

11 Howard Street
Penrith, Cumbria
CA11 9DN

Dear Editor,

Beaver and a New Environmentalism

I read with interest the letter by Jane Karthaus, outlining ConFor's reasons for opposing the re-introduction of beaver to Scotland [Vol. 61 (1): 47]. This letter made reference to my recent article on forestry in Latvia [Vol. 60 (4): 14-21].

I agree with Ms Karthaus that once beaver are released to the wild it may be difficult to control their numbers and that there will certainly be a range of environmental impacts. Nevertheless, there are compelling arguments in favour of bringing back a native species that was only extirpated within the past 400 years and which was for millennia an integral component of our natural environment. Re-introduction of as many native species as possible is a historic conservation goal that is widely supported by the public. For this reason, pressure to bring back beaver is only likely to intensify in Scotland, particularly in light of successful re-introductions elsewhere in Europe. Rather than being rejected as a threat to forestry interests, which appears to be the ConFor position, I wonder if we might view beaver in a more positive light. Perhaps this mammal represents an opportunity to demonstrate our skill in the management of natural resources and as stewards of the nation's woodland heritage?

The forestry community has in the past been seen to act from an entrenched position of commercial self-interest, and has often been accused of not adequately accounting for the wider range of environmental goods and services that flow from forested landscapes. Forests are first and foremost *ecosystems*, with myriad values, far beyond recognised economic activity and fibre production. Their sustainable management requires a balance between social, economic and environmental criteria. On this basis, it now seems anachronistic for any forestry organisation, including ConFor, to draw a distinction between itself and "environmentalists". One of the key features of the forestry sector in Latvia is exactly *this point; forestry is stronger when it works in partnership with other stakeholders and places environmental conservation as its first priority.*

In my opinion, there is a climate for change in Scottish forestry. We need to review our direction. Central to this is realisation of the potential for a vastly increased and more diverse forest estate, one that will undoubtedly incorporate a larger and more sustainable forest-products industry. Restoration of natural ecosystems will be a priority because of their ecological resilience and importance in terms of biodiversity conservation. As in other regions of the world, foresters will need advanced skills in ecosystem management to balance all the various values. The forestry sector in Scotland is in an excellent position to drive forward an agenda for action, but can only achieve its goals from within, not outside, the mainstream of the conservation movement.

It is healthy to see lively discussion about restoring beaver to Scotland. However, I do not agree with a flat

rejection of current proposals about its return. An alternative perspective is that, with time and energy, we may learn to work *with* this species. There is plenty of evidence of good practice to build on from Norway, France and elsewhere.

I am strongly in favour of broadening our environmentalist credentials, demonstrating leadership in ecosystem management and working with others who are passionate about forest conservation, rather than glowering from the shadows.

Yours sincerely,

ER Wilson