



Community
Woodlands
Association

CWA 2023 Conference Workshop Reports

October 2023

Delegates each chose 2 different workshops from a choice of 4
Each workshop lasted for 40 minutes.



Northwoods: rewilding and people

James Nairne

Scotland The Big Picture

Northwoods a network of farms, crofts and community woodlands who own between 100 and 1,000 acres and who commit to re-wilding the land they own. This is a deliberate attempt to engage smaller land holdings in rewilding.

Started in 2021 with 6 partners, now have 62 partners totalling 14,000 acres approximately. About 20 percent of the partners are community woodland groups.

The aim of the network is to remove the barriers they perceive to rewilding.

- Sociological & psychological, people don't want to do it for variety or reasons
- Ecological knowledge, some people feel they lack the expertise to enable rewilding on their land
- Financial, there is a perception that rewilding is expensive and fear of losing subsidies.

Need landowner engagement to kickstart ecological processes in the right direction, reached the point where can't just sit back and let nature take its course: much of the environment is fundamentally broken.

Network members are asked to commit to a 100-200 year timeline to recovery of the land and starting point is owners commitment: the current state of the land is not important in membership.

Land owners are asked to sign up to 9 rewilding principles:

- More native woodlands
- More space for water
- Wilder rivers
- Joined up habitats
- Return missing species
- Let nature lead
- Reinstate natural grazing
- Connect with communities
- Create economic opportunities

Built from understanding that rewilding works for nature, climate AND people.

**Rewilding is an evolving
process
of nature recovery that
leads to restored
ecosystem health,
function and
completeness.**



Have created a rewilding fund which has supported work on Northwoods partner sites to tune of £97k in last 2 years including peatland restoration, new wetlands, ponds, scrapes and leaky dams, engineering to naturalise straightened rivers, Rhododendron removal, tree planting (native species) etc.

Economic activities across the network include: eco-accommodation, woodcraft, nurseries and seed collection, wild food and non-timber forest products. Jobs are being created across the network.

Rewilding is also about people getting out into nature, without knowing it exists there is no way people will treasure the environment.

Discussion in both groups included questions of detail around the Northwoods project and a conversation around landowners that had potentially conflicting interests (sheep) which may make rewilding difficult.



Woodlands for Health & Well-being
Camilo Brokaw
The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)


Camilo draws from his experience of the TCV supported 'Wild Ways Well' project in the Cumbernauld Living Landscapes, established on the principle that engaging in the natural environment is good for us.



Also based on 5 foundations for mental health that arose from the New Economics Foundation:

- Connection – social interaction, talking with other people.
- Active – physical activity.
- Attention – paying attention to what's around, taking notice of things, connecting to the immediate locality, the basis for 'mindfulness'.
- Learning – growing in knowledge, discovering, gaining experience and confidence.
- Giving – reciprocity, putting back to the environment, or to others.

Camilo also referenced a principle from Viktor Frankl: that if we have a sense of meaning, of 'why?' we can survive any 'how'.



Camilo took us through ideas on what makes woodland a good environment for improving mental health and things you might think about when designing a well-being session that uses the 5 principles listed above.

Woodlands are complex environments, and this complexity can reduce anxiety. Perhaps because your attention is drawn outwards rather than inwards.

Woodland smells, ambient chemicals that we can not smell, muffled sounds, the quality of light and multiple dimensions (up, down, sideways, near, far) all can contribute to reducing anxiety.

Sessions might start with walking along a path, simply to explore the space and to get some bearings, then walking off the path – to look for something, gaining confidence in the new environment, discovering, engaging with the space. Use different senses to explore something that might be familiar in more detail, or look at it in an unusual way, from an unusual angle. Then share and talk about what you have discovered, try and describe an object's 'story'.

Create a sense of play. The lack of known rules in a new environment can increase anxiety, or it can be liberating. But then there is learning in discovering what the rules are. As you discover a place through multiple senses you begin to feel connected to it, and to feel part of nature. If we have a place in nature we can better appreciate a place and be inclined to look after it, because it is part of us.

Camilo also raised the problem of trying to know too much, we can become obsessed with 'knowing'. It can be a barrier to just appreciating something or somewhere. One simple exercise might involve a group collecting different leaves and then matching them. Looking at relationships in shape and colour. When people are ready to acquire knowledge, they will ask questions.

Camilo also referenced [Steven Harper on eco-psychology](#).



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What to do When it All Goes Wrong
Willie McGhee
CWA Chair

This workshop was run over two sessions, and the content of this report reflects both those sessions.

At both sessions the delegates were asked to brainstorm all matters that could possibly go wrong within a Community Woodland Group (CWG), and then once the list was compiled the items were grouped into themes to explore ways to resolve those themes.

Session1	Session 2
Community confidence/ engagement	Cash flow and lack of
Recruiting Board Members	Funder relations
Personal Relationships and Paranoia	Trustee disagreement
Tree protection from neighbours	Trustee conflict of interest/ minority voice
Managing expectations v cost	Pest and disease – tree health and fire
Minority self-interest on the Board	Anti-social behaviour
Partnership relationships/ institutional culture	Winding up
Expertise – sustaining it	Skills and expertise
	Trustee/ Board/ Volunteer fatigue/ availability
	Liability
	Community conflict and vocal minority

Governance

- Recruiting Board members
 - Minority self-interest on the Board
 - Trustee Disagreement
 - Trustee conflict of interest/ minority voice
 - Personal relationships and paranoia
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- It was suggested that succession planning be a priority to support the ongoing challenges of recruiting Board members. That each office bearer should always have an understudy depute.
 - It was also discussed whether there should/ shouldn't be a term of service for the Trustees.
 - A skills gap analysis was needed to work out what each CWG needs at the point of recruiting Board members to support the overall expertise of the Board, such as someone with an understanding of finance, HR matters, forester etc.
 - Induction/ informal training for board members understanding the role of non-executive Directors. e.g. a Board Member Pack, which can be sourced from other 3rd Sector interfaces
 - There is also HR training required if members of staff are to be recruited to ensure the Board is knowledgeable with all legal aspects of recruitment.
 - It was mentioned that the Review of the Community Empowerment Act has resulted in a requirement for more support about memorandums of understanding to deal with money within CWGs.
 - A Board Pack would support the understanding of the requirements and expectations of a Board member and should be regularly revisited to enforce to avoid minority self-interest.
 - The Scottish Mediation Service is a very useful resource to have if things become challenging.
 - Robust Governance must be in place and the Board should be able to govern itself.
 - Limit the number of related Board members to reduce silos and bias.

Other ways to resolve conflict of interest resulting from a minority view are:

- Board training
- Constitution (mandatory)
- Annual Review – who? When? How?
- Code of Conduct with shared and agreed values
- Vision Mission and Values
- Job description of every trustee
- Skills gap analysis

Community

- Community conflict and vocal minority
- Community confidence/ engagement
- To avoid community conflict over decisions relating to the CWG, there should be as wide a consultation as possible, in as many ways as possible – in the woodland, schools, town halls, etc, and should tap into the local knowledge.
- DTAS, Community Land Scotland and Scottish Mediation Service are always useful resources if there is a 50/50 split on the outcome of any consultation.

Cash Flow

- Cash flow and lack of
- A good business plan must be in place to support the ongoing financial requirements of the CWG.
- Financial projection should be part of good financial management to project what expenses may be required, and to be able to plan ahead for those.
- The Treasurer is not the sole responsible person for the finance. Treasury is a shared responsibility for all trustees.
- Financial and other reports should be written in layman's terms so they can be easily understood by everyone. There is a requirement for not only financial skills, but clear and easily understood communication skills.
- A dedicated and prioritised amount of time and resource should be allocated to allow for effective finance and fundraising.
- There should be a Reserves Policy in place to ensure that no CWG becomes bankrupt.
- Grant funding and Gift Aid on membership should be used to continue to enhance the finances of CWGs.
- Where possible, CWGs should consider alternative options to create financial sustainability, such as trader income, house building, timber income etc.

Liability

- Tree safety assessments should be made annually, and maintained as part of the woodland management plan
- Risk assessments are to be completed, and actions taken to mitigate the risk – a plan is not sufficient. Any updates should be added to the woodland management plan and evidenced where possible.
- Ensure an insurance policy in place – a suggestion was made that Zurich Charity Insurance covers tree safety liability.

The groups suggested that CWA create a Template for a Risk Register as a result of these sessions.



Are our woodlands diverse enough?

Seamus Bates, Bangor University

Lisa Lamberte, University of Birmingham

The Diversitree project “aims to increase resilience of current and future woodlands by working across a range of scales, from microbes to minds, to understand the methods to, and the impacts of, diversifying tree species composition.”

DiversiTree focuses on woods dominated by two conifer species, Scots Pine and Sitka Spruce, as in the year to March 2021 54% of all new woodland was coniferous. Scots Pine is a native conifer of economic significance. It is planted for timber production but is also the dominant species in the culturally iconic Caledonian pinewoods and is at risk from the tree disease *Dothistroma*. Sitka Spruce is not native to Britain but is our most economically valuable tree species and is at risk from invasive bark beetles and climate change.

DiversiTree addresses four knowledge gaps related to the diversification of woodlands:


- 1) How do stakeholders understand forest diversity, their diversification strategies, and their visions and ambitions for diverse future forests?
- 2) Are the microbes found on the leaves of trees more diverse in woodlands with mixed tree species and does this help trees to better defend themselves against diseases?
- 3) How may diversification of tree species within a wood allow the continued support of woodland biodiversity?
- 4) How do we implement and communicate management strategies to increase woodland resilience?

Further details can be found on the [James Hutton Institute website](#)

Seamus and Lisa are exploring what the term “diversity” (and related terms) mean to different groups, including policymakers, scientists and communities, and where this understanding has come from.

Each workshop split the attendees into 2 groups, who were then asked to consider the scenario below, and answer the questions, as if it were their own woodland.

The scenario



- ▶ You have become responsible for three sections of woodland.
- ▶ A condition of that oversight is that you increase diversity across the property, but beyond that you may manage them as you see fit.
- ▶ The specific species mix currently found in these woodlands can be found on your handout.
- ▶ Please discuss amongst yourselves how you would approach this scenario, remember: there are no wrong answers!

Section A comprises 100% sitka spruce

Section B is 50% sitka and 50% scots pine

Section C - the majority is scots pine with some sitka spruce

When discussing the scenario, the groups highlighted a number of things they would consider as a part of this process, including:

- Community consultation
- Access and parking
- Commercial assessment
- Biodiversity survey
- Site survey
- Access footpaths and paths to extract timber
- Clear felling?
- Grazing deer?
- What about the wider area
- Housing
- Financial stability and sustainability
- Archeology of the site
- Whether highland or lowland
- What's planted in surrounding woodlands

Seamus and Lisa each facilitated a group, mostly observing and listening with occasional curious questioning.

The groups then considered photographs of a selection of 12 tree species, and which would be the top 3 trees they would plant to ensure diversification in their woods.

One of the community woodlands volunteered that the mix in their (actual) woodland is oak, birch and hawthorn.