract a variety of visitors, including residents who visit daily or frequently, day visitors to Moray and those who are spending an extended period of time in the region. Nature and scenery are a draw for many tourists to Scotland and it is reasonable to assume that the forest environment is an important part of this.

Based on work undertaken by Forest Research [5], 67% of forest visits are made by day visitors and 33% by people staying overnight as part of their trip. The spending characteristics of day and overnight visitors differ, with overnight visitors typically spending more per day due to accommodation costs.

Data published by VisitScotland indicates that day visitors in Scotland spend an average of £31 per day, whilst overnight visitors typically spend £42 per day. Applying these estimates to the projected proportion of day and overnight visitors to Moray forestry estate it was estimated that the spending generated in the sustainable tourism sector by these visitors directly supports around 90 jobs.

Public Administration

According to the Scottish Government approximately 40% of Scotland's forest estate is owned by the state[6]. The management of this estate provides direct employment for foresters and other land management professionals. Scotland also has a well-established system of support for private forestry operations and the administration of this system provides additional employment. None of these jobs will be included in the forestry and logging employment captured by the BRES.

Responsibility for managing Scotland's forest estate rests with FLS while responsibility for forestry policy and support lies with Scottish Forestry. Data on the number of people employed by these organisations was provided as part of the research undertaken to inform this strategy. It suggests that taken together the two organisations employ around 50 people in Moray.

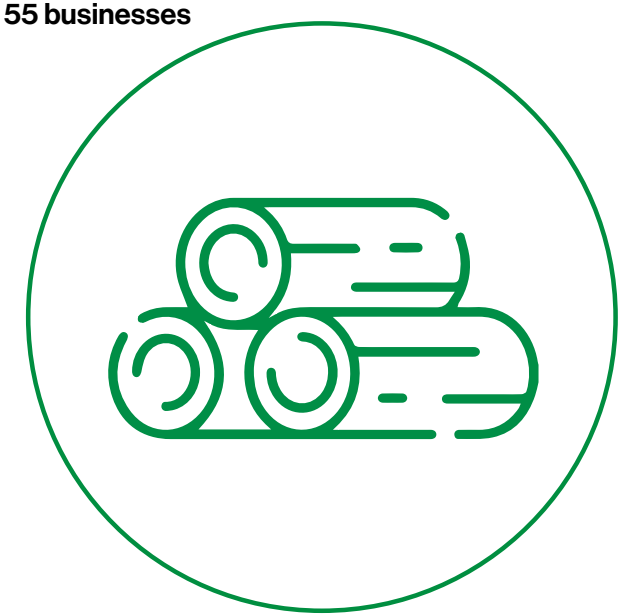
3 Scottish Natural Heritage (2010), Assessing the Economic Impacts of Nature Based Tourism in Scotland.
4 Based on the increase in visits made to all forests in Scotland over a five year period from research published by Forest Research in 2018.
5 https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/statistics/forestry-statistics/forestry-statistics-2018/recreation-3/visits-to-woodland-on-site-surveys/scotland-all-forests-surveys/
6 https://www.gov.scot/publications/woodland-ownership-key-data/

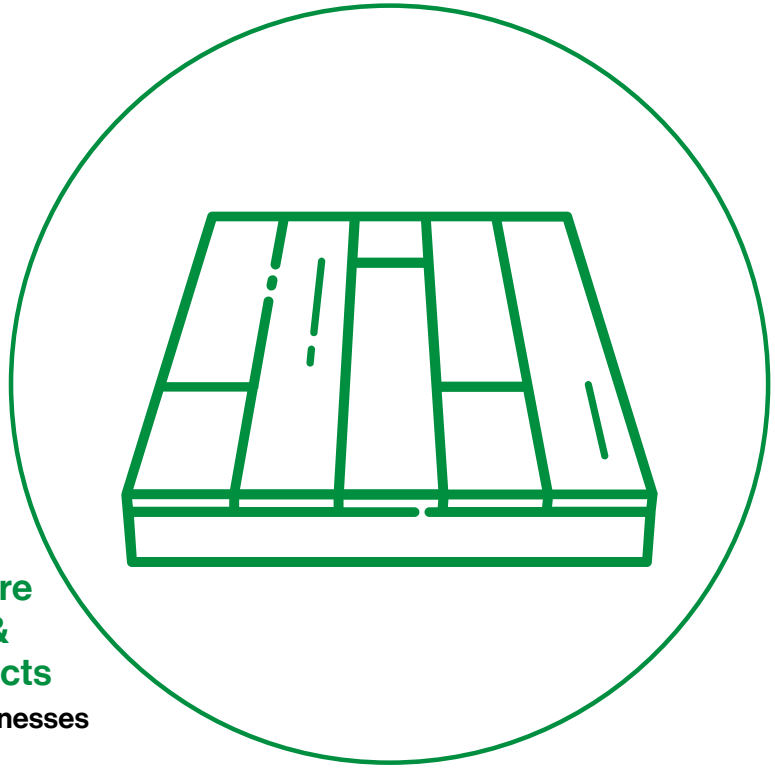
2.2.2 Total forestry related employment in Moray

Taken together the total employment of the sub-sectors considered in this section amounts to nearly 1,000 people across Moray, or around 2.5% of the total labour force. In relative terms, Moray's forestry sector employs around a third of the number employed in the food and drink manufacturing sector (often considered one of Moray's most important sectors).

However, while forestry may not be as large as the food and drink manufacturing sector, it is particularly concentrated in Moray. The region accounts for around 6% of all forestry and logging related employment across Scotland, making the sector five times more concentrated than the Scottish average [7]. Concentrations of economic activity are an important indicator of comparative advantage so this suggests forestry is an important strength for the Moray region. A breakdown of this employment is below.

Forestry & logging
350 jobs / 55 businesses





Manufacture of wood & wood products
450 jobs / 35 businesses

Tourism***
90 jobs

Public administration**
50 jobs

Timber haulage*
40 jobs

Manufacture of forestry & agricultural machinery
10 jobs / 5 businesses

Source: ONS (2023), Business Register and Employment Survey. ONS (2023), UK Business Counts. *Based on estimate of timber haulage employment in Scotland produced for the Scottish Government. **Estimate based on data provided by Forestry and Land Scotland. *** Based on estimated number of visitors and associated spend in the region.

7 Skills Development Scotland (March 2022), Regional Skills Assessment, Moray Growth Deal.

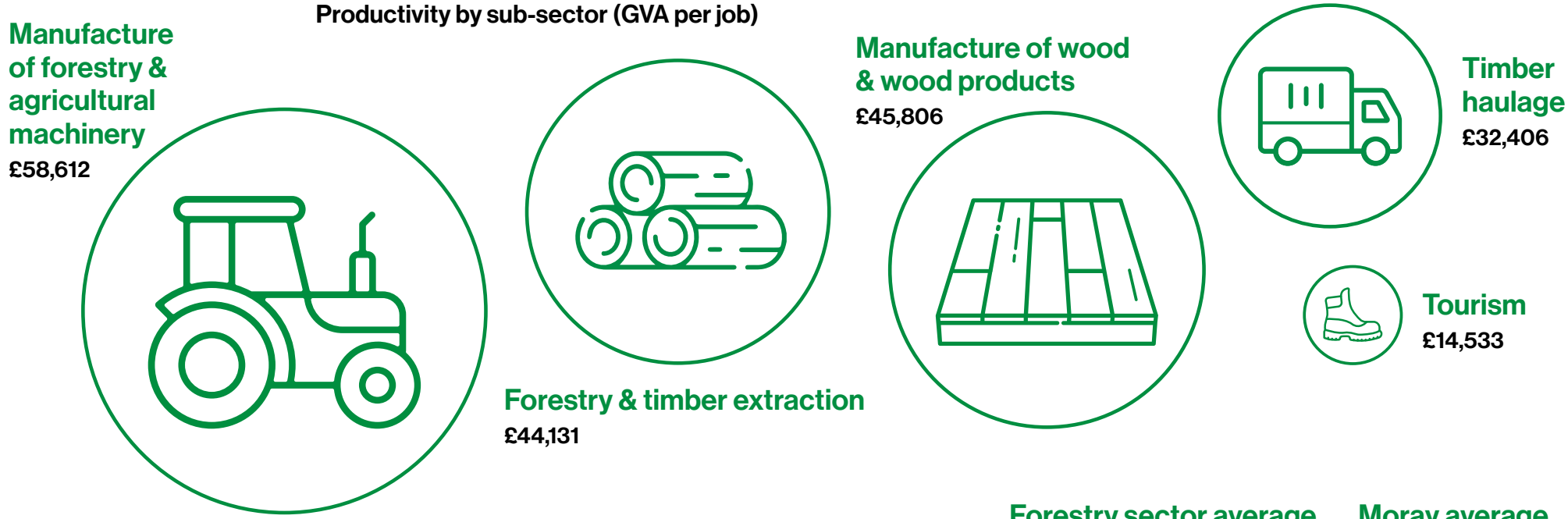
2.2.3 Productivity and the value of forestry to Moray's economy

The forestry sector contributed around
£39 million
to the economy in 2022

In considering the economic contribution of any sector it is important to look at productivity levels because this is the main determinant of economic growth rates over the long-term. Productivity levels, measured as Gross Value Added (GVA), for each of the sub-sectors within the forestry sector are presented in table below. Productivity across the sector is similar to the Moray average (which is overall below the Scottish average). However, there are significant variations between sub-sectors with productivity levels in forestry and timber extraction and wood-based manufacturing, for example, 6% and 10% higher than the regional average.

The total value the forestry sector adds to Moray's economy can be estimated by multiplying the average GVA/worker in each of the sub-sectors listed above by the number of people working in each sub-sector. Using this approach, it was estimated that the sector contributed around £39 million to Moray's economy in 2022. This represents around 2% of the total value added by Moray's economy. This estimate excludes the value added by public sector administration and the indirect effects associated with the forestry related supply chain so should be considered conservative.

Productivity by sub-sector (GVA per job)



Source: Scottish Annual Business Statistics and ONS sub-regional productivity estimates for 2023.

Forestry sector average
£41,774

Moray average
£41,491

2.2.3 Major employers in the industry

90
Moray forestry and timber processing businesses

Moray is home to 90 forestry and timber processing businesses of which 80 are micro-sized businesses with up to 9 staff, 10 are small businesses with up to 49 staff and 5 are medium-sized businesses with up to 250 staff.

Some important forestry employers in the region include:

- **James Jones and Sons Ltd** – a national company operating at Mosstodloch and Forres, providing a range of products including fencing, pallets and construction timber for local and national markets. The company currently employs around 170 people between the two sites in Moray.
- **Logie Timber Ltd** – a local timber business established in 2017 and currently with 10 employees. They embarked on a £1.2m expansion in 2021 with the intention of creating jobs and reducing the company's carbon footprint.
- **Newton Nursery** – the nursery produces around seven million trees each year, equivalent to around 8% of FLS's 25 million annual requirement. It employs 12 full-time staff and has 13 agency staff who are employed at busy times of the year.
- **Christie-Elite and Christies (Fochabers) Ltd** – these are two of the UK's six largest tree nurseries, together producing around half of all trees grown in the UK each year. These nurseries collectively employ around 140 people in Moray.
- **Robertson Timber Engineering** – based in Elgin, this company is involved with the design, manufacture and construction of off-site engineered timber frame structures for buildings.
- **Forres Tree Services Ltd** – a forestry and arboriculture services company operating across Moray, Highlands and Aberdeenshire since 2010. As of 2021, the company employs six people.
- **Moray Estates** – the estate owns and manages around 4,050 hectares of commercial and amenity forest and mills with timber processed by local businesses to create boards and fencing materials.
- **Epic Tree Services** – based in Keith, this business employs around eight people engaged in arboricultural and forestry services.

The region plays an important role in underpinning the wider UK forestry and associated timber construction sectors. It is home to a well-established arboriculture sector that incorporates some of the UK's largest tree nurseries as well as some thriving and innovative timber engineering operations which make an important contribution to the construction sector.

CASE STUDY

Nursery growing in Moray

Moray's drier weather, sunshine and fertile soils have attracted the establishment of many tree nurseries including Christies (Fochabers) Ltd and Newton nurseries.

Christies (Fochabers) Ltd nursery was established in the 1820s, originally as a market garden with a connection to the Gordon Estate but specialised in growing trees from around 1835. They are the oldest tree nursery in Moray and own and lease 400 acres of land for outdoor growing near Buckie. The company buys seed from Forest Start in Shropshire and produce around 22 million barerooted trees (around 20% broadleaves and 80% conifers) per annum. They employ 55 full time and 20 or so part time/seasonal workers at the nursery. They have recently developed and invested in a fully automated tree grading system which has created safer and more comfortable working conditions for staff and increased efficiency given the greater demand for nursery stock. The company is a major supplier of trees to Scottish Woodlands and other forestry companies as well as to FLS.

Newton nursery was established in 1931 by the Forestry Commission and continues to be run by FLS. They largely grow conifers with seed harvested from stock trees on the nursery and currently field grown. They presently provide 7 million of the 24 million trees required annually by FLS for woodland expansion and restocking post harvesting. In 2022 they secured £19 million investment from the Scottish Government to redevelop and expand the current site at Newton, east of Elgin, and to improve efficiency and productivity. This will involve the leasing of additional land and construction of a one-hectare glasshouse for under-cover production, new offices and other facilities due to be completed by early 2025. It is intended to gradually increase production to 16 million trees annually.

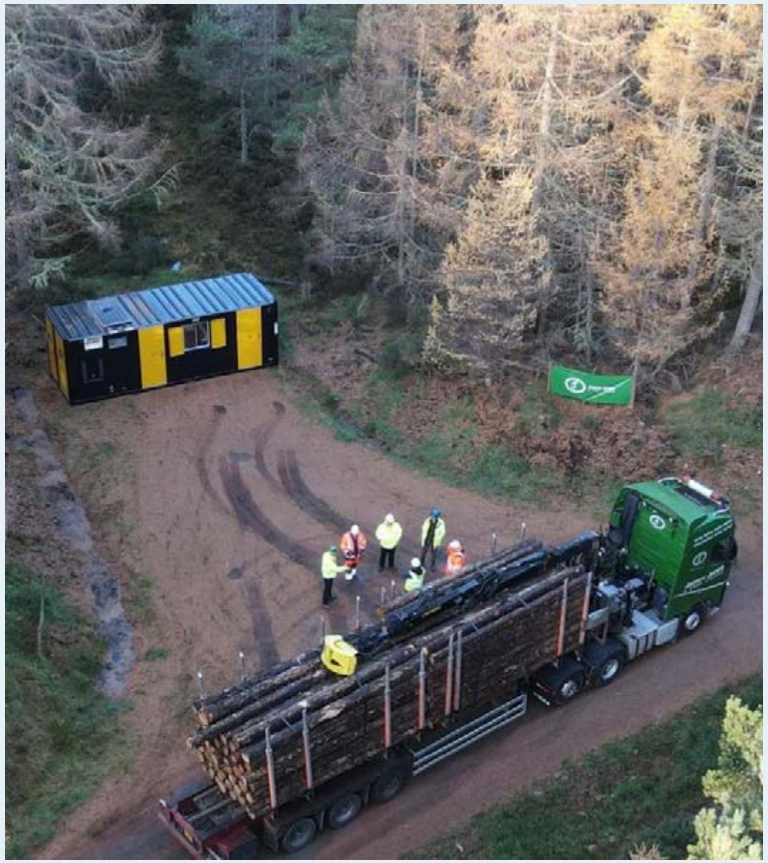
CASE STUDY

James Jones & Sons Ltd

James Jones & Sons Ltd is a Scottish based family run business established approximately 180 years ago. The company has its origins in sawmilling with its services expanding to include timber harvesting and haulage as well as manufacturing.

The company has sought to innovate and lead in areas such as UK Woodland Assurance Standard planting and forest management, timber harvesting and processing methodologies, modern timber haulage techniques, kiln-drying and biomass heating.

In Moray, the company purchased Mosstodloch Mill in 1989 and has recently extended the facility. The site currently employs 73 full time staff and produces a range of products with the agricultural fencing sector being significant. There are a number of added value operations on site, including a direct retail facility for local wood users. The Timber Systems division in Forres was established in 1998 to manufacture JJI–Joists. This was the first UK based manufacturing facility producing engineered timber products for the UK's housing market and JJI-Joists market share of the new-build flooring market is estimated at around 45%. In 2022 they secured funding from HIE to help build a new timber manufacturing and processing facility next to the existing one at Forres which is projected to create 19 new jobs. On-going research and development by the company seeks to open new markets for home-grown timber products.



CASE STUDY

Logie sawmill

Logie Timber is located at Dunphail near Forres on the Logie Estate and specialises in milling local hardwoods and softwoods. There is a strong local customer base for a diverse range of products including cladding, decking, various structural timbers and bespoke joinery hardwoods.

Value is added through kiln drying, planing and sanding. The sawmill employs ten skilled people with the emphasis on quality and milling to customer requirements rather than high output. For many joinery timber products the story and origin of the tree are important in adding value.

Timber is sourced as locally as possible with larch being a significant element used in the construction sector. An increase in the use of Scots pine is likely as the availability of larch is anticipated to decline due to the impact of *Phytophthora ramorum*.

A new sawline, which is housed in the shed built using the sawmill's output, has recently been installed with the daily output of sawn timber expected to rise to 15 cubic metres. Future market diversification includes looking to create Scottish home-grown solid wood flooring and possibly teaming up with a joinery company to develop modular timber framed sheds to rival steel buildings.

2.3 Health and well-being related to woodlands and forests

The majority of Moray's woodlands and forests accommodate tracks and paths for cycling and walking. Some of the most popular woodlands for recreation include:

- The **Moray Monster Trails** for mountain bikes based in Whiteash and Ordiequish Woods. These trails feature a range of different grades of trail bike routes suitable for beginners through to experts.
- **Culbin Forest** and **Roseisle Forests**, the most popular of Moray's coastal forests, which both feature an extensive network of tracks and paths and other visitor facilities.
- **Quarrel Wood** which is local to Elgin and comprises stands of ancient oak woodland as well as conifer species, a network of paths and a sculpture trail.
- **Millbuies Country Park** which features mature stands of mixed policy woodland focused on a former fishery lake.
- **Altyre Estate woodlands** a hidden gem comprising mature mixed policy woodlands and lake but increasingly well-used by residents within the expanding settlement of Forres.
- **Torrieston Wood** which offers a network of steep paths through mature forest with tall Douglas fir and views over the Pluscarden valley to the abbey.
- **Sanquhar Woods** close to Forres which is community owned and managed and includes a network of paths and cycle courses.
- **Drummuir Woodlands** which provides a valuable recreational and educational resource including an all-abilities trail which allows a variety of people to enjoy the trees. One of the oldest community managed woodlands in Moray lies between the station and village.
- **Findhorn valley woodlands** with low-key extensive paths through scenic mixed woodlands on the Logie and Darnaway Estates.

Long-distance trails used by walkers and cyclists are an important feature of Moray's recreational resource and include the Dava Way, Moray Coast Trail and the Speyside Way. Long sections of these routes are aligned within and close to woodland. The Moray Way combines the major parts of these routes and is a promoted 100-mile long circular recreational route. Gravel biking commonly uses tracks constructed for forest management and the extensive productive forests in Moray offer a tremendous resource for cyclists. ACE Adventures offer forest-based activities and accommodation near the Findhorn valley.

Map 3 shows existing recreational facilities and long-distance trails located within and close to woodlands in Moray.

Map 3 **Principal woodland based recreational facilities**

There are a number of community owned/managed woodlands in Moray. These include groups managing woodlands around Findhorn, Drummuir, Forres and Enzie Crossroads east of Fochabers. There are also charities including Wild Things who provide opportunities for environmental education and engagement with woodlands and forests and Outfit Moray, a charity and social enterprise organisation delivering outdoor learning and adventure activities for young people. Earthtime Forest School is accredited by the Forest School Association and has nursery sites on the Duffus Estate and at Cooper Park in Elgin while Stramash Outdoor Nurseries have a site close to Quarrel Wood.

Friends and volunteer groups across Moray organise events such as tree planting sessions, open days and nature walks which enable people to interact with woodlands.

Health and well-being benefits are not just associated with woodlands and forests but also with individual and small groups of trees within Moray's urban areas where they enrich the character of settlements, provide habitat for wildlife and improve the environment for residents. The Scottish Forestry Strategy recognises the important contribution that trees outside of forests and woodlands make to enhancing Scotland's rural and urban landscapes, their role in addressing air pollution, and their biodiversity and cultural value.

CASE STUDY

ACE Adventures

ACE Adventures are based on the Logie Estate in Moray where they lease a house and steading with shared use woodland as their base.

They employ several full and part time staff although the work is very seasonal. They offer some of the best white water rafting in the UK on the River Findhorn as well as other woodland-based activities including canyoning, a tree top high ropes trail, woodland disc golf course and paintballing. They also have a small woodland campsite with space for ten pitches and their own bell tents and shepherd's hut accommodation.

There was an increase in people booking activities with them during the Covid travel restrictions, but this tailed off once foreign travel opened up again. Recently, however, there have been more international visitors booking activities with the company with people from the US, Netherlands and Belgium being particularly evident. School and adult groups, including scout and well-being support groups for ex-military personnel, use their woodland camping area and participate in adventure activities.

In future they intend to develop programmes for the first responder community, providing year-round accommodation and communication spaces for respite, and also for resilience and leadership training, in a natural setting.

CASE STUDY

Wild Things

Wild Things are a charity set up with the aim of enabling links to the natural world through outdoor education and experiences, improving well-being and resilience.

They provide a range of programmes for different ages of people in natural settings working with vulnerable adults, primary and secondary schools, care home residents and the more active elderly. They also offer accredited training which is equivalent to Forest School and leadership training courses, an introduction to bushcraft courses and the John Muir Award.

Woodlands close to schools are commonly used; some of these are privately owned or comprise community woodlands.

CASE STUDY

Forres Community Woodlands Trust

Forres Community Woodlands Trust is the oldest community group involved with woodland and land management around Forres. They own Sanquhar, Muiry and Newforres woodlands on the fringes of the town. Their woodland landholding extends to 66 hectares including nearly 3 hectares of wildflower meadow.

These woodlands were purchased through the Scottish Land Fund with the group raising match funding. They have 85 members and a board which includes a professional forester. Sanquhar Woodland is the largest woodland in the ownership of the Trust and is particularly well used with an attractive mix of trees and some open ground which is managed as species-rich grassland. This woodland accommodates an extensive network of paths and a mountain bike trail.

The Trust get contractors in to do some of the woodland management work, but volunteers remove invasive species such as rhododendron and laurel and plant trees. They receive no grant funding from Scottish Forestry but are supported by donations and receive an income from felled timber.

Wild Things use Sanquhar Wood for some of their activities and events for schools, such as tree planting, are organised by the Trust.

2.5 The environmental benefits of Moray's woodlands and forests

Moray's woodlands and forests provide a wealth of benefits for the environment. They host numerous protected animal species important to the area including red squirrel, black grouse, pine marten, bats, wildcat, goshawk and the Scottish wood ant. Notable plant species include the twinflower and three-nerved sandwort.

Invasive non-native species such as rhododendron, Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed are also present in some of Moray's woodlands and riparian corridors. These can outcompete more diverse native flora and result in reduced biodiversity.

Whilst planted productive forests dominate the woodland cover within Moray, these are unusual in comprising extensive areas of Scots pine with many of these plantations managed under continuous cover systems which increase age diversity of the trees and allow ground flora to develop. Semi-natural woodland is scattered throughout the region. It is found in small patches, most often associated with riparian corridors and in fragmented stands within the wider agricultural landscape and upland areas. Priority woodland habitats in the area include Upland Birch, Upland Oak, Upland Mixed Ash, Lowland Mixed Deciduous and Wet Woodlands. Increasing the cover of semi-natural woodlands is challenged by high levels of deer and livestock browsing, reducing the success of natural regeneration.

Many of the woodlands, planted or otherwise, are present within the Ancient Woodland Inventory. These are areas which have been under continuous forestry cover since 1750. As such, even those of plantation origin have developed semi-natural characteristics and have a rich and diverse soil biota and other associated flora and fauna.

Some of Moray's woodlands are considered to be of national and international importance for their biodiversity and are designated features of the following protected areas:

- Darnaway and Lethan Forest SPA
- Bochel Woodland SSSI
- Culbin Sands, Forest and Findhorn Bay SSSI
- Kellas Oakwood SSSI
- Lower Findhorn SSSI/SAC
- Lower Strath Avon Woodland SSSI
- Mill Wood SSSI
- Quarry Wood SSSI

As well as biodiversity value, the woodlands and forestry within Moray provide a number of ecosystem services including carbon storage, natural flood defence and improved air quality in towns and cities.

CASE STUDY

Agroforestry/ Farmed Based Biodiversity Enhancement

Glenshaugh is an upland research farm, run by the James Hutton Institute, in the Grampian foothills. They have a long-term research project investigating the feasibility of silvopastural agroforestry (trees planted at wide spaces with grazed pasture beneath).

The main objectives of the project were related to farm diversification and production; however this type of farming system is also highly beneficial for the environment. Both insects and birds have been found to have greater species diversity and abundance in agroforestry systems compared to standard agricultural systems. This type of habitat is also beneficial to species such as fungi, bats, black grouse and red squirrel. One of the main benefits of wood pasture is that it provides a porous landscape though which both open ground and woodland species can move and provides linkages to both these habitat types.

As well as the biodiversity benefits the project has found benefits to livestock welfare in terms of shelter provision and higher quality pasture. There was no overall loss in livestock (sheep) production and an alternative income source created through timber.

As a demonstration farm there is a self-guided trail which can be visited with information available on the project and management requirements of this type of system.

CASE STUDY

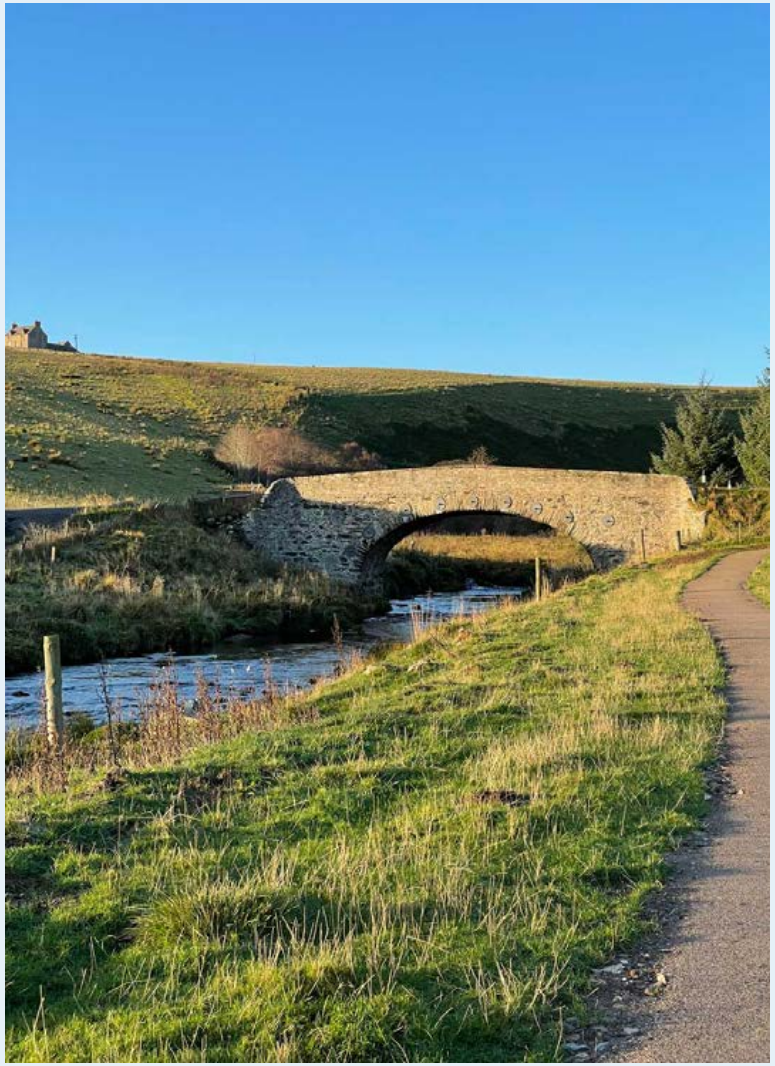
Cabrach Development Trust – Discovery Trail

The Cabrach Development Trust aims to regenerate the Cabrach area, which is situated on the edge of the Cairngorm National Park in Moray, through providing social and economic development opportunities. The area is rich in both natural and cultural heritage, which the Trust seeks to promote.

The Discovery Trail Project involved the planting of 3000 native broadleaved trees in association with the creation of a 2km all abilities walking trail along the River Deveron and Blackwater. The project also incorporated the creation of a wildflower meadow, two nature ponds with dipping platforms, nature hide and interpretation boards. The project was part funded by Woodland Trust, Trees for Life UK and Queen's Green Canopy.

As well as providing a resource for the local community the riparian tree planting will help to stabilise the banks of the water course, reducing erosion and sedimentation downstream and provide shade and reduced water temperatures for fish, increasing resilience to climate change. The planting also helps to connect pockets of ancient and semi-natural riparian woodland which have prevailed along the Deveron.

The Dorenell Ranger Service have hosted guided nature walks on the trails, finding a variety of species including tortoise beetle larvae, hare, dipper and osprey.



3 Issues needing to be addressed by the strategy

Through our consultation on the strategy, we have identified the following issues and challenges which need to be addressed:

3.1 Climate change

869,000
tonnes of carbon per annum are accumlated by Moray woodlands

Climate change and trees

Woodlands and forests can help mitigate the effects of climate change by assisting carbon sequestration. Woodlands in Moray accumulate approximately 869,000 tonnes of carbon per annum with around 95% of this attributed to conifers and 5% to broadleaved trees. Woodlands and forests can also help alleviate the effects of more extreme weather events such as flooding and help to provide shade benefitting a wide variety of habitats and species, including temperature moderation for aquatic species. However, climate change is a factor in the increased incidence of tree diseases and changing weather, including extreme weather events, may increase drought, soil erosion and wildfire affecting Moray's woodlands and forests.

Increasing woodland connectivity provides a number of benefits for biodiversity and can increase resilience by allowing species to move in response to environmental change. Conversely enhanced linkages can allow diseases and invasive species to spread, especially where species diversity is limited, and pest and disease effects can result in at least temporary loss or fragmentation of woodland cover.

Fire management is likely to become a more important consideration particularly in the drier east of Scotland. Historic over-grazing of woodland, erosion of peatland and a lack of diverse vegetative succession can increase the risk of wildfire.

Decarbonising the forestry industry

All forestry operations have the potential to emit carbon due to the energy intensive nature of machinery necessary for felling, haulage and processing. Currently the power required to operate harvesting machinery safely in challenging conditions means that options for replacement with electric driven units will require advances in technology. Transport is a significant emitter of carbon at all stages of the forestry cycle and here progress is likely to be more rapid. The use of electric vehicles by forest managers and contractors is increasing and electric vehicles for timber haulage, and the adaption of existing vehicles to hydrogen, are being trialled in Moray. The carbon footprint of forestry is reduced in Moray because of the short transport distances to sawmills and end users although the use of imported timber by some processing industries in Moray will increase carbon emissions.

3.2 Threats to existing woodlands and forests

Semi-natural woodlands

Although existing semi-natural woodlands are important for biodiversity, their potential value in this regard is often not optimised. Many existing semi-natural woodlands are poorly managed and comprise even-aged trees with little or no regeneration due to heavy grazing by deer and/or livestock. If no intervention is taken, this will lead to the loss of these woodlands in future.

Potential effects of development on woodlands

Some forms of development can lead to the loss of woodland. The Scottish Government policy on control of woodland removal lists types of woodland where the intrinsic environmental value indicates a presumption against removal. These woodlands include semi-natural woodlands, areas supporting priority habitats and species, Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and longstanding plantations with significant biodiversity interest. Guidance on this policy states that where removal of these woodland types is unavoidable, compensatory planting must exceed the area lost to compensate for the loss of environmental value.

Linear developments such as transmission lines and new roads may result in severance of existing woodlands, potentially affecting their connectivity and biodiversity value. National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) requires stronger enhancement and biodiversity improvement in relation to development proposals. Many large-scale developments confine mitigation and enhancement measures to the application site only without considering wider landscape and biodiversity enhancement.

Potential loss of productive forestry

The progressive effects of restructuring to meet the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard may lead to an erosion of the productive forest area. Rewilding and non-intervention forestry encouraged by the Carbon Code (which can compete for land with conventional productive woodland creation schemes) can also potentially reduce the area of productive forestry.

World-wide consumption of timber is predicted to increase in future and large-scale sawmills competing on an international footing require large volumes of uniform high-quality timber to operate competitively. Any significant erosion of the areas of productive Sitka spruce and Scots pine in Moray could threaten the long-term viability of these businesses as well as increase timber imports with associated increases in carbon through transportation.

3.3 Barriers to the creation of new woodlands

In terms of the creation of new woodlands, Scotland has led the way within the UK (and over the past years woodland creation has been at its highest level for a generation). However, government set targets for new woodland creation, and recent reductions in overall funding for planting in Scotland, are challenging.

Woodland creation targets are set out in the Scottish Government's Climate Change Plan. Scotland created just 8190 ha of new woodland in 2022/23 from a target of 15,000 ha. Scottish Forestry approved 11,000 ha of new woodland in 2022 but not all of this has been planted. The new woodland planting targets will increase to 16,500 ha in 23/24 and to 18,000 ha in 24/25. Current figures indicate that 74% of the Scottish native woodland target was met with 2,945 ha being planted in 2022/23.

Traditionally, planting grants covered most establishment costs. Inflation, the shortage of contractors and an increased administration burden for applications have all increased costs significantly while grants, until recently, have largely remained static. Potential private sector carbon funding is unlikely to fill any funding shortfall for productive conifer woodland. Carbon sales are a form of speculation which entails risks and the sale of carbon creates a burden on the land of a very long duration. A 100-year obligation not to thin or manage an area of woodland may impede future management options for landowners. The publicly funded grant system is therefore likely to remain the main policy tool in incentivising landowners to establish new woodlands.

Often, farmers do not know about the availability of grants and/or do not have the time to deal with applications, planting and management. There is also a wider cultural issue associated with the division between farmers and traditional woodland owners in the UK although a younger generation of farmers appears to have a greater appreciation of the importance of woodlands.

Availability of land is also an issue, particularly in Moray where the extent of woodland already present, and the presence of good quality agricultural land, limits the availability of land for new woodland creation. There is also a ready market for barley from the distilleries which means it is often grown on more marginal ground (where new woodland is commonly located in other parts of Scotland) further reducing scope for woodland expansion in Moray.

While the Forestry Grant Scheme has a minimum woodland size of 2 hectares and 15 metre width, the Small or Farm Woodland and Native Broadleaved Grants provide funding for small woodlands under 0.25 ha/15 m width. However, none of these grants fund the planting of hedgerows and field trees (which take up less space on valuable farmland but which can increase biodiversity if planned well) although other sources of potential funding are available.

These include the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme administered by NatureScot/Scottish Government, the Nature Restoration Fund administered by NatureScot and grants awarded by the Woodland Trust. Some consultees commented that the Nature Restoration Fund is geared towards larger scale landholdings and the process tends to favour Non-Government Organisations who have the time and personnel able to put together often complex applications.

3.4 Deer management

Deer are an integral and valued element of woodland ecosystems, however within the UK the lack of significant predators means that populations need to be controlled to prevent damage to woodland and other habitats and to increase the success of natural regeneration of trees.

The high financial and carbon costs of deer fencing, together with its adverse impacts on amenity, landscape and the movement of wildlife, has given greater focus to deer culling although there will always be situations where deer fencing is essential to ensure woodland establishment.

Demand for venison and the supply chain have a direct bearing on how many deer will be culled. Currently there are a number of deficiencies in this interdependent chain including low UK demand and the difficulty part time stalkers have in accessing larder and processing facilities.

3.5 Skills shortages in forestry

Scottish forestry workforce needs to increase by around

72%

Skills shortages are a major concern for the forestry sector across the UK. Research commissioned by Lantra on behalf of the Scottish Forest and Timber Technologies Skills Group suggests the Scottish forestry workforce needs to increase by around 72% by 2027 to meet this gap.

The Institute of Chartered Foresters also point to what they describe as a "crisis" in further and higher education in training provision for the sector, noting that there are very few providers offering courses for the sector. Consultees felt that there is a lack of awareness about work opportunities in the sector and the attractiveness of forestry as a career.

While the Scottish School of Forestry, is close to Moray and offers PDA, SCQF qualifications (which include Modern Apprenticeship courses), HNC and BSc (Hons) courses in forestry, there has been a lack of applicants for some of these courses. There are insufficient school leavers (and older people) being attracted into forestry and forest management and apprenticeship schemes are operated only by a few private estates and FLS. A range of forestry related machinery operation courses are offered across Scotland, but there are currently no formal training courses in sawmilling with equipment suppliers generally supplying only basic training. Opportunities for practical training in deer management, which is essential to the successful establishment of woodlands, are also limited.

The Commission for the Land-Based Learning Review reported to the Scottish Government in 2023. Key recommendations accepted by ministers in 2024 include adapting the education and skills system to be more responsive to support economic needs and ambition, promoting and improving awareness of land-based sectors, changes to the school curriculum in terms of increasing nature-based and outdoor learning and supporting an expansion in school/college partnerships and learning pathways. The forestry sector are also currently working with higher education providers of forestry courses in Scotland to explore a model of a shared placement year, a block release structure and a graduate apprenticeship course.

3.6 Productivity in the forestry sector

Overall productivity levels in Moray are consistently below the Scottish average. Addressing this would help enhance standards of living across the region and increase the overall contribution Moray makes to the Scottish economy.

Some sub-sectors of the forestry sector have a higher productivity when compared with the Moray average. Forestry and timber extraction and wood-based manufacturing is 6% and 10% higher than the regional average.

These components of the sector are likely to be particularly important in driving the growth of the sector over the long-term and make a disproportionate contribution to the prosperity of Moray's economy.

3.7 Timber production, manufacturing and sustainability

2nd

UK is the second largest importer of timber

The UK is the second largest importer of timber in the world. Global demand for timber is set to at least double by 2050 according to the World Bank. The use of home-grown timber has advantages in terms of sustainability and in keeping economic benefits local.

The timber industry in the UK has been historically dominated by imports which delivered high volumes of a standard quality material at relatively low cost. The existence of a vibrant UK sawmilling sector is dependent on consistent supplies of good quality affordable round wood, and this is delivered by Sitka spruce and Scots pine particularly for the larger sawmills. Moray has a competitive advantage in that both these commercial species grow well; however, many manufacturing businesses in Moray use imported timber. Smaller scale niche sawmills can use other timber species and can address the demand for more specialist bespoke products.

Meeting high quality standards is essential for wood using businesses of any size to compete effectively with imported timber. Architects/builders will only use timber products that are reliable in quality and availability terms but meeting stringent quality assurance and operational requirements is expensive and in small businesses this fixed cost has to be spread over a lower output.

3.8 Barriers to increasing the health and well-being benefits of woodlands, forests and trees

Consultees felt that there are likely to be sectors of the community who do not regularly access Moray's woodlands and forests. This may be due to a number of factors including a lack of knowledge of what is there to enjoy, limitations of transport and/or lack of connection to the natural world.

The lack of all-abilities paths within many of the woodlands in Moray inhibits access for some people with mobility issues and the poor condition of paths and other facilities, including car parking, in some areas was also considered to be a barrier to access. Data on the use of woodlands and forests is not available and this would provide a more complete picture on the access constraints present for some people.

In terms of community use of woodlands, some consultees reported that there was a lack of interest in community involvement in the management of woodland and that it takes considerable work to sustain the interest of volunteers. Insurance costs for recreational facilities provided by woodland owners are high. Purchase of woodland is increasingly expensive, and grants from the Scottish Land Fund not always assured, and this is likely to inhibit future community ownership of woodlands.

People and organisations wanting to use public forests for events and activities report the complicated permissions commonly required by FLS.

In urban areas, new trees are often not being planted as future replacements for existing mature and over-mature street and park trees. The protection of trees on development sites is a key issue and new tree planting associated with recent housing developments has tended to comprise shorter-lived, small species such as cherry and rowan rather than the more statuesque oak, beech and horse chestnut favoured by past generations. These larger trees are more valuable for biodiversity but also in terms of their greater visual prominence and ability to provide an attractive setting to buildings and shade/shelter for people.

3.9 Lack of investment in recreation and tourism facilities

Many private forest owners in Moray provide car parking and footpaths (free of charge) but they generally do not receive funding for their installation or for the continued maintenance of these facilities and this results in little incentive to invest further in facilities.

Support infrastructure for visitors to Moray is limited; for example there are few low-cost accommodation options close to the long-distance trails which are a key tourist asset.

Moray's woodlands and forests are not specifically promoted in tourism strategies and there appears to be limited knowledge of the great recreational resource they provide. This applies to both sectors of the local population and visitors from further afield. The lack of data on visitor numbers prevents a strategic vision of recreational opportunities and connectivity.

4 Vision & objectives

Vision

Increase the **value and benefit** of Moray's woodlands; to support **economic growth**, improve **biodiversity** and our **climate response** and provide opportunities to boost **health and wellbeing**.

Objectives

Increase new multi-benefit woodlands in Moray

- Define opportunities for new multi-benefit woodlands.
- Provide supportive policy for expanding Moray's forest cover.

Optimise the economic potential of Moray's woodlands

- Protect and enhance Moray's productive woodlands.
- Increase forestry-related skills and education and boost employment in the industry.
- Support growth and expansion of existing local timber processing and manufacturing businesses.
- Increase the number of tourist visitors to Moray woodlands and forests.

Improve the health and vitality of Moray's woodland ecosystems

- Protect important woodland habitats and species.
- Help the recovery of nature by connecting and increasing biodiverse woodlands.
- Improve the resilience of woodlands to climate change.

Foster greater connection between Moray's communities and woodlands

- Promote the use of woodlands to improve health and well-being.
- Encourage urban planting and the creation of woodlands close to settlements.
- Expand Moray's network of woodland based leisure and recreation infrastructure.
- Promote the 'start to finish' forestry-related economy of Moray.

These objectives are addressed in more detail in Sections 5-8 of the strategy with a summary of key actions set out in Section 9 Delivering the Strategy.

5 Increasing new multi-purpose woodland in Moray

5.1 Opportunities for new multi-benefit woodlands

We will seek to expand both productive woodlands and woodlands created with a primary conservation or recreational objective in Moray within a balanced mix of land uses.

All woodlands can assist in combatting the effects of climate change and can enhance biodiversity, economic output and health and well-being to varying degrees provided they are well-located and designed. Planting of new productive woodlands has the potential to increase the availability of local timber sources and to further reduce carbon emissions associated with transportation.

Spatial guidance is shown in Map 4 which indicates Preferred, Potential, Potential with Sensitivities, Unsuitable and Sensitive areas for new woodland creation across Moray. The methodology adopted for the mapping analysis is set out in Appendix A.

The total area for each of the categories defined on Map 4 for woodland creation is shown in this table:

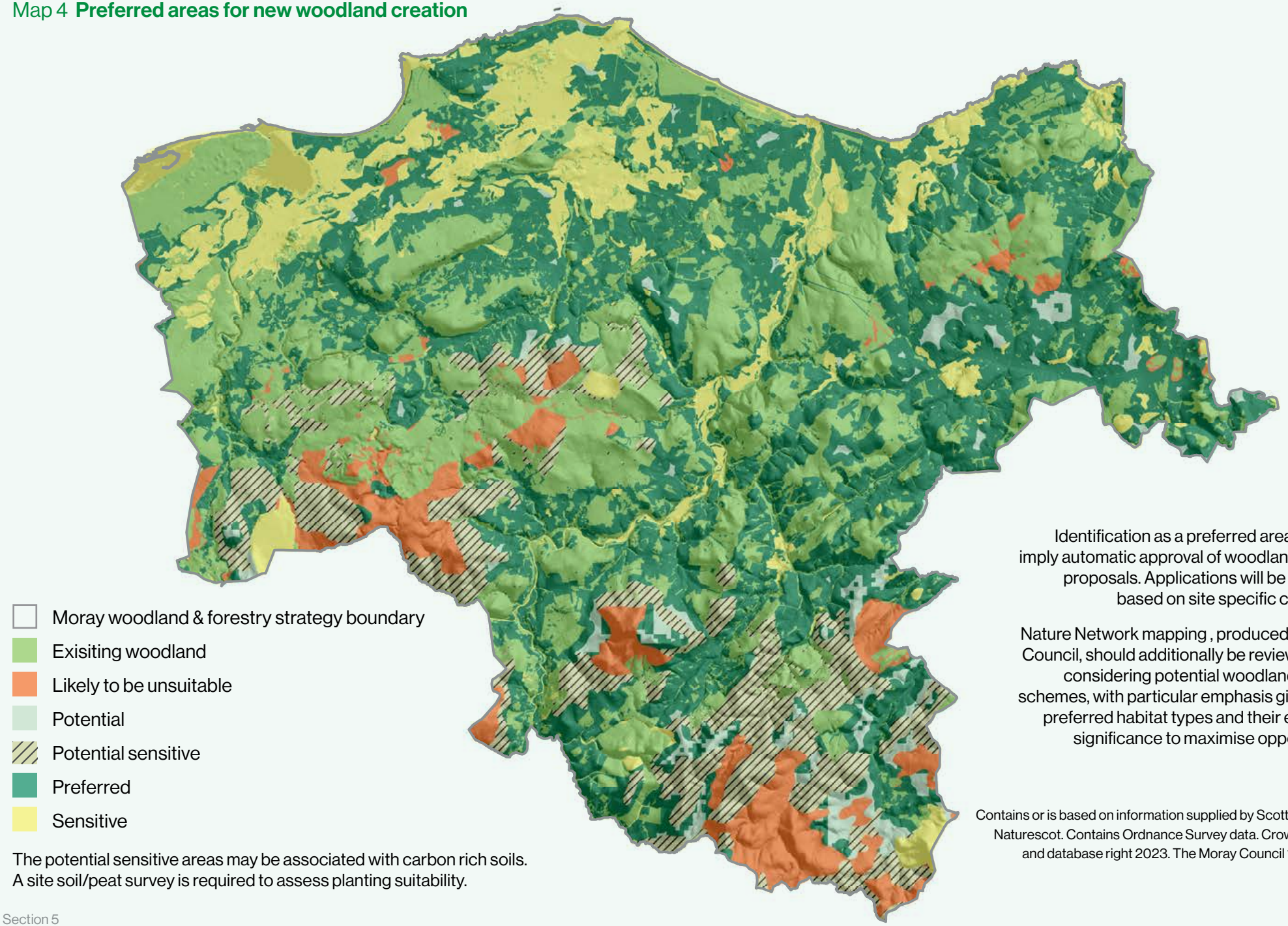
Total areas for each sensitivity category

Land category	Area (ha)	%
Existing woodland	63,604	34
Sensitive	21,930	12
Likely to be unsuitable	11,754	6
Preferred	68,383	36
Potential	4,736	3
Potential with sensitivities	17,059	9
Total hectares	**187,466**	**100**

We will provide positive responses to woodland creation schemes located within the Preferred and Potential categories and in relation to schemes within the Potential with Sensitivities category where identified constraints have been addressed. We will also ensure that consultations on woodland creation proposals are carried out according to best practice set out in Confor's 2024 guidance on engaging with local communities.

More detailed spatial guidance is also provided below with the aim of directing woodland creation to areas where it could potentially have the greatest environmental and/or community benefit.

Map 4 **Preferred areas for new woodland creation**



- Moray woodland & forestry strategy boundary
- Exisiting woodland
- Likely to be unsuitable
- Potential
- Potential sensitive
- Preferred
- Sensitive

The potential sensitive areas may be associated with carbon rich soils. A site soil/peat survey is required to assess planting suitability.

Identification as a preferred area does not imply automatic approval of woodland planting proposals. Applications will be assessed based on site specific conditions.

Nature Network mapping , produced by Moray Council, should additionally be reviewed when considering potential woodland creation schemes, with particular emphasis given to the preferred habitat types and their ecological significance to maximise opportunities.

5.2 More detailed guidance for new woodland creation

Six broad landscape areas have been defined across Moray with the purpose of providing more specific locational guidance on woodland creation and other related opportunities. These areas are shown on Map 5.

Coastal Plain

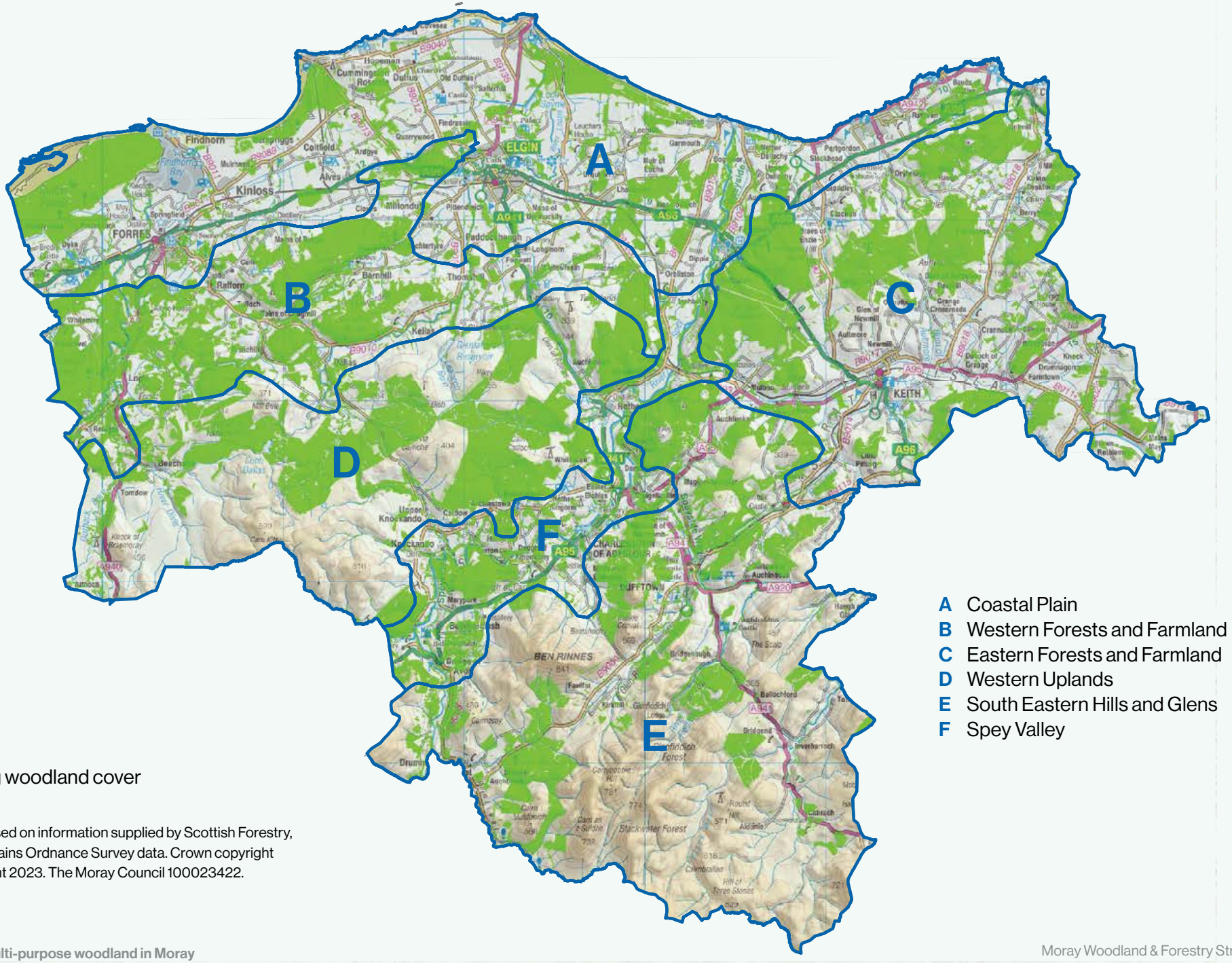
This area includes some of the most fertile land in Moray and it is largely intensively farmed although the productive pine-dominated forests of Culbin, Roseisle and Lossie are planted on sandy soils along the coast. Culbin and Roseisle Forests are particularly well-used for recreation. Small and often isolated productive conifer woodlands are present within the farmed plain and mixed woodlands are associated with estates such as Pitgaveny, Spynie, Findrassie, Westfield and Brodie. Riparian woodlands are present along the lower reaches of the Rivers Spey and the Findhorn. Hedgerows and field trees are present in some areas although farmland in parts of this area has an open character with depleted field boundary planting.

The main settlements of Elgin, Forres, Fochabers, Buckie, Burghead and Lossiemouth are located in this area. Forres is particularly well-endowed with woodland on the edges of the town, with much of this managed by community groups. Extensive woodland also arcs around the northern and north-western fringes of Elgin. Lossie and Roseisle Forests lie close to Lossiemouth and Burghead and Fochabers is surrounded by the woodlands of Gordon Castle estate, Ordiequish and Whiteash. There is relatively little woodland lying close to Buckie.

The good soils associated with the coastal plain preclude the creation of extensive woodland with much of the area shown as lying in the sensitive category on Map 4. However, there are opportunities to enhance biodiversity on farmland which falls into this category by undertaking predominantly native planting to improve the connectivity of often isolated small woodlands, tree belts, hedgerows and field trees. This type of planting would also help to alleviate soil erosion on arable land. Management of existing native and mixed woodlands should be a priority to ensure their longevity. There are also opportunities for the creation of productive and other woodlands with these most extensive in the eastern part of this area. It should be noted that the spatial strategy shown in Map 4 defines the sensitive category on the basis of formally designated areas. Non-designated dunes are present in this landscape area and, due to their importance for Nature Networks, these habitats present a constraint to woodland planting.

Special Landscape Area designations cover Cluny Hill near Forres, Spynie near Elgin and the Moray coast.

Map 5 **Detailed spatial guidance**



The following woodland creation initiatives are already in place in this area:

- Riparian planting for flood management, carbon sequestration and habitat restoration within the lower reaches of the Findhorn and the Muckle Burn as part of the River Findhorn Watershed Initiative and the Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Rivers Trust.
- Riparian planting planned within the lower reaches of the River Lossie north-east of Elgin as part of the Elgin Flood Alleviation Scheme.
- The Moray Farm Cluster Initiative where 15 landholdings have joined together to consider woodland and hedgerow management and creation across a broad area.
- Small areas of woodland planting proposed around Elgin as part of the Bilbohall and Findrassie settlement expansion proposals.
- Woodland management including new tree planting associated with community woodlands around Forres and Findhorn.

Other initiatives that could be considered in this area include:

- The creation of a woodland/green sustainable travel route (potentially based on the former railway line route) from the southern edges of Elgin to Millbuies Country Park.
- Top-up grants provided to landowners with existing woodlands close to urban areas to assist in the provision and maintenance of recreational facilities within easy reach of local communities.
- Top-up grants for new woodlands close to settlements, with this particularly targeting the Elgin, Buckie and Lossiemouth area (MOD constraints allowing) where there are fewer community-owned woodlands in close proximity to settlement unlike Forres where there is very good provision.
- Promotion of community leasing arrangements for woodlands close to settlements (advice and assistance for groups) and top-up grants for creation of community orchards, fruiting hedgerows and small woodlands.
- Potential Woodlots pilot scheme in Council owned woodland, for example Sanquhar Woodland near Forres (the proximity to the urban area may make this less attractive in terms of security than a more isolated woodland area but could have community and educational benefits).
- Planting of small native woodlands, trees and hedgerows on farmland, including gradual replacement of mature ash which are a key characteristic of parts of this area, planned to improve connectivity with existing isolated woodlands.

Western Forests and Farmland

This area is one of the most extensively wooded parts of Moray and this limits scope for new woodland creation. Productive forests, predominantly comprising Scots pine, lie either side of the Findhorn valley in the west and are largely owned by the estates of Darnaway, Altyre and Logie. More mixed coniferous productive woodlands are present in the eastern part of this area planted on ridges and upland fringes; these are both privately and publicly owned and include the Moray Council owned Millbuies woodland estate. The continuous cover management practised by the large estates in the west has resulted in an attractive age diversity of trees and a varied woodland understorey. Some native woodlands within the Findhorn valley are designated for their nature conservation value.

Small pockets of open ground within woodland are scenically important in the west, particularly where they allow views over the Findhorn and Divie valleys. They often also comprise farmland which is valued as part of a balanced mix of land use. Retaining open ground in the lower Pluscarden valley is also important due to the presence of the Special Landscape Area where views to Pluscarden Abbey and the contrast which occurs between the flat farmed valley floor and steep densely wooded slopes are important special qualities. The upper reaches of this valley are less important in this respect and natural regeneration of scrub woodland is already evident in this area. The eastern part of this area has been affected by woodland removal to accommodate dispersed rural housing (west of Fogwatt) and plantation woodland is generally more even-aged and less diverse in this area.

Special Landscape Area designations cover the Findhorn valley, the Pluscarden valley and Quarrel Wood near Elgin.

The following woodland creation initiatives are already in place in this area:

- The River Findhorn Watershed Initiative, creation of 'Riverwoods' in the upper catchment of the Findhorn valley (much of the focus of this initiative is in the less wooded upper reaches of the river which lie outside Moray).

Other initiatives that could be considered in this area include:

- Planting of both native and productive woodland in the area west of Fogwatt (where existing plantations are even-aged and often fragmented) to increase age and species diversity and the connectivity of isolated plantations.
- Consideration of expansion of woodland around Millbuies Country Park and creation of woodlot leases as a pilot scheme within woodland owned by Moray Council.
- Riparian planting along the upper Lossie between Elgin and Dallas linking with existing native woodlands and isolated coniferous plantations on north-facing valley sides below the Rothes wind farm.
- Retention of the 'estate' influenced character of avenues and occasional exotic trees edging productive woodlands in the lower Pluscarden valley and supplementary planting to ensure the longevity of this key characteristic of the Special Landscape Area.

Eastern Farmland

This part of Moray is less wooded than the west although medium-sized productive coniferous forests are present on low hills and upland plateaux in the Bin of Cullen, Aultmore, Whiteash, Ordiequish and Meikle Balloch areas. Wind farm construction on Caird Hill and consents for wind farms on Lorg Hill and Aultmore will be likely to result in some loss of woodland in these areas. Smaller plantations are dispersed across this area and there is generally little native woodland although some mixed woodlands are associated with the estates of Letterfourie and Cullen. Farmland in the core of this area around Grange Crossroads is open with little in the way of hedgerows or field trees and few riparian woodlands. The quality of the landscape around Keith is affected by overhead transmission lines, distillery warehousing and a busy road network and there are few woodlands within easy walking distance of this settlement.

The Deveron Valley in the eastern part of this area is designated as a Special Landscape Area.

While no specific initiatives apply to this area, Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) proposals for woodland creation are present in parts of this area (as they are in all the other areas considered in this detailed guidance).

This area offers the greatest opportunities for new woodland creation in Moray with extensive areas of the Preferred category identified on Map 4. Initiatives that could be considered include:

- Planting of primarily native woodland, including riparian woodland, hedgerows and field trees, to improve connectivity between existing small coniferous plantations on farmland.
- Planting broadleaved native trees and shrubs at the interface of larger productive coniferous plantations and farmland (the lower margins are the most visible part of these coniferous plantations due to the subtle landform of the hills they cover and this measure would enhance often abrupt and angular edges).
- Primarily productive woodlands could also be planted on more open upland fringe farmland and would be particularly valuable where they formed extensions of existing woodlands which ameliorated poorly designed margins. New woodlands should however be carefully located in recognition of the importance of some open upland fringes for waders and raptors.
- New woodland creation around Keith (possibly funded by, or forming an integral part of, large scale infrastructure projects) to provide landscape enhancement and increase opportunities for community access to woodlands in close proximity to the town. This could include creating a woodland link (and off-road walking/cycling route) to Balloch Wood.

Western Uplands

This area is well-wooded in the north-west where productive woodlands are present in the Newtyle Forest/Romach Hill area and across the uplands surrounding the upper Lossie valley. There are also extensive plantations of Sitka spruce and pine in the Hunt Hill area immediately north of the Spey valley. The scale of these FLS woodlands is not appreciated from public roads and settlement and public use tends to be relatively limited. Some of this productive woodland will be removed as part of the consented Rothes III and Clash Gour wind farms (and as part of the peatland restoration planned as part of these developments) and it may be replanted in another part of this general area or elsewhere in Moray. A large woodland creation scheme has recently been planted on the slopes of Carn na Cailliche.

The western part of this area includes the moss of Moidach More which is designated for its nature conservation interest and is consequently sensitive to woodland creation. Natural regeneration of Scots pine is evident on the fringes of this area, for example in the valley of the Divie Burn, on the slopes of Carn Biorach and in the upper Lossie valley south-west of Dallas.

There are some FGS woodland creation proposals in this area and moorland habitat restoration and management plans form part of the consented wind farm proposals.

Much of the unplanted part of these uplands is categorised as Sensitive, Unsuitable or Potential Sensitive. This may not preclude native woodland planting in some areas although opportunities for all types of woodland creation are largely confined to the outer fringes of these uplands. Initiatives that could be considered in this area include:

- Planting of primarily native woodland to enhance the most visible uniform and angular lower margins of coniferous woodlands (particularly those seen to the north of Archiestown).
- New woodlands should be designed to improve connectivity with existing isolated small woodlands on farmed lower slopes, improving biodiversity and enhancing landscape character – such an initiative may necessitate joint landscape scale schemes between adjoining landowners.
- Encourage natural regeneration of Scots pine and other native broadleaves on the fringes of moorland in the upper Lossie valley/Yellowbog area and on the western edges of this area in the Divie Burn valley and on the lower slopes of Knock of Braemoray.

South-eastern Hills and Glens

This area is more wooded in the north but generally comprises open moorland and upland farmland in the south around the Cabrach. The high hills lying either side of Glen Rinnes, including Ben Rinnes, Meikle and Little Conval to the north-west of this glen and the rugged upland ridge with Corryhabbie hill its high point lying to the south-east, are largely open. Some medium sized coniferous woodlands are located on lower slopes and hills within Glen Rinnes and close to Glen Fiddich and numerous small dispersed geometric coniferous plantations pattern. The upper Deveron valley, Glen Rinnes and lower Glen Fiddich are predominantly farmed with small and often isolated coniferous plantations and some birch dominated riparian woodlands.

Special Landscape Areas cover Ben Rinnes and associated uplands and a small part of the Deveron valley where it borders a similar local landscape designation in Aberdeenshire. The south-eastern part of this area abuts the Cairngorms National Park.

Map 4 showing sensitivity to new woodland creation categorises a broad swathe of the higher ground in the southern part of this area as Sensitive or Potential Sensitive principally due to the likely presence of carbon rich soils. The Preferred category generally applies to lower hill slopes and glens.

The following woodland creation initiatives are already in place in this area:

- Cabrach Community Initiative – riparian planting and other woodland creation and habitat enhancement measures.
- The Cairngorms National Park additional grant payment (on top of FGS) to encourage creation of native woodlands in target areas shown in the Cairngorms National Park Forestry Strategy (2018). Areas of Preferred and Potential areas for new woodland lie adjacent to Glen Livet and the Cromdale Hills on the boundary of the Moray Woodland and Forestry Strategy area.

Other initiatives that could be considered in this area include:

- Planting of primarily native woodland, including riparian woodland, hedgerows and field trees within the farmed glens and valleys for enhancement of biodiversity and landscape character.
- New multi-benefit woodlands on hill slopes and upland fringes which could improve connectivity and ameliorate the poor design of dispersed coniferous plantations thus enhancing landscape character.
- Management and expansion of remnant broadleaved woodland in Glen Fiddich and in Glen Rinnes.
- Creation of native woodlands to create a natural appearance on the lower slopes of the high rugged hills which lie in this area, including Ben Rinnes and the hills lying to the south-east of Glen Rinnes, The Buck and the Cromdale Hills. Some of these areas border the Cairngorms National Park and the creation of native woodlands would align with the objectives set out in the Cairngorms National Park Forestry Strategy in relation to improving forest habitat networks.
- Protection and expansion of existing areas of juniper scrub and associated native woodland in the Cabrach area.
- Planting of productive and broadleaved woodland on the lower slopes of the Cabrach area which lie outside the Sensitive category.

The Spey Valley

The Spey valley is broad and well-wooded with a diverse mix of productive and mixed estate-influenced woodland. The northern part of this area includes part of the extensive productive FLS woodland on Ben Aigan and lying north and south of Rothes to the west of the River Spey. A broad undulating shelf of farmland lies to the north of the Spey between Archiestown and Knockando and is patterned with small even-aged spruce and pine plantations, some of these planted on peaty soils. Low hills in the southern part of this area are capped by predominantly coniferous woodland. New woodland planting has been undertaken as part of recent distillery expansion in this area.

The whole of this area is covered by the River Spey Special Landscape Area.

Existing initiatives in this area include riparian woodland planting in the Craigellachie area undertaken by the Spey Catchment Initiative and some individual FGS woodland creation proposals.

The floodplain farmland on the floor of the Spey is categorised as Sensitive in Map 4. The extent of existing woodland in this area additionally constrains scope for new woodland creation with opportunities largely confined to the upper valley sides. The balance of open space to woodland is important to consider both in terms of retaining the scenic qualities of the Spey valley and open views to Ben Rinnes in some areas as well as a balanced mix of land uses and marginal grassland habitat for wildlife in some areas.

Other initiatives that could be considered in this area include:

- Planting of primarily native woodland, hedgerows (where these are an existing landscape characteristic) and field boundary trees to enhance connectivity with riparian woodlands on the farmed floodplain areas against the Spey.
- Creation of new multi-benefit woodlands on upper valley sides and upland fringes which could improve connectivity and ameliorate the poor design of dispersed small coniferous plantations.

6 Optimising the economic potential of Moray's woodlands

6.1 Protect Moray's productive woodlands

Loss of productive woodland may occur through progressive forest restructuring and potential future large-scale development such as wind farms, roads construction and electricity transmission projects.

The protection of existing productive woodlands is important to ensure a sustainable timber source benefiting employment and helping to combat climate change. This aim is also related to our objective of increasing the area of productive woodland in Moray to enable expansion in the production and use of local timber. The removal of woodland to accommodate development will be the last option.

Where compensatory planting is necessary this will take place in Moray or a commuted payment will be required to be paid in line with LDP Policy EP7e. We will also react positively to proposals for well-designed productive woodlands sited in the least sensitive parts of Moray provided identified constraints have been addressed.

6.2 Increase forestry-related education & skills and boost employment in the industry

There is an urgent need to address the lack of young people attracted to working in forestry by:

- Addressing misconceptions amongst the public about the value of the sector.
- Enhancing coverage of the sector in the school curriculum.
- Raising awareness of the career opportunities in the sector.

There are two institutions offering forestry courses in Scotland, Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) and the Scottish School of Forestry which is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI). The Scottish School of Forestry was established in 1972 and moved to a new building at Balloch, west of Inverness, in 2016. Its proximity means it is an important asset to Moray's forestry sector. The school offers PDA, SCQF, HNC, and BSC degree courses in Forestry, Woodland Skills and Forest Management. Courses are full time or part time and one-year pre-course experience in the woodland environment or a Certificate of Forestry may be required for some candidates.

An apprenticeship scheme is run by James Jones and Christies Elite nursery and FLS and some private estates also take on forestry apprentices. The SCQF level 6 forms the Modern Apprenticeship course at the Scottish School of Forestry. Scottish Forestry fund training for women in forestry and for future foresters for those relatively new to the sector.

Research is currently being undertaken by the Scottish School of Forestry on ways of attracting young people into the industry.

This is inspired by curriculum models linking schools to forests in Wisconsin US where 27,000 acres of forest land have been registered to 255 schools in the state and have helped attract more young people to careers in forestry. A possible pilot study is being considered in Highland and/or Moray which may involve linking schools to woodlands in a similar way.

The Royal Forestry Society Junior Forester Award seeks to give children and young people an insight into forestry as a career and to provide them with practical skills for assisting in woodland management. It is aimed at schools and local communities.

Given the importance of the forestry sector to Moray's economy and the significant skills shortages it faces, establishing a mutually beneficial collaborative venture with the Scottish School of Forestry represents an opportunity. This will go hand in hand with increasing knowledge of the forestry industry in Moray, not just amongst young people thinking about future careers but across the whole community, including older people looking for a change of career. Nurseries, landowners and sawmills within Moray have worked collaboratively to promote forestry as a potential career, and there is scope to build on this work and with initiatives undertaken by Scottish Forestry.

We will investigate skills and educational opportunities (identifying any gaps in specialised skills) working with key stakeholders to identify ways of attracting more people into the forestry sector and providing opportunities for training and education. We will also seek to facilitate links between local employers and organisations such as Wild Things who support young people through building connections with nature and woodlands and will investigate opportunities for increasing nature-based and outdoor learning as part of the school curriculum.

Given the proximity of all elements of the forestry cycle within a small geographical area in Moray, there is potential for regular day long field trips to be organised to encompass visits to the whole forestry cycle from nursery growing, to planting and felling sites, to sawmill, manufacturing facility and a building construction site. This could act as a showroom for what productive Scottish forestry is all about, serving the dual purpose of enabling a greater understanding of forestry in the wider public and encouraging people to consider a career in forestry. Many consultees across the forestry sector in Moray could see the potential benefits of this approach and were willing to consider working collaboratively to achieve this.

6.3 Encourage the increased use of local timber in processing and construction

Timber production plays an important role not only in carbon sequestration but also in providing a sustainable substitute for carbon intensive materials such as steel and concrete.

This enhanced benefit has been shown to be very significant by research and the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee which produced a report titled *Seeing the wood for the trees: the contribution of the forestry and timber sectors to biodiversity and net zero goals* (Fifth Report of Session 2022–23).

Localising timber production, adding value, reducing transport distances and embracing the circular economy provide wider benefits in terms of climate change, economic resilience and social justice, creating an environment that is conducive to the thriving domestic forest industry, but ultimately economic factors and price are still the main drivers that determine whether home grown industries thrive or fail. The historical trend for sawmills to become fewer and larger has recently tended to be reversed with a number of small sawmills opening to service niche demands. These mills often work in a complementary way to the larger sawmill as they are more adaptable to small-scale local demand and can often utilise a wider species and size range. Where the sawn timber can be used locally then this also increases the competitive advantage of small mills and demonstrates their sustainable credentials.

We will identify and explore ways of removing barriers to the use of local timber which would increase the sustainability of businesses and potentially increase employment in Moray. We will work with forestry organisations considering ways of encouraging architects and builders to choose local timber. Meeting quality and operational requirements is key to expanding the use of domestic timber. Collaborative working or the establishment of a size proportionate system of quality standardisation could help to keep this administrative cost at a reasonable level and ensure that small mills can still compete on price. Moray-produced sawn timber/timber products, used locally for a wide range of applications, offers significant sustainability, social and carbon benefits, but meeting quality requirements consistently and competing on price are challenges. A presumption on the preferred use of home-grown timber on the basis of its environmental and carbon credentials may be an option to consider that avoids protectionist complications.

6.4 Grow the number of sustainable timber processing and manufacturing businesses in Moray

Linked to the above objective, we will work to increase the diversification of forestry-related businesses in Moray in terms of their size and the type/supply of timber that could be used.

We will particularly aim to expand the region's strength in timber engineering which embodies a significantly higher level of added value than the more traditional manufactured timber products that comprise most of the output of the UK sector. There is scope to expand the range of engineered timber products at all scales, and for small timber processes this can create a significant market opportunity, for instance the use of local roundwood in engineering structures reduces wood waste and processing costs and provides a sustainable, adaptable and easily worked material.

The demand for wood fuel at scale and to meet local demand for logs is strong and this could provide an opportunity for more farmers to become involved in timber harvesting and processing using machinery at quiet times of the farming year and bringing their own woodlands into active management. Many farmers have already embraced this opportunity. There are also opportunities for genuine waste products in timber growing and processing to be used as woodfuel/biomass.

We will aim to strike a balance in relation to economic interventions in terms of maintaining the viability of established businesses while at the same time expanding the number and diversity of businesses. Interventions in terms of grant incentives can destabilise functional economic systems.

In terms of improving the sustainability of the forestry industry the use of electric vehicles by forest managers and contractors is increasing and electric vehicles and vehicles adapted for hydrogen for timber haulage are being trialled. Advances in timber technology and utilisation of round timber can all make better use of the product and lead to a reduction in carbon emissions. Simple processes such as using offcuts and waste wood to generate heat or energy on site can reduce the carbon footprint of kiln drying significantly. One of the main advantages that Moray possesses for carbon friendly forestry are the short transport distances to sawmills and end users.

6.5 Increase the number of tourist visitors to Moray's woodlands and forests

We will support greater promotion of Moray's woodlands and forests for recreation and tourism.

We will work with Visit Scotland and Visit Moray Speyside to identify ways of increasing visitors and addressing any improvements needed to wider visitor facilities including accommodation and transport.

We will also work with FLS to encourage greater investment in recreational facilities in their forests in Moray and will consider ways in which assistance can be given to encourage landowners to provide and maintain visitor facilities such as car parks and footpaths in woodlands and forests. We will plan and promote responsible access to woodlands and forests which avoids disturbance to sensitive species and habitats.

7 Improving the health & vitality of Moray's woodland ecosystems

7.1 Protect important woodland habitats and species

We will investigate ways of gaining greater protection of native woodlands where their longevity is threatened by lack of management and overgrazing.

The genetic resilience of these woodlands (and particularly woodlands protected as SSSIs) should be maintained by natural regeneration where possible (controlling deer and livestock in favour of fencing) or using seed sourced and grown on from the woodland.

Landowners often do not have the knowledge or financial incentives to manage these woodlands and we will work with other partners to identify woodlands at risk across Moray and consider ways of encouraging landowners to utilise the natural capital of their woodlands.

7.2 Help the recovery of nature by connecting and increasing biodiverse woodlands

Our aim is to support the planting and establishment of native woodlands to improve connectivity with existing woodlands. We will also look to increase the range of woodland habitats established within Moray, including areas of montane woodland on higher hill ground and expansion of existing areas of juniper scrub.

Expansion of native tree planting in areas surrounding designated woodlands will increase their size and provide a transition between higher and lower quality habitats in the surrounding landscape. Riparian planting will also be encouraged to build healthier and more resilient watercourses and to connect remnants of native and ancient woodland. Urban planting schemes can provide linkages to core woodland habitat in the wider landscape as well as providing health and well-being benefits close to where people live. New woodlands primarily planted for timber production can also provide wider benefits for nature too if their design follows best practice set out in the UK Forestry Standards.

For all woodland creation schemes, the use of locally sourced native stock and seed sources which are suited to the climate and local conditions is desirable. This is especially important when planting near to existing native and ancient woodland.

Whilst woodland creation is an important tool for building nature networks, it is important that it is not delivered at the expense of other valuable habitats such as peatlands, wetlands, dune habitats and semi-natural grasslands or where it may adversely affect their connectivity. Sites designated as important for such habitats have been considered within the spatial guidance accompanying this strategy. Good examples of these habitats

Courtesy of Spey Catchment Initiative

are also present outside of such designated sites, and so detailed site-specific assessments are required to ensure woodland creation occurs in the most appropriate places.

Small conifer plantations on farmland in some parts of Moray are often isolated and make a suboptimal contribution to biodiversity (and to landscape character where they are poorly designed in relation to landform). We will encourage farmers and landowners to consider enhancement of existing woodlands through new farm-wide plans which include the planting of field boundary trees, hedgerows and the creation of riparian and small woodlands which will form part of integrated initiatives to improve biodiversity and nature networks on farmland across Moray while minimising effects on productivity.

We will seek to optimise opportunities to enhance biodiversity and landscape benefits in our responses on new forestry proposals and Forest Plans for existing woodlands. We will also ensure that developers adhere to the stronger requirement in NPF4 for development proposals to offer mitigation and enhancement measures aimed at strengthening nature networks. With this in mind, we will require major developments to include broader 'landscape scale' mitigation and enhancement measures to include more extensive planting of native broadleaves outside an application site with the aim of increasing biodiversity and landscape benefits. We will also require a full evaluation of the biodiversity value of woodland proposed to be removed to accommodate new development as a precursor to defining an equitable compensatory planting area or commuted payment amount in accordance with our requirement for habitat reinstatement.

CASE STUDY

Moray Farm Cluster Initiative

The Initiative involves 15 farmers/land managers of various scales across the Laich of Moray who have joined together with the aims of enhancing landscape and biodiversity and increasing climate and economic resilience across approximately 6600 hectares of land.

The area covered by the Initiative includes some of the best agricultural land in Moray and the objective is to retain productive farmland but to enhance biodiversity around it. The corridors of the rivers Lossie and Spynie, the Spynie canal and the disused railway line will form a focus for enhancement with the management and extension of existing wet woodland and new riparian woodland proposed.

Existing woodland across farmland will be managed, with the removal of invasive species and deer control comprising principal management measures, and new small farm woodlands will be created. Tree and hedgerow planting is planned along field boundaries to help prevent soil erosion and enhance wildlife habitats. Opportunities for public access are additionally being considered as part of the Initiative.

The group received Highland and Islands Environment Foundation funding to help develop their proposals and their subsequent bid to the Nature Restoration Fund has been successful.

7.3 Improve the resilience of woodlands to climate change

Woodland creation, the production of timber locally (replacing carbon intensive building materials such as concrete and steel) and the regeneration of existing woodland all play a key role in combating climate change.

Climate change may however increase the ecological and economic risks for forestry in terms of changes in rainfall, varying temperatures, wildfire and storm events and disease/pest risk.

Diversity is generally associated with greater resilience and across the forest as a whole a diverse range of age classes, silvicultural types and species well adapted to the site are likely to reduce the risks from climate, storms, fires and diseases. Species choice for new planting is guided by use of the Ecological Site Classification (ESC) system which can include assessments based on climate projections using models. Models are an approximation of reality with variable accuracy; however using ESC with good soil data is a useful guide to ensure the right tree is planted in the right place.

A major consideration in terms of disease impacts is that vigorous fast-growing trees are much less susceptible to diseases than stressed trees growing on an unsuitable site. The process of species selection is well understood by foresters, and the current Forestry Grant Scheme process overseen by Scottish Forestry is an effective mechanism for delivery of multi-purpose resilient woodlands. The UKFS specifies minimum proportions of species types and open ground and this also plays a key role in ensuring diversity.

The management of most forest areas is also undertaken with oversight by Scottish Forestry via the control of felling and the Long Term Forest Plan process. Most forest plans seek to increase diversity in terms of species, age class and structure.

Trees and woodlands while mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration can also protect and enhance the local habitat for other land uses, for example by providing shelter for stock, reducing wind erosion on light soils, improving water quality and the biodiversity of water courses as well as reducing flood risk.

In terms of wildfire risk, good access for the fire service is essential for control where fast reaction times can increase effectiveness. A diverse age class structure of trees can also help reduce fire and wind damage risks.

8 Fostering greater connection between communities & woodland

8.1 Promote the use and stewardship of woodlands to improve health & well-being

Encouraging greater use of woodlands

We will encourage the use of woodlands for early years education, investigating the expansion of Forest Schools and the possibility of creating links between individual schools and nearby woodlands. We will work with partners to improve recreational facilities in our woodlands and forests which can be used by people of all ages and abilities This will also include exploration of ways of promoting outdoor forest-based activities as part of Green Prescriptions recommended by health professionals.

Community ownership and/or management of woodlands

We will provide support for community woodland groups including initiatives designed to:

- Help community groups identify and secure suitable land for acquisition or leasing.
- Provide information and advice on the legal, financial and technical aspects of acquisition or leasing and management of woodland.
- Promote and facilitate the sharing of good practice and experience among community woodland groups and other stakeholders.

A standard for community engagement in woodland management should be put in place with this based on the national standards and informed by good practice guidelines. We will provide access to central support for community groups and we will interface with other third sector support organisations to make connections between people who are involved or interested in community woodland in Moray. Community groups will be made aware of grants available to them.

Lease arrangements offer scope for community involvement with low barriers to entry in terms of capital requirements compared with an outright purchase. Maintaining public ownership of the woodlands while leasing to the community also provides a safety Woodland crofts

Hutting

Hutting is the practice of establishing small, simple huts for recreational use (and not permanent living) in the countryside. The Council is supportive of hutting within Moray's woodlands provided the scale and nature of development is compatible with the surrounding area and complies with the good practice guidance set out in Reforesting Scotland's 'New Hutting Developments.

Woodland crofts

Woodland crofts could be a means of increasing connections with woodlands and forests and can be associated with a range of benefits for both nature and the community. Woodland crofts are registered crofts with sufficient tree cover to be considered a woodland under national forestry policy. They can generate similar benefits to regular crofting but also create opportunities to utilise the woodland resource to support a sustainable livelihood and a high standard of living for residents.

In 2010 Scottish Ministers designated parts of Moray as crofting areas, creating the opportunity to apply the approach more widely. However, it was not until early 2022 that this opportunity was first taken up by the owners of 5 acres of naturally regenerated woodland on the Moray coast. We will investigate the creation of an approved Moray Council policy in relation to woodland crofting.

Woodlots

Woodlots comprise small parcels of woodland which are usually leased by communities, small-scale forest businesses or individuals who do not wish to take on the risk or capital costs of purchasing woodland. They can enable woodlands to be managed sustainably for small-scale timber production with the woodlot leaseholder managing the woodland to an agreed plan that has been approved by Scottish Forestry.

Rentals are usually low with the improvement to the woodland being the main management objective. Forestry professionals and amateur foresters are generally envisaged as being suitable leaseholders for this type of management agreement but there is also scope for the process to promote training education and business start-ups by providing an entry point into the forest industry.

Woodlots have similar health and well-being and local economic benefits to woodland crofts but generally do not involve habitation on the site (but may require the holder to live nearby). From the owner's perspective, the arrangement offers the potential to increase the value of the woodland at low cost and is particularly suitable for small, hard to access woodlands that would otherwise not be commercially viable to actively manage.

CASE STUDY

Ardochy Forest

Glengarry Community Woodlands is a Development Trust and Company Limited by Guarantee with charitable status. It exists to advance sustainable community development, organise educational and recreational activities and advance environmental protection and improvement.

The Trust was formed in 2016 after the community purchased a 31-hectare forest in Invergarry. Since then, management has focused mainly on harvesting timber, setting up a firewood business and delivery of a community engagement programme.

In 2022 the Trust expanded its holdings through the acquisition of two further areas of woodland on either side of the A87. The sites, which cover a combined area of 66 hectares, were acquired as an asset transfer from Forest and Land Scotland, using funds provided by the Scottish Land Fund. The Trust intends to use these new sites to establish six woodland crofts and four affordable homes which will be delivered through a community-led project involving the Woodland Crofts Partnership and the Communities Housing Trust.

The project has been designed to encourage young people and families to remain in the area by creating new opportunities to generate income through the sustainable management of local woodland. In this way it is hoped that the project will help repopulate the glen and improve long-term sustainability. Any new homes sold as part of the project will have discounts protected in perpetuity though the application of a Rural Housing Burden, which also prioritises local communities in allocations, allowing control over future sales. The new crofts will be similarly protected to ensure their benefits are retained within the community upon any future change of occupation.

8.2 Promote the 'start to finish' forestry-related economy of Moray

Much of Moray already serves as a national exemplar of what a forestry economy in a mixed landuse setting might look like.

This strategy seeks to encourage new woodland and other types of planting in less sensitive locations, creating a more balanced mixed landuse across all the region which would enhance biodiversity and landscape diversity. The special character of Moray and its diverse 'start to finish' timber economy could be used to promote an understanding of forestry to decision makers and local schools.

We will facilitate a programme of visits to forests and forestry-related industries and talks for the local community and also for Moray Council staff and members. We will also encourage nature and outdoor based education within the setting of forests and woodlands for our nurseries, schools and further education colleges.

8.3 Encourage urban planting and the creation of woodlands close to settlements

National policy places importance on the health and well-being of communities. NPF4 includes policies on sustainable and liveable places, the creation of 20-minute neighbourhoods and active travel.

Urban trees and woodland are important for the health and well-being of communities and will become important as climate impacts become more severe.

Moray Council's Local Development Plan policies on Placemaking requires developers of 10 houses or more to create multi-functional spaces and networks which connect people and nature. Woodland is a feature in many of the larger settlement expansion developments proposed in Moray, for example in masterplans for the Bilbohall and Findrassie developments near Elgin. We will continue to support the creation of woodlands and orchards close to towns and villages which can be accessed by walking and cycling and which will offer recreational facilities and opportunities for people to be involved in their management. We will also encourage better management of existing woodlands and trees in urban areas and promote the planting of larger trees, such as oak and beech, which have a greater beneficial effect on the character of settlements and the well-being of residents.

We will also support the provision of more opportunities for children and young people to play and learn in woodlands and forests particularly close to urban areas.

8.4 Expand Moray's network of woodland based leisure and recreation infrastructure

We will consider sustainable transport connections between urban areas and woodlands and ways of expanding recreational facilities and activities for local communities. This will include identifying opportunities for trails and facilities for all abilities.

We will continue to consider active travel routes within new areas of housing and the potential for linkages with existing and new paths, former railway routes and quiet roads in the wider countryside which would provide easy access to woodlands.

We will also identify opportunities for new trails and facilities for all abilities within woodlands, including the provision of nearby car parking for those less able to walk and cycle.

9 Delivering the strategy

	Actions	Delivery opportunities	Timescale	Achievement indicators	Delivery partners (lead body in bold)
1	**Increase new multi-benefit woodlands in Moray**				
1.1	**Support expansion of woodlands in Moray from 34% cover to 36% by 2035**	• Identify opportunities for woodland creation through the approved Moray Woodland and Forestry Strategy. • Secure external funding for additional incentivisation for woodlands with primary biodiversity, tourism, recreation and community objectives. • Secure external funding to maximise opportunities for planting on greenspaces, improving connections between existing woodlands, urban tree planting and woodlands in and around settlements. • Ensure delivery of compensatory planting within Moray to retain proportion of woodland cover (see also 1.2 and 3.2).	2025–2035	% increase in woodland cover measured in Scottish Forestry data	Scottish Forestry, Moray Council, landowners and developers and community groups
1.2	**Develop a Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) and Regional Just Transition Plan to address land use priorities**	Balance environmental, economic and social land use requirements in a strategic level RSS. This will consider issues such as the need to safeguard food production areas, open areas important for nature conservation and woodlands. It will also identify opportunities to increase woodland cover, peatland restoration and biodiversity and consider spatial planning of energy production, settlement expansion and employment. Duplication will be avoided by embedding strategic level Just Transition projects in the RSS.	End 2025	RSS and Just Transition Plan produced	**Moray Council,** Scottish Forestry, National Farmers Union, Cairngorms National Park Authority, Highland Council, Aberdeenshire Council
2	**Optimise the economic potential of Moray's timber products**				
2.1	**Creation of a local construction forum**	Develop a new forum of local construction professionals supported by engagement from forestry businesses and public sector partners. The aims of the forum should be to explore ways of promoting the greater use of local timber (see 2.2 below) and improving connections between growers, processors and users of timber.		Creation and regular meetings set up of forum	**Moray Chamber of Commerce, Moray Council,** Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Homes for Scotland, Scottish Forestry, CONFOR
2.2	**Promote the use of locally grown timber in construction through Community Wealth Building Strategy and planning policy**	• Promote the greater use of locally grown timber through planning policy and early engagement with developers. • Prepare a woodland crofting and woodlots policy to facilitate the growth of small scale timber production, processing and manufacturing businesses.	April 2026	Inclusion of policies in Draft Local Development Plan	**Moray Council**

	Actions	Delivery opportunities	Timescale	Achievement indicators	Delivery partners (lead body in bold)
2.3	**Safeguard land for tree nurseries and opportunities for expansion**	• Engage with current nursery owners to explore future plans. • Identify nursery sites in the RSS and Local Development Plan and designate for safeguarding	April 2026	Identification of safeguarded sites in Draft Local Development Plan	**Moray Council**
3	**Improve the health and vitality of Moray's woodland ecosystems**				
3.1	**Enhance woodland biodiversity and connectivity for nature through well-sited new woodland creation and by protecting, improving and expanding Moray's existing semi-natural woodlands**	• The woodland creation sensitivity map and the more specific locational guidance in the Strategy recognises the importance of Nature Networks to influence the appropriate location and type of new woodlands. • Put together an inventory of existing semi-natural woodlands under threat. • Long term forest plans/woodland management plans will be encouraged to consider how they can contribute to Nature Networks and prevent risks to biodiversity from non-native species. • Source external funding for an incentivised scheme to deliver Nature Networks and multi-benefit woodlands. • Promotion and advice aimed at increasing uptake of Scottish Forestry grants and funding from other sources for agroforestry and planting of hedgerows, trees and small woodlands.	2025 start and continuing through period of Strategy	Number of woodlands surveyed and management plans drawn up and implemented.	**Scottish Forestry, Moray Council**, Nature Scot, Woodlands Trust, Spey Catchment Initiative
3.2	**Ensure development proposals safeguard existing trees and woodlands and enhance biodiversity through new planting**	• Establish a requirement for individual trees and woodlands to be assessed by an ecologist and/or arborist where the Council deems appropriate and to ensure that the mitigation hierarchy is applied. • Ensure mitigation and enhancement plans for large developments adopt a landscape scale plan beyond site boundaries and significantly increase native woodland beyond that required by compensatory planting. • Increase monitoring of woodland felling as part of permitted development to ensure compensatory planting is undertaken and managed in the longer term. • Ensure removal and long-term management plans are put in place as part of development proposals to control invasive non-native species.	2025 start and continuing through period of Strategy	• Quality assurance in relation to application of NPF4 policies 3, 6 and 11. • Delivery of training for planning staff. • Production of new local planning guidance for biodiversity	**Moray Council** Scottish Forestry, NatureScot (as key consultees on major developments)

	Actions	Delivery opportunities	Timescale	Achievement indicators	Delivery partners (lead body in bold)
3.3	**Ensure woodland management and creation proposals address opportunities for nature-based solutions and climate adaptation**	• Strengthen consideration of climate adaptation when assessing forest plan applications aiming for diverse woodlands that can mitigate the risk of wildfire, pests and diseases and restore the function of other habitats which help reduce climate change effects such as dune systems and peatland. • Encourage increased riparian planting to help reduce climate change effects and adaptation.	2025 and throughout period of Strategy	Data on extent/nature of new planting	**Scottish Forestry, Moray Council** Spey Catchment Initiative, Findhorn Watershed Initiative Forestry and Land Scotland, RSPB, NatureScot
4	**Education, skills and community involvement with woods and forestry**				
4.1	**Ensure people of all ages are equipped with knowledge and skills for forestry and nature-based careers in Moray**	• Coordinate an engagement programme with schools, including nature-based and outdoor learning, providing opportunities for young people to connect with woodlands and learn forestry skills. • Create and promote local opportunities for forestry related training for all ages. • Explore opportunities to develop apprenticeships for saw-milling as part of wider apprenticeship opportunities in Moray.	In place by 2027 then ongoing	• Engagements with nurseries and schools (Environmental Science Learning Centre, Climate Ready Schools, Moray OWLS, careers events and forthcoming Scottish Government commitments on increasing outdoor learning). • Participation in the Royal Forestry Society Scottish Junior Forester Award scheme. • Increased numbers of courses/ apprenticeships.	**Moray Council, Scottish Forestry, CONFOR, UHI Moray, Skills Development Scotland, Lantra** Developing the Young Workforce Moray, Moray OWLS, STEM, tsiMORAY
4.2	**Increase opportunities for communities to use woodlands for recreation, health and wellbeing**	• Facilitate access for people of all ages and abilities to use and care for woodlands. • Raise awareness of the role and importance of Moray's woodlands. • Encourage an increase in tree canopy cover in urban areas. • Ensure that larger scale housing applications include planting of woodland and orchards as part of their landscape proposals with these designed to increase biodiversity and connectivity with surrounding woodlands, trees and hedgerows.	2025 and ongoing	• Environmental education sessions delivered. • Training delivered to elected members. • Core Path priority improvements delivered. • Green prescriptions available and promoted. • Increases in urban woodland and tree planting schemes delivered in accordance with Scotland's Forestry Strategy objectives. • Increased community involvement in the management of woodlands.	**Moray Council** Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry, tsiMORAY, Forestry and Land Scotland, NHS Grampian, Moray OWLS, Community Woodland Association and community organisations

	Actions	Delivery opportunities	Timescale	Achievement indicators	Delivery partners (lead body in bold)
5	**Tourism and Recreation**				
5.1	**Identify opportunities for new/expanded woodland based tourism infrastructure in the forthcoming Tourism Strategy**	• Participate in developing a Tourism Strategy for Moray which identifies opportunities for woodland related tourism and recreation such as accommodation, linked trails, car parking, events, waymarking and interpretation. • Consider a Forest/Climate Forest branding identity for Moray.		New infrastructure opportunities and promotion strategy identified	**Visit Moray Speyside** Moray Council
5.2	**Deliver new/expanded tourism and recreation infrastructure**	Secure external funding to deliver actions identified above.	2025 and ongoing	Monitor increase in footfall/ parking use	**Forestry and Land Scotland, Scottish Forestry, Moray Council**
5.3	**Increase visitor numbers to Moray's forest recreation sites**	• Collate baseline visitor numbers to main recreational forests. • Promote increased use through marketing and the opportunities identified in action 5.1.		As above	**Forestry and Land Scotland**
5.4	**Ensure provision of access points and enhanced safe and sustainable travel routes to woodlands from settlements**	• Maximise opportunities to connect people with woodlands when determining planning applications. • Explore recreational opportunities during the design and consultation phases of the woodland creation process. This may include considering the installation of forest tracks at an early stage to increase opportunities for recreation. Require developers to contribute to the enhancement and management of nearby woodlands where increased community use likely.		• New sustainable transport routes created between settlements and woodlands. • Increased funding for management of community woodlands	**Moray Council**, Scottish Forestry, local community groups owning and/or managing woodlands around settlements.

Appendix:
Methodology for woodland creation sensitivity map

The following table sets out the methodology adopted for the mapping of woodland creation sensitivity (shown in Map 4) categorised as Sensitive, Potential with Sensitivities and Likely to be Unsuitable. Preferred Areas are identified as those outwith the constraint categories set out below:

Constraint	Information layer	How dealt with in the sensitivity map
Existing woodland	National Forestry Inventory Scotland 2022 supplemented with recent grant claims data from SF	Existing woodland excluded from analysis
	Native Woodland Survey of Scotland	
Agricultural land	Land Capability for Agriculture (1:50k) Class 3.2 and above	**Potential** but can be upgraded to **Preferred** by opportunity layers
	Carbon Rich Soils (Category 5)	**Potential with Sensitivities** Subject to detailed assessment of soils on a case-by-case basis
	Land Capability for Agriculture (1:50k) Class 1, 2 and 3.1	**Sensitive**
Urban area + proposed development	Housing allocations from Moray Local Development Plan 2020	Existing and planned settlement expansion excluded from analysis
Cultural heritage	Scheduled Monuments (with 20m buffer)	**Sensitive**
	Battlefields	
	Gardens and Designed Landscapes	
Natural heritage	Local Nature Reserves	**Sensitive** but subject to consideration of the nature of the designation and the type of woodland proposed
	National Nature Reserves	
	Wetlands of International importance (RAMSAR)	
	Special Areas of Conservation/Special Protection Areas/Sites of Special Scientific Interest	
Carbon rich soils	Carbon rich soils (Category 6)	**Likely to be Unsuitable** (where sites can be shown through site soil survey not to be deep peat, they will be considered to fall within the **Potential** category)

Nature Networks mapping produced by Moray Council should additionally be reviewed when considering new woodland planting proposals. This mapping identifies strategic desirable Nature Network connections between key habitats and areas designated for their nature conservation value. Appropriate woodland planting schemes which enhance connectivity between relevant habitats will be preferred.

The table below sets out where opportunities have been identified for planting adjacent to settlements, creation of habitat networks and natural flood management and the approach taken in relation to agricultural land classification:

Opportunity	Information layer	How dealt with in the sensitivity map
Planting adjacent to settlements	1 km buffer around settlements identified in the Moray Local Development Plan 2020.	Upgrades Class 3.2 and above land to Preferred due to benefits
Woodland habitat networks	500 m buffer around existing woodland	Upgrades Class 3.2 and above land to Preferred due to benefits
Natural flood management	SEPA Natural Flood Management opportunities for run-off reduction (medium and high potential)	Upgrades Class 3.2 and above land to Preferred due to benefits
	SEPA Natural Flood Management opportunities for floodplain storage (medium and high potential)	Upgrades Class 3.2 and above land to Preferred due to benefits