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Mairi Gougeon MSP Visits Foresight Sustainable Forestry's Afforestation Site at Fordie Estate

Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, Mairi Gougeon, has visited Fordie Estate, a 2,150-hectare mixed afforestation and forestry asset located in Scotland owned by Foresight Sustainable Forestry ("FSF").

She was accompanied by representatives from Confor, the not-for-profit organisation for the UK's sustainable forestry and wood-using businesses, as well as Scottish Forestry, the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support, and regulations.

During the tour at Fordie Estate, Mairi Gougeon viewed how a holistic sustainable approach to forestry, afforestation and land management can benefit communities and provide significant employment opportunities and economic benefits in Scotland.

Scotland is battling to meet its target to plant 15,000 hectares of new woodland each year (rising to 18,000 hectares per annum by 2025) in order to combat climate change and nature loss. FSF's woodland creation schemes in Scotland represent 22% of the annual planting target and c.40% of the planting that was achieved last year making the company a key player in the implementation of government strategy. In addition, with 80% of timber in the UK imported from abroad, the creation of new forestry assets provides an opportunity to create a local sustainable source of supply and a catalyst for economic growth in Scotland.

FSF currently has more than 50 forestry and afforestation projects in Scotland, representing around 85% of the fund's assets in the UK by value. The fund's afforestation programme across the UK is anticipated to create 700 rural work opportunities in the planting stage and 35 long term full time equivalent jobs. To support this, FSF expanded its forestry skills training programme earlier in the year.

Mairi Gougeon also had the opportunity to hear more about the challenges associated with meeting Scotland's planting targets, the nuances and complexities involved, including a constructive discussion about how to reduce some of the barriers that those pursuing woodland creation schemes currently face in areas such as securing permission and grants for planting, securing carbon credits under the Woodland Carbon Code's current rules and finding practical metrics for monitoring biodiversity.

Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, commented:

"My visit to Fordie Estate offered a valuable insight into modern, sustainable forestry practices, and FSF's positive focus on enhancing biodiversity and community engagement.

"I was also pleased to hear that the company is committed to helping Scotland meet its world leading climate change targets and producing the wood products we need to meet society's increasing demand for timber.

“Woodland creation is very much a partnership where government, the forestry sector, landowners and communities all work together in order to achieve our goals in tackling climate change and nature loss.”

Robert Guest, Managing Director, Foresight Sustainable Forestry, commented:

“It is a great honour to welcome Cabinet Secretary Mairi Gougeon to our Fordie Estate. Mairi’s genuine interest in sustainable forestry resonates with our shared commitment to achieve Scotland’s environmental and economic goals in a way which benefits the country’s communities and economy.

“We are committed to playing a significant role in achieving Scotland’s tree planting targets in a progressive sustainable way. It’s our ambition that the holistic approach we are taking at Fordie, focussed on delivering a broad range of natural services from a diversified rural business, can provide useful lessons and inspiration to others.”

Stuart Goodall, CEO of Confor, commented:

“Creating new working forests is about more than just producing the wood we need for a low carbon future. It’s about providing places for wildlife and for people and helping Scotland’s rural communities to diversify. At Fordie, FSF have embraced mixed land use, and consulted with the local community on how to expand the area of modern sustainable forestry on the estate.

“Scotland has fallen behind in its tree planting aspirations and Confor is committed to working with Mairi Gougeon to get planting back on track. If we don’t, then Scotland will almost certainly miss its net zero target for 2045.”

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About Foresight Sustainable Forestry

Foresight Sustainable Forestry Company Plc is the first and only UK listed investment trust focused on UK forestry, afforestation and natural capital. FSF was awarded the London Stock Exchange’s Green Economy Mark at IPO. In December 2022, FSF became the first fund to be accredited with the London Stock Exchange’s Voluntary Carbon Market designation. FSF aims to generate sustainable financial returns for its Shareholders through investing in a diversified portfolio of UK forestry and afforestation assets.