

Manifesto for the 2021 Scottish Parliament Elections

Trees for a green and just recovery



WOODLAND
TRUST SCOTLAND

Woods and trees offer solutions to some of the most pressing problems facing our society.

Good stewardship of the nation's native woodlands will reap huge rewards.

The needs of our woods and trees must be in the minds of the next Government.

It is essential the next Scottish Government leads on tackling climate change and reversing biodiversity loss through investment in nature-based solutions. In a nature and climate emergency, and as we recover from the Covid-19 pandemic, there is no time to waste. The Advisory Group on Economic Recovery has highlighted the key role of nature-based solutions. We need to apply them, now.

Resources are limited and have to be well spent. Investing in native woodland and trees should be a priority because it is a cost-effective, nature-based solution to the climate emergency. Our native woodland already provides space for wildlife to thrive and people to enjoy, while supporting many jobs across Scotland. It can provide even more if we expand woodland cover and take better care of existing woods.

Ahead of COP26, the next Scottish Government must show the world that it has its own house in order when it comes to protecting and enhancing nature.

Imagine a Scotland where:

- our ancient woods and trees, jewels in our ecological and cultural heritage, are given the same protection as our ancient monuments
- trees make our towns and cities greener, healthier and more prosperous places to live and work
- we have double the amount of native woodland we have today
- our existing native woodland and the wildlife it supports is protected from overgrazing by deer
- we take seriously our responsibility to protect and expand our globally important rainforests on Scotland's west coast



Making this happen...

Scotland must set out a clear direction towards environmental restoration which will provide economic benefits as well as help meet climate and biodiversity targets. Woodland Trust Scotland is asking you to emphasise the following in your party manifesto for the upcoming election:

SUMMARY

Woodland Trust Scotland top priorities for the next Scottish Government to deliver are:

- Double native woodland cover by 2050 and create the UK's biggest native woodland
- End the destruction of ancient woodland and trees immediately
- End overgrazing of woodland by deer
- Save Scotland's rainforest, a globally important habitat on the west coast, before it's too late
- Green up our towns and cities
- Put trees and woods at the heart of sustainable land management

These issues should be viewed as a priority to be included in your party's manifesto as steps towards solving the environmental emergency and not passing this onto future generations.

Read on for full details of these priorities and contact us for more information (see page 12).

Double native woodland cover by 2050 and create the UK's biggest native woodland

The next Scottish Government will take us halfway to the deadline for reaching Scotland's ambitious target to reduce 75% of greenhouse gases by 2030. To maximise the benefits of trees to address the climate and nature emergencies and contribute to reaching that target, Scotland's native woodland area must double from the current 4% to 8% of land area by 2050. We need woodland that is delivered at scale, locks in carbon for the long-term and also provides habitat for biodiversity. Native woodland can deliver all these benefits and much more.

By committing to creating the biggest native woodland anywhere in the UK, the next Scottish Government will be contributing to a green and just recovery. This woodland can be achieved through tree planting and natural regeneration. Planting trees sourced and grown in Scotland or the UK can provide increased nursery sector employment opportunities and minimise the biosecurity risk associated with imported species. Small scale woodland related enterprises are important employers in rural Scotland. e.g. community woodland ownership, timber processing, and harvesting of non-timber forest products such as mushrooms. Significant native woodland expansion would provide these organisations with certainty and opportunities for growth and job creation.



John Macpherson/WTML

The next Government must invest in native woodland expansion by:

- Creating the biggest native woodland anywhere in the UK.
- Setting the target for native woodland creation to be at least 50% of the overall target for tree planting.
- Increasing the grant monies available for native woodland creation part of the forestry grant scheme.
- Mandating native trees are grown and sourced in the UK.
- Integrating trees and woods with farming to fully enable the benefits of trees (at a variety of scales) to be recognised by everyone.
- Supporting nurseries to enable a rapid expansion of Scottish grown trees to reduce the risk of importing diseases.
- Ensuring this expansion drives the recovery of nature; enriches people's lives and stores carbon for the long-term.



Ben Holmes/WTML

End the destruction of ancient woodland and trees immediately

Ancient woodland and veteran trees are irreplaceable and deliver the most benefit for biodiversity. They are part of our cultural and natural heritage. Alongside woods and trees of importance to nature and local amenity, they are in desperate need of protection. Scotland's next National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) is a chance to give ancient woodland the protection it deserves from inappropriate development and to ensure trees are around long-term to absorb carbon to meet Scotland's climate targets. Ancient woodland is also under threat from overgrazing; this issue is addressed in the section below.

The next Government must make it a priority to bring forward an NPF4 that:

- Ensures no further loss of ancient woodland and veteran trees from development.
- Strengthens policy wording for the protection of ancient woodland and veteran trees, including for the provision of buffer zones between ancient woodlands and proposed developments.
- Protects Scotland's globally important west coast rainforest habitat.
- Works at landscape-scale and takes account of cumulative impacts of development, to avoid fragmentation of habitats and support better connections between habitats.
- Updates the current Ancient Woodland Inventory to provide a reliable and comprehensive inventory to allow better protection of this habitat.



End overgrazing by deer once and for all

Deer are an important and valuable part of Scotland's nature. The impact of high deer populations on the successful creation, protection and restoration of native woodland, is however constraining Scotland's ability to meet climate and nature targets. Restored woodland can help meet climate targets. The natural capacity of soils and plants to store carbon means that restoring native woodland habitats, including Scotland's precious rainforest and irreplaceable ancient woodland, can provide nature-based solutions to climate change.

Herbivores, specifically deer, are one of the biggest threats to Scotland's woodlands. Modernising deer legislation and the implementation of the Deer Working Group (DWG) recommendations are key to improving the condition of our woodlands. If we are to meet our forestry targets and climate and biodiversity ambitions, Scotland's deer issue must be addressed once and for all.



Just transition and green recovery rationale: Scottish Environment LINK has identified that modernising our deer management system can provide the following green recovery benefits:

- More rural jobs: Lower densities would require more stalkers. Drawing upon existing skills and expertise across the private, public and voluntary sectors, deer management could be expanded to include community models of hunting (as widely practised in Europe), giving an economic and social boost to our most sparsely populated areas.
- Reduced rural inequality: Getting more people involved at local level in planning and delivering sustainable deer management could help ensure that revenues from stalking and venison are distributed more widely and fairly.
- A cut in greenhouse gases: As well as damaging emerging woodlands and peatlands, Scotland's red deer alone produce 5,500 tonnes of methane each year – the equivalent of 137,500 tonnes of CO₂. A 20 per cent reduction in numbers would save the carbon equivalent of around 15 million car miles on Scotland's roads each year.
- A stronger venison industry: Doubling the annual deer cull in Scotland would potentially double revenues from this nutritious, low-fat premium protein which is already worth millions to Scotland's rural economy.

The next Scottish Government must tackle this issue head on by:

- Introducing a new or updated Deer Act.
- Implementing the recommendations of the Deer Working Group.
- Integrating deer management within the land use frameworks to ensure decisions are taken at landscape scale and for a variety of public and environmental outcomes.
- Setting a clear direction for deer management in Scotland with a view to ensure that numbers are sustainable, to allow Scotland to meet its climate and biodiversity targets.
- Resourcing and empowering NatureScot to use its powers in this area for the public benefit.



Save Scotland's Rainforest, a globally important habitat on the west coast, before it's too late

Scotland has some of the best remaining rainforest sites in Europe and we owe it to the world to protect them. The combination of high rainfall and relatively mild year-round temperatures means woodlands on the west coast are very humid. This allows these woodlands to provide a refuge for some of the world's rarest bryophytes and lichens.

But Scotland's rainforest is in trouble and it needs policy support and resource allocation that promotes its restoration and expansion. As little as 30,000 hectares remain – a mere 2% of Scotland's woodland cover and only one fifth of the area it could occupy according to climatic conditions. The main threats to this habitat are deer browsing and rhododendron infestation.

Just transition and green recovery rationale:

As shown above, addressing deer overgrazing can provide green recovery benefits. The same is true for rhododendron clearance. Done at scale and with appropriate follow-up interventions over time this clearance can deliver significant environmental outcomes. It is a labour intensive job which can result in the creation of local enterprises to manage this issue and build skills within a community. Projects already proposed within the rainforest area illustrate the opportunities for investment, enterprise and community involvement to help achieve benefits across society, rural economy and the environment. Support from the next Scottish Government for the rainforest means a sustainable future route for securing investment, managing, expanding and linking rainforest clusters, and for communities to engage and benefit more from the rainforest.

The next Scottish Government must take serious and urgent action to support Scotland's rainforest:

- Strengthen policy and allocate resource so that browsing is at a level to allow regeneration and the sustained long-term ecological health of the rainforest.
- Set out a strategic objective to remove long established invasive non-native species (INNS) supported by a strategic road map to tackle INNS, at the scale needed, and with a legacy strategy incorporated, in order to manage re-invasion and biosecurity.
- Recognise the restoration and expansion of Scotland's rainforest as a nature-based solution to the climate and biodiversity crisis.



Green up our towns and cities

Access to woodland and trees can make us physically healthier, improve mental wellbeing and increase quality of life. During the Covid-19 lockdown, where accessible to them, people have found much needed respite in nature and in woodlands. But the lockdown restrictions have also highlighted the unequal access to good quality greenspace and woodland, particularly in areas of highest deprivation. This is why we need to bring more trees close to where people live and work. Urban trees deliver significant economic benefits through the delivery of ecosystem services such as: clean air, rainwater management, health and wellbeing for people, access to high quality greenspaces.

The next government must commit to increasing the tree canopy cover across all Scotland's towns and cities by:

- Adequately resourcing local authorities to deliver this increase and to protect existing trees.
- Making policy provisions in the National Planning Framework 4 to support urban tree planting and the greening up of our towns and cities.
- Ensuring trees are planted close to where people live and where most benefit would be delivered to communities.



Put trees and woods at the heart of sustainable land management

The next Scottish Government has to take unique opportunities to change land management policies and subsidies to deliver a viable future for people and land. Trees and woods in our landscapes provide us with many life essentials: clean air, water, soil health, fuel and building materials. Trees also offer huge benefits to wildlife and new woods and trees will help improve biodiversity and habitat connectivity across landscapes. This is why trees must be put at the heart of new sustainable land management policy.

Sustainable land management is also tied in with land use and ownership. Fully healthy, restored native woods can be community assets which can help empower communities to take their future into their own hands.

Community woods require more management and can engage people over the long-term thus providing resilient jobs.

To deliver a sustainable land management policy with opportunities for all, the next Scottish Government must:

- Ensure that the Regional Land Use Frameworks are a precursor to any decision on support for action.
- Introduce comprehensive, simple incentives to deliver action and outcomes that benefit the environment and people.
- Target incentive mechanisms to address specific issues associated with priority species and habitats. For example new native woods adjoining ancient woods to buffer and extend them.
- Support advice and training to deliver resource efficiency and innovation. For example agroforestry systems.





Julie Howden/WTML

These issues should be viewed as a priority to be included in your party's manifesto as steps towards solving the environmental emergency and not passing this onto future generations.

Woodland Trust Scotland hopes you take the above into account in the development of your party manifesto and looks forward to continuing to work with you on these vital issues over the coming years.



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