

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE 2022/23



Andy Rockall - CWA Director.

Photo courtesy of Cormonachan Community Woods

Summary

A challenging year that saw the pandemic officially end and the trend toward in-person activity continue. Virtual meetings continue to reign supreme; there are undoubtedly advantages to a meeting without travel. Some things are best face to face though and the conference in September demonstrated that.

The continuing Scottish Government commitment to Community Wealth Building and building a wellbeing economy in addition to enhanced focus on the twin climate and biodiversity crises brings attention to Community Woodland Groups.

For CWA a year of staff change with long standing Chief Executive Officer Jon Hollingdale and Development Officer Joanna Rodgers deciding the time was right to step away from the organisation.

SUPPORT FOR MEMBER GROUPS

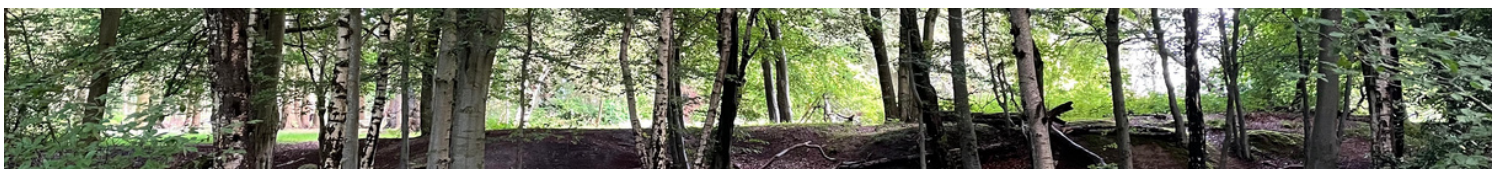
CWA is very grateful for continued support from Scottish Forestry which enables provision of a support and advisory service for new and existing community groups.



Advice and support over the year has included acquisition processes, management and development of woodlands for community benefit and technical forestry topics. Along with the core funding from Scottish Forestry project funding, membership fees and consultancy income allow us to support our members.

The suite of information notes has continued to grow and we delivered a range of online training events throughout the year. Our monthly ebulletin and quarterly newsletter go directly to a mailing list of just under 500 and no doubt are forwarded to many more. Our social media accounts are active with an aggregate following of around 6,000. During the year we created a Facebook group specifically for younger people involved in the community woodland movement intending to do our best to encourage diversity of ages among people actively involved. This group whilst small continues to be active and grow.

During the year we received and dealt with 101 queries from existing or prospective groups across a massive range of topics some relatively straight forward to respond to, others more complicated and time consuming. Queries are recorded under 5 categories acquisition (16 queries), social benefits from woodlands (14), business development/social enterprise (15), capacity and governance (21) and finally woodland management and planning. This last category generated just over a third of queries (35) and included advice on mapping, woodland restructuring, invasive non-native species and management of contractors amongst other subjects. In addition, but not included above we receive a small number of queries from organisations or individuals in England seeking support that we deal with by signposting to relevant organisations south of the border.



Events

The annual CWA conference took place at Birnam Arts on Friday 30th September and Saturday 1st October. Face to face for the duration for the first time since the pandemic 60 delegates attended representing 25 community groups, 10 other organisations and some individual members. 6 additional representatives registered but were unable to attend due to illness.



A recorded address from Mairi McAllan MSP, Minister for Environment and Land Reform opened the event followed by speakers from the Green Action Trust and The Enchanted Forest. Workshop topics included Natural Capital Markets, Governance & Fundraising and the CWA AGM was followed the dinner and a ceilidh dance which closed Day 1. Day 2 morning was taken up with presentations from member groups with Glengarry Community Woodlands, West Stormont Woodland Group and Carsphairn Community Woodland describing developments with their projects. Lunch followed an interactive workshop on partnership working and community wealth building. And after lunch, site visits to Alyth Hill Users Group, Dronley Community Woodland and the Highland Perthshire Community Land Trust site at Dun Collich took delegates away from Birnam.



Presentations from the conference are available on the [CWA YouTube channel](#).

We also delivered a number of online events including A beginners guide to trees and carbon, an introduction to myForest mapping software and an event on citizen science in community woodlands. Recordings of these events are also available on our youtube channel through the above link.

Pockets & Prospects

CWA continues to manage the Pockets and Prospects grant scheme: Scottish Government funds which allows for micro-grants to community group members.

This year 8 small grants were awarded which were targeted at reaching new audiences and supported tree planting at Dingwall, delivery of the John Muir Award to a newly engaged school on the Southside of Glasgow, creation of outdoor growing areas at Beechbrae and support for a Tree Warden scheme in Fife looking to attract involvement from people not previously engaged. Other supported projects were at Applecross, Cormonachan, Raasay and West Calder. We are grateful to the Scottish Community Alliance who facilitate this grant scheme.

Photo: Cormonachan Falls, courtesy of Cormonachan Community Woods

Native Woodlands Project

With grateful thanks to funders, Scottish Forestry Trust, The Pebble Trust and Future Woodlands CWA delivered a six-month project to articulate and promote the Economic and Social Benefits of Native Woodlands to communities.

Four CWA member groups contributed to the project:

- Friends of Glenan Wood
- Knoydart Forest Trust
- Cormonachan Community Woodlands and
- Arkaig Forest Trust



This resulted in four short films and a case study for each woodland. In addition, a more technical report was also produced. The outputs of the project are available on the project pages on the [CWA website](#) and will be used to promote and support the CWA belief that communities are capable, competent managers of woodlands that deliver their own self-determined benefits. It is clear even from just this small sample of 4 woodlands that there is considerable diversity in the woodlands that communities manage, with benefits as diverse as the woodlands themselves.

As well as the funders grateful thanks go to Diane Oliver and Diane Campbell who completed the 6-month project as a job share and went above and beyond to produce really valuable case studies, films and report.

Membership and staffing

We were pleased to welcome 10 new members through the year, 4 groups and 6 individuals. CWA membership is currently 164 groups, 60 individuals and one of the groups is itself an umbrella organisation representing another 30 groups.

Staffing underwent significant change through the year. After 15 years in post CEO Jon Hollingdale stepped down in April and after offering some extended and gratefully received support to his successors left the organisation toward the end of the year. Also regrettably, toward the end of the year and after a little over 3 years in post Development Officer Joanne Rodgers decided the time was right to move on. We wish both well.



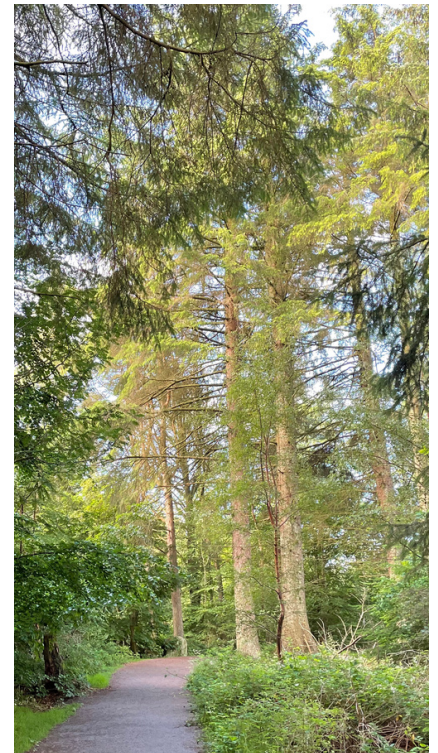
Jon Hollingdale (right) in 2003 at the official launch of CWA at the Scottish Parliament

Willie McGhee stood in as interim CEO for a short period during which the CEO post and job description was slightly changed with the new post of Director filled by Andy Rockall on September 1st. Andy comes to CWA with a wealth of experience in the third sector as staff and volunteer including time on the board of various organisations and 12 years working for Scottish Natural Heritage. Following the AGM during conference at the end of September Willie took up the post of Chair. Piers Voysey remains as the Senior Woodland Officer providing technical advice on forestry and also supporting members across a wide range of topics.

Policy

CWA works at policy level asserting that communities are competent capable managers of land and woodland delivering their own self-determined benefits. We are a named delivery partner in the National Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan with a role in delivering a framework to maximise community benefits from forestry and woodland. We sit on the Rural Operational Development Committee inputting to the Scottish Rural Development Programme and we seek out opportunities to promote the strengths and benefits of community leadership in land and woodland management.

One element of our policy work is preparing responses to consultations relevant to community woodlands. Responses are circulated to members and posted on our website, this year we responded to consultations on Land Reform, National Planning Framework 4, the Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement and the Forest & Land Scotland communities strategy.



Future plans

CWA is a membership organisation; we exist to support members and work to connect communities with their land and woodland. With a new Director and new Chair we are looking to prepare a development plan for the organisation, our aspiration is to increase our own capacity so that we may in turn provide more support to members and enable more community benefits to be delivered more widely. A membership survey was carried out in the last year to inform this work.

In the short term we will be recruiting a new post of Communications and Administration officer, restructuring the post that Jo left. And we are also fortunate to have received a little extra funding from Scottish Forestry for a yearlong half time post. This extra capacity will allow us to increase our support to members, organise a small number of exchanges and we will also look to establish a mentor scheme specific to the needs of community woodland groups. The idea of a mentor scheme has been around for some time but the impetus to develop it as a priority came from the member survey which showed the biggest issue member groups face is capacity. We're not expecting the mentors will directly increase capacity for groups, but they might show shortcuts to getting things done.

We will continue to work in the policy area and at the time of writing are working on responses to the consultation on amendments to the Forestry Grant Scheme which has been vital to community woodland groups for many years and separately a consultation on Community Wealth Building which as a direction of travel from Scottish Government has potential to radically reshape the economy with community at the centre and is therefore vital to our work.

We expect to deliver a range of one training events and our conference will take place in the Autumn. It was good to hold conference as a physical face to face meeting last year and we look forward to doing that again.