Perceptions of woodland resilience on private estates in the Highlands
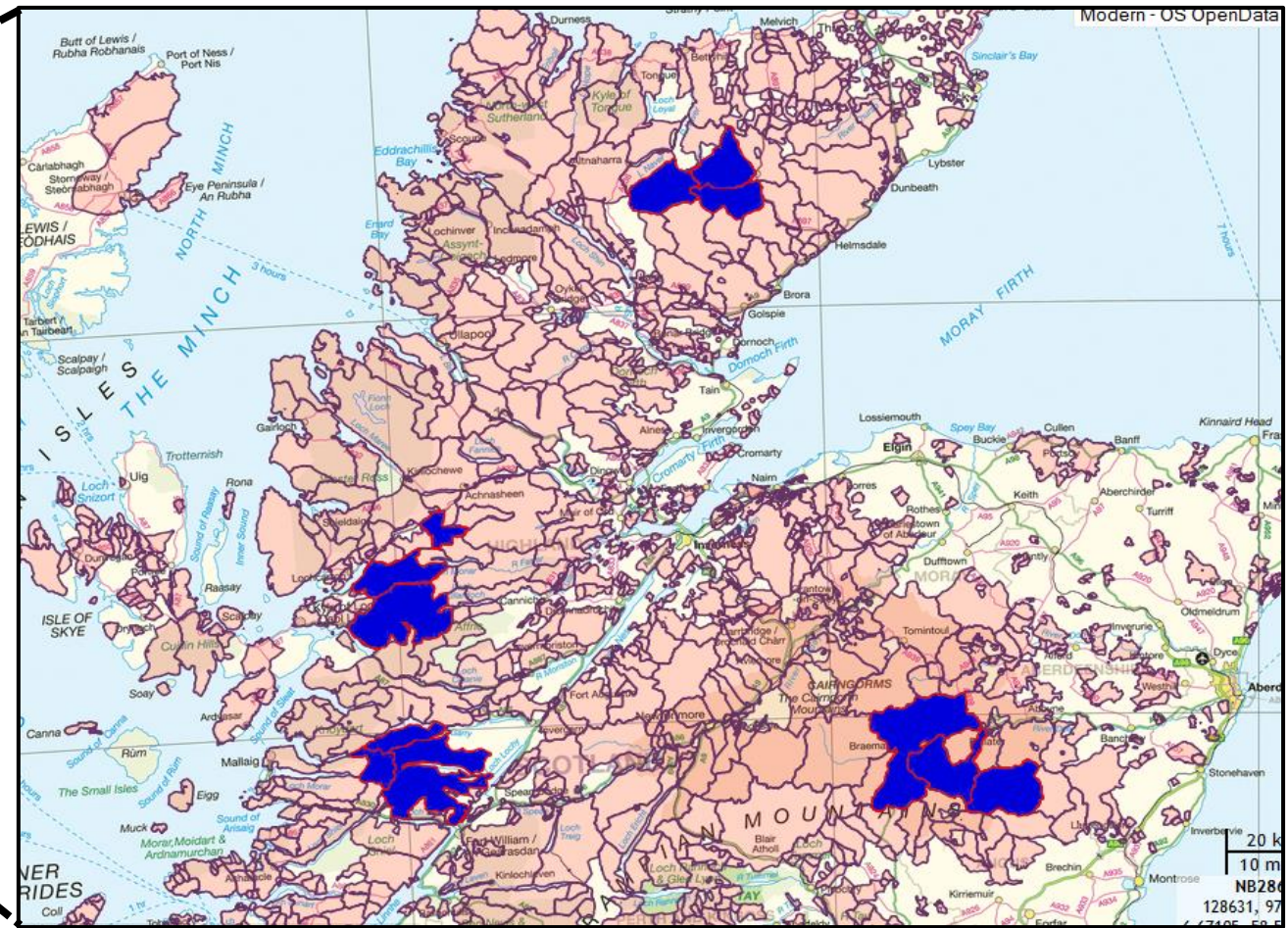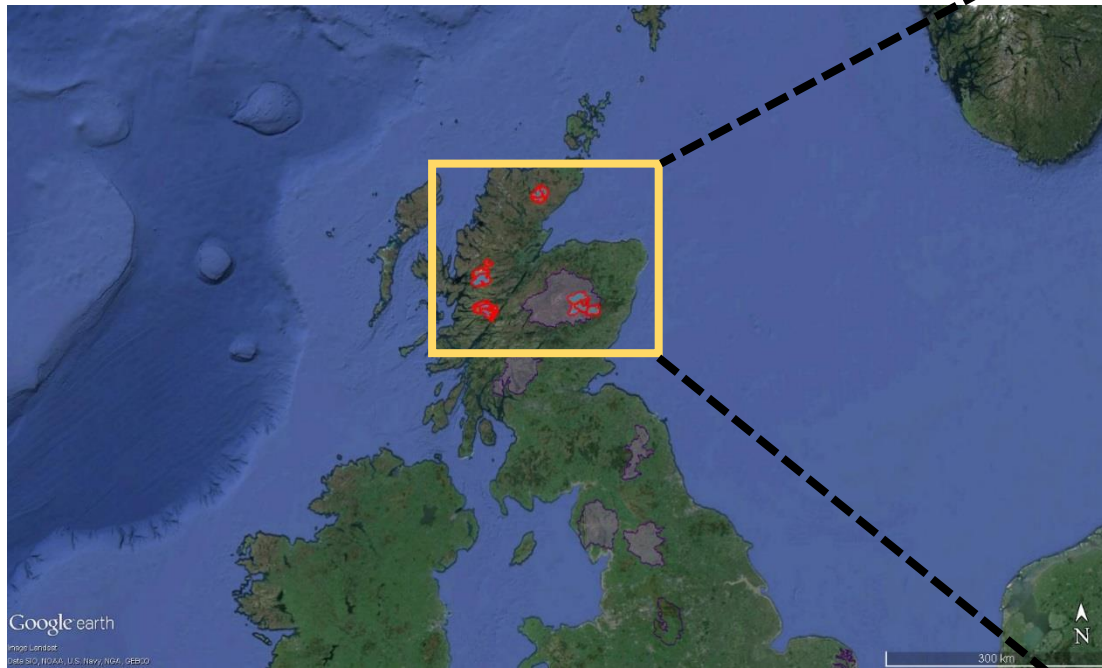

Euan Bowditch – University of the Highlands and Islands

Private sporting estates

- 43% of the Highlands
- Individuals owning large tracts of land (5,000-40,000 hectares+)
- Often absentee owners
- Traditionally bought as retreats
- Now bought for status, recreation and sporting pursuits
- Woodland owners?

Case Studies – Scottish Highlands

Targets:

→ Current woodland covers 17% of Scotland

→ Highlands = 18% coverage

→ 25% coverage by 2050

→ Translates to 10,000 hectares of newly planted woodland every year

→ Targets are falling short….

Resilience

- Big policy aim for Scottish government in regards to the economy, rural populations and the environment – "*Resilient and healthy woodlands*"

- Academic view – Stability, adaptation and transformation

- What does this mean to estate managers?

- Woodland viewed through climate change, tree health and genetic resilience
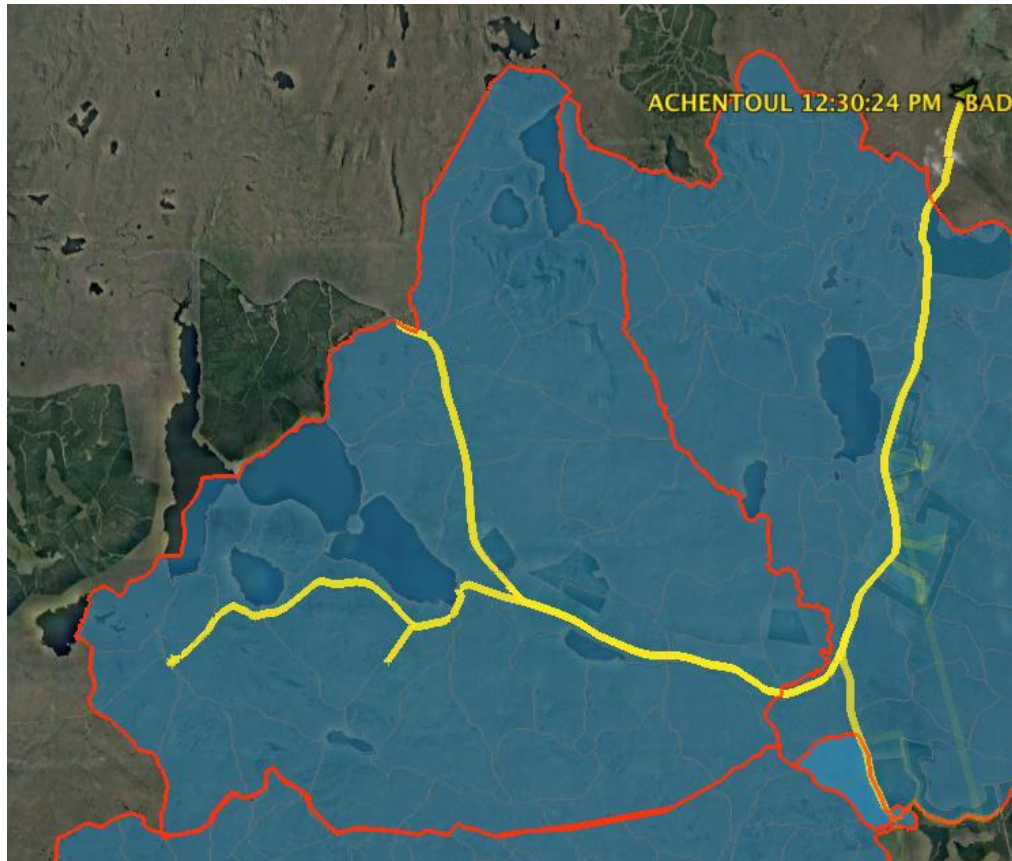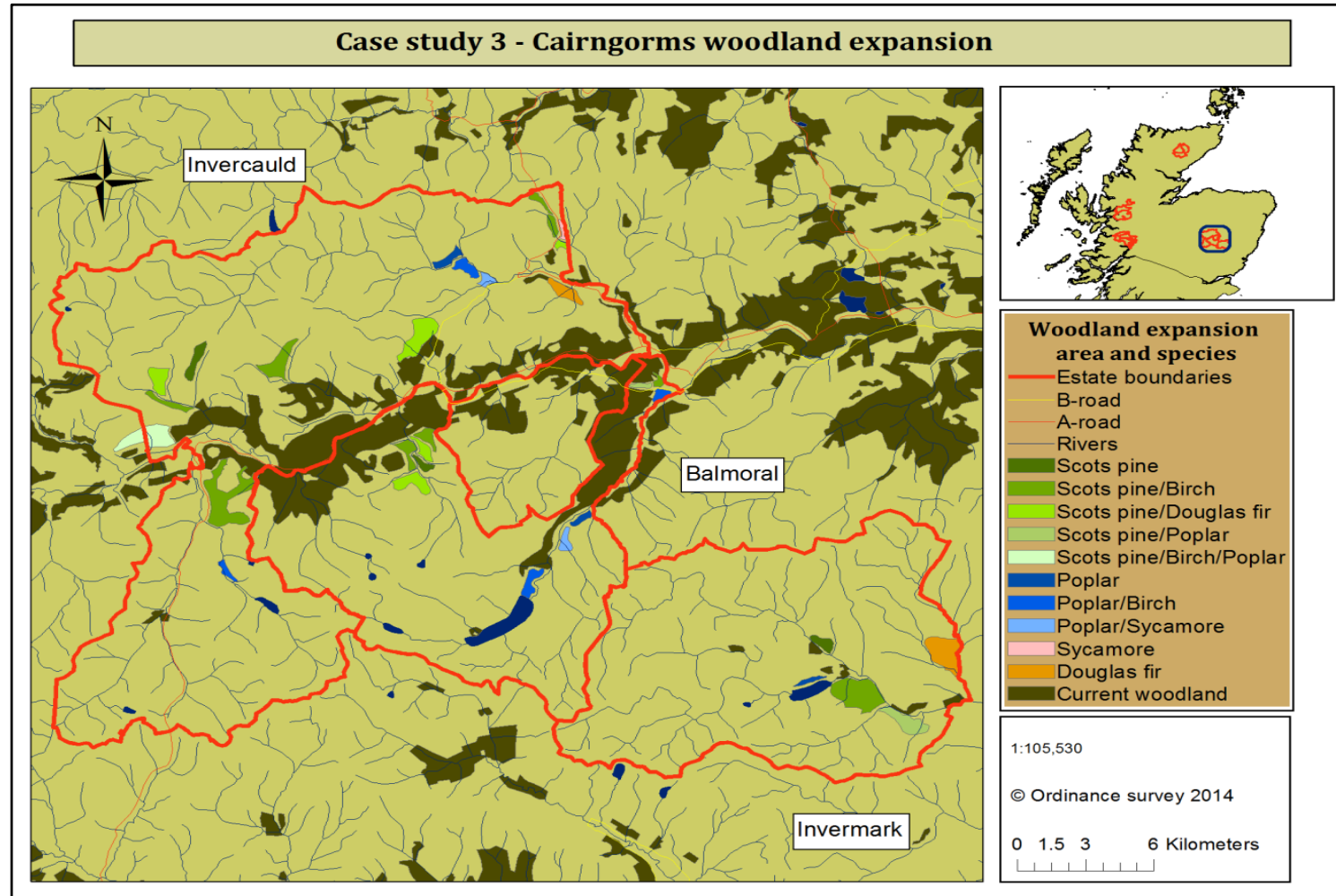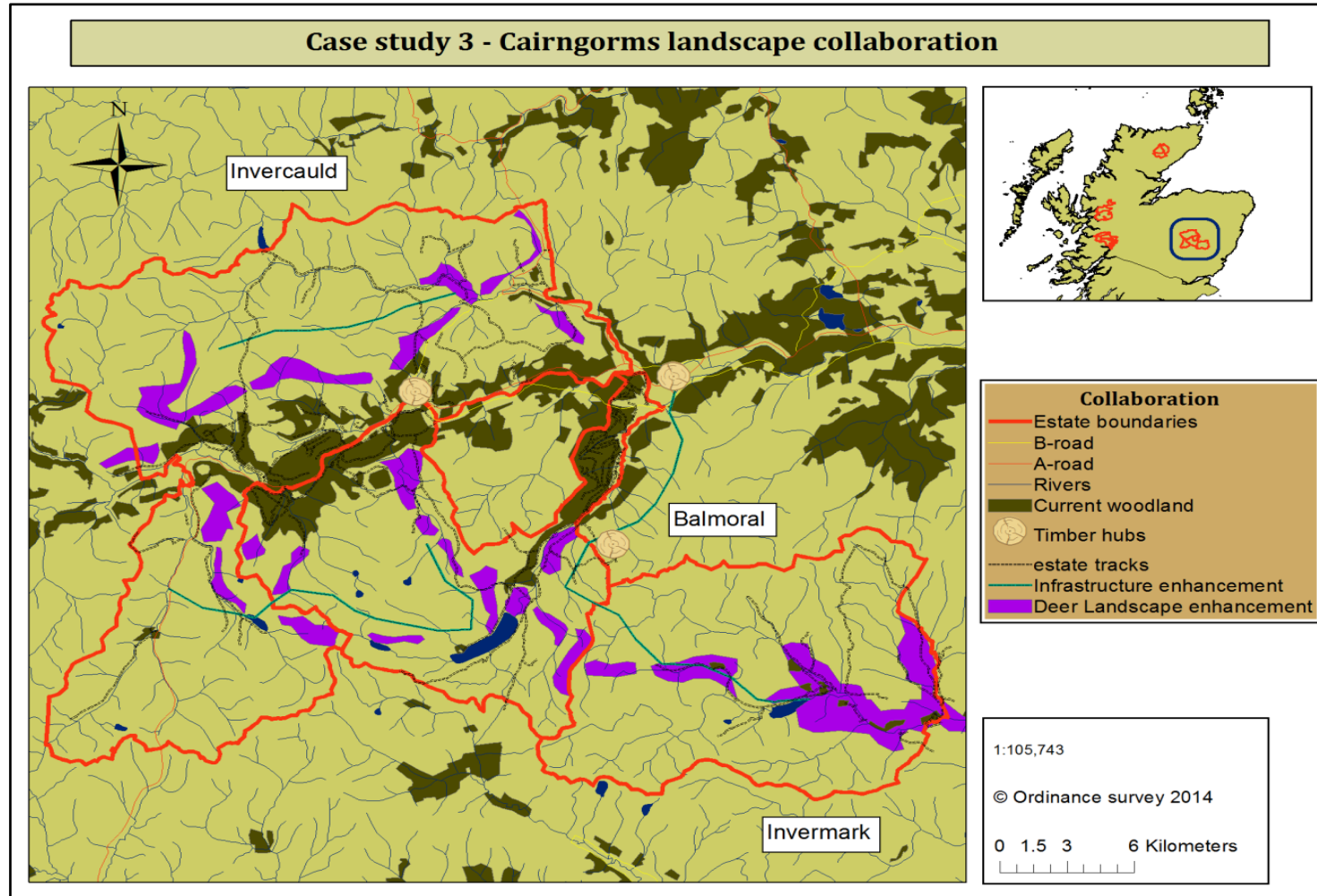
Resilient woodland

Red Grouse

Deer

Field Interview

Woodland planning
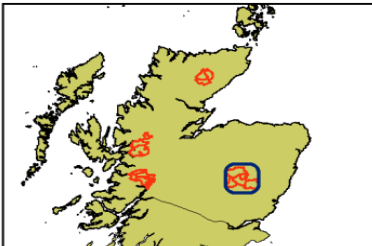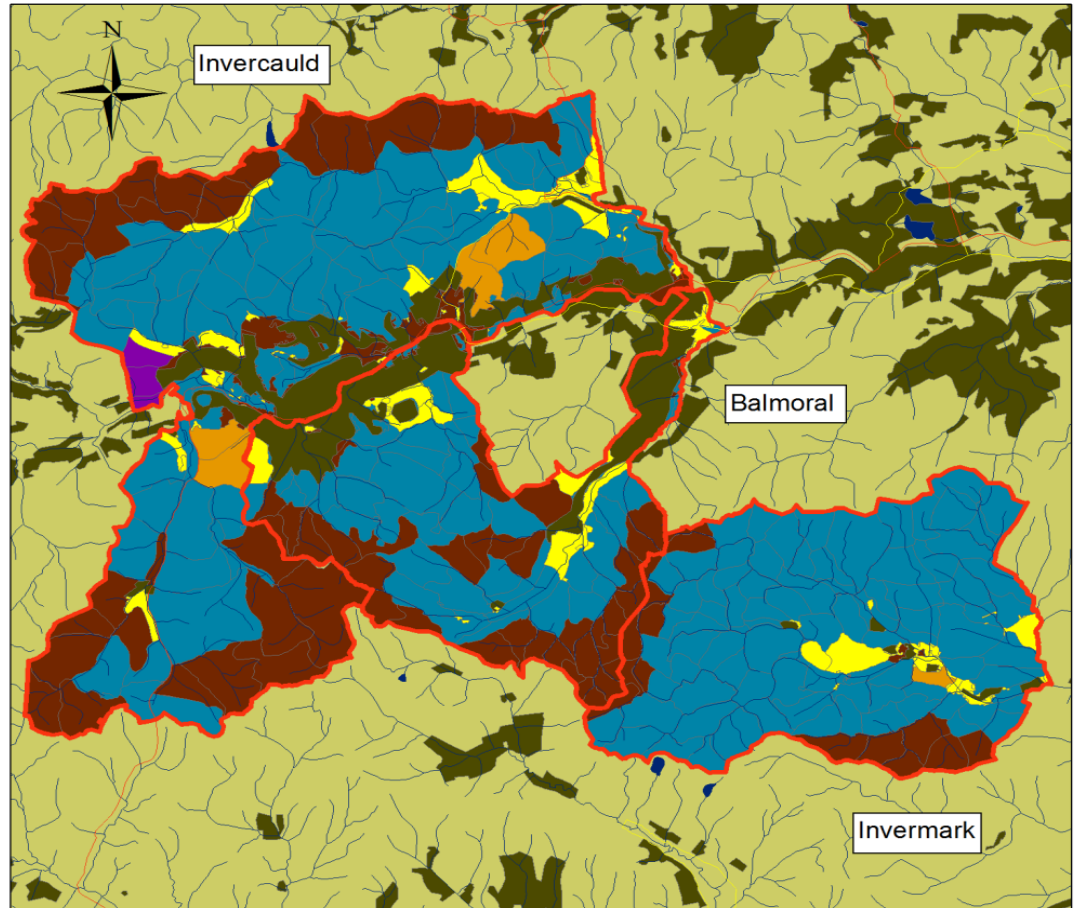

Case study 3 - Cairngorms woodland expansion

Collaborative planning
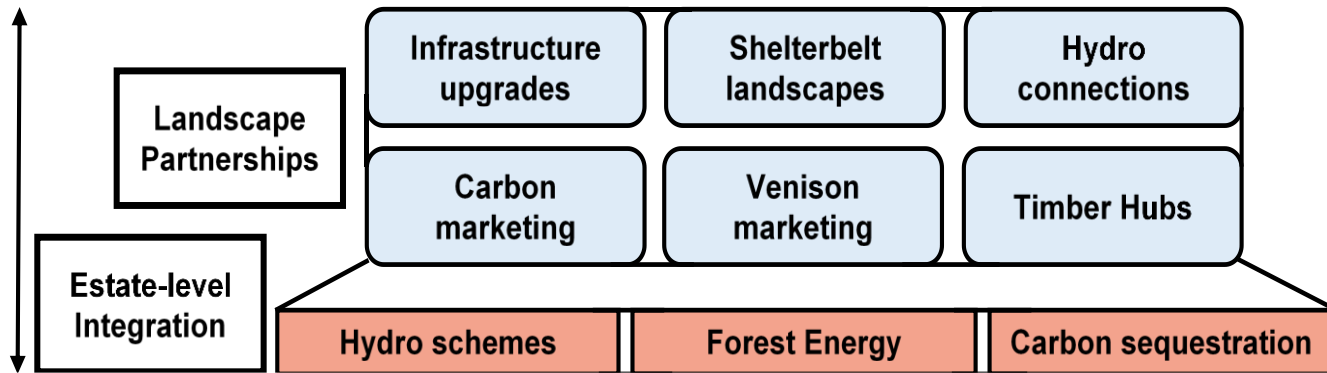
Resilience over the estates

Resilient woodland types

- Stable
  - Amenity woodland
  - Caledonian pine
  - Shelterbelts
  - Christmas tree plantation

- Adaptive
  - Broadleaf planting,
  - Riparian woodland and
  - Natural regeneration

- Static
  - Plantation woodlands (non-native)
  - No infrastructure access

- Transformative
  - Small fragmented areas vulnerable to disturbance
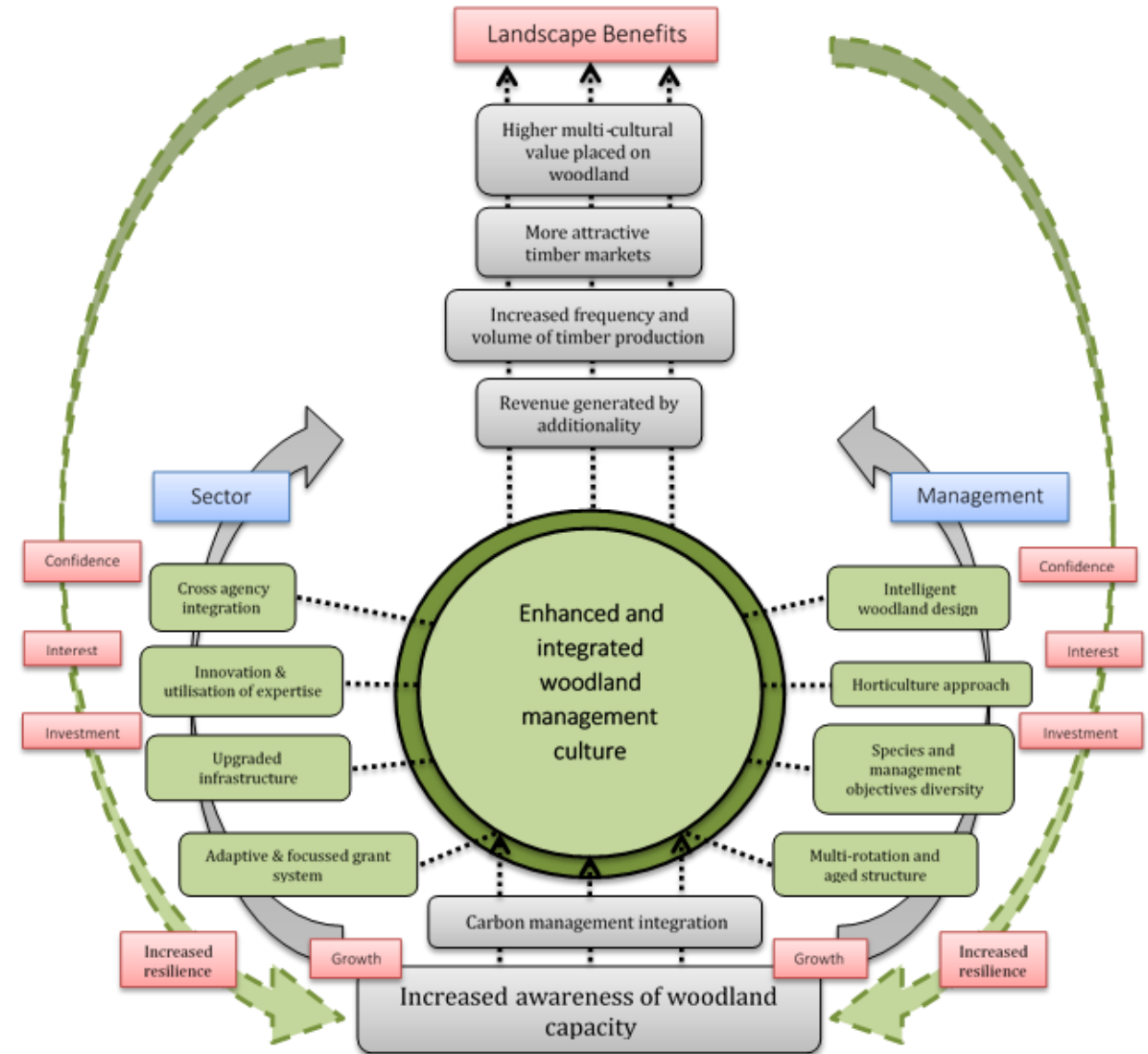
Estate woodland resilience

- Conflicting rationales between socio-economic and ecological resilience (unwillingness to diversify)
- Mostly forestry considered an unstable culture on estates
- Social neglect and reduced capacity
- Lack of skills and knowledge
- Incompatible time frames - policy
- Perception of woodland influenced by landscape narratives

Moving resilience forward

Woodland resilience

- Adaptive and focussed grant system with greater interaction

- Building regional expertise

- Upgrade infrastructure

- Single tree management – understanding the tree

- Encourage diverse silvicultural approaches

- Agency agreements

- Link climate change to practical management options

Re-interpretation of woodlands

Perception linking to confidence and capacity