Forestry and Land Scotland
Coilltearachd agus Fearann Alba

Strathyre Forests Long Term Plan approach to CCF

Overview and background to CCF management

Previous plans identified significant areas of West Strathyre, Strathyre East and Kirkton for management under Continuous Cover Forestry, although only a small area of the forest, primarily in West Strathyre, has ever been managed as such. All previous plans recognised the implementation of CCF is a long-term aspiration and that not all areas are suited to CCF management. It is widely accepted that the successful implementation of CCF requires clear objectives, as well as appropriate management and suitable site conditions – in particular:

- Regular thinning to generate and maintain individual tree stability; and
- Site conditions suitable to achieve this (in terms of exposure, soil properties, and access)

Historic rationale for CCF

The overarching aim of CCF outlined in previous plans was the maintenance of permanent woodland cover, with the intention of achieving the following objectives in tandem with continued timber production:

- Landscape continuity and visual amenity
- Slope stability and soil protection
- Water quality protection
- Habitat continuity and biodiversity
- Species and age-class diversification

CCF issues and challenges

The ability to undertake regular and consistent management operations is critical to the successful implementation of CCF systems. This remains a challenge in many areas previously identified for CCF, where poor operational access, primarily due to steep ground, has made delivering regular thinning interventions impractical. This issue has been recognised for at least 15 years and is likely to remain the most significant constraint on the wider implementation of CCF going forward. Repeated thinning over many years helps to develop a more stable stand structure and encourages natural regeneration under sheltered woodland conditions. However, heavy thinning can also promote regeneration which is not desired, such as Sitka spruce in areas identified for species diversification. Finally, while CCF is often promoted as a means of increasing forest resilience, it is not immune to major disturbance events such as windblow, which has affected several areas previously managed under, or transitioning towards, CCF.

Future management approach

The implementation of CCF should be considered as a means of achieving specified management objectives, and not as an objective in its own right. While the reasons for pursuing CCF management outlined above may still be relevant, the implementation of CCF does not guarantee the delivery of these objectives; many of which can also be achieved through other means. For example, landscape continuity and slope stability may be achieved by restructuring the forest to minimum intervention woodland, which in some locations may be more suitable than pursuing continued timber production through CCF.

Experience gained over successive plan periods indicates a substantial proportion of the areas identified for CCF are unlikely to be suitable for this management approach going forward. This may be because it is operationally impractical, because the site or stand structure is not suitable, or because CCF will not achieve the specified management objectives. The new Long Term Plan (LTP) must therefore reconsider where CCF management is prescribed, and focus on suitable locations where it can realistically deliver the defined site management objectives.

This approach will be achieved through the following general principles:

1. Going forward, the specific management objectives for each area of the forest will be more clearly defined, and appropriate interventions will be specified to achieve these objectives.
2. CCF will only be prescribed where it is realistically achievable, and where it offers a clear and deliverable pathway to achieving the management objectives for the area in question.
3. Where CCF is identified as a suitable management system, more detailed plans will clearly outline the required interventions to achieve the specific management objectives.

Summary

Previous plans identified extensive areas for management under CCF; however, experience has shown that many of these areas are unlikely to be suitable for CCF management. The new LTP will therefore review the application of CCF and identify the management approach most suited to achieving site-specific objectives. Depending on local circumstances, this may include continued CCF management, clearfelling, long-term retention, minimum intervention, or other Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS). Details of these will be developed and presented as part of the full LTP submission.