

Minister takes the high road for woodland fact finding mission

The Minister and Fergus Ewing MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity visited a number of forestry sites, including a new woodland creation scheme at Westloch and the 'Sheep and Trees' scheme at Wakefield Farm. The Minister also received a tour of Forest Research where she was updated on their essential tree-related research work.

The Scottish Government has made it a statutory requirement to publish and maintain a forestry strategy and in 2016, the McKinnon review recommended streamlining the tree planting process and earlier engagement between tree-planting businesses and communities.

In 2017, a new "Sheep and Trees" partnership initiative was introduced, aimed at helping land managers to identify the many opportunities woodland creation can bring to support and develop their existing farm enterprises.

During a tour of the sites the Minister discussed these developments with Cabinet Secretary Ewing and Forestry Commission Scotland officials as part of her research aimed at advancing policies and initiatives to improve woodland cover in Wales.

The Welsh Government's [Woodlands for Wales Forestry Strategy](#) and accompanying 5-year action plan sets a target of 2,000 hectares of new planting per annum. Increasing woodland cover and developing a competitive and integrated forestry sector are key outcomes of the Strategy.

Hannah Blythyn said:

"Not enough trees are currently being planted in Wales. That is why I identified improving and expanding our woodlands as being amongst my top ministerial priorities. Our Woodlands for Wales Strategy is a long term vision for forestry in Wales and we need to back this up with innovative, effective action on the ground.

"It is important we in Wales are outward looking and seek to learn from other countries' successes. Whilst the land area available for afforestation is much larger in Scotland than Wales, the visit was an invaluable opportunity to examine the Scottish approach and the subsequent successful increase in woodland creation. I am grateful to Fergus Ewing, Forestry Commission Scotland and everyone I met for the warm welcome.

Rural Affairs Secretary Fergus Ewing said:

"I was delighted to welcome Ms Blythyn to Scotland. The visit was a

valuable opportunity to share our experiences and strengthen our cross-border collaboration.

“Scotland’s forestry industry is a real success story contributing £1 billion to the country’s economy and supporting 25,000 jobs. Woodland creation is very much at the heart of this success and I have introduced a number of new measures to drive this forward. By working hand in hand with the industry and other land managers, we are now starting to see a welcome increase in tree planting activity across Scotland.

“I hope we can continue to share experiences and learn from each other as we work to deliver our common goal of planting and growing more trees for the benefit of everyone on these islands.”