British forestry: 70 years of achievement

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Summary

After a brief review of changes in major demands for wood before 1900, data for the woodland area in Great Britain at intervals through the present century are tabulated. Tables show how the targets for productive woodland area set in 1915 and renewed in 1943 have been achieved. The main increase in gross woodland area occurred after 1945.

The state forest service for Great Britain, the Forestry Commission, was formed in 1919; as a result of its vigorous land acquisition and afforestation policy, at 31.3.96, it owned or leased 35 per cent of the British woodland area.

Government support for private forestry has been through grants both for rehabilitating felled woodland and extending areas planted; grants have been paid mostly through the Forestry Commission.

The most recent Government policy statements on forestry look to further substantial increases in the woodland of Britain, reflecting the influence both of membership of the European Community and cognisance of global environmental and resource needs.

Introduction

The first issue of Forestry opened with an article by R. L. Robinson† briefly reviewing the policy framework in which the newly formed Forestry Commission was to operate. He pointed out how, apart from the Crown woods, it had been the accepted policy of Great Britain up to 1914 to regard forestry as the business of private individuals, not the State. However, to meet the exigencies of the 1914–18 war, timber was felled on between 180 000 and 200 000 ha of private woodland. This, and the experience of owners of hardwood and coppice areas in England that, in the immediately preceding decades, their woodlands had yielded little or no margin of profit, led to recognition of the need for the State to become involved and to the formation of the Forestry Commission in 1919. Robinson foresaw that if an adequate reserve of growing timber was to be maintained in this country, the State would have to come more and more into the business, on a scale influenced less by the desirable rate of planting than by financial considerations.

He also predicted a dominant role for introduced conifers, Sitka spruce, Japanese larch,

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† R. L. Robinson (later, Sir Roy, and finally Lord Robinson of Kielder Forest and of Adelaide) had been appointed 'Technical Commissioner' at the formation of the Forestry Commission in 1919. He became Chairman of the Commissioners in 1932 and held that position until his death in 1952.
Lodgepole pine and Douglas fir and expansion of the domestic wood using industries to accommodate the produce.

This paper describes achievements over the last 70 years in the context of Robinson's beliefs and the longer silvicultural inheritance of British woodlands and forests.

Loss of forest area

In post-glacial time, the countryside was largely forest, its composition being limited by species' individual success in migrating from continental Europe. However, with the arrival in neolithic times of men able to clear land and cultivate the soil, the forest was progressively driven back until by 1900, the woodland cover was down to about 5 per cent of Britain's land area (Godwin, 1975; Perlin, 1989).

Woodland survived where it was seen to be of use or because of its inaccessibility. Few of Britain's present woodlands are not marked by some past use, whether rural or industrial.

The value of woodlands, apart from shelter, underwood and habitat for wildlife, was formerly for fuel and timber. The prevalence of former charcoal hearths in many older woodlands reflects charcoal's importance as the prime means of smelting iron up to the eighteenth century. By late Elizabethan times, conflicting demands of ship building, iron smelting and glass production were causing concern. Some 100 years later, Pepys and Evelyn both chronicled the widespread shortage of accessible timber. Imports of Baltic planking for shipbuilding was reported in the 1670s (Hart, 1995).

The discovery of techniques for coking coal and the ability to smelt iron with coke instead of charcoal was the first of a series of changes devaluing the then woodland structure and management.

A second major blow to former long-term aspirations and assumptions was the change from wood to steel for the construction of ships. During the Napoleonic wars, great calls were made on British woodlands to find wood for boat construction. By 1815, there was again a general shortage of timber, prices were high and prospects during the next three decades for profitable new hardwood plantations were good.

Much of the present day older broadleaved woodland dates back to this period. By the 1860s, however, it was clear that there would be no long-term future demand for oak for boats. Prices fell and for lower quality wood have not recovered.

A third blow to woodland management and particular the underwood industries based on coppice working was the advent, first of wire and its use for fencing, and then of manufacturing processes able to turn out superior goods at lower costs than could come from coppice. Coal, gas and latterly electricity supplanted wood for domestic heating.

By the end of the nineteenth century, North America and continental Europe had become the main sources of supply of timber for the UK (Holmes, 1975).

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, many of the more prosperous landowners became interested in the plants being discovered by explorers and plant collectors. In many estates, specimens grew far faster than any indigenous species, particularly species from the oceanic regions of the Pacific coast of North America. Small-scale trial plantations followed, thereby laying the foundations for much of twentieth century British forestry (Macdonald et al., 1957). Many other exotic species showed potential for enriching the landscape through sensitive introduction of specimen trees and shrubs along woodland edges.

Changes in woodland area in the twentieth century

Table 1 lists woodland areas for years in the period 1895–1996 for which there are data from woodland censuses or surveys.

Figures for each year in Table 1 are not exactly comparable because each census or survey was carried out on a slightly different basis, e.g. in respect of the smallest woodland area considered. Nevertheless, these differences have been corrected for as far as possible so that the table clearly shows the important trends during the period. Table 2 shows changes in woodland area for five periods within the overall period of Table 1.
Table 1: Woodland area in Great Britain 1895–1996 and Northern Ireland 1924 and 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective date of survey or census</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1913</th>
<th>1924</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1947</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total woodland—GB</td>
<td>1103</td>
<td>1294</td>
<td>1254</td>
<td>1376</td>
<td>1457</td>
<td>1740</td>
<td>2108</td>
<td>2406</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive High forest</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>877</td>
<td>573</td>
<td>771</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>1265</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>2157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conifer</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>1321</td>
<td>1521</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardwood</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coppice/coppice with standards</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other woodland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>554</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrub</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felled</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>328*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>Wales</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>892</td>
<td>852</td>
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<td>England</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total woodland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive woodland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other woodland</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>State owned</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Area of wartime felling was 200 Kha.
Values are '000 ha.

Table 2: Changes in woodland area in Great Britain 1913–1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total woodland area</td>
<td>-40</td>
<td>+122</td>
<td>+81</td>
<td>+283</td>
<td>+368</td>
<td>+298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productive woodland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High forest</td>
<td>-304</td>
<td>+198</td>
<td>-14</td>
<td>+508</td>
<td>+616</td>
<td>+276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coppice/coppice with standards</td>
<td>-32</td>
<td>+5</td>
<td>-74</td>
<td>-116</td>
<td>+9</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other woodland</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>+350</td>
<td>-81</td>
<td>+169</td>
<td>-109</td>
<td>-257</td>
<td>+21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>-7</td>
<td>+8</td>
<td>-120</td>
<td>+131</td>
<td>+338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>+23</td>
<td>+129</td>
<td>+73</td>
<td>+403</td>
<td>+237</td>
<td>-40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values are '000 ha.
The tables show:

- The target identified initially by Acland (Anon. 1917), and renewed in 1943 of 5 million acres (i.e. 2 million ha) of productive forest by the end of the century was achieved with a few years in hand.
- There was only a small net change in the gross woodland area of Great Britain between 1913 and 1939. Since then however, the total area has nearly doubled. The net area of privately owned woodland did not increase however until after 1965. What increases in woodland area there were until 1965 can be attributed to the activities of the Forestry Commission—the State forest service.
- The net area of State forest increased until 1980 after which the effect of politically imposed land sales is apparent.
- The effects of wartime demands in 1914–18 and 1939–45 appear as reductions in high forest area between 1913 and 1924, and again between 1939 and 1947. The areas shown as felled in 1924 and 1947 also reflect these demands.
- The 1914–18 fellings reduced the area of conifer woodland in Britain to its lowest level this century and had not been replenished by 1939. The 1939–45 wartime fellings caused a lesser drop. The conifer woodland area in Britain in 1913 was not again equalled (and subsequently exceeded) until the 1950s.
- While the decline in area of coppice shown is dramatic, some of the decrease results from reclassification, former abandoned coppice being reclassified as scrub.
- The area of unstocked felled land conspicuous in the 1947 census figures has been largely eliminated. Most was replanted, but some became agricultural land, some was used for housing and some for commercial developments. Nevertheless, the trebling of the productive forest area between 1947 and 1996 demonstrates the effectiveness of the stimuli to forestry during this period.

The role of the State

Before 1919, Britain had no State forest policy in any accepted sense of the term. Previous action in relation to woodland had been taken *ad hoc* in response to specific problems arising in relation to the Crown forests or to the provision of oak for naval purposes. When this requirement petered out, the country reverted to a *laissez faire* policy encouraged by a vista of apparently infinite cheap imports from overseas.

The necessities of the 1914–18 war drew the Government's attention to the danger of undue reliance on timber imports. Following a report by the Acland Committee (Anon., 1917), an Interim Forest Authority was set up in 1918 and a Forestry Bill passed in 1919. This Act established the Forestry Commission and gave it wide powers to acquire and plant land, promote timber supply and forest industries, undertake education and research, make grants and give advice to woodland owners.

For Great Britain, the long-term target was to bring into production all the then felled and devastated land and in addition, to increase the conifer woodland area by approximately 720 000 ha to an overall total of 1 930 000 ha.

Since its inception, the Forestry Commission has been the main driving force in the UK behind forestry refurbishment and expansion in the twentieth Century. Its programme of afforestation coupled with effective staff training and a programme of applied research has given it a standing of international renown.

In Northern Ireland, the interests of forestry are looked after by the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland (DANI).

At the same time, the need to work closely with other Government departments with environmental responsibilities has been fully recognized, e.g. Scottish National Heritage, English Nature, Countryside Commission etc.


Conclusions from the 1994 Forestry Review are set out in *Our Forests The Way Ahead Enterprise Environment and Access* (SOED, 1994). They include provision that the part of the Forestry Commission responsible for woodland management (i.e. Forest Enterprise) should operate as a semi-autonomous ‘Next Steps Agency’ within the Forestry Commission. This took effect from 1st April, 1996, (Forest Enterprise, 1997).
Support for private forestry

The Forestry Commission has always perceived the annual increase in woodland area as one major yardstick of success, both its own and private planting.

During its first 20 years, the Forestry Commission planted 149,000 ha, purchased a further 23,000 ha of standing woodland, and gave private owners planting grants for 51,000 ha. This however amounted to only 66 per cent of what had been hoped for by the Acland committee and reflected widespread lack of interest among woodland owners in new planting or restocking felled land. Discussions in 1930 and again in 1938 were opened with private forestry interests seeking how best to stimulate planting, against a background of agriculture in depression. Matters reviewed included taxation, forestry advisory services, organized marketing, training for estate woodmen, publications on forestry techniques etc. ‘Forestry Practice’ (Forestry Commission Bulletin 14) was first published in 1933 in response to these representations.

The 1939–45 war needs over-rod more long-term considerations and made substantial calls on the woodland resources. Notwithstanding, in 1943 the Forestry Commissioners prepared reports on Post-war Forest Policy and Post-war Forest Policy, Private Woodlands (Forestry Commissioners, 1943a, 1943b). These carried recommendations similar to those of the Acland Committee in 1917, i.e. to replenish and increase the productive woodland area, with a target of 2 million ha by the year 2000. These recommendations were accepted and embodied in the Forestry Act, 1945.

In 1945, the 1938 consultations with private woodland owners were resumed and led eventually to the 1947 Forestry Act empowering the Forestry Commission to operate a ‘Dedication

Table 3: Forestry grant-aid schemes available to the private woodland owner, 1947–1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of scheme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1946–1947</td>
<td>Interim planting grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947–1975</td>
<td>Dedication scheme—Basis I and Basis II (area in scheme at 31.3.75: 479,000 ha*) incl. management grant; maintenance grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973–1974</td>
<td>Interim planting grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974–1981</td>
<td>Dedication scheme—Basis III (area in scheme at 31.3.82: 132,000 ha*) incl. management grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978–1981</td>
<td>Native pinewood grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949–1958</td>
<td>Thinning grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949–1972</td>
<td>Approved woods grant (area in scheme at 31.3.74: 70,000 ha*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951–1977</td>
<td>Small woods planting grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977–1981</td>
<td>Revised basis for grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951–1958</td>
<td>Poplar planting grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953–1957</td>
<td>Grey squirrel tail bonus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954–1978</td>
<td>Scrub clearance grant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981–1988</td>
<td>Forestry grant scheme (area in scheme at 31.3.89: 273,000 ha*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985–1998</td>
<td>Broadleaved woodland grant scheme (area in scheme at 31.3.89: 47,000 ha*)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988–</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–</td>
<td>Community woodland supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–(1998)</td>
<td>Locational supplement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988–1992</td>
<td>Farm woodland scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992–</td>
<td>Farm woodland premium scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995–</td>
<td>Woodland improvement grant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The areas shown above are the gross areas accepted into schemes up to the time they were closed to further applicants. Planting under approved plans could continue until the date of expiry of the relevant plan. Areas for new planting and restocking are both included. Some areas might remain unplanted.

Source: Forestry Commission Annual Reports.
scheme' as a means of combining grant aid to private owners with promotion of good forestry management.

Between 1947 and the present, there have been a series of measures both fiscal and grant aid to encourage private woodland planting. Grand-aid schemes are listed in Table 3. To appreciate their full significance, they have to be related to the national tax regimes (income tax, death duties/inheritance tax, company taxation etc.) at the time, an aspect outside the scope of this paper. It should be noted however, that the ability to offset expenditure on new forest plantations against income before tax was a strong incentive for many individuals to invest in forestry.

The figures for areas of land entered for these schemes and the increase in productive woodland on privately owned land illustrate the success of the grant systems.

The European Community and United Nations
Since UK’s entry into the European Community, its policies and directives have had an increasing effect on forestry, partly as a side-effect of its agricultural policies and partly in relation to attempts to harmonize trade.

At the same time, the United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 on Environment and Development has placed forestry in a more prominent position in relation to issues of global environmental stability and sustainability.

It might be expected that having achieved the area of woodland targeted both by Acland in 1917 and again in 1943, a halt to woodland expansion might be called. However, EC and UN pressures undoubtedly had some influence on Government thinking; in 1991, after some 12 years of evolving initiatives, a Government policy statement sought:

- the sustainable management of our woods and forests;
- a steady expansion of tree cover to increase the many diverse benefits that forestry provides.

In 1996, three Rural White Papers were issued (Cm 3016, 3041 and 3180) expressing the Government’s view that:

- in England, the area of woodland should be doubled over the next 50 years (current productive area, 877 000 ha);
- in Wales, the woodland area should increase by 50 per cent (current productive area, 235 000 ha);
- in Scotland, the expansion of woodland area should continue, so as to provide environmental benefits as well as increasing timber production in the long run (current productive area, 1 085 000 ha);
- in Northern Ireland, the least forested part of the United Kingdom, afforestation should be encouraged on land where it is the most appropriate long-term land use (current productive area, c. 100 000 ha).

Taking England and Wales alone, this implies increasing the British woodland area by 50 per cent and is setting a target of woodland expansion similar to Acland’s, but in half the time. Any increases in Scotland are additional to that!

Promotion of wood-using industry
Through the Forestry Commission, the wood-using industries have been provided with medium-term forecasts of timber availability as a basis for commercial expansion. These have been updated at five-year intervals. It has also been the Forestry Commission’s policy to market timber on a regular annual basis and not to allow market price to control supply.

Log price and demand is to some extent cyclical, dependent both on market buoyancy and industrial capacity. Pulp, chipboard and other panel products operate in an international market where the timing of new capacity coming on stream is not always well done. Competitiveness may also be affected by changes in rates of exchange of national currencies. For example in the early 1980s, the high value of sterling against the dollar weakened the competitive position of several pulp and board mills in the UK and led to their closure. Other pressures leading to closure have been small scale of operation and loss of market. One notable example of the loss of market is the disappearance of the UK match industry, to the dismay of the many woodland owners who had been carefully nurturing their
poplars for this market. A more gradual but larger scale loss of market has been that for mining timber.

On the positive side, the demand for timber for constructional purposes has remained throughout the present century. Mechanical stress grading ensures that timber grown in the UK is utilized to its fullest potential. The pulp and particle board industries are currently thriving. In particular, medium density fibreboard (MDF) is widely welcomed and utilized.

Conifers and conflict

The extensive planting of conifers has not been welcomed everywhere. In the Lake District in Cumbria, north-west England, opposition to conifer planting was voiced in the 1930s; subsequently, other voices elsewhere expressed similar views.

After 1945, control of building and commercial development was vested in Local Authorities. Development on farmland and change of land use between farming and forestry were however excluded. Periodically, however, often in reaction to specific circumstances, calls have been made to bring afforestation of farmland under local authority planning control.

These calls have been turned down. However, a system of consultation about new planting proposals was set up, using local authorities and national nature conservation and amenity bodies as the touchstones for local acceptability. While periodically updated (most recently in 1996), this system remains in being and works fairly well. Only a small number of unresolved cases have gone to Regional Advisory Committees or higher levels for resolution. At the same time, the time and cost of preparing plans, especially if an environmental assessment is required, are considered excessive by many private woodland owners and agents.

Only in one instance has a Forestry Minister written to the Forestry Commissioners imposing a blanket restriction. This was in 1988 and was to the effect that unimproved land in England above the 800 foot contour should not under ordinary circumstances be planted with crops that are predominantly coniferous. The restriction is still in operation.

In Scotland, Indicative Strategies for forestry were developed in the 1980s as part of Structure Plans. They act as a means of forewarning potential planters of the attitude of Regional Authorities in particular areas.

Broadleaved woodland

In 1919, the first priority was the successful establishment of conifers; broadleaves were planted on heavier lowland soils, especially in the 1930s, and often in mixture with conifer nurses.

After World War II, the first priority in replanting was again conifers. A Treasury policy review in 1957 gave more prominence to economic returns from plantings, continuing the emphasis on conifers and leading to some conversion of broadleaf areas to conifers.

In the mid 1960s however, HRH the Duke of Edinburgh sponsored a debate on The Countryside in the 1970s. This led to a review of practice in relation to broadleaved woodland and a subsequent rise in status of broadleaves in British forest policy. This change was also influenced by the scale of loss of broadleaves in many rural areas through:

- conversion of former areas of broadleaved scrub;
- loss of elms through Dutch elm disease;
- hedgerow removal on farms and die-back of hedgerow trees through increased exposure and loss of roots through cultivation;

and by the recognition of the importance of ancient semi-natural woodlands.

From that time, the Forestry Commission has given greater priority to good silviculture of its broadleaves plantations and to the inclusion of broadleaves in new plantings, private and state, where they would contribute to the landscape and wildlife value of the site.

Broadleaved woodlands policy was reviewed in 1984–85 and Guidelines for the management of broadleaved woodland was issued in 1985.

Multi-purpose forestry

Within a very short time of its inception and in particular, with the transfer of the New Forest,
Forestry Commission staff had to incorporate in their management, provisions for wildlife management, access and recreation, as well as the obligations arising out of the particular histories of the two best known former Crown forests.

The Forestry Commission designated its first National Forest Parks in the 1930s in Argyll, Snowdonia and the Forest of Dean. These were followed in the 1940s by Hardknott, Glen Trool and Glen More.

Increasing demand for attention to effects of forests on:

- rivers and lakes, wildlife conservation;
- landscape, archaeology;
- visitor management, community involvement and recently;
- air pollution and carbon sequestration in relation to global warming;

has led to series of guidelines and other publications on these topics for woodland managers.

Sustainable non-market benefits

Activities such as walking, riding etc., in the forest have reasonably well established bases for valuation, using counts of individuals participating and the type of activity.

Increasingly, the value of woodlands as a setting for housing or commercial development is also becoming recognized. Similarly, trees in towns are being assigned values for their landscape effect due to size, location, colour, form etc. There is still scope to improve the basis on which non-market benefits are valued so that they may be funded with increased confidence.

The future—the challenge

R.L. Robinson in his paper on ‘British Forestry’ in Forestry 1 (1927) observed:

... the man who strives to become the perfect forester has set up for himself a high and worthy ideal. He is to work ... for his bread and butter (which may be available in sufficient quantity, but certainly not in superfluity), not only for others, but also for future generations. In keeping a just balance between the present and the future, between the work which is accessible from the ride side and that which is remote, he is to resist every temptation merely to ‘make a show’ or to be content with shoddy work.

These remarks made in 1927 apply just as much now.

The political support in the United Kingdom for continued multi-purpose woodland planting is assured in the short-term. However, as in the 1920s, change is all around us. To achieve the most recent targets for forestry, present and coming forest managers will have to be cognisant of:

- World population trends. The world population has increased dramatically in the twentieth century; many authorities expect it to increase by 80–100 per cent over the next 50 years. The consequential need for food, and for raw material for housing and industry is likely to stretch world food production resources, and put further pressure for forest clearance in Third World lands. Pressure to maintain biodiversity and wildlife habitat will increase correspondingly.
- World carbon dioxide levels have increased and will increase further if mankind’s activities continue as at present. Possibilities of global warming result from this change.
- Understanding of the genetic codes embodied in DNA strands of many living organisms is making feasible biological changes previously believed to be impossible. Agriculturists are relying on increases in crop yields through genetic engineering to feed increases in world numbers.
- Micro-chip information technology is changing more rapidly and more conspicuously than any other current non-biological aspect of modern life. Its influence is all-pervasive. It is likely to alter life-styles fundamentally and may affect demands on resources.

The ethical challenge

The ethical challenge is to keep under continuing surveillance, the values underlying judgements on the balance of resource allocation in forest practice in the UK, compared with the evolving world scene.
The professional challenge

The professional challenge is to maintain:

- vigilance against the known and unknown threats;
- prudent enterprise in innovation;
- vigour in promoting effective and safe working practices;
- humility to review dispassionately the possibility of mistake.

If these are met, the future of British forests and the forestry profession is assured.

References


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