

# THE DEBATE ON FORESTRY AS A MEANS OF SOLVING THE HIGHLAND PROBLEM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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## I. Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to reveal the main characteristics of the debate on forestry as a means of solving the problems of the Scottish Highlands in the twentieth century, especially from the foundation of the Forestry Commission in 1919 to the present day. In the essay the main arguments for a large-scale increase in forestry in the Highlands are analyzed, and an estimate is given of the importance of the role played by factors connected with underdeveloped areas in the forestry policy which was followed. These matters are examined in the context of the success which the forestry policy has had. Moreover, the arguments of critics of the forestry policy are dealt with. The arguments of those who did not take a definite stand in this respect are also analyzed. An attempt is made to find out how much continuity there has been in the debate and to what extent one can discern certain main stages in it.

The subject may be regarded as important both as part of the policy of the authorities towards the Scottish Highlands and as part of the history of forestry in Scotland, especially in the Highlands.

As is well known there is no universally accepted definition of the term 'Highlands'. Here it is taken to include the former 'Crofting Counties', which include the islands. (The islands, of course, do not play an important role in the forestry debate. Great hopes were never attached to them as far as afforestation was concerned). This area is a little smaller than that for which The Highlands and Islands Development Board now has responsibility. It is important in this connection that sometimes an area described as the North of Scotland is referred to in the debate about forestry, and quite often references are made to Scotland as a whole. Sometimes what is said about Scotland is applicable to the Highlands per se.

The procedure of research is primarily to investigate systematically

writings from the period under review. On the one hand, there are writings on the Highlands problem and ways of solving it where forestry is mentioned; on the other hand there are writings on forestry in Scotland and in the Highlands particularly where the Highland problem is mentioned.

I am not aware that a work has been written on exactly the subject which I deal with. There are, however, various works on the history of forestry in Scotland and on the Highland problem where forestry as a means of solving that problem is mentioned. Then there are works on the profitability of forestry in Scotland as a whole.

The sources used are varied. Because of the limitations of space it is not possible to refer to as many sources as would have been desirable. References to individual works have out of necessity to be selective. They are, on the whole, meant to be typical of certain views that have been put forward. I refer to various government reports and statements of official policy and to articles and chapters in books which deal in one way or another with the subject. Some of the material is found in academic treatises, either on the history of forestry or on the Highlands in general. Some scholars have taken a definite stand on these matters, and the same applies to some people associated with the shaping of government policy. Moreover, there are writings by people connected with forestry, by landowners and others who have a vested interest in land use. There are few academic articles which deal with the development in the last few years. Therefore newspaper articles have been used considerably as sources for this period.

A systematic search for material has been carried out, but it is obviously impossible to find all the material which might be of considerable relevance. *An Annotated Bibliography of Rural Land Use in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland* by A.S. Mather and R.J. Ardern has been very useful. The bibliographies in some of the books used have also been of considerable value.

## **II. Background: The Debate on Forestry as a Means of Solving the Highland Problem until the End of the Nineteenth Century<sup>1</sup>**

It is striking how little the subject of forestry in the Highlands has traditionally been related to the Highland problem. It has, naturally, to be borne in mind that the Highland problem in the present-day sense of the term is an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century phenomenon. The disappearance of most of the Caledonian forest and further destruction of woodland after the '45 led to the Highlands becoming very poor in forest cover in the later eighteenth century and forest fires in the nineteenth

century were a further problem. There was considerable interest in the cultivation of trees in Scotland in the early modern period, but it was only in the eighteenth century that forestry became really important in Scotland, associated with the improvers. It was for the most part a Lowland phenomenon; most of the 2000 square kilometres planted with wood in the period 1750-1850 were in that part of the country. Certainly there was considerable planting on some Highland estates, but Highland forestry was restricted by various factors, e.g. the low number of suitable species. This deficiency was to a certain extent put right in the nineteenth century, through the introduction of Sitka spruce and other species by David Douglas and other pioneers.

The second half of the nineteenth century was not very eventful in this respect, but the foundations were then laid of the debate in the twentieth century. The establishment in 1854 of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society, as it is now known, did not mark a turning-point in this regard. Nor did the introduction of Japanese larch and other species which turned out to be valuable change much. The low level of commercial planting in the Highlands in this period can, of course, be related to prevalent attitudes to forestry in the United Kingdom as a whole.

In this period of laissez-faire and supremacy of the United Kingdom in terms of trade not much attention was paid to the need for home-grown timber. The end of the nineteenth century is, however, important from the point of view that the 1880s witnessed the beginning of a thorough search for a planned solution to the Highland problem.

### **III. The Period from 1900 to 1919**

In this period the Royal Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland and the Royal Scottish Forestry Society played a part in drawing attention to the importance of timber production in the United Kingdom. It is noteworthy, however, that a national scheme of afforestation such as that put forward by the Royal Commission on Coast Erosion in 1909 was not particularly concerned with the Scottish Highlands, wide-ranging though the scheme was. An afforestation scheme for the Great Glen, sponsored by the Royal Scottish Forestry Society, was an important milestone here even though little came out of it. The conclusions reached by this body were positive as regards the possibilities of the area. Their final clause points towards the future debate of forestry as a means of solving the Highland problem: 'A great deal of permanent and periodic employment would be given by the establishment of forest centres.'<sup>2</sup> It is important that one of the persons responsible for this survey was Simon, Lord Lovat, a man who had a vision of forestry being closely linked with the future of the Highland economy.

Then there was the Great War, which was a watershed in the history of forestry in the United Kingdom and in Scotland in particular. An exact figure concerning how much of the woodland in Scotland was felled is not available, but most of what remained of the old Caledonian forest disappeared together with much of what had been planted in modern times. The issue of a strategic need for timber now came into focus as did the issue of afforestation as a means of strengthening the economy. They no doubt played a considerable part in the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 1919. It is remarkable that in the recommendations of the Acland Committee, the report of which led to the foundation of the commission, it was stated as a first objective of the forestry policy that there should always be a strategic reserve of timber in the country sufficient to sustain a three-year war; secondly, that steps should be taken through the forest industry to arrest the drift from the land.

#### **IV. The Period from 1919 to 1945**

Two main trends can be discerned in the 1919-1945 debate. Some thought that forestry could change much in the Highlands; others thought that this was not the case. The debate must be seen against the background of the actual development in forestry.

In this period there was considerable discussion about the problems of Scotland, especially immediately after the First World War. This applied not least to the Highlands. Some attention was given to forestry in this respect. However, taken as a whole it cannot be said that a great effort was made with forestry in the Highlands in the inter-war years. The debate on the merits of forestry there cannot thus be seen against the background of a vigorous policy in this field.

Even though land was available in the Highlands at very low prices, not much was planted until after the Second World War. Exact figures concerning the planting in the Highlands are not available, but some 550 square kilometres were planted in the whole of Scotland by the Commission by 1939 as compared with some 840 square kilometres in England and Wales. Little private planting was done.

The amount of money put into forestry fluctuated. Considerable cuts were made in the grants allocated to forestry, by the Geddes Committee (1922) and the May Committee (1931). Thus the debate was not marked by changes in the extent of the forest cover to the same degree as in the period after the Second World War. The debate was more about what could be done or what should be done than about the effect of the policy followed by the authorities.

In the Second World War there was much felling of private woodland in Scotland. Again, there was discussion in wartime in the United Kingdom on what needed to be done after the war. This resulted in the White Paper *Post-War Forest Policy*, which was published in 1943 and which laid the foundations of much that was to come after, e.g. the Forestry Act of 1945.

There is continuation in this period in the argument that forestry would increase rural employment in the Highlands. Employment for smallholders came especially to the forefront. H.F. Campbell, an advocate in Aberdeen, wrote in his book, *Highland Reconstruction*:

Forestry promises to become of great importance in the Highlands in the near future. By means of afforestation a fuller use can be made of the land, and at the same time employment will be provided for smallholders in the forests.<sup>3</sup>

Jonathan Claxton, in his article, 'Afforestation in the Western Highlands and its Effect on Repopulation', argued that if matters went well forestry would be very beneficial to the area, increase the population and provide more employment than on deer forests or grazings.<sup>4</sup> He emphasized that afforestation did not displace anybody.<sup>5</sup> The idea of workers' holdings, which was put forward in the Acland Report, obviously appealed to Claxton. Workers at such 'forest units' would get a guaranteed payment for 150 days per year for forestry work, get 5 to 10 acres of land and be able to work on these or as hired men during the harvest. Claxton wrote about 'the nucleus of a new rural life'.<sup>6</sup>

H.J. Scrymgeour Wedderburn, M.P., took a similar view in the article 'The Position of Forestry in the National Economy'. He dealt with the United Kingdom as a whole, but discussed the Highlands particularly. He said:

The forest workers' holdings which are being established in many parts of the Highlands are one of the most valuable forms of land settlement which can be suggested, because the holder does not have all his eggs in one basket.<sup>7</sup>

When, at the end of the article, he discussed the future of the timber industry in the country he did not refer specifically to the Highlands, but he obviously placed emphasis on the issue of rural employment, which was more relevant to the Highlands than other parts of the United Kingdom:

We hope to see the timber industry in this country grow, and we hope ultimately to see ancillary trades arising from it; but in my view the main place of forestry in our national economy, the main good

that it can do, is to increase the opportunities of rural employment, either by itself or as an adjunct to agriculture, so helping to maintain a larger population in the country and a more settled economy in our rural life.<sup>8</sup>

A somewhat different argument in favour of forestry was put forward by George J. Campbell, Captain, in his article, 'Forestry in Scotland'. Generally speaking, he wrote from the point of view of a landowner; at the same time he gave a balanced overview of the attitudes towards forestry at this time. He regretted the loss of forest cover for Scotland – one of the few writers on the subject who emphatically did so. He talked about 'the restoration of this natural balance', maintaining that reforestation is an end in itself.<sup>9</sup>

Just before the Second World War an official body took a very positive attitude towards forestry in the Highlands, with reference to the employment it could create. The Scottish Economic Committee asked the Committee on the Highlands and Islands to examine the economic condition of the area and the possibilities of development of local industries there. In the report *Highlands and Islands of Scotland: A Review of Economic Conditions and Recommendations for Improvement*, published in 1938, various measures were recommended in order to strengthen and expand afforestation.

The other school of thought was of the opinion that forestry in the Highlands just would not make much difference to the economy there and that it was not worthwhile to make a great effort with it. In the report of the Geddes Committee it was argued, with reference to forestry, that it was not justifiable to create employment on an uneconomical basis. A related view is evident in some writings from the latter part of the period examined in this chapter. The attitude of the authors was that experience had shown that for various reasons the prospects of forestry in the Highlands were not as bright as some people had thought. An argument of this kind was put forward in *A Plan for the Highlands: Proposals for a Highland Development Board*. There it was said that afforestation in the Highlands 'has fallen slightly into disfavour in recent years'. This was said to be caused by the difficulties of commercial disposal of timber from the existing forests in the Highlands; it was urged that a national marketing organization was needed, and that there was overall a lack of organization.<sup>10</sup> Douglas M. Reid, in his pamphlet, *The Problem of the Highlands: A Survey of the Position as It Affects the North West*, was in favour of afforestation on a considerable scale, but did not want land to be taken away from the crofters. He argued that afforestation did not create much employment.

Along with roads and piers, afforestation forms a final panacea for the ills of the Highlands, according to some of our landowning friends. I have given this much thought but have failed to see in what way it would form a final cure to the existing depression.<sup>11</sup>

The report *Post-War Forest Policy* marked the end of an era. There forestry matters were dealt with in the context of the United Kingdom as a whole; a major effort was envisaged. In as far as the Highlands were discussed specifically, a positive view was taken of their prospects. A similar attitude is clear in an article by John Bannerman, which was published near the end of the war, 'Post-War Development of the Highlands and Islands'. Bannerman was a member of the Forestry Commission and Vice-President of An Comunn Gaidhealach. He argued that sheep farming and forestry should not be difficult to reconcile and spoke of the possibility of additional employment for crofters in forestry. 'The expansion of forestry, both State and private, must, therefore, be considered an important factor in the post-war rehabilitation of the Highlands.'<sup>12</sup>

#### **IV. The Period from 1945 to 1970**

When the debate in this period is investigated various background factors have to be taken into account. Here one should emphasize increased interest in forestry in the United Kingdom as a whole and various plans and reports that were made concerning its progress and prospects. The regional aspect of forestry in the United Kingdom became more marked. The Forestry Commission took on a new lease of life. The development of technology is of importance here. The arrival of a new tractor-driven plough meant that great stretches of land in Scotland which previously had been regarded as unplatable were now available for forestry.<sup>13</sup> There was a continuous debate on the future of Scotland going on, not least about the Highlands and Islands. An advisory committee concerning this area, The Highlands Advisory Panel, functioned in the period 1947-1964, and in 1965 the Highlands and Islands Development Board was established, which was a landmark. In a wider context, Scotland became more and more a focal point of British forestry matters, not least as regards the activities of the Forestry Commission, and at the same time forestry became a more important ingredient in regional policy. This coincided with the diminished importance of the strategic argument regarding forestry; by 1960 it had become of relatively little significance. Yet another factor which must be borne in mind here is the decline of hill farming in the Highlands in the 1960s, which meant that more land became available for forestry than would otherwise have been the case.

In this period the debate was very much shaped by government policy.

This is not surprising, considering that now the government took more definite action as regards forestry in the Highlands than before, which has to be seen in the context of a changed policy towards the Highland problem in general and a change in the national forestry policy. This new emphasis in Highland policy and forestry policy in particular is evident in various reports, which to a certain extent moulded the action taken by the government. This change is, for instance, seen in the White Paper *A Programme for Highland Development*, published in 1950. There great hopes were attached to afforestation; a large-scale programme of afforestation was recommended. A similar attitude is evident in the so-called Zuckerman Report from 1957. It dealt mostly with the United Kingdom as a whole and little was said about Scotland in particular, but it is clear that the attitude was taken that forestry would be important for Scotland, including the Highlands. In the report of the Commission of Enquiry into Crofting Conditions in Scotland, published in 1954, an emphasis on planting in the crofting counties was recommended. This shows how relevant the social policy argument had become in relation to regions where conditions for forestry were not among the best in Scotland. A similar argument was put forward in *Review of Highland Policy* from 1959. In 1958 the government announced a change in its forestry policy. Now special attention was to be paid to the upland areas where expansion of forestry would provide diversification of employment and major social benefits. This was of importance in the Highlands. The employment argument is well put in *The Scottish Economy 1965-1970: A Plan for Expansion*, published in 1966. There it says:

The Government fully recognises the importance of afforestation in providing employment opportunities in rural areas and in providing the raw material for home-based timber-using industry. In the Highlands, forestry offers the best prospects of providing the necessary industrial core of the economy.<sup>14</sup>

This change in government policy meant a considerable extension in the area planted annually, which again changed the tenor of the debate on forestry.

Matters related to forestry are always dealt with in the annual reports of the Highlands and Islands Development Board. It is clear that the attitude of the various leaders of the HIDB, to the present day, towards forestry was positive; they certainly regarded it as an important factor in the Highland economy. This they showed in practice by allocating grants to forestry.

Individual writers who expressed an opinion on the prospects of forestry in this period were on the whole positive. A good example of this view is



found in an article by Lord Dulverton, 'Forestry and Hill Farming in the Highlands of Scotland'. There he said that he believes strongly that 'forestry must replace sheep farming as the backbone of rural economy in the Highlands'.<sup>15</sup> It was a widespread view in this period that hill farming and forestry could relatively easily be reconciled. Such an opinion appeared e.g. in an article by M.A.M. Dickie, of the Department of Agriculture for Scotland, 'Rural Development Surveys in Scotland'. He said:

... there's promise that forestry can be integrated with agriculture in hill areas with little or no loss in stock-carrying capacity, that the shepherd population can be retained in the glens and that the whole rural economy can be given fresh vigour.<sup>16</sup>

T.D. Cotter-Craig, M.A., in the article 'Forestry in the Highland Counties', strongly advocated co-operation between the landowning interests and the forestry ones. He was in favour of afforestation in areas where access was difficult.<sup>17</sup>

Even though the debate on the merits of forestry was not very heated in this period, there are some references to it, especially to a clash between forestry and farming interests. Thus Magnus Magnusson dealt with the resistance from farming and sporting interests to forestry plans in his article, 'Highland Administration'.<sup>18</sup> William John Christie of Lochlochart, in his article 'Outlook from the Outback', referred to the discussion about the amount of land which the Forestry Commission bought. The article shows that at this stage many landowners were concerned:

Those amongst us who see it as a threat moan that 'if only the Forestry Commission was stopped from buying land then we could afford to set our son up in a farm' or else they sell out and give up the struggle. Others, including myself, who see the tremendous potential in our hills and moors battle on.<sup>19</sup>

Serious doubts were also expressed about the compatibility of deer farming and forestry. It is evident from a report on a 'Symposium on Red Deer and Forestry' that the Forestry Commission had been criticized for erecting long fence lines and for not making adequate provision for downfalls and shelter.<sup>20</sup>

Although strategic considerations ceased to be of much importance as regards Highland forestry – and forestry in the United Kingdom as a whole – the need to reduce the importation of timber was referred to as an economic factor. This occurred in various policy statements. Lord

Dulverton mentioned this aim among the important ones in his above-mentioned article; he wrote there about the saving of imports of wood products.<sup>21</sup>

## V. The Period from 1970 to the Present

In this period many important changes took place which influenced the course taken by Highland forestry. There was no sudden turning-point about 1970. But there was a change in that the plans of successive governments for afforestation became less extensive than before. As the 1970s passed there was gradually less financial support given to forestry than had previously been the case. This meant that less was planted than before. Relatively cheap land was becoming less readily available than in the 1960s. Moreover, the new concern with environment resulted in controversy related to forestry coming to the fore more than previously. There were also some setbacks associated with the timber industry, such as the closure of the pulp section of the pulp and paper mill at Corpach near Fort William in 1980.

The arguments for forestry in this period were largely the same as before. There was not much emphasis on reforestation, giving the land its old cover of vegetation. Organized forestry was seen as creating possibilities for the revival of isolated areas and districts where there had been much depopulation. State forests, it was argued, created much employment, at the beginning and later when the timber became saleable, and it would be the basis of various local industries. A view of this kind with regard to the United Kingdom as a whole appeared e.g. in the government report *Forest Policy*, published in 1972. Forestry in areas of crofts and other small farms could create employment at certain times of the year, create shelter and prevent erosion. The foundation of national forest parks in suitable places for holiday-making and outdoor recreation in general was thought to be an aim of considerable importance. Moreover, emphasis was laid on the fauna being enriched by forestry. Some people who were in favour of extensive forestry argued that it was perfectly compatible with other forms of land use; taking good grazings and areas that were suitable for cultivation under forestry was to be avoided.

The arguments against the forestry policy which was followed were varied. The protagonists were, of course, representative of different interests, and the emphasis of the criticism changed somewhat as time went on. I shall now proceed to deal with the main fields of criticism.

There was the view that from a strictly economic point of view forestry in the Highlands was not a particularly good long-term investment in that it

would not provide future employment for many people in relation to the cost. This opinion was e.g. expressed in an article by S.M. Hampson, of the University of Aberdeen, 'Highland Forestry: An Evaluation'.<sup>22</sup> It gave rise to a debate between Hampson and R.A. Farmer, of the University of Aberdeen; the latter took an opposite view on this issue.<sup>23</sup>

The argument was put forward that the forestry policy followed did not entail the best use of the land. Much was actually written about land use in this period. Competition for land between forestry and deer forests was sometimes referred to. As was the case in the previous period, some people associated with deer farming criticized the forestry policy which was followed. An example of this is an article by the Viscount of Arbuthnott, 'Red Deer Management and Economic Afforestation in the Highlands of Scotland: A Dilemma of Land Use', where he argued that the integration of forestry and deer farming required heavy cost. The need for extensive fencing was referred to as well as the fact that forestry reduces land for winter feeding.<sup>24</sup> But primarily the criticism was to the effect that the interests of sheep farmers had not been taken sufficiently into account. Too much of good grazings and land that was suitable for arable farming had been used for forestry.

Attitudes to land use, with special reference to forestry, varied considerably in the 1970s. To a certain extent this was a case of a continuation of the debate in the sixties. A good example of the tenor of the discussion in the seventies is found in a report from a symposium, published in *Scottish Forestry* in 1978. A view that was typical for many landowners occurred in the article 'Inter-Relations between Agriculture and Forestry: An Agricultural View'. Forestry was to a certain extent blamed for the decline of hill farming. A stand was taken against *laissez-faire* as regards forestry policy and land use in general. The attitude is evident that forestry should be restricted to certain areas; it was thought that it competed too much with sheep farming. Integration was advocated to a certain extent.<sup>25</sup> A similar attitude is clear in the pamphlet *Land Use in the Highlands*, which the Scottish Landowners' Association published in 1980. There integration was recommended, but it was argued that the forestry policy followed had not been sensitive enough towards the interests of the landowners.

The attitude of some people connected with forestry can be seen in an article corresponding to the one mentioned above, 'Inter-Relations between Agriculture and Forestry: A Forestry View' by G.G. Stewart. In this article it was pointed out that there are certain benefits for agriculture to be derived from forestry. Integration was strongly advocated and described as follows: 'To integrate the two uses, forestry and agriculture, means to bring them together in such a way that the consequences give rise

to benefits to each which would not otherwise be obtained.<sup>26</sup> Guidelines for integration were put forward.

The criticism has been made that large blocks of woodland have been created at the middle of slopes of hills and mountains, and the bottoms of valleys where there is arable land and the upper part of the slopes have thus been separated. The result has been to make it difficult for livestock to get across. Moreover, it has been pointed out that fences around woods have driven deer towards the farms. It may also be mentioned that the new forests have created favourable conditions for an increase in the number of foxes, which has been a thorn in the flesh of the sheep farmers. There have been clashes of interest in other ways. The burning of heather has thus on occasion caused damage to woods. It has been pointed out that in areas where it is possible to create employment opportunities in traditional farming, especially sheep farming, by increased use of fertilizer and increased cultivation of land, it is difficult for private parties that have interest in traditional farming to compete with the forestry authorities for the land. The financial assistance given by the authorities to individuals who wish to buy land for the purpose of afforestation also comes into reckoning here; it has been resented by many. Criticism of this kind has sometimes been made by people who refer to areas where they live themselves, and at times the view is implied or expressed clearly that in these regions extensive afforestation is not economical.

In this period certainly efforts were made to reconcile the interests of farming and forestry. In some cases there was a change in that the blocks of wood planted were not as large as previously. The shelter created by woods could be beneficial for farmers and crofters. There were cases where farmers took up forestry on a small scale as an ancillary occupation, which was supported by the government.

Another aspect of the criticism directed towards the forestry policy is that it had not worked as planned in keeping people in isolated areas. Thus it had not been as strong a factor in regional policy as had been hoped for. Even though whole parishes have been allocated to forestry not so many employment opportunities have been created. An example of this is Assynt in Sutherland. The area is 475 square kilometres; only 13 square kilometres thereof are suitable for forestry. It only provided employment for seven men.<sup>27</sup> It was argued that despite the progress made in technical matters many regions in the west were not adequate in this respect. Attention was given to the fact that increased mechanization meant that the new employment opportunities were not as numerous as had been thought and that these were to a lesser extent than expected in outlying areas. This was connected with a somewhat different pattern in the habitation of the forest workers. They could now travel considerable

distances to work, from relatively few centres. The champions of forestry countered some of these arguments forcefully. They pointed out how poor conditions for traditional farming were in certain areas and that it was much more expensive to create new employment opportunities in traditional farming than in forestry.

Finally, there are the arguments of the environmentalists. Some were primarily directed against the visual aspect of the new forests. Large blocks of wood of sitka spruce and other conifers were thought to spoil the landscape; it was emphasized how monotonous these were. This criticism was e.g. discussed in Campbell's article, 'Forestry in Scotland', and in Martin Ball's 'The Conifer Invasion: Modern Forestry and Highland Wild Life'.<sup>28</sup> The forestry authorities have met this criticism by laying down that a certain percentage of all new woods should be hardwood. This, however, has not meant that the controversy about these matters has come to an end.

Another criticism concerns the effect of forestry on the fauna. It was not questioned that the effect can be considerable, but the criticism was countered strongly by people associated with forestry. Thus Sir David Montgomery, chairman of the Forestry Commission in Scotland, wrote in the article 'Clearing the Deadwood from Forestry Debate':

People are also worried about wildlife. In fact, modern forestry can have a very positive effect here. Good landscape design, now becoming fundamental in planting operations, often increases the diversity of the forest and improves it as a wildlife habitat. Afforestation of open hill land does change the habitat and the wildlife associated with it, but the number of song birds ... is greatly increased. And ... no species of bird has seriously declined on a national scale as a result of afforestation.<sup>29</sup>

Sir David added that certain mammals have increased in number and extended their range. He also mentioned the effect of afforestation on the flora: 'Although afforestation of moorland can reduce certain plants, it can increase the number of different plant species.'<sup>30</sup>

Particular cases of the controversy concerning forestry and conservation throw light on the nature of the debate. Two of these may be mentioned. In 1984 the planting of a site at Creag Meagaidh, Strathspey, which had been designed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest, was criticized. The Nature Conservancy Council's advice against the development led to half the area originally intended for plantation being planted, by the company Fountain Forestry, after a decision was taken by the Secretary of State. The 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act was referred to in this connection.

Among the bodies who took a stand against the planting were the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Friends of the Earth, and the Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group. Victor Russell, Convener of the last-named group, argued that more afforestation was needed in order to reduce expenditure on imported timber and that there were appropriate areas for conifer plantation within Badenoch and Strathspey, but that planting at Creag Meagaidh was going too far. Sir David Montgomery made out a case for the approach of the Forestry Commission:

In operating the consultation procedures the Forestry Commission's role is to attempt to reconcile the interests of various competing land uses. In doing so, the Commission always bears in mind its statutory responsibility to have regard to conservation and other interests as well as forestry.<sup>31</sup>

By far the most fierce controversy of this kind has been over the Flow Country in Caithness and Sutherland. There are undoubtedly many reasons for the intensity of this debate. Here one can mention the reputation of the area because of its special nature, the extent of the planting proposed by the companies in question, the resentment of some people caused by the level of tax relief given to individuals in connection with forestry, which was important for this region, and the concern of those who had a vested interest in the economy of the area at the prospect of numerous jobs being put at risk.

These matters came to a head in July, 1987, when the Nature Conservancy Council called for a two-year moratorium on afforestation in the area. Its rate was said to have been too fast and it was argued that more research into the ecology of the region was needed before a decision could be reached on a sensible policy. It was mentioned that the loss of the Flow Country, the largest unspoilt primeval bog in the United Kingdom, represented the largest single loss of wildlife habitat there since 1945. It was also said that the area was possibly the world's largest single expanse of blanket bogs. Of the peatlands, 16 per cent had been lost to approved planting, mostly since 1981. The stand taken by the NCC was supported, *inter alia*, by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the World Wildlife Fund.<sup>32</sup> Prominent individuals also supported the Council's action. Among those was Bruce Sandison, the author of various books on the area. He argued in the article 'Seeing the Wood for the Trees' that the hills and moorlands of Caithness and Sutherland are areas of 'great scenic beauty; contain important historical remains and wildlife habitats'. Sandison said that few of the forestry jobs were held by local people, and that it was far from certain that extensive forestry would be of decisive importance in the future economic development of the Highlands. In this

connection he referred to blows that the Highland economy had been subjected to in the last few years and prospective competition from the Third World.<sup>33</sup> The argument concerning a policy of conservation being very beneficial to the tourist industry has been put forward by other writers who are concerned with issues of ecology, as a practical one.

The arguments against the proposal of the NCC were succinctly put by Robert Cowan, the chairman of the Highlands and Islands Development Board. He thought that the NCC had overstated its case and that some kind of compromise was possible. His approach is evident in the following words:

We believe it is possible to achieve a purely conservation area for perhaps half the entire expanse of blanket peat, while indicating areas where forestry makes economic sense without unduly affecting the environment or scenic value, with areas for small-scale farm/forestry, peat extraction and other job-creating activities.<sup>34</sup>

He argued that a moratorium on forestry would soon remove about two thirds of the forestry jobs in the area. A similar attitude was taken by Robert MacLennan, the MP for Caithness and Sutherland. He urged that the report of the NCC should not be accepted. 'He said a moratorium would threaten 200 private-sector forestry jobs, a similar amount in the Forestry Commission, and "could damage the prospects" of up to 2,000 jobs.'<sup>35</sup>

The outcome of this controversy was not clear when this essay was written.

## VI. Conclusion

To a certain extent there was continuity in the debate throughout the period covered in this essay. All the time there was a dispute as regards the potential and real economic benefit to be derived from forestry in the Highlands. The extension of the possibilities inherent in forestry there after the Second World War changed the situation somewhat, as did, conversely, some of the problems of the timber industry in recent years. But in the whole period there were people who argued that forestry could be, and indeed was going to be, one of the mainstays of the Highland economy. It is important that there was a definite switch of emphasis in that Highland forestry came to be discussed more in the context of the Highland problem, much less in terms of the strategic needs of the United Kingdom for timber even though the financial need to reduce the importation of timber was an ever-present argument. This change was marked in the late 1950s and the 1960s. In a way the debate can be seen as

having been carried on at two levels: first, as regards official policy, and second, as regards private initiative, but in the end the whole debate was shaped at any given time by the policy followed by the government; subsidies, tax relief and similar matters were always very important. At the same time the points of friction changed somewhat in the course of time. Thus the argument of forestry versus sheep farming was most heated in the 1960s and 1970s while the attacks of environmentalists on the forestry policy which was followed are mainly a 1980s phenomenon.

Seen in an international context, it is difficult to find close parallels with the debate on forestry as a means of solving the Highland problem. Scotland is peculiar, or at least became so after the Second World War, in that the conditions for forestry, especially the planting of conifers, are very good in relatively large areas where land was available; at the same time the area covered with forest has been relatively small and there has not been any precedent in history for forestry having been a major factor in the economy of the country and, specifically, that of the Highlands. To a certain extent, a parallel can be found in some countries, such as Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland, in that farmers have been given grants in order to take up forestry as an ancillary occupation. Subsequently there are some parallels in the debate in the above-mentioned countries on these grounds.

On the other hand, the efforts to strengthen the Highland economy are comparable with such efforts concerning so-called problem regions in many countries, e.g. in the European Community. In that way the debate on how to use the natural resources of the Highlands has many parallels.

### **Acknowledgements**

I am grateful to Mr. John Simpson, Department of Scottish History, University of Edinburgh, Dr. W.W. Newey, formerly of the Department of Forestry and Natural Resources, University of Edinburgh, and Dr. D.C. Malcolm and Dr. W.E. Scott Mutch, the same department, for giving me advice concerning my research for this essay. I am much indebted to the Faculty of Arts and the Department of Scottish History, University of Edinburgh, for giving me an opportunity to work at this research as a Post-Doctoral Fellow of the Department of Scottish History in the autumn of 1988.



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