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# The Guardian

## What 'rewilding' really means for forestry and heather moorland

Plantations are an excellent way to combat climate breakdown, writes **Andrew Weatherall**, of the National School of Forestry. And **Rachel Kerr** says heather moorland is rarer than rainforest and the underlying peat is more effective at carbon storage than trees

### *Letters*

Fri 24 May 2019 17.08 BST



The Forestry Commission was established 100 years ago to create a “strategic reserve of timber” after Lloyd George stated “Britain had more nearly lost the war for want of timber than of anything else”. The UK is 50% self-sufficient in food, but only 20% self-sufficient in wood, so we still want timber more than anything else.

Any call to redirect subsidies to restore woodlands is welcome (Use farm subsidies to rewild quarter of UK, urges report, 21 May). The Rewilding Britain report states: “Commercial conifer plantations should not be eligible, except where they are removed and replaced with native woodland.” This approach is understandable if the aim is to increase habitat for wildlife. However, plantations are an excellent way to combat climate breakdown, because the growing trees sequester carbon and the forests store it, just like in more natural woodlands, but harvested wood products also provide a carbon substitution effect when used instead of concrete or steel.

The report suggests healthier eating can release land from intensive agriculture, but conversely we should be using more, not less, wood. Any different approach in the way land is managed should include plantations, which can also be native trees to produce timber alongside the restoration and expansion of our most precious ancient semi-natural woodlands. Without this we are dependent on greenhouse gas emissions to import wood.

**Dr Andrew Weatherall**

*National School of Forestry*

. I'm a supporter of subsidies to encourage landowners to restore woodlands and meadows, but it's of concern that Rewilding Britain seems to suggest that it's OK to plant our heather moorland, as if it's just sitting there doing nothing. You report that Rebecca Wrigley, its chief executive, said rewilding "did not have to involve an overall reduction in food production" and pointed to "millions of hectares of low-grade agricultural land, much of it in the uplands". In fact, heather moorland is rarer than rainforest, and the underlying peat is more effective at carbon storage than trees. The UK contains 75% of the world's remaining heather moorland - with grouse moor estates arguably containing the richest biodiversity - and we need to protect it.

I also take issue with the term "rewilding", which promulgates the romantic fallacy that all this is somehow going to look after itself.

What is really meant is that landowners will be encouraged to manage the land in a different way. It's important that the UK's largely city-based population understands this.

**Rachel Kerr**

*Bradford, West Yorkshire*

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