



## Consultation on Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014-2020: Stage 1 – Initial Proposals

June 2013

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### Woodland Trust Scotland

The Woodland Trust Scotland (WTS) is part of the UK's leading woodland conservation charity and has three aims: to enable the creation of more native woods and places rich in trees; to protect native woods, trees and their wildlife for the future; to inspire everyone to enjoy and value woods and trees. In Scotland we own and manage 80 sites covering 8,750 hectares.

Our vision is of a country rich in native woods and trees, enjoyed and valued by everyone. By 2050, we would like to see landscapes with a robust, joined-up, diverse and resilient woodland resource, maximising the potential for woods and trees to deliver biodiversity and the other vital services. This means protection and restoration of woods of high biodiversity value, e.g. ancient and semi-natural woods, and a substantial increase in tree cover, a significant proportion of which should be native. We would like to see many more areas meeting the Woodland Access Standard, as defined in the Scottish Forestry Strategy, because around 72% of the Scottish population has no accessible wood within walking distance.

As an active member of Environment LINK Scotland, Woodland Trust Scotland intends to sign up to their joint response to this consultation.

### Specific Comments

#### Question 1 – Are there other areas you think the Partnership Agreement should address?

Woodland Trust Scotland welcomes Scottish Government's commitment to "make the economy environmentally friendly and resource efficient" and believe that the aspirations under this should be linked more specifically to a commitment to sustainability, biodiversity and adaptation to climate change. There is also a need to clearly state how the three funds would interact and co-ordinate to avoid duplication and address current areas of underfunding.

**Question 2 – Do you think these thematic objectives will best address Scotland’s short-term and long-term challenges?**

In our opinion, all three “themes” could support woodland creation and protection schemes, so we are happy to support the objectives as set out. However, in common with a number of our environmental colleagues, we have concerns about a focus on sustained economic growth at the expense of producing a economy led by sustainable development. It is also important that each fund is flexible enough to allow regional variations.

**Question 3 – Do you think there are any other thematic objectives which should be addressed?**

For Woodland Trust Scotland, the Scottish Government’s National Outcome which states “*We value and enjoy our built and natural environment and protect it and enhance it for future generations.*” is key, and would argue that it only features as a small part of the new thematic approach. A greater focus on the benefits to the economy and jobs that our natural environment brings would be welcome.

**Question 4 – Do you think the Scottish Themed Funds will address Scotland’s key challenges?**

It is extremely important to ensure significant funds are devoted to land based environmental schemes and that the environment in terms of biodiversity, climate change adaptation, landscape and historic environment does not become lost or a subsidiary objective after carbon reduction and resource efficiency – many measures for which have substantial private as well as public benefit.

**Question 5 – How do you think the governance and delivery arrangements will impact on your sector?**

PMCs will need to be more than just monitoring committees and should take an active role in directing their funds. We would recommend that individual PMCs be set up for each fund and on a regional basis to provide the capacity for an appropriate level of detailed scrutiny.

**Question 6 – How do you think the governance and delivery arrangements will impact on your organisation?**

Woodland Trust Scotland's greatest frustrations as both an applicant and advisor to other applicants lies in the complexity of the current delivery process, as such we would favour simplification.

**Question 7 – Are there any unidentified governance or delivery arrangements that could aid simplification of the future programmes and ensure that the Structural Funds complement each other?**

The Land Use Strategy pilots in the Borders and Aberdeenshire look like successful models of collaborative regional partnerships, and could form the basis of fora to focus on specific structural funding issues, along the lines of the suggested regional PMCs.

**Question 8 – What other delivery options do you think would be feasible for delivering youth employment initiatives?**

N/A

**Question 9 – What other measures could be taken to reduce the audit and control pressures?**

N/A

**Question 10 – Do you have any further comments on the proposals?**

None