

Resource Sharing for Community Woodlands: a Report on Models and Options



Community
Woodlands
Association

**Community Woodlands Association
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Summary

Community woodland groups are typically volunteer-led and rarely possess all the skills required to deliver their objectives for multi-benefit forestry. Employing a professional forester can facilitate better community management, but may not be feasible with limited resources. One potential solution is for groups to act collectively and/or share resources.

This issue was discussed at a meeting¹ organised by Kilfinan Community Forest Company on the 15th April 2015, at which it was agreed that there was interest in resource sharing amongst community woodland groups, particularly in Argyll.

It was proposed that CWA investigate the options and produce a report looking at shared forester initiatives and considering other models of resource sharing.

This report outlines four models of resource sharing, based upon the outputs of two workshops, a series of face to face interviews and desk top research.

Methodology

Desk top research consisted of:

- A literature review
- Review of existing models across the UK and internationally

Workshops & meetings:

- CWA conference, Dunoon – 18 attendees from community woodland groups across Scotland, England and Wales, Forestry Commission Scotland and Highlands and Islands Enterprise staff
- Smallwoods Simwood ‘Regional Learning Lab’ meeting held in Fort William – 7 attendees from Lochaber Environmental Group, Argyll Small Woods Cooperative, Forest Enterprise and Forest Research

Interviews:

- With a range of community woodland groups and small woodland owners to assess capacity, interest and needs.
- Forestry contractors and consultants
- With Mick Bracken (Ward Forester – Devon)
- Jane Hart (Sylvanus Trust, Evaluation of Ward Forester Project)
- Mark Prior (Forestry Commission, England, Ward Forester Project)
- Alex Kelly (Irish Wood Producers)

The workshops and interviews with community woodland groups and small woodland owners reinforced and supported the demand for an organisation or individual to increase their capacity for forest management.

¹ The meeting was attended by Kilfinan Community Forest Company, South West Mull & Iona Development, Aigas Community Forest, Strathfillan Community Development Trust, FCS, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Community Woodlands Association, with apologies from Bute Community Land Company, the Isle of Rum Community Trust and the Falkland Centre for Stewardship.

Literature review

Many forest owners contract professionals: they engage foresters, and/or other resource managers for their technical knowledge and/or expertise to manage their forests and market the products. Resource professionals can exert significant influence over landowner decision-making and implementation of forest management. Misaligned objectives can occur when the motivations of the landowner and the resource professional are different, for example when both actors are seen as pursuing their own self-interests².

This may result from differing financial incentives - for example, contractors/buyers may seek to limit timber-harvesting costs at the expense of environmental standards that are important to the landowner. However, it may also arise from other sources: a public agency forester may allow agency goals and priorities to override landowner goals³. In addition landowners also have to deal with multiple and sometimes-conflicting professional opinions, which may impact their satisfaction with the process resulting in a loss of confidence and trust⁴.

These concerns were aired in the interviews and workshops held for this study. The participants perceived that larger companies may not have the required understanding or the expertise to deliver the holistic approach that is desired by many community woodlands and other small woodland owners. There can be a lack of trust and a fear that companies may act in their own best interest rather than that of the community, and that this might be accentuated by the community's lack of expertise.

Cooperation and cross-boundary coordination could reduce the risk and uncertainty associated with hiring a forester or other natural resource professional individually. Or alternatively natural resource professionals could provide a bridging function among unacquainted neighbouring landowners – matching landowner's practices and objectives so that all clearly benefit. However as illustrated through interview, landowners tend to focus on specific practices – their mainstream objectives, and are commonly less interested or often don't have the time or capacity to foster organisational development of this type⁵. In addition social relationships play a major role and this requires landowners' willingness to participate and an understanding of why it may be of benefit.

Lack of joint knowledge also makes any type of shared action difficult. This could be improved by cross-boundary coordination (combining knowledge from different fields or disciplines). This type of cooperation has the potential to alleviate problems between landowners/managers and professionals and it may also reduce costs and the uncertainty associated with hiring a professional⁶.

² Rickenbach MG, Reed AS (2002) Cross-boundary cooperation in a watershed context: the sentiments of private forest landowners. *Environmental Management* 30(4):584–594

³ Rickenbach, M., Zeuli, K., Sturgess-Cleek, E., (2005). Despite failure: the emergence of new forest owners in private forest policy in Wisconsin, USA. *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research* 20: 503-513

⁴ Cumming, G.S., Cumming, D.H.M., Redman, C.L., (2006). Scale mismatches in social–ecological systems: causes, consequences, and solutions. *Ecology and Society* 11, 14

⁵ Rickenbach MG, Reed AS (2002)

⁶ Rebecca J. Gass, Mark Rickenbach, Lisa A. Schulte & Kimberly Zeuli., (2009). Cross-Boundary Coordination on Forested Landscapes: Investigating Alternatives for Implementation. *Environmental Management*, 43:107–117

Gass suggested four guidelines to help achieve cross-boundary working;

- Foster dialogue among landowners toward shared cognition and oversight
- Match landowners' practices and objectives such that there are clear benefits to all
- Develop relationships through low risk activities where possible
- Do not expect on-going cooperation

At a minimum, this would entail information sharing among landowners, but could extend to coordinating specific practices or plans. For example, landowners may collectively act to reduce fire risks or remove invasive species. In other instances, landowners may be enticed or compelled to improve or maintain socially important ecosystem services (e.g., water quality, wildlife habitat, etc.). But this again involves a level of trust and capacity, and the willingness for interaction from professionals across all disciplines involved.

Taking this a step further, Hokajärvi⁷ found that if a mediator is sensitive to the owner's needs and wishes and s/he is trusted and communicates the range of opportunities but can also act as an activator, then the forest owner manager is more likely to engage. This reduces the issues surrounding capacity of the landowner to manage the woodland on their land. Using this model the activator takes on a role as a gatekeeper or broker in the network that surrounds forest management, different landowners can link into this mediator at differing levels depending on their needs. Individual forest owners' motivations can be taken into account tailoring services provided individually, which in turn builds mutual trust and the social capital of the actors in question.

Once some landowners are engaged in this type of model it sends out the message that the mediator/broker/gatekeeper can be trusted and more are likely to want to engage – most individuals evaluate an innovation, not on the basis of scientific research by experts but through the subjective evaluations of their peers who have adopted the innovation⁸. As the network then builds it becomes easier to reach and influence previously unengaged landowners.

This is the basis of the more successful associations described below. An organisation is formed that acts as an independent activator/gatekeeper/broker/mediator/advisory body to any forest owners that wish to join. Many provide opportunities for networking, training and knowledge exchange where members can engage to whatever extent they wish or have capacity to. The responsibility for management is taken by the association but full control maintained by the member.

⁷ Hokajärvi, R., Hujala, T. & Tikkanen, J., (2011). Change in forest planner's advisory role. *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research*, 26:5, 466-476

⁸ Kueper, A. M., Sagor, E.S., & Becker D. R., (2013) Learning from Landowners: Examining the Role of Peer Exchange in Private Landowner Outreach through Landowner Networks, *Society & Natural Resources*.

Existing models of resource sharing

Four discrete models were identified, these are outlined below, with examples of each

- Associations and Cooperatives
- Machinery rings
- Brokers & Consultants (Commercial & Not for Profit)
- Shared forester projects and initiatives

Associations/Cooperatives.

Numerous international models of landowner co-operation exist; many are organised as cooperatives but other forms exist.

In Sweden forest owner associations are an important influence in the national wood market, accounting for 28% of the annual harvest⁹. At one time there were over 30 smaller associations which have progressively merged to create 6 large associations; these which co-operate to obtain market influence and negotiate improved prices. Approximately 44 percent of all Swedish family forest owners (> 5 ha/ ownership) are members of an association.

Owners associations also occur in the USA where at least 16 forest owner cooperative groups have organized in Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New York, Vermont, Virginia, and Wisconsin¹⁰.

1. Södra

Södra Skogsägarna, trading as Södra, is a forestry cooperative based in Växjö, Sweden. Södra was formed through a merger of smaller county associations. Initially founded by locals to serve local need, it was supported by the government. Södra

- Includes more than 50,000 forest owners in southern Sweden, who between them own just over half of all private forests in the area.
- Owns a group of companies that are successful in both Swedish and international markets. This gives them a market for their raw materials from the forest and at the same time provides the foundation for profitable forestry.
- Is A large employer, 3,500 people work for the group, in areas that range from forestry management and environmental conservation to accounting, sales and product development.

2. Irish Wood Producers

Irish Wood Producers (IWP) are a not for profit company managed by farmers, established to support farmers and private wood producers and to develop their forestry and timber products in the South East of Ireland. IWP:

⁹ Kittredge D. B., (2003). Private Forestland Owners in Sweden: Large Scale Cooperation in Action. Journal of Forestry, 41-46.

¹⁰ Community Forestry Resource Centre 2002

- Delivers training courses, events and field visits.
- Has an extensive inventory of members' forest holdings, which are clustered to improve profitability e.g. thinning, clear fell and marketing.
- Plays a key role in woodchip supply across the region.

Irish Wood Producers is a very recent amalgamation of the Wexford Wood Producers Ltd., Timber Kilkenny Co-operative Society and Laois Farm Forestry Growers Group. Timber Kilkenny was originally a cooperative, but despite funding support and a large membership, they did not manage to become self-sustaining. Laois and Wexford were discussion groups with no formal structure.

The restructured company is committed to delivering services, harvesting timber and developing biomass markets in the wider area. The merger took over a year to agree and was based on a close geographic location in addition to common goals for members and identified needs in each group for economy of scale for contractors and markets. IWP service the 648 members with local events and training, harvesting, timber sales and biomass contracts of ~5,000 tonnes a year.

The increase in scale has increased sustainability, securing dedicated harvesters, timber sales and biomass contracts. The key has been entry into the biomass market with woodchip supply across the region. In total 54 sub-contractors are supported by the company with an increase in available equipment, an insurance scheme and training. Even so, margins are tight and corporate social funding is currently being sought to support the training and advice network provided.

3. Argyll Small Woods Cooperative

The Argyll Small Woods Cooperative was set up in 2014 by a group of farmers and landowners interested in managing their woodlands, following a 2 year pilot project supported by the Argyll Agricultural Forum, the Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society and Forestry Commission Scotland.

The cooperative's primary purpose is to generate sustainable income from small woodlands. It aims to work with woodland owners and workers to develop their understanding of small woodlands through advice, training, knowledge sharing workshops, and practical demonstrations and case/studies. It will act as an honest broker for members and provide a vehicle for joint development activity.

Cooperative members include farmers, estate owners and community owners, woodland workers including forestry contractors, forest managers and trainers.

Machinery and Business Rings



There are 13 machinery rings in Scotland and 15 in England and Wales. The first was established in 1987 to support Scottish agriculture and rural business, optimise efficiency and generate economic activity. Scottish machinery rings in Scotland are members of the Scottish Machinery Ring Association, and have a combined membership of over 7000 farmers and other rural business.

Traditionally they have focussed on the farming sector and many of the rings still do, however, a few have stronger links to forestry.

1. *Borders Machinery Ring (BMR)*

Borders Machinery Ring was established in February 1987 by 23 farmers and contractors. It was the first ring in the UK and has the aim of rationalising labour, machinery and input costs.

BMR has experienced Forestry Consultants who can provide a comprehensive woodland management service. They:

- Provide advice, mapping, quotes and bespoke woodland management plans.
- Organise felling and marketing of timber, as well as replanting and woodland creation.
- Apply for government grant funding and felling licences on members' behalf.
- Organise woodland operations in relation to neighbouring woodland properties (This reduces operational and haulage costs).

2. *Highland Business Services (HBS Ring Ltd)*

Highland Business Services is a cooperative comprising 1100 Farmers, Estates, Contractors, Small Businesses and individual members. These businesses offer a range of forestry services:

- Fencing
- Hedge planting
- Tree planting
- Tree surgery
- Tree marking & advice
- Woodfuel processing

Brokers & Consultants

There are a number of instances of groups of consultants and brokers operating collectively and offering services to a portfolio of clients. These can operate on a commercial basis (the first two examples below) or on a not-for-profit basis (e.g. Rural Development Initiatives)

1. Timber Auctions

Timber Auctions operate an electronic round timber marketing service for buyers and sellers throughout the UK. Clients include individual woodland owners, estates, syndicates, trusts, pension funds, investment companies, management companies, consultants, and local authorities, The Woodland Trust, The National Trust and the Forestry Commission.

2. Canopy Land Use

Canopy Land Use provides guidance and management on a range of land use issues, particularly those relating to forestry, arboriculture and the environment. Canopy consultants are self-employed specialists maintaining their own independent client portfolio. The client benefits from the individual attention of their chosen consultant, while that consultant has access to facilities that only a larger organisation has the economies of scale to provide. Services include:

- Forest Management
- Arboricultural management
- Round timber marketing
- Farming & conservation
- Ecological assessment
- Environmental assessment

3. Rural Development Initiatives Ltd

Rural Development Initiatives Ltd is a not-for-profit company operating across the UK, offering a wide range of services to landowners, woodland owners, forest supply chain operatives and biomass producers. It supports owners with their applications for grant funding through signposting to appropriate grants and help with the forms.

RDI manages Yorwoods and Northwood, which are the woodland initiatives for the Yorkshire and Humber (Yorwoods) and the North East of England (Northwoods). These initiatives work in partnership with and under contract to local and national public bodies and also with private and charity bodies to deliver programmes which make a significant difference to the trees and timber sector.

Landskills

A training project funded through the Rural Development Programme for England (RPDE) which enabled forest managers, workers and woodland owners to access discounted training courses for training such as use of chainsaw, first aid and knowledge transfer training (e.g. woodland management workshops).

BioNErgy

A three year £1.3m RPDE funded delegated grant scheme for developing woody biomass supply chains in the North East of England.

Woodland Management Advice and Planning

Supporting woodland owners with the production of a UKFS woodland management plan. This work is usually done at no cost to the woodland owner as many of the plans attract grant support from the Forestry Commission through their Woodland Planning Grant. Following the plan RDI support the owner further by undertaking contract management activities using a pricing structure which best suits the owner.

The initiative operates in a different way than most private woodland/forestry agents: they put an entire package together for the woodland owner and the support does not stop on the completion of the management plan or funding applications. Thus for a woodland owner looking to bring woodlands back into management for their woodfuel requirements:

- A management plan will be produced which includes a felling programme
- Relevant training will be identified to aid the owner to meet his objectives and training offered at discounted rate through the Landskills programme
- Specialist equipment will be identified which will aid the active management of the woodland and support to develop a funding package to purchase equipment.

Shared forester projects and initiatives

A variety of shared forester models exist. In their simplest form this could be one landowner/manager providing services on a commercial basis for their neighbours. Knoydart Forest Trust is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It manages woodland owned by the Knoydart Foundation (community landowner) plus 4 other estates as well as a number of smaller family owned areas of woodland. KFT provides woodland management and creation services as well as landscape work, timber construction, contract work such as track maintenance, line clearance and other works for Knoydart Renewables.

1. Heartwoods

This was a 5 year project Woodfuel Project based in the West Midlands to support bringing woodland into management running from 2009 – 2014.

Objectives:

- Build capacity, provide advice and deliver training.
- Help create new enterprises and woodfuel businesses.
- Provide help to expand existing businesses.
- Encourage people to manage woodlands.
- To get more timber into the supply chain.

Principle Support Mechanisms:

- Training: provision of a package of training and subsidised training through the Woodworks programme (FMOC, Chainsaw Certification, etc.).
- Subsidised Advice: Heartwoods advisory services included a network of private sector foresters across the region who were able to help woodland owners and managers maximise the benefit of their woodlands.
- Signposting / Grant Facilitation: the team helped stakeholders with information on grants, signposting and offered a resource as a first point of contact for any Woodland and Forestry associated stakeholders.
- Events: an events programme supported the forest and woodland industries in the West Midlands. They were wide ranging from woodland walks to specific events such as assessing timber for added value markets.

Heartwoods' work with woodland owners was said to have made a difference in a variety of ways:

- Getting owners to think about woodland management for the first time, and bringing about new woodland management actions. This had positive impacts for the owners with improved habitats and access and creating new income streams through firewood sales.
- Helping owners to understand the economic potential of their woodlands and adding value to their woodland products.

2. Ward Forester

The Ward Forester initiative began in Devon in 2010: it was originally funded by Devon County Council and aimed to encourage woodland owners/managers to sustainably manage their woodlands. Private sector forestry consultants undertake the role of Ward Foresters

to work a “ward”: a cluster of woodlands under different ownership, developing opportunities to introduce economies of scale and more attractive tender opportunities for forestry contractors through cross-ownership working¹¹.

The project has adapted a model of productive group woodland management practiced in Germany and successfully piloted the method in Devon. Based on the feedback from woodland owners, forestry consultants and other stakeholders in the sector, the model is well regarded and supported. It appears to offer sufficient flexibility in approach to respond to the individual needs of woodland and owner whilst seeking benefits through cross-ownership working.

The primary focus was development of wards to make operational economies over discreet geographical areas. Owners joined on ‘no obligation’ basis and were allocated ‘ward’ foresters drawn from private sector. The main area of work initially was on management plans to help inform development of joint operations and they very quickly built large database of owners. It is heavily influenced by landowner engagement, many of whom would describe themselves as for example ‘farmers’ or ‘professionals’ who own woodland in addition to their primary concern.

In 2013 Devon County Council withdrew from the project and Trees and Land CIC, a social enterprise, formed as a vehicle for Ward Forester and other woodland/timber based initiatives e.g. SW Grey Squirrel Initiative. There was a recognition that ‘ward’ style approach was limiting and relied too heavily on feedback from private foresters.

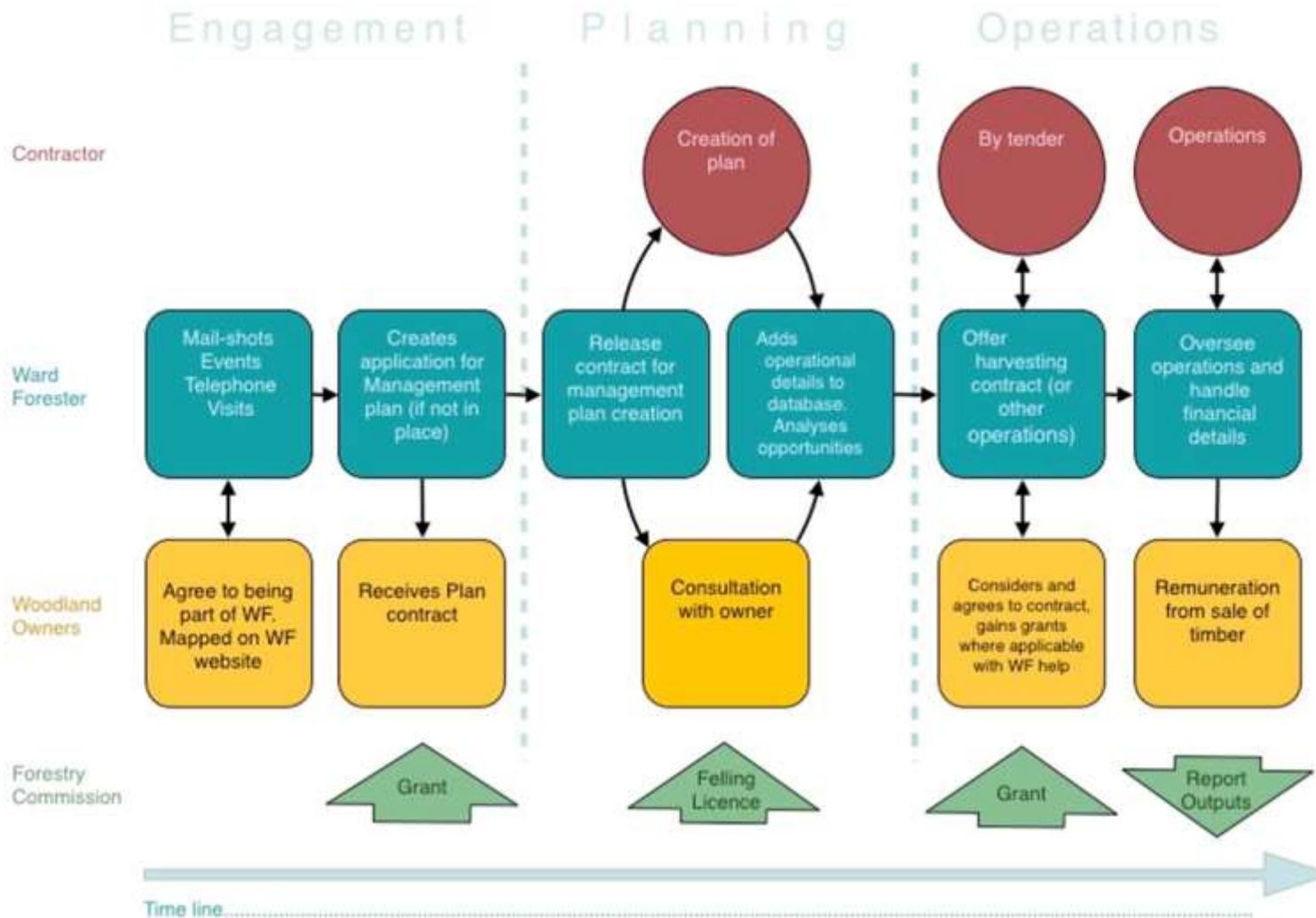
In 2014 a more integrated approach was developed, by which consultants are now hired and all transactions processed through the Ward Forester account. This facilitates development of wider networking with markets, together with direct management of economic opportunities for landowners.

The process is strongly dependent on management plans and associated grants, so liaison with the Forestry Commission is crucial for streamlined and efficient running. Once plans are assessed and associated felling licences approved, the Ward Forester seeks contractors for felling and extraction. Landowners are presented (without obligation) with a plan for harvesting and backed by guaranteed sale of timber, which gives them the confidence to proceed.

This process mirrors the activities of ‘forest associations’ in Finland, Germany etc. However, European models rely heavily on public support, based on the recognition that if neglected woods are to be managed this does not happen on its own, i.e. if woodlands were able to be managed economically without support then they probably already would be! The project is supported through corporate social responsibility investment from Andrew Harvey of Shopfitters Ltd.

¹¹ Hart, J. (2013). Ward Forester pilot project – Final Evaluation Report. The Sylvanus Trust

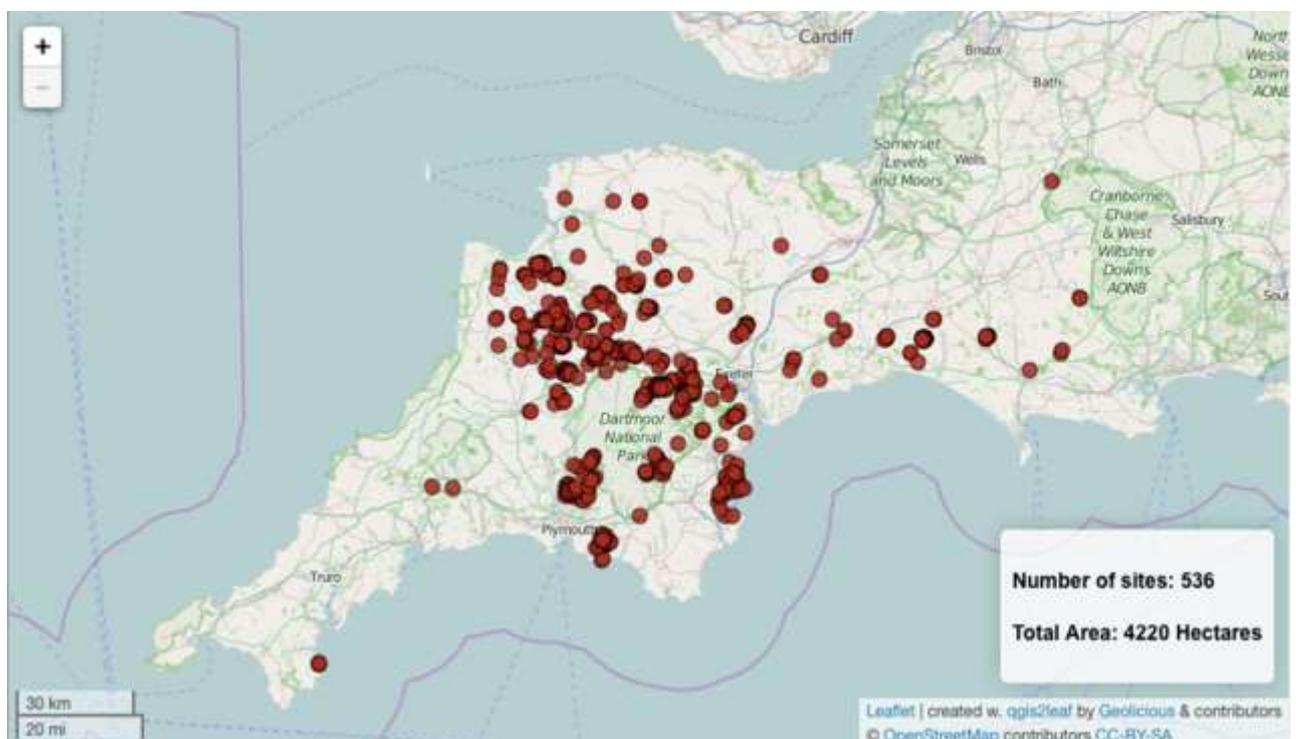
The Ward Forester Process:



Outputs to date include:

- 2010/13: The project was responsible for bringing in excess of 3000 m³ timber to market which would have otherwise remained standing.
- 2014: 12 management plans were completed and est. 1500 m³ of harvestable timber to be brought to market.
- 2015: 30 new management plan applications representing > 700 ha of woodland.

Originally focused on North and West Devon the project now covers all of Devon, Cornwall, Dorset and Somerset with over 4000 ha of woodland in the database, and increasing steadily through word of mouth, FC signposting and Farming and Wildlife Group (FWAG) partnership. They are currently developing a mechanism for attracting more corporate social responsibility investment.



Ward Forester is also:

- Continuing to develop GIS based tool for inventory and market based opportunities
- Seeking further partnerships with organisations such as FWAG SW, Torbay Council, Treeconomics, Silvanus, and Dorset AoNB to increase opportunities for other projects to bring woodlands into active management following the initial engagement process.
- Seeking further opportunities for public funding through new RDP schemes

In addition, as the project has developed, it has stimulated a review of FC England's management plan approval process; subject to approval a pilot will be rolled out this autumn.

Outputs from Workshops and Interviews

Responses from the workshops and interviews to the key questions around the need for resource sharing are tabulated below.

Question	Ownership/Management Type					
Who?	Community Groups	Small woodland owners	Farmers	Crofters	Estate Owners	Public Sector
Why is there a need for sharing resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge, skills and capacity e.g. H & S, Funding sources, forest management plans, practical forestry • Lack of finance • Forestry consultants too expensive • Can't afford to hire foresters • Lack of trust • Need someone that can take a holistic approach • Don't know the markets • Don't know who the smaller contractors are • Don't need someone all the time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge, skills and capacity shortage • Management is too costly • Don't know how to access markets • Often treat their woodland as a garden extension • Don't realise that need to/or could manage the woodland • Don't know who the contractors are – larger or smaller 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge, skills and capacity shortage • Forestry is not main occupation and has been ignored in the past • Not familiar with SRDP options for forestry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge, skills and capacity shortage • Forestry not main occupation • Don't know what finance is available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management is not viable • Too much effort for smaller areas • Only concerned with commercial plantations • Usually use mainstream contractors • Don't know who has appropriate equipment for more difficult to access/manage woodland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some smaller remote areas may not be currently managed because they are not commercially viable • Lack of finance available for areas that require low impact silviculture • Would like to give local appropriately skilled contractors the opportunity of work • Agencies have an increasingly limited amount of time to deal with small groups and landowners who require more help and support because of their lack of knowledge. • They would prefer to be working with one person. This is at a range of levels for example the sale of raw material for firewood is very time consuming for FE if they could deal with one person/organisation that had the responsibility for marketing and sale this would be ideal.

Question	Ownership/Management Type					
Who?	Community Groups	Small woodland owners	Farmers	Crofters	Estate Owners	Public Sector
What is needed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with sourcing finance • Submission of SRDP applications • Management planning/forest design plans • Deer plans • Access plans • Rhododendron management – scoping & planning • Forestry Contractors on part time basis • Training (e.g. practical – chainsaw and management) • Help with markets (from woodfuel to higher value products) • Help with plant health • Help with H & S • FSC certification for some groups • Help with habitat management for priority species/PAWS/listed sites/landscape • Business start-up – woodfuel business/tree nursery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of best practice • Help with sourcing finance e.g. SRDP • Management planning • Management • Practical forestry • Access to markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with sourcing finance e.g. SRDP • Help to produce management plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help with sourcing finance e.g. SRDP • Help to produce management plans • Access to appropriate equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To see cost effective examples to illustrate how management of their smaller more difficult to access sites could be managed to make a profit/break even 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More trained contractors (e.g. H & S, appropriate equipment) • Good lines of communication (e.g. for landowners responsibilities)

What are the opportunities and constraints of resource sharing?

<p>Opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximising local value from forest management • Scale to increase viability • Products – timber, non-timber products, public benefit • Renewable energy • Access to markets • Joint marketing/niche marketing/branding • Brokerage • Training • Sharing skills and knowledge • Advice • Access to equipment/forestry contractors/forestry companies/consultants • Machinery pool? • Safe middle man • Networking – sharing good practise/sharing trained volunteers • GIS mapping • Management planning UKWAS certification opportunity/group certification schemes • Framework contracts • SRDP applications • Insurance pool • Pooled access to funding • ‘Consignment’ /absentee full service management
<p>Constraints</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accessing funding • Challenging existing companies/displacement • Needs a long term relationship between the woodland owner, managers, contractors, timber buyers etc. • Security of tenure • How would you ensure product and performance is consistent? • Appropriate level of bureaucracy • Geography • Critical mass required

Analysis

Workshops and interviews sought to define the need for resource sharing: what was needed and why? This process elicited a wide range of responses, but with some common ground across landowner types around management planning and assistance with SRDP and other funding.

Community landowners articulated a longer list of needs, reflecting both their broader range of objectives and the greater number of community groups surveyed. Community needs included practical and managerial tasks, from training and rhododendron management to plant health and Health and Safety.

Participants were also asked about the perceived opportunities and constraints for resource sharing; again, this prompted a wide range of potential activities. It seems unlikely that one single model or structure would support all possible needs or pursue all the possible opportunities, and that any model adopted here would need to be able to operate within the local context, delivering the services required by participants, with the flexibility to tie into broader networks and markets.

Finding the right niche seems critical: the Irish Woodfuel Producers have done this quite effectively by tying into the woodchip market in their region and providing a stable market for their members' products at the same time as upskilling their sub-contractors. The Ward Forester model has focussed on woodland management planning, harvesting and marketing, whilst the RDI in the north of England has developed a more holistic approach offering more hand holding and training. Notably, all three have evolved somewhat since their inception.

Community landowners in Scotland, with small and geographically isolated woodlands, are at a disadvantage with respect to economies of scale, and this might militate against certain types of organisation or delivery. Some structures, such as a shared forester, could focus on community landowners, whilst others, such as a forest machinery ring might have to be concentrated geographically with the private sector as the major customer.

As detailed previously, a range of models and structures exist, elements of which could be used to develop a Scottish initiative. It was seen as important that such an initiative be led by an organisation accountable to the community sector. This could be a body such as CWA (the preferred option, at least initially), one of the individual groups, or an entirely new body.

Given the range of needs expressed by workshop attendees and interviewees, the best fit appears to be some form of "shared forester" model, focussing on some core services, including management planning, grants and funding, forestry operations, networking and training, although the precise scope and structure of this remains to be fleshed out.

It was recognised that the greater the range of services and scope of intervention that the initiative offered, the fewer groups were required to produce a critical mass, and the greater the likelihood that the initiative would be focussed geographically, and on the community sector. Thus, if the project provided a 1-day-a-week forest management service (covering a wide range of activities) for community woodland groups then each forester would only serve 4 or 5 groups, whereas if it focussed primarily on producing woodland management plans it would need a much greater number of clients, probably drawn from a wider geographic area and across ownership types. The availability and perceived security of income, whether from grants or sales, is likely to be a key factor in designing the structure and scope of any initiative

Conclusions and next steps

The general consensus amongst workshop attendees and interviewees was that there was a need for greater sharing of resources amongst community woodland groups. The initial impetus for this investigation was the perceived need amongst a number of community woodland groups for forest management services.

Some groups would like to employ their own forester (on a full-time or significant part-time basis), but do not have the resources to do so. A “shared forester” initiative, led (at least initially) by CWA appears to be the most appropriate route to achieve group aspirations although there are a number of ways in which it could be implemented.

Desired features of the model:

- Core services offered should include management planning, grant applications and forestry operations.
- Services should also include networking opportunities for knowledge exchange, training and skills development.
- Group marketing, certification and insurance schemes could be part of the model.
- Support should take a holistic approach to management and tailor to individual landowners needs and requirements.
- Responsibility should sit with an independent but accountable organisation.
- Depending on the services provided, it could include all types of woodland owner: community, farmer, crofter, NGO and estates (private and public sector).
- It should support and use existing sub-contractors, but ensure they have the appropriate skills to carry out the required objectives.
- It should be easy to evaluate, and flexible enough to evolve and adapt
- It should seek to become financially sustainable, but it is recognised that funding would be required for initial set up and to provide ongoing soft support such as training/networking and advice.

Next Steps:

- Quantify need from community woodland groups and clarify key services required.
- Identify potential clusters across Scotland and establish an initial group of groups/woodland owners/managers to join a pilot.
- Find a body/organisation to host the initiative (e.g. CWA).
- Develop the business model and produce a business plan.
- Seek funding (for initial set up – sustainability would be required in the long term).
- Implement a pilot initiative to test the model.
- Monitor and evaluate the pilot.