

Developing recreation in the nations forests

Mark Holroyd - North England Director

Alex MacLennan - Recreation, Public Affairs Manager



- Introduction to Forestry England
- Whinlatter Forest, Cumbria
 - Introduction
 - Key features and facilities
- Masterplanning and zoning
- Tree disease
- The future

- We are the state forestry organisation for England.
- England's largest land manager caring for over 250,000 hectares of land
- We manage forests for **People**, for **Wildlife**, and for **Climate**
- We sell 1.3million tonnes of timber annually and welcome 285 million visits to our land across England.



- We are the first state forest organisation in the world to receive the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) accreditation.

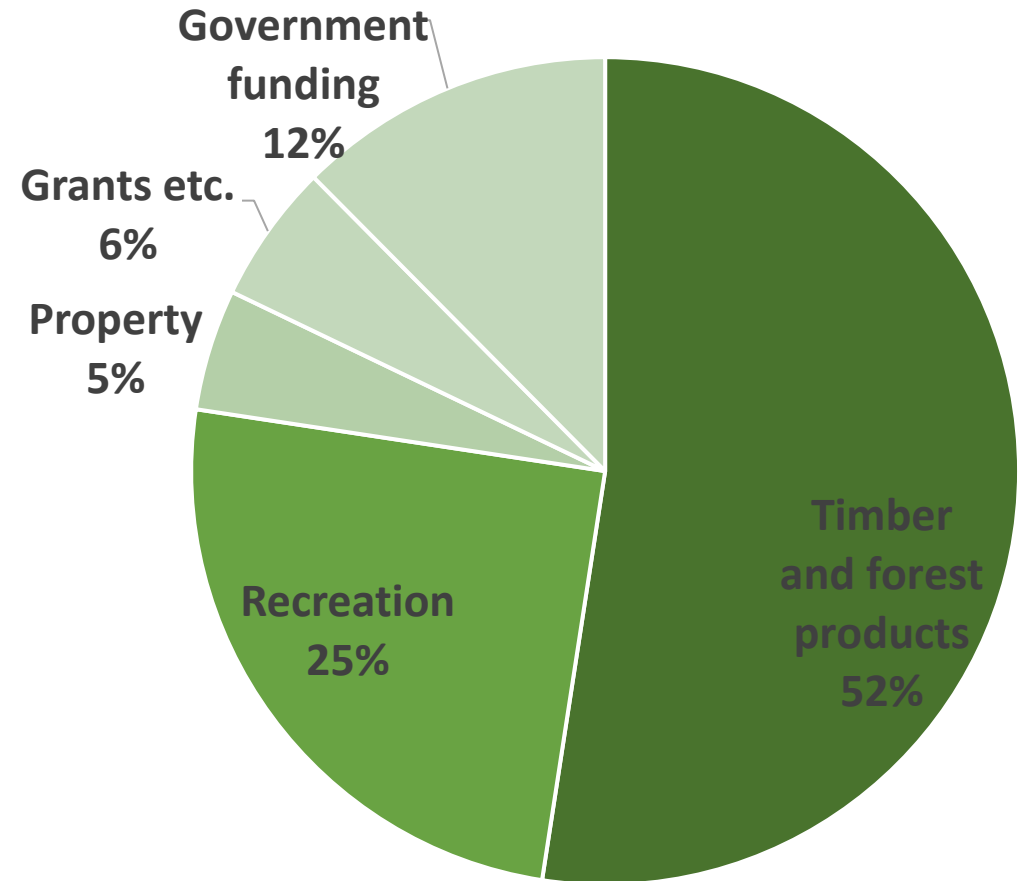


The mark of
responsible forestry



How Forestry England is funded

- Public corporation with powers to trade commercially
- Reducing annual government subsidy for operating costs, but increasing capital investment to fund new woodland creation, nature recovery.
- Recreation is an important and growing part of the business, including:
 - car park revenues, annual membership sales, recreation business lease income (restaurants, bike hire, high ropes courses), corporate partnerships and retail



Data from 2024-25 accounts. Operational income only



Forestry England

Some example activities within the Recreation Matrix

High commercial impact

Pots of Gold



Heartwood



Low social impact

High social impact



Sinkholes



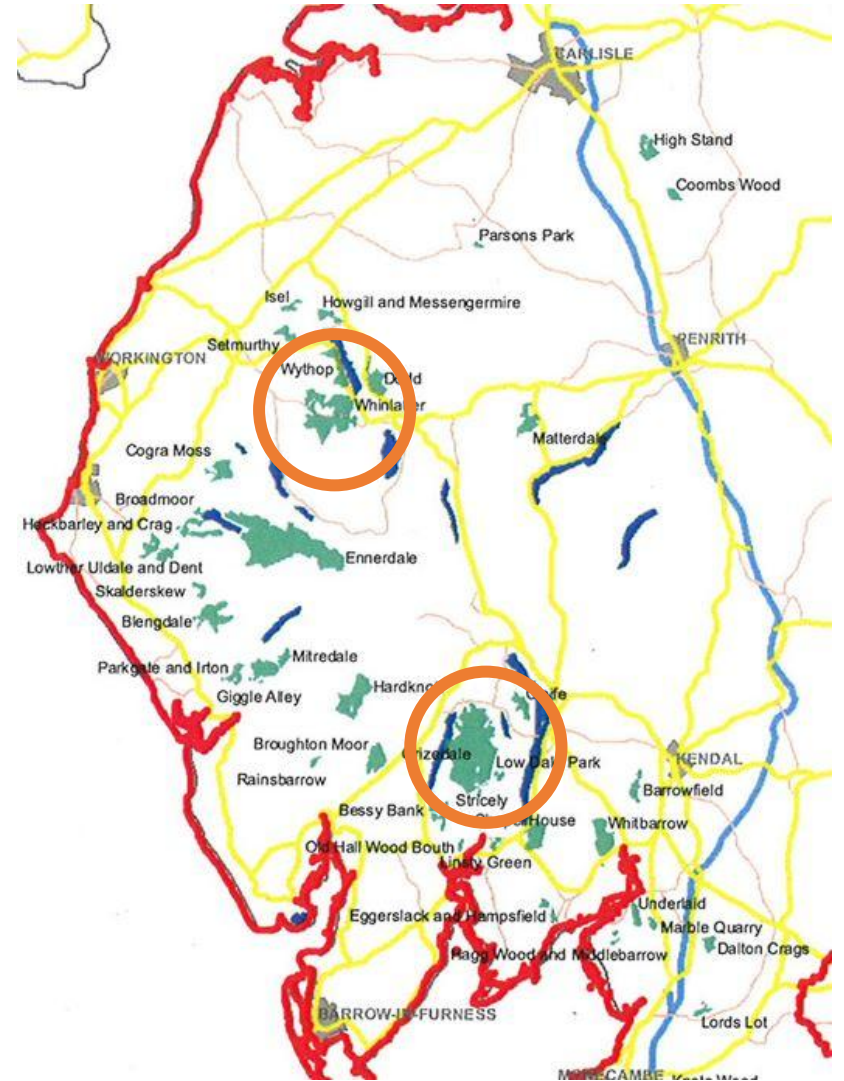
Forest Fungi



Low commercial impact



- We manage 5% of the Lake District National Park.
- ~120 square kilometres.
- Two main forest recreation sites:
 - Whinlatter - 250,000 visitors
 - Grizedale - 200,000 visitors

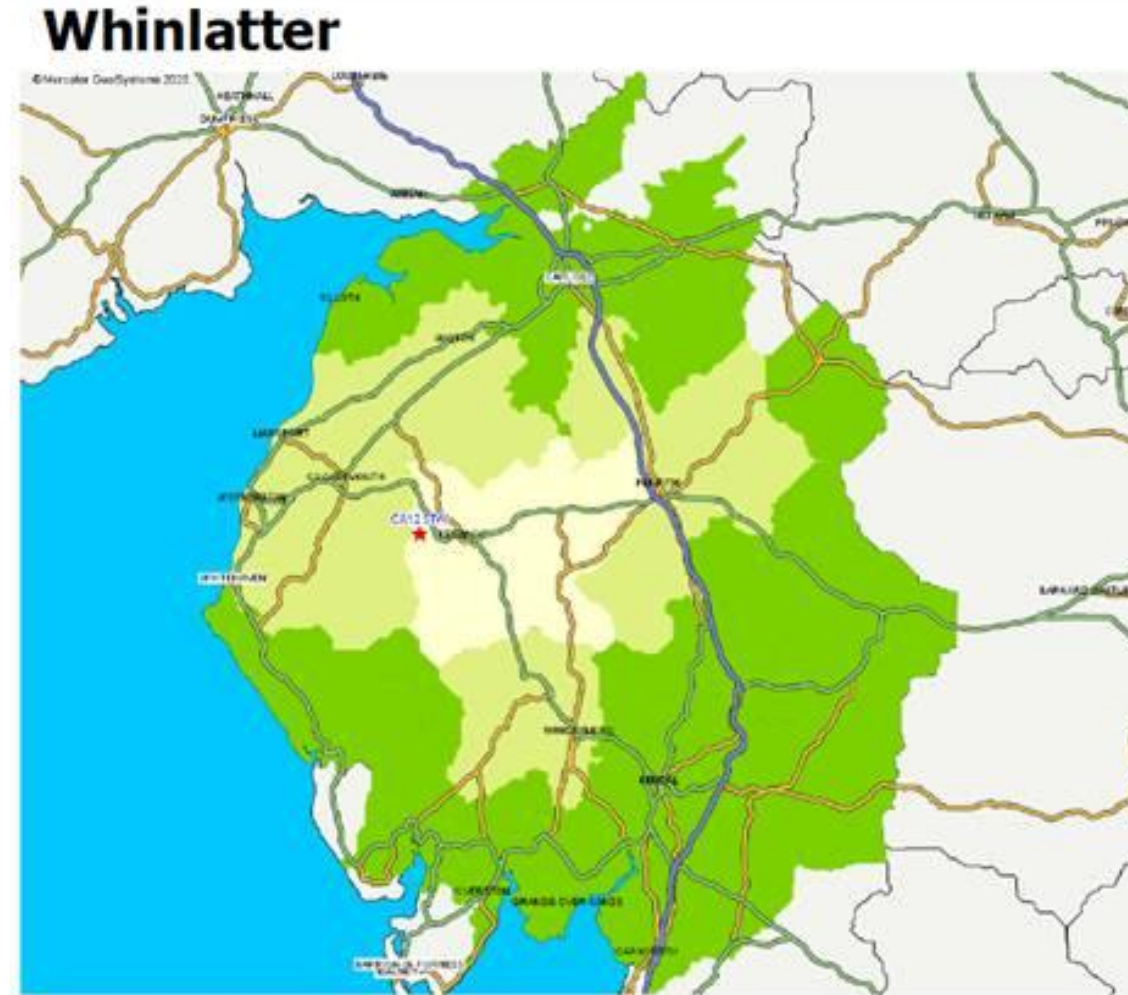






45% staying tourists in Lake District

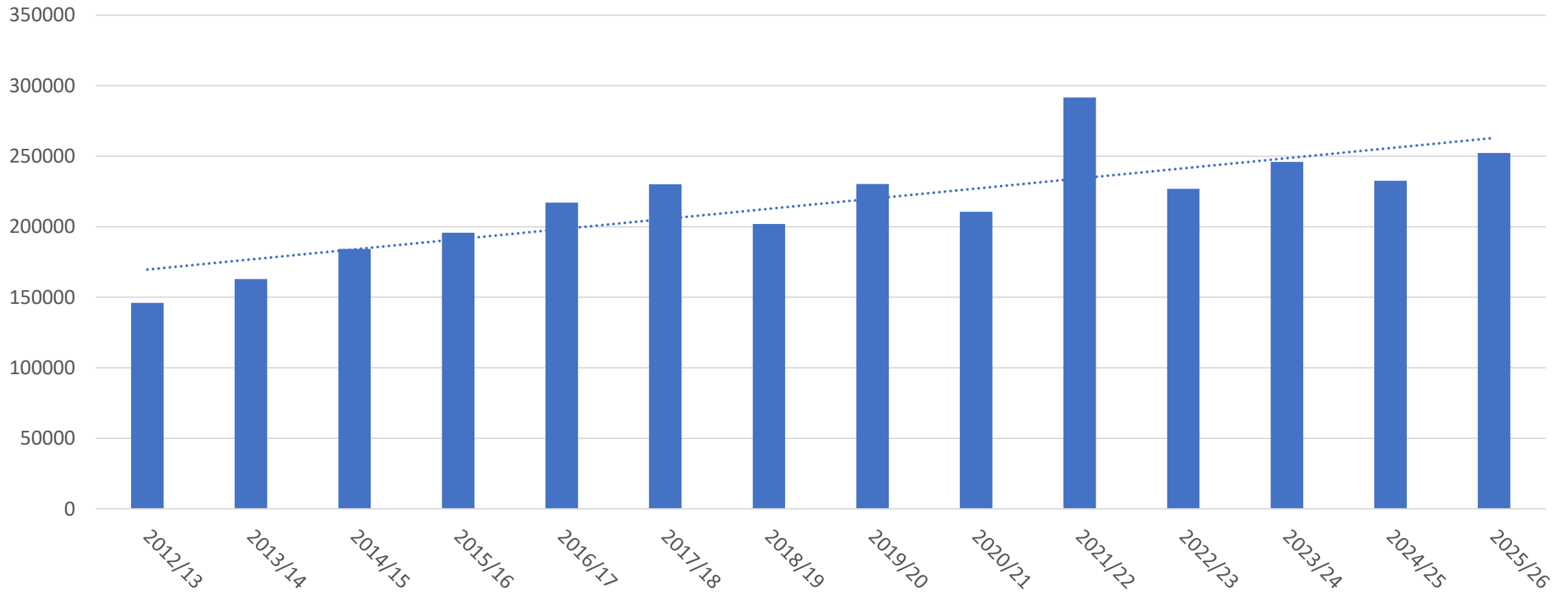
55% visiting residents from North and West Cumbria



One Hour
Resident Travel
Market

496,144

Economic visitor numbers to Whinlatter Forest



- Car park - 200 spaces + 40 outlying
- Café
- Bike hire, shop and training centre
- GoApe
- Wild play area and Gruffalo sculptures
- Information point and Forestry England operated shop
- Walking trails
- Running trail offer
- Off-road cycling trails
- All-terrain mobility scooter hire
- Alpaca walks (leased business partnership)
- Active Forest Site
- Britain's Hilliest ParkRun



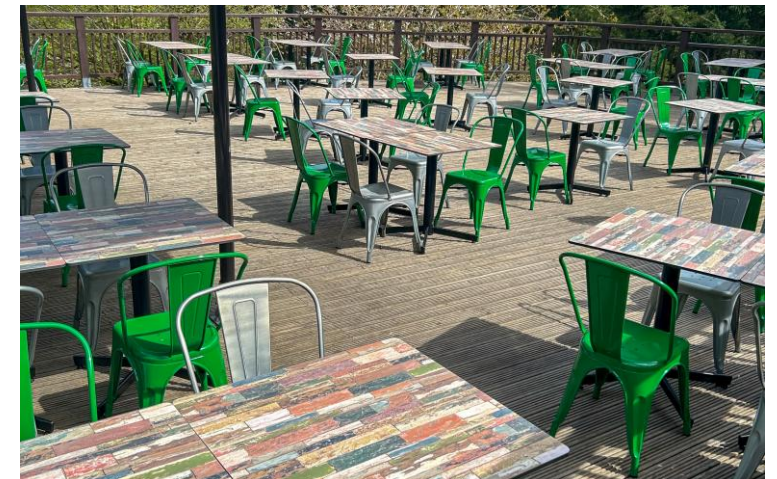












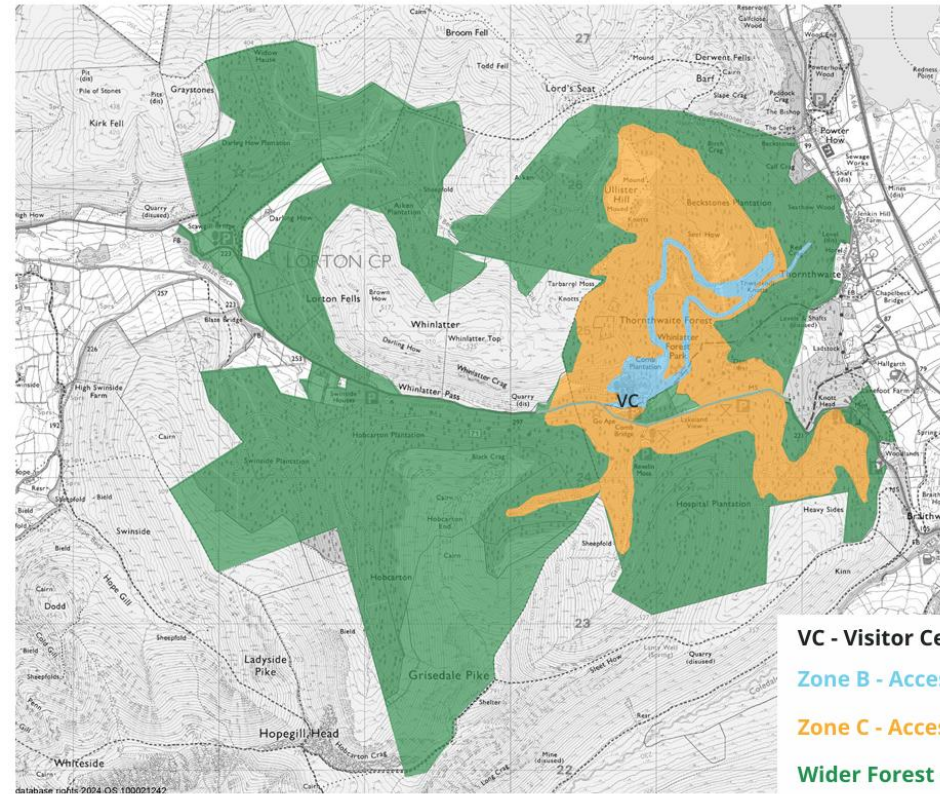
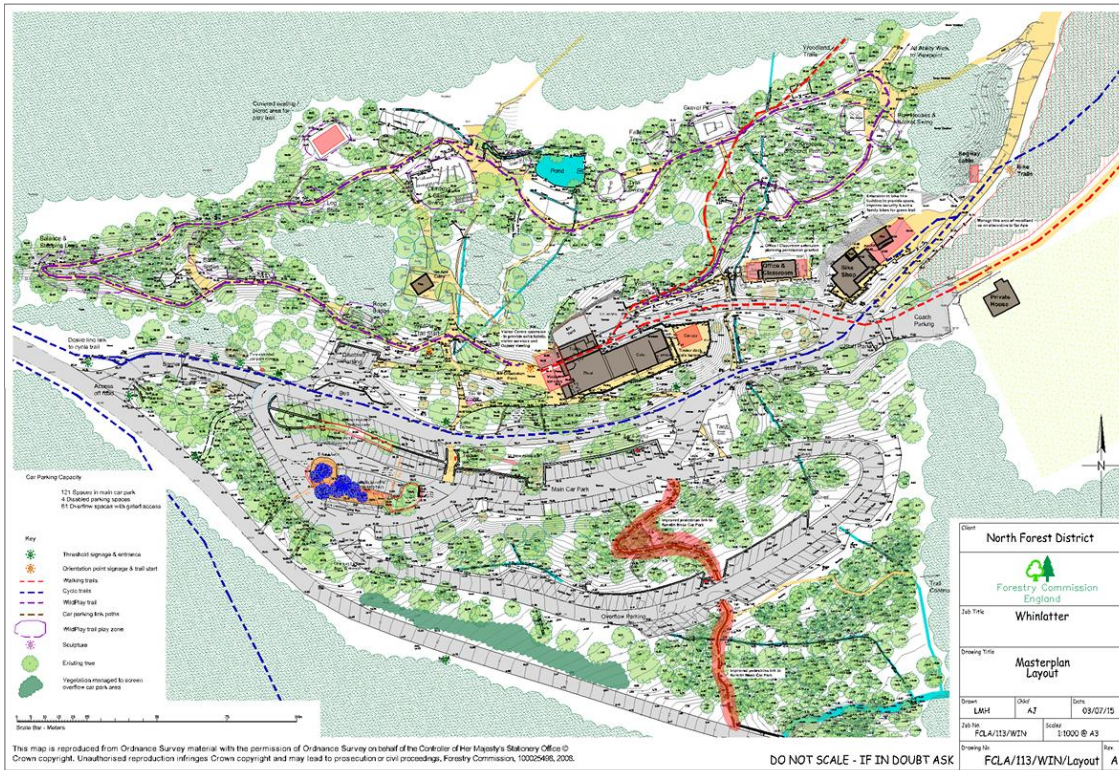






All terrain mobility scooters









- Continued development of the accessibility of the site through new picnic area.
- Trail running centre - potential for partnerships and experiences
- Further GoApe development
- Hydroelectric power scheme
- Small scale off-grid accommodation



The changing face of Kielder Forest - the first 100 years!

Alex MacLennan

Recreation, Public Affairs Manager- Northumberland



Introducing Alex and North England

Locations worked in to date



Highlands of Scotland
1986 – 1993

Wiltshire/Avon &
Oxfordshire 1993-1997

Scottish Borders
1997-2005

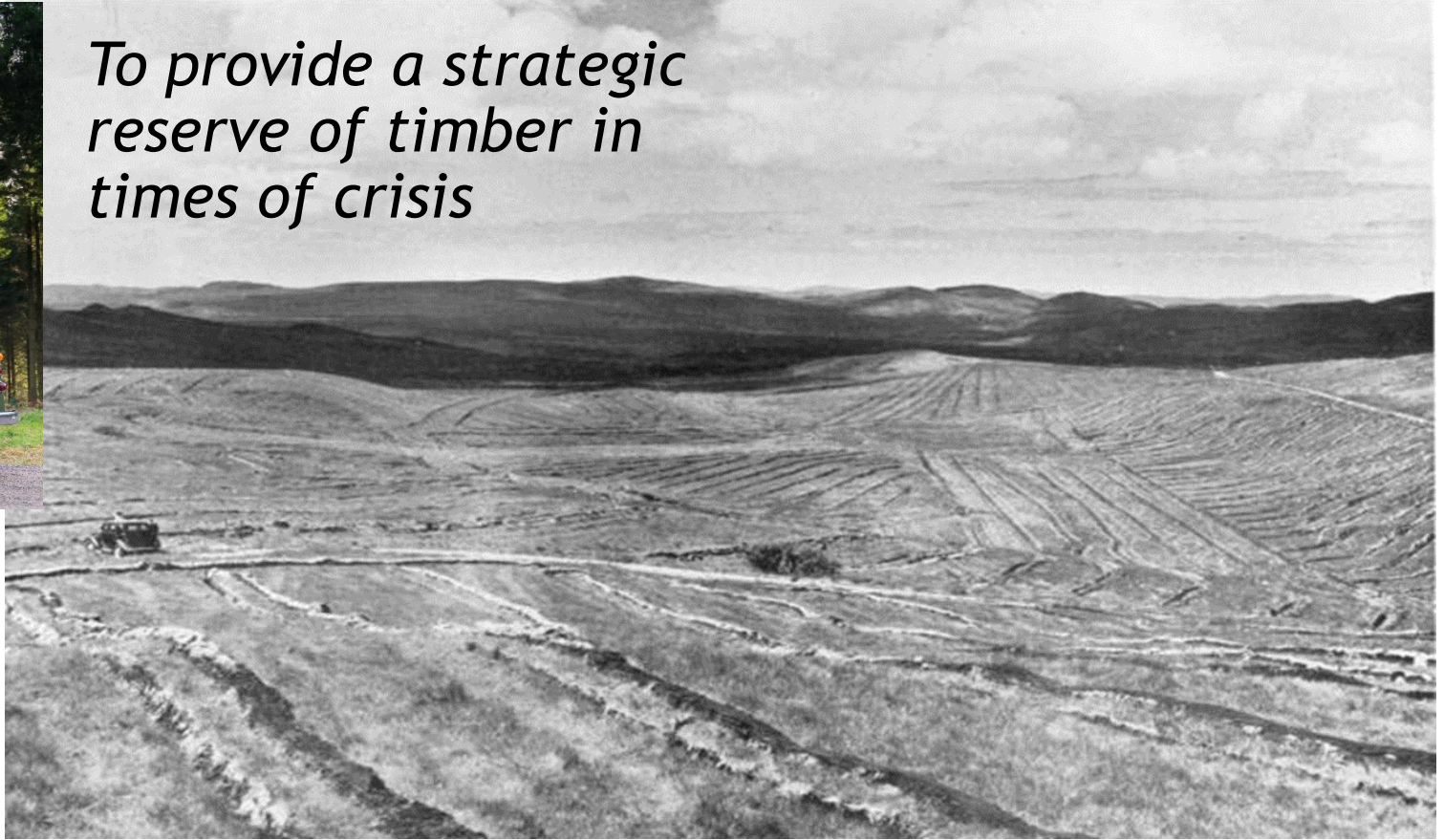
North East England
2005 – current



Forestry Commission 1919



To provide a strategic reserve of timber in times of crisis



Early ploughing in Kielder- similar scenes across the UK!



The People - Lord Robinson of Kielder Forest



Roy Lister Robinson - Lord Robinson of Kielder Forest. Seconded to the explosives department, Ministry of Munitions and Agriculture (1915-18), he subsequently became secretary to the forestry sub-committee of the Cabinet Reconstruction (Acland) Committee and was largely responsible for the report which led to the establishment of the Forestry Commission in 1919 and his appointment as its technical commissioner. He became vice-chairman of the commission in 1929, and chairman in 1932, holding that office until he died. He was appointed O.B.E. in 1918, knighted in 1931 and raised to the peerage in 1947

*To the memory of
Roy Lister Robinson OBE
Baron Robinson of Kielder Forest and Adelaide
A member of the Forestry Commission from its
inception in 1919 and its chairman from 1932-1952
Born 8th March 1883 died 5th September 1952
His ashes are scattered in this forest which owes
its existence to his creative energy and vision*



The People - the communities

The Kielder Forest villages, Byrness, Kielder, Stonehaugh... more were planned but never built!
None of the villages built were completed!



How did the first 100 years go?



100 YEARS
of Kielder Forest

Kielder Forest today a forest for all

Kielder Forest is England's largest forest and one of Western Europe's largest created forests. There was a shift in vision in the 1960s of the management of the forest by the Forestry Commission to provide access for people to enjoy public forests and for environmental protection.

The biggest change to the forest came in the 1970s with the construction of Kielder Water. It was required to supply the growing populations and industries of the north east of England. The reservoir and dam opened in 1982.

The reservoir is the largest artificial lake in the UK, holding 200 billion litres of water. Not only used for supplying water, it is a hub for watersports. The Lakeside Way, which circumnavigates the whole reservoir and was constructed 2005-09 is 26 miles long and used for the Kielder Marathon.

Today, Kielder Forest is managed by Forestry England, who are partners in Kielder Water & Forest Park Development Trust, a partnership between Forestry England, Northumbrian Water, Caber Trust Kielder, Northumberland County Council, Kielder Observatory Astronomical Society and Northumberland Wildlife Trust.

Kielder Forest is grown and looked after for this generation and the next. It is a place for people to enjoy, to help wildlife and provide sustainable timber.

Forestry England look after **620 km²** of forest at Kielder, that's **239 square miles** or **86,834 football pitches**

20 years to fill

Kielder timeline

- 1974 Kielder Forest Drive opened
- 1982 Kielder Water and Dam opened
- 1982 Kielder Castle Visitor Centre opened
- 1993 Cross Border Trail opened
- 1993 Kielder Forest Park established

forestryengland.uk

From its origins as an upland conifer plantation, Kielder has evolved into something unique: the nation's largest forest maturing into a landscape found nowhere else in the UK.





As an upland forest, Kielder has always demanded resilience. Storm Arwen was a stark reminder of the importance of multi-purpose forestry that is planned for the long term. Timber production remains just as vital today as it has ever been, sitting alongside wider environmental, social and economic objectives.

What the past 100 years have demonstrated is just how diverse Kielder Forest has become. It is steadily shedding the outdated reputation of a “dark conifer forest - just trees” and emerging instead as a large-scale forest tourism destination and a reputation for wildlife.

With the growth of *Wild Kielder*, interest and curiosity have never been stronger than in 2026, as we move into the next century of the UK's largest continuous forest area, including its adjoining Scottish and Cumbrian forest blocks.

Economy - 100 years on



- **£ Forestry & Timber:** ~500,000 m³ of timber harvested annually, supporting ~200 direct jobs plus wider timber and biomass industries across the North East.
-  **Sustainable Management:** 3.5 million trees planted every year—equivalent to 1,000 ha—sustaining long-term forestry and seasonal contract employment.
-  **Wildlife Management:** Over 1,200 deer managed annually and supplied into the UK food chain.
-  **Tourism & Jobs:** 120+ tourism-related jobs, with Kielder a strategic hub for cycling, events, and outdoor recreation.
-  **Dark Skies & Events:** Birthplace of Northumberland's £25 m Dark Skies economy, with year-round events driving local employment.

Changing public access

So how did it all begin?

What AI says..... *Forest access in the UK has evolved from ancient, common usage to strict feudal hunting laws (11th-17th centuries), a period of private enclosure, and finally to modern public access via the Forestry Commission (founded 1919) and Right to Roam legislation, shifting from purely timber production to multifunctional recreational use.*

I have witnessed 1st hand the changes from the late 1980's until current these evolving changes.

My own take on all this has been two key main elements, the forests maturing/ evolving in the UK from plantations into multi- purpose forestry making them more attractive green spaces.....



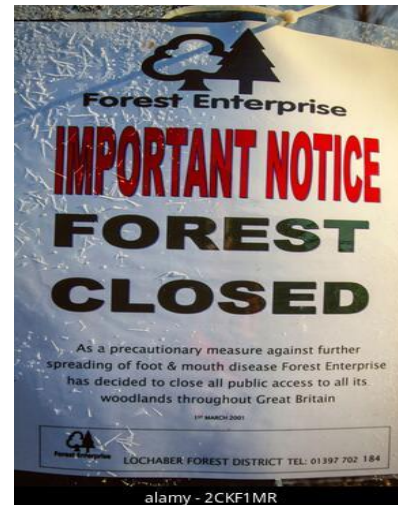
Changing public access

... and society realising the importance of access, from major events which have defined the countryside...
Leading to increasing awareness of how important connecting with nature is.

1987 storm



Foot & Mouth 2001



Covid - 19



Storm Arwen 2021



 Forestry Commission England **UK Forestry Standard**



People



Improving public access



Mounting Block

Kielder's Lakeside Way, created between 2006 and 2009 - 26 Miles of multi-user trail





LONESOME PINE & LONE STAR MTB/AMTB TRAILS



LONESOME PINE TRAIL

TRAIL START
Kielder Castle car park
TRAIL FINISH
Kielder village
TRAIL LENGTH
12.5 miles / 19.7 km
TRAIL GRADE
▲ Red Difficult

LONE STAR TRAIL

TRAIL START
Kielder Skyspace car park
TRAIL FINISH
Kielder village
TRAIL LENGTH
6 miles / 9.5 km
TRAIL GRADE
♣ ADAPTIVE MOUNTAIN BIKING (AMTB) BLACK

Follow the waymarked route as shown. Take a photo of the map for reference. Facilities only available at Kielder Castle.

The Lone Star Trail is built for Adaptive Mountain Bikers (AMTB). It can be used by MTB riders. Please give way to AMTB users.

Bike trails maintained by  Forestry England

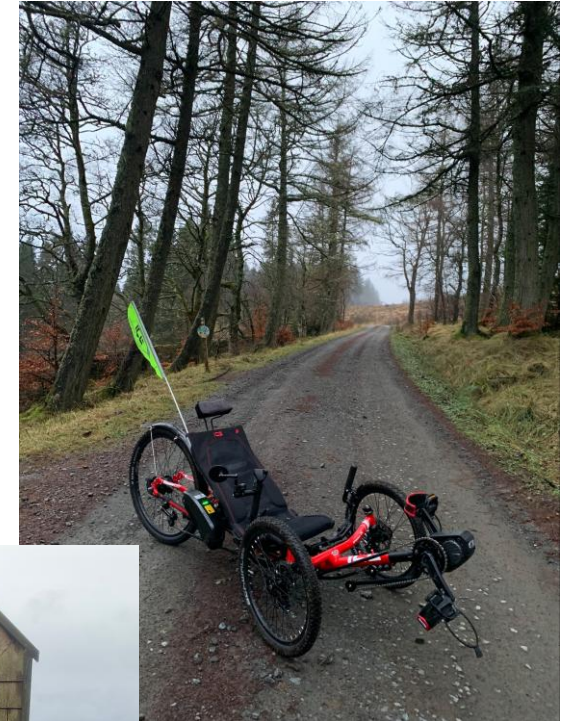
HOW OUR MTB/CYCLE TRAILS ARE GRADED

Green Easy Expect: Relatively flat, wide and smooth trails. May include gentle climbs, descents, roots and small berms, with easy to avoid features such as rocks and potholes. Surface might be loose, uneven or muddy at times.	Blue Moderate Expect: A mixture of climbs and descents with moderate gradients, technical features like tree roots and rock steps, jumps and berms. Ridable features at controlled speed.	Red Difficult Expect: A mixture of steep climbs, descents and/or avoidable features. Larger jumps, berms and rocky features at controlled speed. Technical features such as tree roots, drop-offs and large rocks. Very variable surfaces.	Black Severe Expect: Long, steep climbs, descents and/or avoidable features. Sharp corners and difficult features. Rapid rate of surface change. Commitment required.	Double Black Extreme Expect: Very fast and steep descents. Large drop-offs, jumps and avoidable obstacles that require high levels of skill and commitment. Extreme level of exposure or risk. Rapid rate of surface change.	Forest route & similar Expect: Gradients can be steep or variable. Surfaces may be uneven, loose or potholed. Navigation skills are useful. Look out for vehicles, forestry work and other users.
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On 26th November 2021 Storm Arwen created havoc with over 1 million trees crashing down - one of the affected areas was the eastern facing hills of the Lonesome Pine MTB Trail.

Following timber recovery work, the trail was upgraded via funding from the Northumberland County RAMP fund to create the 1st mtb trail of significance in North England to be suitable for adaptive bikes. This has excited a wide audience and has already pump primed several initiatives....





RAMP 2 – 4 Adaptive Cycles funded, being prepared for use from April onwards.
collaboration between Forestry England, Team Cycles and Calvert Kielder





ADAPTIVE
Riders
COLLECTIVE



ADAPTIVE
Riders
COLLECTIVE



Steve Cram's Northumbrian event - now uses sections of the Lone Star Trail for running!





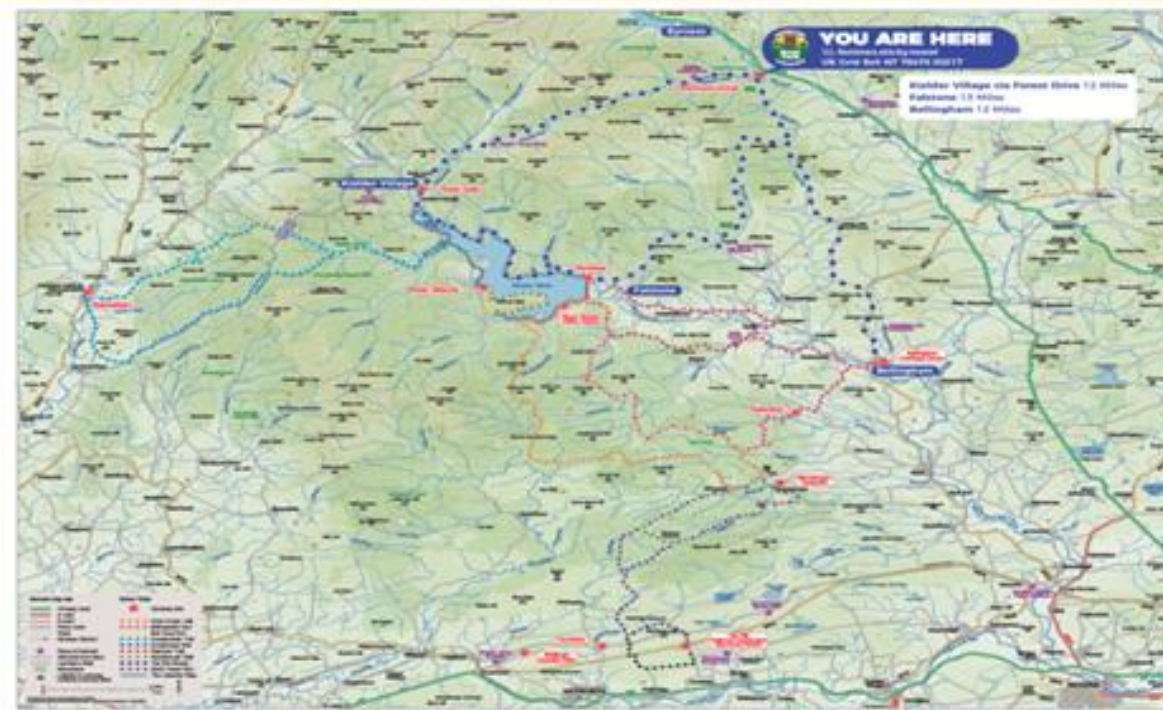
Welcome to the Reiver Trails

www.reivertrails.com

A new set of 10 trails, some enhanced reworked added/ blended rights of way tied into forest road network. Linking communities around the outside of the forest with interconnecting trails

Lakeside Way- central connector!

Network allows for public transportation links to the community starting points!



Welcome to the Reiver Trails - a network of waymarked multi-user routes taking you through spectacular landscapes, linking communities and bringing you closer to nature. For full details about each trail and keeping safe, please scan the QR code.



CROSS CRAGS TRAIL

A trail in the heart of Kielder Forest - A 30-mile circular route between Stonehaugh and Kielder Water, along forest tracks. (Scan QR Code to download route)



BELLINGHAM TRAIL

A trail in the heart of the North Tyne valley - A 30-mile circular route starting from Bellingham following both forest tracks and moorland lanes. (Scan QR Code to download route)



BULL CRAG TRAIL

Lakeside views for all the family - A 6.5-mile circular route starting from Kielder Water, suitable for walkers and riders of all ages. (Scan QR Code to download route)



CROSS-BORDER TRAIL

Crossing the border into Scotland - An adventurous 30-mile circular route between Newcastleton and Wark's Linn, near Kielder Village. (Scan QR Code to download route)



EMBLEHOPE TRAIL

Into Northumberland's wild spaces - An adventurous circular 40-mile route connecting Bellingham with Kielder and Redburn. (Scan QR Code to download route)



FALSTONE TRAIL

In the footsteps of the Border Reivers - A scenic 13-mile circular route in the North Tyne valley between the picturesque villages of Falstone and Greenhaugh. (Scan QR Code to download route)



STONEHAUGH TRAIL

A trail in the heart of Kielder Forest - A 1.2-mile circular route starting and finishing at Stonehaugh, following forest tracks. (Scan QR Code to download route)



THE SILL TRAIL

At the centre of Hadrian's Wall Country - A 6-mile circular trail starting and finishing at The Sill National Landscape Discovery Centre. (Scan QR Code to download route)



WARK FOREST TRAIL

From the Wall into the Forest - A 24-mile route connecting The Sill National Landscape Discovery Centre and Stonehaugh. (Scan QR Code to download route)



LAKESIDE WAY

A 30-mile multi-user trail around the Kielder Water shoreline, featuring beautiful views, stunning forest scenery, abundant wildlife and intriguing art works.

The Kielder story cycling - evolution again!

In the early days of 1980's when the very 1st mountain bikes came into the UK, Kielder Forest was one of the earliest venues to host mtb events on forest roads.

So much so they even ran a Kielder branded MTB!



Fast forward nearly 20 years to 2005 and a latecomer to the MTB singletrack scene (due to the challenging ground conditions). The origins of the kick start the mtb trail network commenced with a mere £5000 and a call for volunteers



And.... 21 years on from the very initial 1st spade on the ground....

The vision to sustain all year-round cycle tourism continues - the longest downhill in England opens on May 1st 2026! YOU ARE ALL INVITED....



Inspiring the next generation- get outdoors into the forests, make it fun!..

Gruffalo is a real attraction..



Kielder Forest - overnight stays in car parks - harnessing the Dark Skies and also reducing issues in car parks!



Overnight motorhome parking at Kielder Stay overnight for just £15!

We are happy to welcome campervans to stay overnight in our castle car park - there's nowhere quite like England's largest forest for a truly unforgettable night!

Park up after 5pm and soak up stunning dark sky views.

Please note that we do not allow tent, touring caravan or car parking - click [HERE](#) for information on nearby campsites.

Please visit responsibly

Don't park on verges or block gates or junctions

Leave no trace - take all waste away with you

Use self-contained toilet facilities inside your vehicle only (toilet block available at Kielder Castle car park)

Don't start fires or use BBQs (gas or charcoal)

Maximum continuous stay - two nights



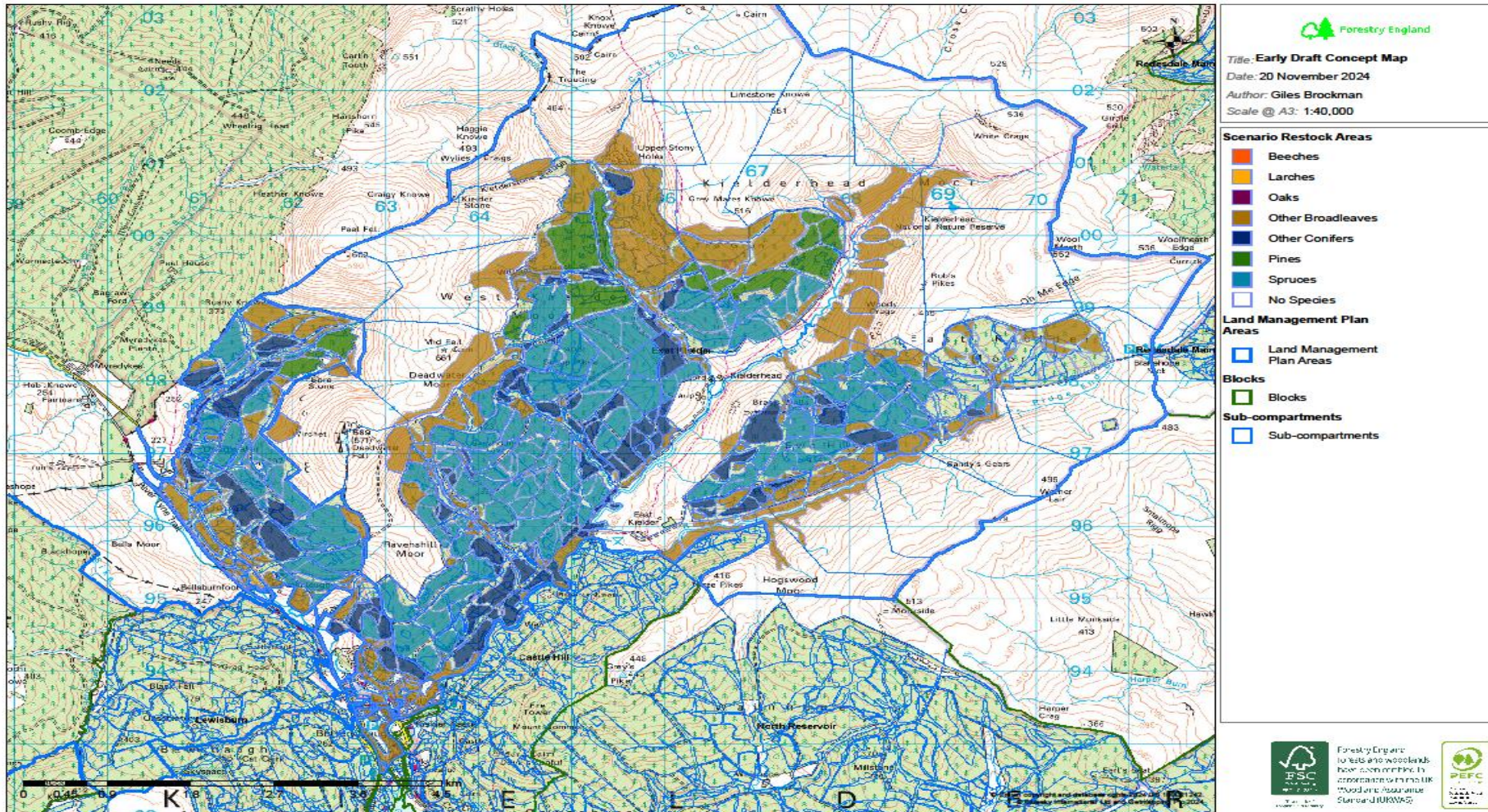
So what did we say and we do.... A forest summary report on the last 21 years!

- Created Lakeside Way – 26 miles of multi-user trail.
- Initiated the Kielder Osprey Project- now the largest colony of Ospreys in the UK!
- Created the largest mtb trail network in one forest location in the UK.
- We harnessed the Dark Skies and unlocked an annual spend in Northumberland of £25 million per annum including building the multi- award Kielder Observatory (owned by Forestry England)
- Created over 250 miles of waymarked forest roads for walk, cycle and horse access, interconnecting with rights of way including establishing better connectivity to outside forest communities. We are currently unlocking the heritage tales on the area through this project and creating shorter, easier to do loops.
- Implementing adaptive cycling
- Reopening Kielder Castle Café for the future generations to enjoy and fit for purpose with access for all included.
- Created the environment for businesses such as Team Cycles to thrive and expand staffing levels.
- Host the largest programme of rural events per annum in Northumberland from Dark Skies to Motorsport car rallies and everything in between!
- Work with volunteers to connect with nature and maintain our trail networks
- Opened up our Kielder Forest car parks for overnight stays creating a new stream of rural income
- to local businesses such as café's pubs etc.

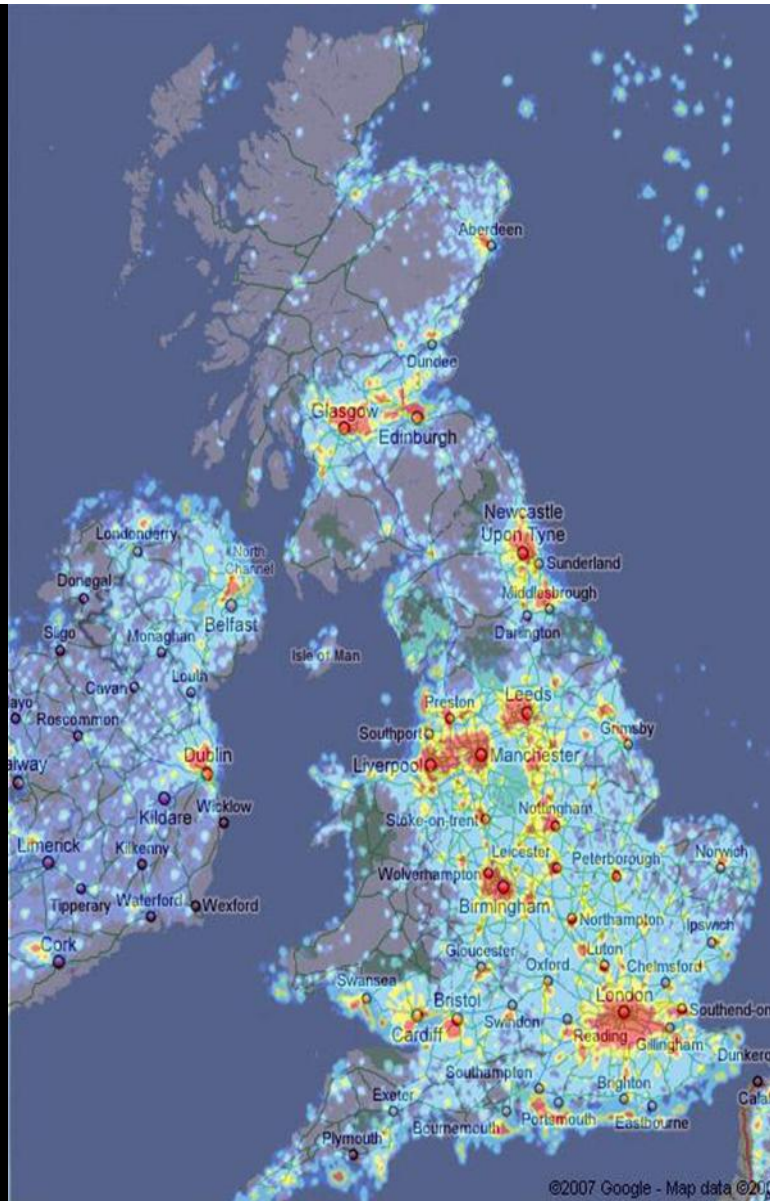


Wild Kielder Vision

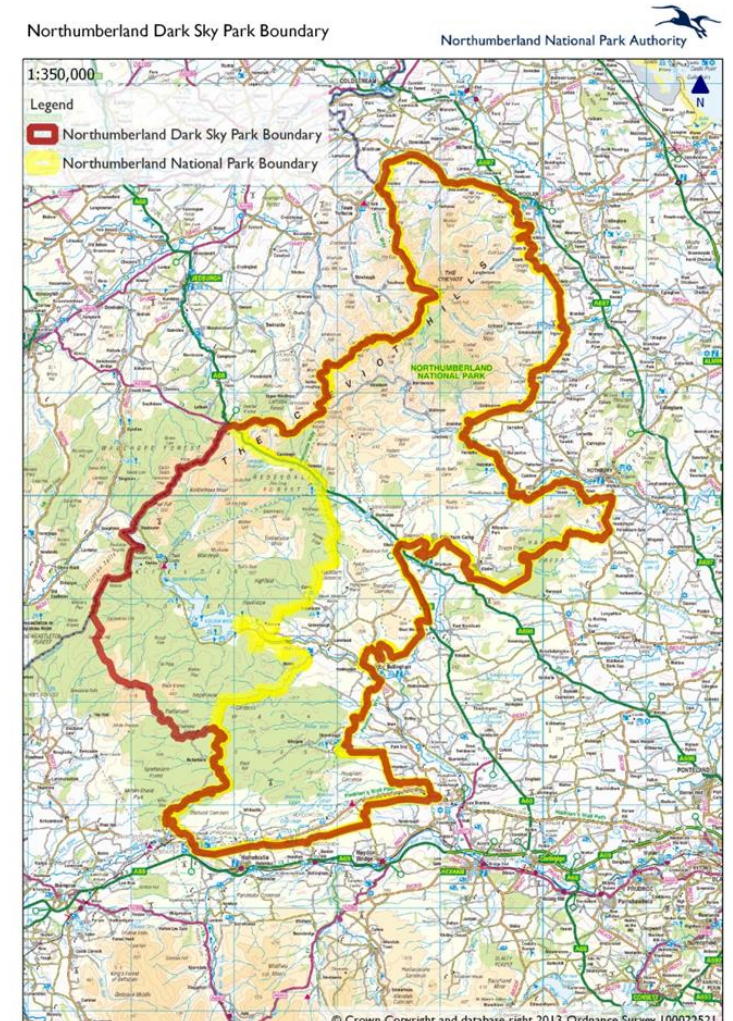
A new upland landscape: together, we are reshaping the uplands on a vast scale for nature and people - creating a dynamic, resilient landscape rich in biodiversity, where sustainable, productive forests stand as its thriving heart.



Remembering who we are is still important...



Dark Skies, creating all year round tourism. 3rd largest Europe



NORTHUMBERLAND
AN INDEPENDENT SPIRIT

Northumberland Dark Sky Park

Europe's largest Gold Tier
Dark Sky Park.

visitnorthumberland.com/darkskies

Kielder Observatory, Kielder Water & Forest Park.

Sycamore Gap, Hadrian's Wall in Northumberland National Park.



<https://youtu.be/9rd2ljglcGM>





Forestry
England

Growing the future