# Concerns grow over the future of Scotland's forestry sector



In a recent investigation by The Herald, concerns have emerged about the current state of Scotland’s forestry sector, which is seen as integral to achieving net-zero targets and addressing a projected shortage of timber for housebuilding. The discussion has been spurred by a range of factors impacting the supply chain, particularly from tree nurseries to sawmills and wood-panel manufacturers.

The Confederation of Forest Industries (Confor), a representative body for the industry, has signalled a significant level of anxiety regarding the future viability of tree planting initiatives. Despite an ambitious goal to plant 18,000 hectares of woodland each year, the industry has consistently fell short, largely due to substantial funding cuts. In 2023, for instance, there was a notable 41% reduction in the budget that was only partially restored by approximately 18% to a total of £45 million. Confor's chief executive, Stuart Goodall, indicated that to align with the target for tree planting, an additional £24 million would be necessary.

Goodall elaborated on the fragility of the sector’s confidence, stating, “The 41% budget cut hit industry confidence in woodland creation hard.” He noted that the lengthy and resource-intensive process of applying for woodland creation approvals requires certainty in funding for both landowners and the businesses involved. As Goodall explained, “It can take up to four or five years... to prepare an application to create a new woodland and to have that approved by Scottish Forestry.” This uncertainty has led to caution among tree nurseries as they evaluate their production of young trees, fearing that a lack of funding could necessitate the destruction of young trees cultivated in anticipation of demand.

The ramifications of reduced funding extend beyond immediate financial concerns; Goodall warned that if the current budget limitations persist, it is plausible to see a 40% decline in woodland creation, equating to approximately 9,000 hectares anticipated for the current year compared to over 15,000 hectares the previous year.

Scottish Forestry, however, maintains a different narrative regarding woodland creation. A spokesperson highlighted that there is, in fact, funding available for around 10,000 hectares of new woodland, which they argue is a remarkable achievement given recent challenges including the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit-related disruptions, and severe weather events. In 2023/24, Scotland reportedly achieved its highest level of woodland creation in 34 years, planting a total of 15,000 hectares, which amounts to 30 million trees, illustrating an increase of over 80% from the previous year. The spokesperson noted that of the total, over half constituted native woodland, reaching the highest figures since 2001.

Despite these developments, Scottish Forestry acknowledged that current funding levels make it impossible to meet the ambitious tree planting targets and expressed anticipation for a completion of around 10,000 hectares in both 2024/25 and 2025/26, still representing the largest level of woodland creation in the UK.

The agency also pointed out that while public funding is a critical element influencing woodland creation, it is not the sole determinant. Confidence levels among landowners, economic conditions, and stakeholder reactions to woodland creation significantly influence the sector's dynamics. The agency expressed concern that some stakeholders reportedly oppose all forms of woodland creation, further complicating the landscape for potential projects.

The forestry and wood processing sectors in Scotland are pivotal, employing more than 25,000 individuals and contributing approximately £1 billion to the economy annually. As the conversation regarding funding, confidence, and future initiatives continues, it remains a focal point for understanding the trajectory of Scotland's forestry ambitions and their broader implications for environmental goals and economic stability.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.industryintel.com/forestry-and-timberland/news/scotland-created-over-15-000-ha-of-forests-during-2023-24-planting-period-according-to-forest-research-committee-says-that-scotland-should-plant-18-000-ha-of-woodland-or-year-by-2025-to-fight-climate-change-although-country-recently-cut-planting-budget-163968518040> - This article supports the claim that Scotland created over 15,000 hectares of forests during the 2023-24 planting period and highlights the challenges posed by funding cuts to meet the ambitious target of planting 18,000 hectares annually.
* <https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/rural-affairs-and-islands-committee/correspondence/2025/forestry-and-woodland-management-in-scotland-20-february-2025.pdf> - This document from the Scottish Parliament discusses concerns and proposals related to forestry and woodland management in Scotland, including the need for better community consultation and environmental impact assessments.
* <https://charteredforesters.org/future-woodlands-scotland-launches-forestry-skills-programme-to-bridge-scotlands-forestry-skills-gap> - This article highlights the need for a significant increase in Scotland's forestry workforce to meet tree-planting targets and introduces the Forestry Skills Programme to address this gap.
* <https://www.noahwire.com> - This source provides the original context for the discussion on Scotland's forestry sector, including concerns about funding and supply chain impacts.
* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/forestry-strategy-for-scotland-2019-2029/> - This document outlines Scotland's forestry strategy, which includes ambitious targets for woodland creation and sustainable forestry practices.