



The economic and social impacts of community management of native woodland in Scotland

Community Woodlands Association

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Future Woodlands Scotland



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Community Woodlands Association (CWA) undertook a short research project to better understand the economic and social impacts of native woodlands under community management. This report was produced in conjunction with a suite of four case studies¹ to illustrate the socio-economic benefits of community management of native woodland plus a series of short films².

One objective of the project was for the study groups to use project outputs for promotion, publicity and income generation. CWA will use the report, the case studies and films to raise awareness within the community sector, and more broadly with partners, supporters and policy makers. CWA objectives for the report are to,

- inspire and encourage other communities to actively own and manage native woodlands and, where possible, to increase the area of native woodland under community management,
- raise awareness of the potential economic and social benefits of community managed native woodland,
- improve understanding about the relationship between communities and native woodland, and
- assist CWA better understand how to support communities to manage native woodlands.

Four rural community woodland groups (CWGs) – all based within Scotland’s temperate rainforest zone on the West Coast – were selected for the study. The population of the four communities totals 1,270 individuals, and community groups manage some 2,400 ha of land, of which 1,700 ha is native woodland.

The groups, their management objectives and motivations include,

- Arkaig Community Forest – restoring pine forest in partnership with the Woodland Trust,
- Cormonachan Community Woodlands – preserving rainforest for future generations,
- Friends of Glenan Wood – conserving ancient trees,
- Knoydart Forest Trust – creating new woodlands and jobs, climate change mitigation through tree planting.

Whilst the groups have broadly similar objectives and are all involved in managing native woodlands they differ in character, land tenure arrangements and in their governance structures.

Two of the four groups were established in the late 1990s, both being Companies Ltd. by Guarantee with charitable status. Neither of these groups own all woodland under management – one leases woodland from Forestry and Land Scotland, the other manages woodlands on community land and additionally on neighbouring private estates. The other two CWGs are SCIOs, established in the mid-2010s. These groups purchased forest land through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) from Forest and Land Scotland.

¹ <https://www.communitywoods.org/native-woods-project>

² <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PL1VN8uoROlmTGrbXS31pXzJ4sm7iPGYLw>

CWGs tend to represent communities in their locale, meaning that, in broad terms, the aims and objectives of a community may be delivered through a community woodland group.

Research was carried out by reviewing management plans, interviewing board members, staff and partners and by talking to community members and local businesses. A key methodological aspect of this research involved community woodland groups telling their story, and explaining why their woods have value for them³.

CWGs often work in partnership to develop and manage their woodlands:

- In 2016 Arkaig Community Forest worked in partnership with the Woodland Trust to secure a Loch Arkaig Pine Forest, passing some 95% of the land to Woodland Trust Scotland and retaining 5%.
- In 2015 Cormonachan Woodlands Association took on the Cormonachan Woodlands Project, established in 1998, in co-operation with Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre, Loch Goil Community Trust, Loch Goil Primary School and Forestry and Land Scotland.
- Friends of Glenan Wood was formed to purchase Glenan Wood after Forest Enterprise Scotland announced its sale in 2016. Glenan Wood was brought into community ownership in December 2019.
- Knoydart Forest Trust manages woodland on the Knoydart peninsula on behalf of the Knoydart Foundation, the community landowner – which bought 7,100 ha of Knoydart Estate in 1999. And it manages native woodland on behalf of neighbouring private landowners.

The study found that the economic benefits generated through community management of native woodland included,

- some £1.092 million pounds of income - groups and partners accessed a range of funding, including grants, donations, and through sales of sawlogs, sawn timber, firewood, small timber products,
- £225,000 of unpaid volunteer time input,
- 27 FTE jobs created – direct plus indirect, indirect employment in infrastructure and tourism, including tree nurseries and forest contracting,
- 14 FTE direct jobs created.

Social benefits generated through CWG native woodland management include,

- Health and wellbeing, community cohesion, inspiration, the satisfaction of caring for landscape, nature connection,
- Learning and education – for all ages, opportunities to learn about the environment and ecology, foraging, the importance of the rainforest, the role of trees in climate change.
- Improved confidence i.e., Arkaig Community Forest, worked with Woodland Trust Scotland to purchase Arkaig Forest and recently registered to buy land for housing by lodging a Community Asset Transfer request.

³ [Native Woods project — Community Woodlands Association \(communitywoods.org\)](https://communitywoods.org)

Introduction

The Community Woodlands Association Native Woods Project undertook research to identify and articulate the economic and social value of community management of native woodlands. The environmental benefits of native woodland restoration and management are well understood, however there is less understanding of economic and social benefits. A greater understanding of these benefits could help guide government agency, third sector and local community support for community owned and managed native woodland restoration and management. This report does not attempt to quantify environmental benefit arising from community woodland group management.

Short timescales and the nature of the project research – interviews and discussion with groups – means that the report is discursive and less analytical than would have been the case with a longer more academic study.

The Community Woodlands Association Native Woods Project was funded by Future Woodlands Scotland, Scottish Forestry Trust and The Pebble Trust and ran from July 2022 – January 2023.

The four community woodland groups are located on the west coast of Scotland and are connected to the globally significant Atlantic temperate rainforest.

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



Figure 1. Location of Community Woodland Groups.

We use the Scottish Forestry definition of native woods. *Scotland’s Native Woodlands are simply defined as those where over half of the dominant tree species are naturally occurring here in Scotland*⁴. Native tree species are those which arrived naturally in Scotland without direct human assistance. All our native tree and shrub species colonised Scotland after the last Ice Age (approx.

⁴ [Scottish Forestry - What are Scotland's native woodlands](#)

9,000 BP) including Scots pine, birch (Downy and Silver), alder, oak (Pedunculate and Sessile), ash, hazel, willow (various species), rowan, aspen, Wych elm, hawthorn, holly, juniper, elder and Wild cherry⁵.

Community ownership and management

Half of Scotland's privately owned land is owned by 0.008% of the population. This concentration in landownership brings challenges for Scotland's communities, especially rural communities⁶.

Since the Scottish Parliament was established in 1999, a series of rights for communities have been introduced. These include:

- Community Right to Buy and Crofting Community Right to Buy in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003
- Community right to buy abandoned, neglected or detrimental land (ANDL) and the right to request an asset transfer from certain public bodies in the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015
- Right to Buy to Further Sustainable Development in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016
- The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 also made Scotland the first country in the world to set out landowners' responsibilities as well as their rights⁷.

Community woodland groups have been pivotal to community land management and ownership – breaking new ground and exploring different management styles since the first community woodland purchase in the UK by Borders Community Woodland (BCW) at Wooplaw⁸, in the Scottish Borders, in 1987.

From 2005 – 2016, Forestry Commission Scotland provided a legislative process for communities to purchase national forest estate through their National Forest Land Scheme (NFLS). After The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) developed their Community Asset Transfer Scheme⁹ (CATS) which opened in 2017.

This impetus and legislation enabled a significant change to the pattern of land ownership over the last 25 years with large and small community buys outs, creative land ownership and management agreements all enabling empowerment, confidence building and most importantly allowing communities to explore and deliver solutions to the issues affecting their areas.

Community Woodland

A community woodland is one partly or completely controlled by the local community, through a community woodland group. There are now over 160 community woodland groups across Scotland, involved in, or responsible for, the management of thousands of hectares of woodland and other

⁵ <https://forestry.gov.scot/forests-environment/biodiversity/native-woodlands/scotlands-native-woodlands>

⁶ <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/land-reform/>

⁷ <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/land-reform/>

⁸ <https://wooplaw.org>

⁹ <https://forestryandland.gov.scot/what-we-do/communities/community-asset-transfer-scheme>

habitats. Just over half own their woodlands, the remainder lease or have formal and informal partnership arrangements.

Community groups that own or manage woodland are above all part of the community in which they are rooted. This is their strength and at times their challenge. Community woodland groups are as diverse as the communities of Scotland.

Community woodlands contain different woodland types from ancient semi-natural woods to conifer plantations and they vary in size from under a hectare to over a thousand hectares. Some groups employ staff to manage and develop the woodland, other groups can be wholly voluntary.

The Community Woodlands Association (CWA) was established by community woodland groups and Reforesting Scotland in 2003 with 40 members. CWA works in partnership with the other support bodies in Scotland to ensure that communities who are seeking to / or managing or own areas with woodland receive appropriate advice, guidance and support.

Research

Three research outputs were agreed between the CWA and grant funders,

- An overview of woodlands and management objectives and how these impact on economic and social benefits
- Research on outlining the social and economic impacts
- conclusions reviewing impacts.

The project involved identifying 4 community woodland groups who entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with CWA to allow the collection of study material and information.

The groups contributed time to the research through meetings, interviews, online surveys, event organisation and making themselves available for filming. Often, community woodland research places a time burden on community groups. In this work every effort was made to gather information with minimal impact on the groups, and to agree meeting times to suit community members.

Research and survey included,

- a desktop study – compiling and assessing woodland management plans, management accounts, Board meeting minutes, newsletters and search of social media accounts,
- meetings and site visits,
- a questionnaire to the 4 groups and their key partners,
- online surveys which were circulated round the group members and some local businesses,
- meeting other relevant partners and organisations.

The study groups.

In this section we look at the background to each of the Community Woodland Groups (CWGs) and lay out our findings.

The CWG case studies focus on remote rural communities, located on the west coast of Scotland. They have a small, total population of 1270 and the woodlands under community management form part of the Atlantic temperate rainforest.

ARKAIG COMMUNITY FOREST (AKW)

Loch Arkaig Pine Forest extends to some 1045ha of previously neglected Caledonian rain forest in Lochaber. It was purchased from Forest and Land Scotland in 2016 as a joint endeavour by the local community (pop. 60) through the Arkaig Community Trust, in partnership with the Woodland Trust. Arkaig Woods are co-managed between the community and Woodland Trust Scotland with forest restoration objectives including the provision of local economic and social benefits.



People in Arkaig Community Forest

CORMONACHAN COMMUNITY WOODLANDS (CCW)

Communities have been involved in Cormonachan Woodlands in Argyll since 1998 and in 2021 the community (pop. 400) signed a formal lease agreement with Forest and Land Scotland through Cormonachan Community Woodlands Ltd. The 63.9ha wood is being managed by volunteers to conserve and expand native woodland and to allow greater public access. In addition to Forest and Land Scotland, the other partnering organisation is Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (AOEC), who host some 1,000 school children annually and run youth and adult outdoor learning courses, plus corporate team building days.



Theatre event in Cormonachan Community Woodland

FRIENDS OF GLENAN WOOD (FOGW)

Glenan Wood, 148ha, is a broadleaved woodland, some of which is on a Plantations on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS), and some of which is semi-ancient woodland, containing veteran oaks. The woodland was purchased by the community (pop. 700) in 2019 from Forest and Land Scotland. Friends of Glenan Wood are working to achieve a balance between preserving and restoring the woodland and supporting local people.



Foraging training event in Glenan Wood

KNOYDART FOREST TRUST (KFT)

The Knoydart Foundation led a community buyout of a portion of Knoydart Estate in 1999, resulting in community ownership (current pop.110) of 1,025ha of woodlands. Knoydart Forest Trust was set up in 1999 to manage the woodland on behalf of Knoydart Foundation and the focus of KFT is to develop a circular economy providing sustainable jobs, mitigating climate change and creating native woods for future generations. To broaden their ability to earn income from local timber and support local employment KFT established a trading entity Wood Knoydart in 2013.



Community group in Knoydart Forest

In terms of **governance** all four CWGs are charitable bodies:

- Arkaig Community Forest and Friends of Glenan Wood are Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIOs).
- Knoydart Forest Trust and Cormonachan Community Woodlands Ltd are Companies Limited by Guarantee with charitable status.
- Wood Knoydart, the trading arm of KFT is a Charitable Incorporated Company (CIC).

The CWGs have formal voting members, with a total membership (across all groups), of 216 or 17% of the total population of 1,270. Members resident in the local communities have voting rights to elect office bearers and pass general meeting resolutions, associate members, those who are remote from the communities do not.

Community Involvement

As the term community woodland suggests, local communities and community group members set the aims and objectives for governance, woodland management and broader aspirations. Regular local consultation, discussion and meetings are one set of activities that sets community woodland groups apart from private and public landowners. Most elected board members are likely to live locally, and may be linked to other community interest groups in their area.

Communities are more likely to support project plans when they have been involved in the decision making and are kept informed of progress. The four CWGs have social media accounts and members newsletters to keep people up to date.

Community Vision

All CWGs have written vision statements, which form the basis of project plans. Commonality amongst the CWG vision's include restoration, enhancement, and increased biodiversity of native woodlands for the benefit of their communities; access, stewardship, learning and recreation, including volunteering.

Arkaig Community Forest and **Knoydart Forest Trust** vision statements include wording referring to economic development. These are remote communities with small resident populations and limited access to local employment, making employment generation from economic development a logical objective.

Cormonachan Community Woodlands and Friends of Glenan Wood do not contain economic statements. CCW have conditions in the FLS lease preventing commercial activity, which the group were content to sign up to. FoGW made a fairly recent woodland acquisition means and their focus is on the immediate conservation of the native woodland.

Aims

Arkaig Community Forest aims to restore native woodland habitats and to re-connect local people with the management and stewardship of the woodland and to use the woodlands to underpin sustainable rural development in the community of Achnacarry, Bunarkaig and Clunes (located some five miles west of Spean Bridge in Lochaber, Highland).

Friends of Glenan Wood aim to work with local people to bring the woodland into 'good health' by clearing invasive species, reducing the impact of the burgeoning deer population and creating access to allow people to enjoy the woodlands.

Cormonachan Community Woodlands aims to create a sustainable Atlantic oak woodland habitat which is used both for education and recreation by locals and the general public. The management and development to be carried out by a dynamic community woodlands association.

Knoydart Forest Trust aims to enhance biodiversity, habitat resilience and mitigate against climate change through woodland creation and appropriate management, to promote, develop and sustain local employment and economic activity, to manage the forest by enhancing and expanding the native woodland and restructuring and diversifying the non-native woodland, to create a locally useful timber resource and to encourage public access and enjoyment of the woodlands.

woodland management

Community woodland groups vary widely in their management expertise, their desire to actively manage woodland and their ability to undertake management operations. It has been suggested, although not researched, that community ownership of woodlands can result in more intense and frequent management than conventional industrial forestry or than in State Forests.

Three of the four CWGs manage ex Forest and Land Scotland forests. An increase in woodland management in community woodlands may be due to a number of factors – local ties to the woodland, a local requirement for more/improved outdoor access, a local demand for small quantities of timber for firewood or construction, a local desire to create jobs, community valuing biodiversity and a willingness to act to enhance woodland biodiversity, or an attachment to a local feature, such as an archaeological site.

A measure of how the CWGs manage their woodlands is illustrated by **Cormonachan Community Woodlands**, CWG being awarded “**Highly Commended**” in Scotland’s Finest Woods Awards (www.sfwa.co.uk), Community Woodlands Award (Small community woodland group competition) on 24th June 2022 at the Scottish Government’s Pavilion at the Royal Highland Show.

Woodland management plans

Arkaig Community Forest and Cormonachan Community Woodlands have 10-year woodland management plans, Knoydart Forest Trust has a 20-year management plan and the Friends of Glenan Wood, are currently working to the recommendations from their PAWS report with a view to creating a management plan. All four CGWs are managing portions of woodland areas classed as Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and areas of Ancient Semi Natural Native woodlands (ASNW).

The combined total area of forest land under management for all four groups is circa 2,400 ha with some 1,700 ha of native woodlands.

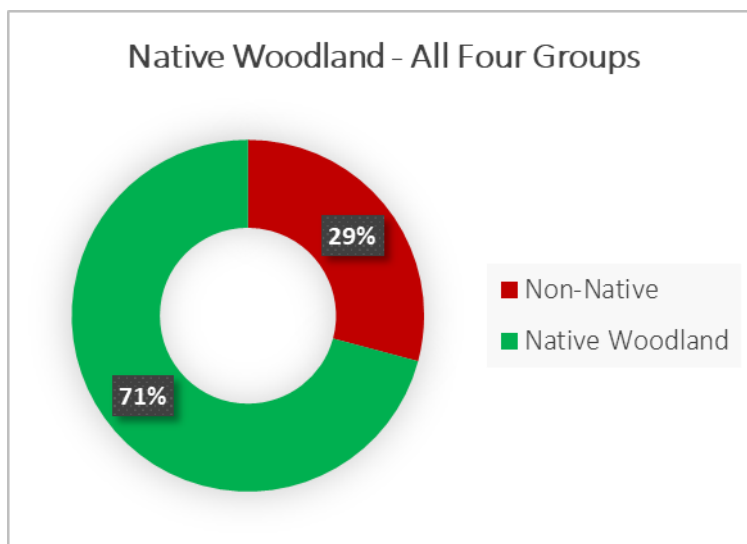


Figure 2. Proportion of native woodland as a percentage of the total woodland area

Native woodland types and management.

ARKAIG

Caledonian Pine Wood, Oakwood, Plantation on ancient woodland (PAWS)

Glen Mallie Woodland is a mix of broadleaf and pine trees. There are many mature Scots Pine on the site along with a pulse of regeneration from restoration works in the mid 90s. A small track runs through the site leading to a highseat for deer stalking. Rare lichens can be found on a hazel on the Allt Coire Bhotrais which borders the site. The Ardnois woodland is best accessed by boat, being somewhat landlocked. A ruined settlement of four black houses leads to a hollow way path which was most likely created by driving cattle onto the hill. To either side of the hollow way there are many wood ant nests with trails of ants following the old path and branching out into the woodland. The site is a mix of peatland and woodland with mature Scots Pine and ancient coppiced alders. There is a large stand of lodgepole pine, some larch and Sitka spruce on the site. Ardnois also benefited from restoration in the 90s and has a similar pulse of regeneration from that time. Tom an Eireanaich is mostly oak woodland with some tall stands of birch. There are many mature oak trees on the site and some exceptionally large diameter oak trees from past coppicing. There is a woodland garden on the floodplain of the Allt Bhan. The woodland garden features a willow coppice and fruit trees.

KNOYDART

Native woodland types and management include- Caledonian pinewood expansion, Atlantic oak wood conservation, birch woodland expansion, upland oak woodland expansion, conservation of wet woodlands.

Inverie Woods (257ha) extensive restructuring to create quality timber clear windblow and change from plantation in some areas but also areas of remnant ancient woodland. Gusierein & Folach (231ha) plantation. 601.5ha new native woodland created since 1994 with 454.5ha of that being established since KFT began.

CORMONACHAN

Mature native broadleaves mainly oak ranging from 200cm for the tall straight oaks to 540cm for a multi-stemmed pollarded tree. Areas of mature hazel stools with many examples of 'sticky glue fungus' and some sections of planted exotic conifers mainly Sitka spruce. Estimated c500 year old oak and 150yr old birch.

63.9ha ASNW managed by community & 7.8 ha of exotic conifer which is excluded from the management agreement; includes 8.9 ha PAWS status; ancient Atlantic oak and hazel woodlands; issues with self-seeding Sitka spruce and Rhododendron ponticum - recorded on the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland and some areas Sitka spruce stands are considered PAWS sites.

GLENAN

Mainly oak & birch with some small areas of underplanted and self-seeded conifers, part of Argyll Atlantic oak woods and considered rainforest. Most of Glenan is included the Native Woodland

Inventory and forms perhaps one of the largest intact and most accessible areas of native woodland in Cowal or even in Argyll. Glenan is surrounded by commercial conifer woodlands that historically, in parts, were planted over and through native woodlands. Some oaks considered veterans and possibly ~300yrs old.

Issues – Exotic invasive species such as Sitka spruce and *Rhododendron ponticum*, overgrazing by high numbers of herbivores (mainly deer) and a skewed (old) tree age class crisis.

Tenure - of the land as outlined in the introduction to this section, and detailed in each case study, is a factor in preparing a woodland management plan. It determines what can and cannot be done with the resource. Three of the four communities own all or part of the woodland, two woodlands were purchased from Forest and Land Scotland, and one is managed under a lease agreement with Forestry and Land Scotland.

Woodland management objectives:

- restore, conserve and/or create native woodlands,
- eradicate or control invasive species including *Rhododendron ponticum* and non-native trees including plantation conifer – also Himalayan balsam, etc.,
- ensure adequate herbivores management, particularly deer,
- improve access,
- provide learning resources, training courses and volunteer opportunities.

All woodland areas contain archaeological features, three groups wish to utilise these as key features, enabling or improving access to local heritage sites.

Knoydart Forest Trust incorporates archaeology interest in their forest plan and note that there will be no disturbance of archaeological features when planting. KFT are focusing on restructuring an area of non-native broadleaf and monoculture plantation near their area of population, Inverie.

Balancing the need to provide amenity access in a mixed broadleaf woodland for community use and the economic aims of the community with the creation of native woods, mean not all non-native species will be removed.

Key Challenges

Creative solutions can sometimes be done with more agility at a smaller scale and small community organisations can deliver and respond quickly. Seemingly small changes are big for them.

For community groups the incentives are much more than the economic - the social benefit is just as much an incentive. Innovative solutions can be found to deal with problems which deliver social and/or economic benefits. For example:

- Protected species present such as bats, otters, eagles, osprey,
 - Install webcams to view but not disturb the wildlife habitat,
 - Volunteers to monitoring and run education events.
- Archaeology present
 - Use history to engage people.
- Invasive non-native species present
 - Timber extraction for woodfuel and other products.

Economic Benefits

An economic benefit is any benefit that can be quantified in terms of the money that it generates. Net income and revenues; surplus and net cash flow are economic benefits. An economic benefit may also refer to a reduction in something such as a cost.¹⁰ For an overview of the Scottish Governments strategic approach to economy and community benefits see **Appendix**.

Examples of economic activity in the CWG native woodlands include:

- wildlife/adventure tourism,
- deer management (stalking, venison sales),
- wild foraging,
- woodland management (planting, thinning, invasive clearance) and rural skills training (wood working, practical skills, safety qualifications)
- charitable fund raising
- partnership working

More specific examples,

- Firewood and timber sales – felling of non-native trees,
 - **Arkaig Community Forest** donate firewood to older people in the community and **Knoydart Forest Trust** have developed a regular income stream from firewood sales,
- Tree nursery– employment linked to new native woodland creation,
 - **Arkaig Community Forest** have developed a tree nursery and recently employed a nursery manager,
 - Establishment of a private tree nursery in Knoydart to supply native trees to **Knoydart Forest Trust**,
- New planting (contracting)
 - **Knoydart Forest Trust** establish new native woodland on Knoydart Foundation land and carry out Woodland Creation grant scheme contracts on behalf of landowning neighbours, using locally recruited tree planters.
- Deer management - employment from stalking
 - **Arkaig Community Forest** have trained 6 people to DSC level one and Woodland Trust Scotland employs a local company to manage deer,
- Affordable food source from sale of processed venison
 - **Knoydart Forest Trust** and **Arkaig Forest Trust** process and sell venison locally. **Arkaig Forest Trust** has advertised for a Deer Larder Manager
- Fencing – for deer control
 - **Arkaig Forest Trust** in partnership with **Woodland Trust Scotland**, and **Knoydart Forest Trust** tender fencing contracts and where feasible employ local fencers.
- Making and selling wood products –

¹⁰ <https://marketbusinessnews.com/financial-glossary/economic-benefit/>

- **Wood Knoydart** sell locally milled and crafted timber products – from kitchen utensils to timber cladding. They have an online shop and retail locally in Mallaig and in the Scottish Borders.
- Environmental survey
 - Local people have been engaged to carry out ecological surveys, where the skills exist.
- Tourism – provision of a woodland rangers
 - The Knoydart Foundation Ranger service provides visitors to Knoydart with the opportunity to join paid tours.
- Outdoor education –
 - **Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (AOEC)** run school level, youth and adult outdoor education courses with opportunities to learn about native woodland. **Wood Knoydart** run workshops for schools.

Indirect local economic benefits

- Tourism through improved woodland access, local walks - Local businesses such as B&Bs, shops, cafés and restaurants benefit from visitors attracted to the locale from improved access through native woodland,
- Woodlands as venues, for photography courses, wellbeing events – yoga/meditation/forest bathing, walking groups, theatre groups and artist courses.
- Wild harvest and forest craft enterprises such as edible plants and fungi foraging, hardwood for crafts and artists.
- Forest classrooms, such as the University of the Highlands and Islands use of **Arkaig Community Forest** woods for student classes.

There’s a great opportunity with community forests and how they complement business and lifestyles to the benefit of the communities that they are in and which they serve.

Ian Jurgenson, Managing Director, Portavadie by Glenan Wood

Income

All four CWGs are active in fund raising and two are attempting to increase earned income. Figure 2. Shows the total income for all 4 groups, with values for grants, donations and earned income. Grants are by far and away the largest proportion of group income, however the groups with larger areas of forest and land, such as Arkaig and Knoydart have more opportunities to produce revenue form tree harvesting, new native woodland creation and product sales. The two smaller groups rely more heavily, as a proportion of income, on grant funding.

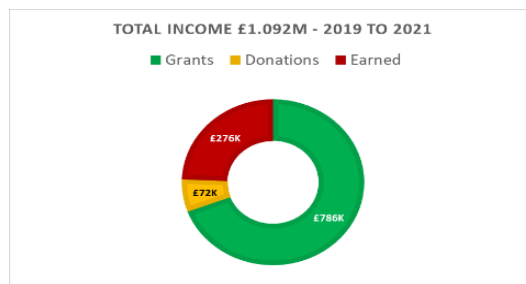


Figure 3. Total income for all four groups from 2019-2021, rounded to nearest £1,000.

Earned income is reinvested locally wherever possible. Knoydart Forest Trust earns significant income, demonstrating experience and longevity of forest management (maximising revenue from timber sales and contracted Forest Grant scheme creation). Some £47.5K of income was earned by Wood Knoydart in 2022 through small products sale and firewood.

Knoydart Forest Trust	Accounts 2019 / 2020	Accounts 2020/2021	Accounts 2021/2022
Grants	£63K	£113K	£63K
Earned	£2.8K	£34K	£140K

Table 1. Grants and earned income for Knoydart Forest Trust.

Cormonachan rely entirely on grants, donations and membership – donations in their box in the squirrel hide provides around £500/year – which is paid out to feed squirrels at £450/year, net surplus £50, net social and environmental gain – healthy squirrels and happy visitors.

Grant funding

Grant funding is an important route to finance for all community woodland groups. As it is for forest investment companies, landowners, farmers and crofters.

Each of the CWGs have to a greater or lesser extent been successful, in securing grant funding for specific projects. Communities can source grant funding coming from two main sources. Government – for agri-environment/forestry/biodiversity/access schemes, or from charitable/foundation funding.

Depending on the source of grant funding, grants are paid to allow communities to deliver on national policy outcomes, such as biodiversity enhancement or protection, woodland creation, or community empowerment; or to protect or enhance historic features, provide skills training for young people or create new access routes. In general terms it is easier for community groups to source grant funding from the charitable/foundation sector than it is for private forest owners.

Examples of grant funding to the CWGs

Cormonachan Community Woodlands in July 2022, were offered full funding for the “Upper Cormonachan Heritage Paths Project” amounting to £253,146.00 for the construction and a further £32,306 for a 3-year part time Heritage Developer (£18,000 through Ardroy OEC) and the balance for training, promotion, etc. from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, NatureScot (Scottish Rural Development Programme) through their Agri-Environmental Climate Scheme – Improving Public Access and local donations of £18,400 from Lochgoil Community Trust and members and supporters.

At the beginning of 2023 **Arkaig Community Forest** were awarded £37,818.07 from the Rural and Islands Communities Ideas into Action Fund, which is delivered in partnership between the [Scottish Government](#) and [Inspiring Scotland](#). The funds will pay for butchery equipment and required drainage in the deer larder to complete the ‘hill to table’ process of the Arkaig deer larder, plus the development of the tree nursery. In announcing this grant funding, the ACF stated that the grant funds were ...”*therefore enabling ACF to become a more resilient community forest*”.

Friends of Glenan Wood have struggled to raise funds for capital works and for employment. Their last financial report, circa 2021 showed grant funds raised from Scottish Land Fund Grant - £11,000 restricted funds for Forest Ranger salary Keep Scotland Beautiful Grant - £9,870 restricted funds for the orchard Tighnabraich Development Trust Grant £3,136 unrestricted, and donations of £2,737.

DIRECT LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

Direct local employment is a common objective amongst community woodland groups; however, it relies on continuity of funding, building income streams, expertise, and prudent management. It would appear easier, as noted above, for groups managing larger areas of forest and land, as opposed to groups managing small areas of forest, to generate funds to employ staff. It may also be a reflection on local community skill sets, time and resource availability and numbers of people involved. Smaller groups may have limited income/material/time resources and may struggle to gain a 'critical mass' of funding over sufficient period to allow them to develop successful funding strategies.

FoGW and CCW are run by volunteers, with part time input from paid individuals. This is the norm for many small community woodland groups, and it is, as noted above, somewhat high risk. Volunteers age, move on, or tire of continually battling for funds and at Glenan, they have run out of funding for their 0.2 FTE woodland ranger and are seeking finance to be able to re-establish this post.

FoGW illustrates the time commitment required by volunteers to work through grant processes and it demonstrates the fragility of short-term grant funding.

Arkaig Community Forest secured funding enabling them to advertise a new post managing their deer larder.

CCW are focussed on social benefits, this is in part a consequence of their lease with Forest and Land Scotland, which perversely, prohibits CCW undertaking income generating work. As the example of grant funding in the income section shows, Cormonachan have a track record of successful funding bids. Their Heritage Project funding 0.2 FTE staff and their partnership with Ardroy OEC provides an additional member of staff.



Knydart Forest Trust – firewood processing

INDIRECT LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

Indirect jobs include those employed by project partners and who are engaged or connected to work in the community forests.

Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (AOEC), Woodland Trust Scotland (WTS) and Knoydart Foundation (KF) are partner organisations. Rather tellingly FoGW do not currently have a project partner.

WTS, KF and AOEC employ local people wherever possible and generally use local contractors for forestry work and deer management. Partners also have access to significant resources, allowing them to create local employment.

The table below outlines the number of jobs created and supported by the 4 groups in the case study. In 2022, the employment levels were 24.7 FTE (full time equivalent), across the following roles:

Job type	Direct FTE	Indirect FTE
Forester	3	2.5
Deer stalker / ghillie	0	1
Fencing	0	1
Project management / admin	1.7	1
Tree nursery management	1	0.3
Ranger	0.2	1
Outdoor education	0	12
Total	5.9	18.8

Table 2. Direct and Indirect FTE's across all groups

In two of the four CWGs business development opportunities for using timber, contracting woodland creation, venison sales and tree growing are intended to reduce reliance on grants and donations.

Grant income is a catalyst to developing business streams and it has enabled ACF to employ 1.6 FTE - a p/t Development Officer and p/t Tree Nursery Manager to develop two income generation projects.

In 2022, funding to ACF facilitated purchase of a modular deer larder, built on land which the community owns at Clunes – adjacent to their office buildings, which were purchased from Forestry and Land Scotland via the Community Asset Transfer Scheme. ACF are now developing a venison processing business to sell venison to local markets.

Working in partnership with the Woodland Trust provides access to business development opportunities and results in more local employment. The ACT tree nursery will sell saplings to Woodland Trust Scotland as part of WTS work to restore the Arkaig Caledonian forest. It is envisaged that the nursery will, in due course, be able to grow enough trees to supply others.

In Knoydart there is a new, privately owned tree nursery developed by a local person to supply trees to KFT, who are developing new woodland creation schemes on Knoydart Foundation land and on neighbouring private estate land. Knoydart Forest Trust does direct sales of milled timber for construction and firewood to local markets.

TRADING

Knoydart Forest Trust (KFT) established a trading subsidiary – Wood Knoydart CIC - intended to diversify and earn income from a variety of wood using activities. It was set up in 2013 with support from the CWA Social Enterprise Development Project and it designs, produces and sells small timber products. KFT has moved external contract work into this trading arm and Wood Knoydart runs workshops teaching people green woodworking skills.

The Knoydart Foundation has a community shop, selling Wood Knoydart small timber products and venison. The venison comes from the Knoydart Foundation community venison project, created as a spinoff of deer management to produce a quality local product.

TRAINING

Skills and training courses can provide certified qualifications that can be used by volunteers and others in their current or potential employment. And volunteers can learn skills that allow them to carry out essential forest management.

Training can include first aid, chainsaw, brushcutting, managing invasive species, all-terrain vehicles, fencing, dyking and many others. The Covid pandemic curtailed training over two years, however courses are being carried out.

Recent training courses include,

- 2 people x power boat level 2 at ACF,
- 6 people x Deer Stalking Certificate 1 (DSC1) at ACF,
- 12 people x heritage and archaeology at CCW,
- 8 people x emergency first aid at work at CCW,
- 16 people x emergency first aid at work at KFT; 4 people from KFT and 12 from other organisations in the community.

CWGs apply for small pots of funding to run courses, some qualifications are time limited and need refreshed, so some attendees will be for refresher courses. There is a requirement to train new staff and volunteers when there are changes in personnel.



Forest skills training – Arkaig Forest Trust

TOURISM

There is a recognition of the value of the outdoors to the Scottish economy and the role it plays in supporting sustainable economic growth - creating employment, sustaining tourism spend and enhancing the profile of Scotland through the promotion of its natural landscape and scenery¹¹ and figures from Visit Scotland highlight that tourism in the Highlands significantly increase year on year.¹²

A total of 75,500 people is estimated to visit the 4 case study woods every year, this in part through the Great Trails network to do bikepacking, walking and cycling. These visitors will likely support tourism and hospitality jobs. It was outwith the scope of this research to fully quantify the impact community involvement in the woodlands has made. However, local tourism businesses (cafés, restaurants and shops) have stated that they benefit from the increases in footfall from visitors to the woods. Many accommodation providers highlight their local community woodland as a specific attraction on their website and one entrepreneur has included the walks at Cormonachan Woodlands in a popular visitor trails guide which is available to download from their website¹³ or purchase in local shops.

We interviewed people who earn income from using the woods as a venue but are not directly connected to the community woodland group. For example, a local ecology tour business provides jobs for two local people delivering tours teaching clients about flora and fauna. They use the community wood to highlight woodland regeneration and a number of people responded to the surveys stating that they use the woods for business for activities such as forest bathing, guided foraging and walks, cold water swimming, photography, running and fitness retreats.

Artists were interviewed who participate in the Argyll Arts Trail and although they don't make money from the trail, they say that involvement raises awareness of their work and leads to future work.

Glenan Wood is,

- situated next to the ferry slip linking the Cowal and Kintyre peninsulas,
- the start / end of the Loch Lomond and Cowal Way, one of the Great Trails of Scotland,
- adjacent to the luxury resort spa and marina, Portavadie.

Friends of Glenan Wood have been focussing on local events and woodland restoration, however, the potential for linking with Portavadie is significant. Portavadie Estates are keen to be involved at the wood – both for their 30,000 visitors/year to enjoy, but also for their staff to use as a base to volunteer, get involved locally and build a sense of community as although only 4.5 miles from the village of Tighnabraich, Portavadie can feel isolated for their 70 live in staff. There are distinct synergies between the native wood and Portavadie Estates - supporting and benefitting this local business.

¹¹ <https://www.hie.co.uk/media/6143/adventure-tourism-in-scotland-executive-summary.pdf>

¹² <https://www.visitscotland.org/research-insights/regions/highlands>

¹³ <https://lochgoilheadholidays.com/local-walks/>

Social benefits

A social benefit is the total benefit to society from producing or consuming a good/service, including all the private benefits plus any external benefits of production/consumption. If a good has significant external benefits, then the benefit will be greater than the private benefit.¹⁴

All the interviews and consultation that took place as part of this research stated the diversity of native woodlands is what makes them special in comparison to single species plantations. The diversity of the flora and fauna contributes to physical and mental wellbeing. All groups encouraged people into the woods to learn and take advantage of this by:

- Arranging volunteering days
- Community gatherings for social engagement
- Training courses/outdoor education events e.g. in foraging, citizen surveys, etc
- Access paths for walking and cycling
- Creative activity – art and crafts, woodlands as a venue for theatre, sculpture trails (all groups have a sculpture trail created with community involvement)
- Wood lots – two groups are planning to introduce these to allow individuals access to a defined area of woodland for their own use to build businesses,
- Woodland crofts – groups introducing these to help provide a resource for local people to create sustainable jobs relating to woodland this can also help people with housing as they can build on the land.
- Affordable housing for rent/buy – communities who own land are considering places where they might be able to provide local housing and in some cases plots for self-build.

INDIRECT SOCIAL BENEFITS

- Other businesses/projects/public bodies / university / colleges / schools - using the woodland for events that bring wider social benefit connecting people with nature
 - wellbeing events e.g. forest bathing, meditation, disadvantaged groups, Branching Out

Cormonachan Community Woodlands is the only group that regularly record volunteer hours. The others are estimates. Unless a funded project calls for it most groups do not record every hour of volunteer time. This is because volunteers love what they do, they are passionate and dedicated and recording time spent, particularly on administration, research and project development work would be difficult, as it is done by individuals in their spare time. It is much easier to estimate practical work in the woods.

¹⁴ <https://www.economicshelp.org/blog/glossary/social-benefit/>

The information presented are estimated totals of both practical and project development volunteering over a three-year period 2019 to 2021.

Estimated hours	Arkaig	Cormonachan	Glenan	Knoydart	Total hours	£ equivalent	Total £
Volunteers	3,180	8,328	1,350	294	13,862	@ £15/hr	£197,280
Board	500	300	200	420	1,420	@ £20/hr	£28,400

Table 3. Voluntary input – numbers of hours and estimated financial value

Volunteer duties include forestry work, hosting events, survey work, staff and/or volunteer management, completing funding applications, administration and finance, project management.

Having been here over a period of time, its really good to see that you are actually making a difference – with the will and determination it can be done.

Bruce Caradine, Fife Conservation Volunteers, Cormonachan

Board duties are reading reports and attending board meetings, contributing to strategic direction.

The figures in the table above include 2020 and 2021 when Covid restrictions were in place. Board members met on zoom more regularly and met up and worked together outside. Social events were organised outdoors and volunteering for woodland workdays continued but with Covid regulations observed in all cases.

Funding applications are usually prepared and submitted by volunteers except when staff are employed for this task. Volunteers and staff need appropriate skills, time and dedication to successfully complete applications. For example, to apply to the National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of a £0.25m project, the CCW secretary and 2 previous chairpersons donated almost 1,000 volunteer hours – worth (@£20/hr) £20k and equivalent to a 1 year 0.6 FTE job.

Staff can move projects forward at a considerable pace as they are paid to focus on tasks. However, funding is normally required to employ a staff member. It falls to volunteers to complete applications, carry out recruitment, interview, induct and where necessary train new staff. Once a staff member is appointed someone, usually a volunteer board member, is required to dedicate significant time in management and ongoing support for their work.

A questionnaire sent out by the groups to their members provided the following list of activities that people said they participated in:

Case study member online survey	Arkaig	Cormonachan	Glenan	Knoydart	Totals	% of total responses
Total number of responses	6	10	8	32	56	
Walking/dog walking	3	9	8	30	50	89%
Family / friends	1	3	2	9	15	26%
Nature	1	4	6	14	25	45%
Foraging	0	0	0	8	8	14%
Art/Craft/photography	0	3	3	6	12	21%
Volunteering/Learning Events	3	6	0	5	14	25%
Meditation/relaxation	1	3	0	5	9	16%

Table 4: participatory activities in the four woodlands.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

People were also asked how often they get out into the woods.



Figure 4. Frequency of woodland visits

Quotes from the questionnaires:

- *Guests like to walk in the woods and use the bike tracks and the trails are great*
- *The native woods give me physical and mental health and wellbeing, I learn about nature and care for the environment*
- *Just being in the woods is beneficial, the smells, the chemicals from the trees, the atmosphere*
- *I enjoy improved physical and mental wellbeing, relaxation, opportunities for socialising and hope eventually to have my own hoose in the woods*
- *Being in the woods gives me a sense of community and a better understanding of the natural world*
- *Time in the woods gives me mental refreshment and renewed health*

Building networks and developing social capital is essential for community woodlands groups to demonstrate the benefits they provide. All have strong connections to their local community, and all are working in partnerships of mutual benefit. They work with many other organisations and connect with funders, supporters and learn from others.

CWA is at the centre of the Community Woodlands network in Scotland and brings groups together through face-to-face meetings and sharing experience at the annual conference and regular training events. CWA also facilitate direct connections between groups. All groups will freely share their experience with others although CWA seeks ways to reward them for their time and expertise. Knoydart Forest Trust, due to their 23 years of experience have become an exemplar of how to make the most benefit for your community through economic benefit. Another exemplar group, not part of this study is Abriachan Forest Trust who deliver huge social benefit from their mono-culture forest.

Below is a diagram plotting the complex connections Knoydart Forest Trust has developed. Possibly more complicated than the relationships of other community woodland groups however it is indicative of the far-reaching connections within a small remote rural community.

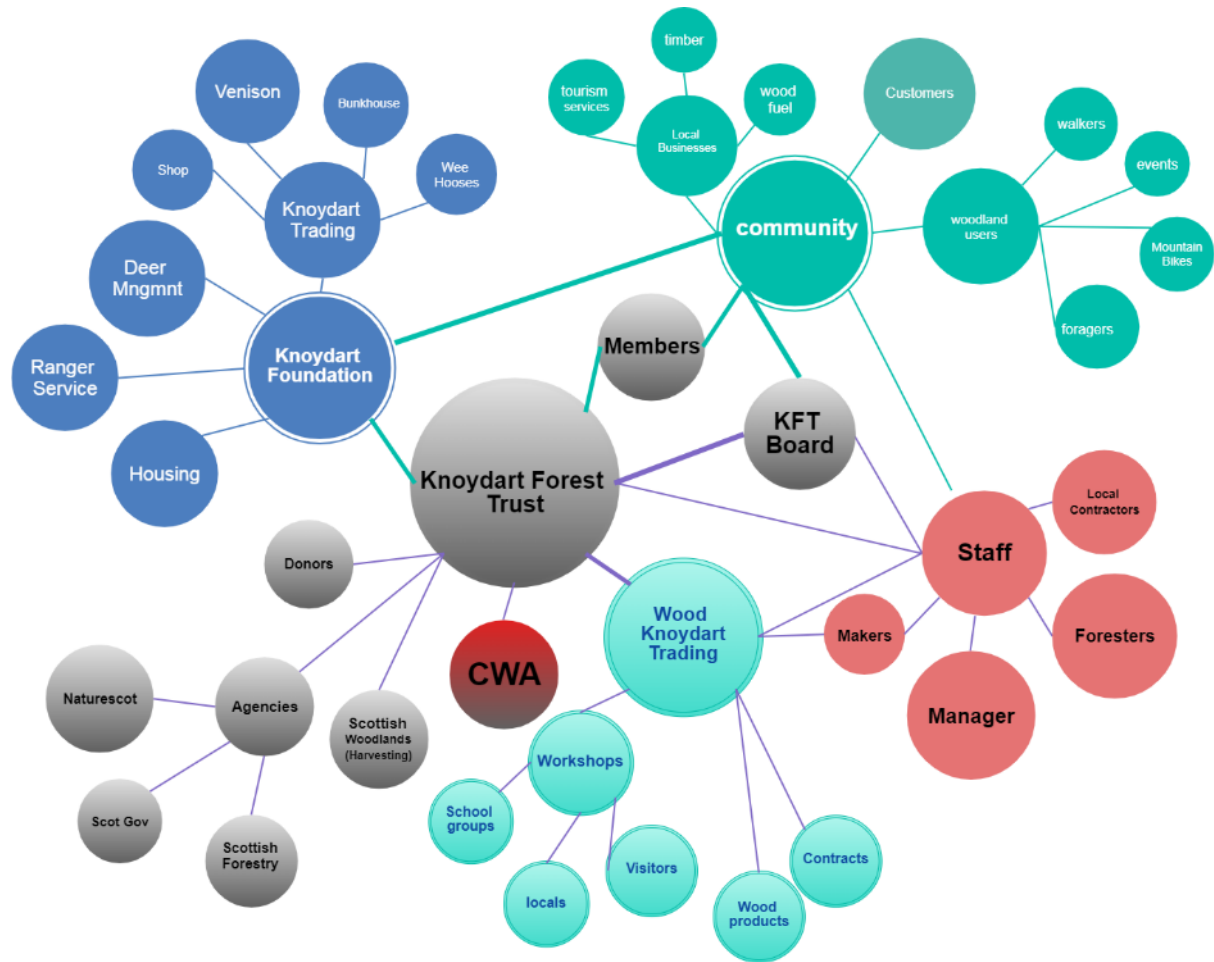


Figure 5. Knoydart Forest Trust relationship mind map

Partnerships

Three of the groups work in formal partnerships that are key to the success of their aims and objectives.

Arkaig Community Forest and Woodland Trust Scotland

The community owns 5% of the forest and has a co-management agreement with Woodland Trust Scotland who owns 95% of the land. They manage the whole forest together. The success and experience that the community gained from this arrangement gave them the confidence to buy a 6ha oak woodland with buildings currently used as offices. They are now looking at additional land for housing and woodland crofts. This is a strong partnership and Woodland Trust Scotland uses local contractors as much as possible keeping the wealth within the community. Local skills are complemented by the significant resource available to WTS and creates local jobs in a small rural community. The group themselves are beginning to develop income streams from the areas of woodland that they own outright.

It's a really great example of how a large environmental NGO and the local community can work together for combined benefit.

Dr Jessica Maxwell, Woodland Trust Scotland

KNOYDART FOREST TRUST AND KNOYDART FOUNDATION

The Trust has a management agreement with the community landowner, Knoydart Foundation, to manage and use the forest resource for economic and social community development. This arrangement allows them to make long term plans and derive significant income from developing wood and timber products. It also allows them to offer woodland management services to neighbouring landowners. Knoydart Foundation use the managed woodland to earn income from visitor tours.

CORMONACHAN COMMUNITY WOODLANDS, ARDROY OEC LTD AND FORESTRY AND LAND SCOTLAND

Initially established in 1998 as a joint working group led by Ardroy Centre with Lochgoil Primary School and the local community, Cormonachan Community Woodlands Ltd (CCW Ltd) now has a 20-year lease (until 2041) with Forestry and Land Scotland which does not permit any commercial activity or economic benefit from the woodland. They therefore focus on conservation of the native woodlands with a huge amount of volunteer involvement. Ardroy Outdoor Education Centre (now a social enterprise) continues to be integral to the success of the woodlands and re-established a further a 10-year Memorandum of Understanding with CCW Ltd in 2022.

Building connections is part of strategic development however as community woodlands are so close to the local people it is also important to have fun. Volunteers regularly arrange social events like barbecue's, annual fun events (often coinciding with a short AGM) and celebrations of project start and end dates.

All 4 of the woodlands are home to arts and sculpture trails – some are permanent, some are short lived, some are created with professional artists or for TV series and some are all about involvement. All of them encourage people into the woodlands – building nature connection and improving and supporting their mental health and wellbeing.

Woodland Trust Scotland recently completed and launched their 6km sculpture trail in Arkaig Pine Forest – designed to lure people off the main track and deeper into the woodlands. Knoydart Forest Trust (Inverie Woods) and Cormonachan Woodlands have had sculpture trails for some time.

“This wonderful exhibition of art has given the [Cormonachan] woodlands a real sparkle. I did not think our walks could be so much fun. As you wander round and appreciate the amazing art work you see the beauty of the framework in more detail, even in the smirry rain!”

Argyll Arts Collective collaborate with woodland groups to run an annual Arts Trail. Born out of the pandemic in 2020 as a way for artists to share their work in an outside environment the Arts Trail has now run for 3 consecutive years in Cormonachan Woodlands and once in Glenan Wood. The artists are not paid but their travel expenses are reimbursed, and they get a fair amount of social media coverage through the Collective social media promotion campaign and local posters. We asked some of them about why they get involved and what they get from it. There is a strong network of artists in Argyll, a history of coordinated open artists’ studios and many short- and long-term art and sculpture trails - most of the artists involved in the Arts Trails were asked to contribute – some of them using pieces created for other outdoor and woodland arts trails.

None of the artists found it directly increased their sales or own publicity however, one artist had received commissions as a result of her involvement in other woodland arts trails. All the artists said they would do it again and the benefits they did gain included:

- interaction, collaboration with other artists, woodland/nature reserve rangers and volunteers
- spending time together in enjoyment and appreciation of these wonderful natural environments
- the enjoyment and appreciation of the work by visitors to the trails
- photo-opportunity of work sited out in the landscape

“I chose to get involved because, as a resident of Lochgoilhead, this is local to me, showcases my work and because I am supportive of community art events in general”

Labyrinths are popping up everywhere – walking them can be a very meditative experience and creating them builds teamwork and fun. In Argyll, local artist Margaret Ker runs many workshops with communities, schools, and groups – building and walking these ancient pathways. Both Cormonachan Woodlands and Glenan Wood have a permanent labyrinth for people to walk and events and local businesses running health and wellbeing workshops make use of them as well.

“The labyrinth acts as a metaphor for the path we walk throughout our lives, journeying to our own centre and back out again into the world. I enjoyed the experience of focusing on the path as it turns round and around. I also enjoyed that sense of being able to take time out or myself, to be with myself. This is so appealing in our busy lives, and is undoubtedly beneficial to one’s wellbeing.”

TaiChi Magazine article about Glenan Wood World Labyrinth Day¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://taichimag.org/Issue%2066%20-%20labyrinth.pdf>

Outdoor theatre is a fantastic way to involve people and communities in the outdoors, Cormonachan Woodlands raise funding to host the Argyll Walking Theatre who run outdoor theatre aimed at all ages bringing families and friends out into the woodlands.

reviewing against the sector

We attempted to gain a better evidenced understanding of how 'typical' the four groups are, against the wider backdrop of community woodlands across Scotland. With the data currently held by CWA it is not possible to undertake a full analysis and we recommend that CWA undertake a full baseline study of community woodland tenure, governance, size and type. CWA will require resources to do this as it is likely that each group may require more than one phone call – with groups being run by busy volunteers – often with their own work to juggle, and with knowledge often being held by several different people depending on their voluntary or staff remit, it can be a challenge to manage to contact folks. A recent online survey of CWA members produced only a 20% response.

The analysis that we undertook in September 2022 (Appendix) and the very general overview is that the majority of groups own their land. With only 31 of the c.160 CWA member groups answering detailed questions about woodland type, areas etc on their membership form, it is hard to fully understand the current woodland type and ownership pattern across the sector. The analysis shows that exactly 50% own their woodland (however, only 30 groups answered this question); the next biggest category is those with a legal agreement at 26.7%.

Following the establishment of the first community woodland in 1987 (Wooplaw Community Woodland, Scottish Borders) we witnessed the biggest increase in the number of groups in the 2000s with numbers dropping considerably since and a few groups emerging in the 2020s. We can probably attribute this rise to changes in land reform legislation and initiatives such as Community Asset Transfer Scheme, National Forest Landscape Scheme and Scottish Land Fund and then the fall due to the pandemic as well as the rising costs of land and the challenges of navigating the community right to buy system which is a difficult and complicated process with many legal requirements, very short timescales and a lack of available funding to meet rising land prices.

We also need to acknowledge that with these groups being run by volunteers within their own community it can also be challenging to develop, gather and exercise the right skills in the right place at the right time as communities learn to work together, navigate partnership working and find ways to disseminate information and consult that best suit their areas and the people who live there.

We know there are a number of groups who have been unsuccessful over the last 20 years in successfully acquiring their woodland and we would put this down to most often being community capacity - especially when faced by bureaucratic hurdles, although we have also seen a number fail at the stage of securing funding and then the community capacity to cope and bounce back from such a failure has crumbled.

Using CWA's knowledge and first-hand experience of the sector we can say that the groups are broadly typical of community woodlands in general, demonstrating:

- A range of motives for buying / managing their woodland although access and being able to use the woods is always the biggest driver – it is the outcomes that vary.
- A range of ownership / management patterns

- Working in partnership is key.
- As confidence in the groups grows, so does their ability to deliver outcomes and develop a range of solutions.
- Securing investment is challenging and hard work.
- Having staff or dedicated (almost full time) volunteers makes a massive difference to both timescales and ability to deliver outcomes.

The majority of community woodland groups are Companies Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status, followed by SCIO and then CICs with a few unincorporated organisations still on the scene.

The four groups probably reflect this range of tenure and governance and:

- are a mix of ownership, partnerships and leasing
- two of them are Companies Ltd by Guarantee with Charitable Status and two are Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIO)
- were established 1998, 1999, 2014 and 2017.

What is interesting is that the 2 organisations who don't own land were established in the late 1990's and are now both Companies Ltd by Guarantee and operate under lease or other agreement and the 2 who were established in the mid 2010s are both SCIOs, and have both taken advantage of the Community Asset Transfer Scheme.

They are typical in that they are all groups of individuals pulled together to work for a common, community and heritage focussed vision. Every community group is unique and responds to their local situation – to protect a resource, to enhance their local area, to put new life into their communities and to have fun contributing to something for which they have a passion or interest.

In terms of native woodlands we would say again, that these case studies are broadly similar to native woodlands in terms of:

- The threats they face through overgrazing, invasive species and the age class of the trees
- Restoration and constructive management of these woodlands is time critical – particularly in the Scottish rainforest zone
- Woodland creation is on the increase across the sector but can be more of a challenge for community groups to deliver as they generally don't have access to areas of land large enough to meet grant criteria

the intersection of communities and their native woodlands

When asked what it was about native woodlands that makes the difference – ALL of the groups said diversity. Diversity of habitat offers diversity of experience, use and inspiration and can lead to a diverse, thriving, sustainable community.

Communities manage many different types of woodland – with native woodlands, there will always be the challenge to find the right balance between driving enough finance from the woodland to cover management and restoration costs and preserving and restoring the ancient woodlands for future generations. With emphasis on removing monocultural invasive species such as Sitka spruce there is less opportunity to optimise a ‘normal’ commercial return on timber.

Many community woodland groups purchase forest that is perhaps commercial monoculture and then establish mixed zones by creating areas of native / more natural / mixed species as well as perhaps choosing to continue with a more commercial crop or a continuous cover process.

Community groups, made up of individuals with personal motives are generally more altruistic in outlook than perhaps a private finance investor or company, and therefore not seeking a return on investment in terms of financial capital – they have an interest in terms of return on investment across environmental, social and economic.

Forestry grants generally allocate greater resource to woodland creation and less to sustainable woodland management. Recent changes to encourage more native tree planting means those with open land can plant new native woodlands and receive grants to do so and sell carbon credits to offset other activities. This potentially excludes communities as they seldom buy to plant new and generally buy to conserve, restore or preserve what is already there.

With more people interested in a financial return from either timber or funding to plant new woodland, land prices are increasing – this has potential implications on affordability for communities. The recent upturn of ‘green lairds’ may also be affecting this – their aspiration to plant and restore the countryside may be different from a community group seeking to diversify land ownership for the benefit of the community.

One aspect highlighted during the research was the importance of the native woodlands as sources for new trees – seed collection (often as community events and by volunteers, brings people together); the establishment of tree nurseries at Arkaig Community Forest and by a private individual at Knoydart – ensures correct provenance for the woodlands, provides new trees for woodland creation and restoration and creates, jobs and economic activity. Community tree nurseries are quite common at community woodlands or by crofters on woodland crofts – which have often, themselves been created by a woodland group. At Glenan Wood there are plans for the woodland to act as a seed bank which will be able to contribute to neighbouring woodlands and potentially for wider networks with private landowners such as Kilfinan Connect.

“I strongly believe that you get a much higher quality of management if the people who are doing the work live in the environment that they are managing.”

Grant Holroyd, Forester, Knoydart Forest Trust

conclusions

Undertaking this research has highlighted economic and social benefits that arise from the community ownership and management of four native woodlands on the west coast of Scotland. Throughout our research we can see that these are of course, intrinsically linked to environmental drivers and outcomes. There is definitely a symbiotic relationship between the people of these communities and the landscapes in which they live, work and play which can bring a full range of benefits, building community wealth, contributing in a positive way to combat the climate crisis and securing a sustainable future for all.



Across the case studies several themes are common. They make a real difference to their communities, contribute to improving demographics, provide social and economic opportunities and nurture and care for their natural heritage.

ECONOMIC

Partnerships and networking are absolutely key to these groups. This spreads risk, enables partners to use their strengths and skills to build a strong community of interest as well of geography. It can bring a diverse range of funding. The demographics of each area have similar issues with lack of access to housing for local people / people to move into the area for work, sparse and aging populations and what is probably an over reliance on tourism. Tourism is also an opportunity, but many tourism organisations are suffering lack of available staff due to housing and other associated issues including the seasonality of the sector.

Non timber forest products have been on the increase across community woodlands for some time and this builds confidence to try new pilots which may become business spin offs or generate income – tree nurseries are one example.

Many woodlands and other community groups have polytunnels for community growing (the one at Arkaig is now used for the tree nursery and their woodlands are all threatened by invasive (usually non-native) species and over grazing is common to all. They all recognise that deer management is a landscape scale issue and 3 of them are looking at or have developed business opportunities through this – both Knoydart and Arkaig work with partners to manage the deer with added economic benefit; Glenan are keen to look at opportunities in the nearby future. Knoydart Foundation has a community

gardening project), orchards (Glenan), willow harvesting (Arkaig) and foraging happens across them all.



SOCIAL

Community woodlands learn from and inspire each other – we can see this at Arkaig as they visited Knoydart Forest Trust (facilitated by CWA) and as a result are developing their ideas much faster than previous woodlands may have. Confidence has increased across the sector. Projects, conferences, training and enabling peer learning through CWA is a vital component in empowering community woodlands.

People work together to find creative solutions through their commitment, enthusiasm and skills and everyone has reasons to be involved – lifestyle, values, ecology, nature connection being a regular motivator. Tree planting is an extremely popular activity bringing a sense of community, a sense of caring for the environment and future generations – a real ‘feel good’ factor – improving mental health, a practical task connecting people to the land. This is reflected in people changing lifestyles – moving to Knoydart to live life more in tune with their values¹⁶; or visiting Knoydart and Scotland from highly urbanised area and observing that ‘people in Scotland feel more connected to the land – part of it’¹⁷.

The woodlands are managed primarily for their biodiversity and ecology – all social and economic benefits arise from this style of management. Three of the case study groups are focusing on removing non-native conifers and replacing with range of natives.

At Cormonachan – a neighbouring large estate has been actively managing the deer across their area and the difference can be seen in the natural regeneration in Cormonachan Woodlands. With regards to invasive species, much of the work is done by volunteers – bringing many social benefits. We can see this demonstrated at Cormonachan where some of the volunteers have been travelling from all over Scotland twice a year, for the last 20 years to remove Sitka spruce – developing a real sense of community and stewardship and being inspired by the difference they are making – the areas they have cleared have regenerated well over the time.

¹⁶ <https://youtu.be/lCkghJl8lNE>

¹⁷ <https://youtu.be/NoPFiFhRpo4>

Glenan has been inspired by the neighbouring community forest at Tighnabruaich) Kilfinan Community Forest Company) and the Forest Ranger and OWL leader both live in the forest crofts created by Kilfinan CFT.

VARIATIONS ACROSS THE CASE STUDIES

As previously mentioned, the newer groups are developing their ideas and projects over shorter timescales than those previously. We believe this is down to peer learning, the earlier groups blazing the trails plus support and guidance from CWA.

Motivations to care for their woodlands differed across the groups – Cormonachan was all about access for children and young people to use the woods to learn, have fun and make the most of their landscape which was until then, inaccessible. Knoydart Forest Trust was created to manage the woodlands on community land purchased by the Knoydart Foundation; Arkaig and Glenan were purchased to save and restore their fragile, globally important native woodlands.

Three of the groups are actively focussed on restoration of their rainforest. Knoydart are different with policy, semi natural woodlands around the village, becoming increasingly more natural and then native as they expand outwards and create new native woodlands across the peninsula. They also manage their plantation woods for milled timber and firewood – a different scale to the others.

All the groups work in partnership however, tenure is different for each. 2 of the groups own woodland – although Arkaig don't own all of the woodland they co-manage; 1 of the groups leases their land and the 4th manage the woodlands on land already owned by the community (as well as for neighbouring landowners).

Community woodland groups managing native woodlands may appear to be small in terms of locality but collectively they contribute significantly at a strategic level. They deliver all outcomes outlined in the National Performance Framework and meet all 5 pillars set out in the community wealth building model. Their skills in building social and natural capital, keeping wealth local can be contributed to their ability to:

- develop strong working relationships through ongoing engagement and consultation with their community
- work in partnership to meet wider community aims
- be flexible and actively seek ways to overcome the challenges they face
- understand their unique landscape.

One thing is for sure - there is no one solution fits all when it comes to working at a community scale which is why community involvement, networking and partnerships are key to landscape scale projects and visions.

recommendations

raising awareness

To increase awareness of the economic and social benefits of community managed native woodlands:

- CWA held a webinar to report back to their membership and others on 14th March and will investigate running an event for more strategic partners in due course
- Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest recognises the work of these community woodland groups and will add the information to their publicity and social media channels
- CWA and the groups will explore how best to use the materials within their own areas. Arkaig are currently seeking new staff and find the case study a great way to promote and bring people (staff, volunteers, new board members) up to speed – they will also be leaving hard copies in their local library and campsite. All of the groups will be adding the films / links to their social media
- CWA will investigate contacting local, independent cinemas to include the short films before the main feature

To build on the connections made from this project and facilitate further peer learning, CWA is applying to the Community Learning Exchange fund¹⁸ to organise a site visit to Arkaig Community Forest, with a potential further site visit to the 2 groups based on the Cowal peninsula.

ongoing and future development

The process of telling their story has engaged the 4 community woodland groups and there is merit / potential to explore further ways to do this eg. more groups with films; a podcast series and inviting some of the travel/ environmental vloggers to visit and learn more about community woodlands – the rainforest gets a lot of interest.

The groups face ongoing challenges – mostly around succession planning, governance, funding and woodland management. CWA is vital to the sector to continue to share their expertise and we strongly recommend that the organisation is strengthened in order to continue to build this. The pandemic and changes of the last few years has seen a bit of a hiatus in many groups and CWA and now is the time to begin to move forward again.

One of CWA's many strengths is leading on themed projects specific to their members woodland resource eg. developing Branching Out Highland. Individually, volunteer led groups don't have the capacity. There are several advantages to CWA leading these 'single interest' projects – CWA can employ project-based staff to develop and drive the project as a whole – facilitating appropriate training and seeing the whole picture – enabling and empowering the groups to undertake the work at a local area based level. Where groups are seeking more general guidance, CWA is embedded

¹⁸ <https://scottishcommunityalliance.org.uk/community-learning-exchange/>

within the wider support network for community ownership and can direct its members to the appropriate organisation.

With community woodlands able to act as local anchor organisations, and use their woodlands for inspiration, venues and events a wide range of economic and social benefits can be delivered. We are seeing a rise in themed grassroots sector membership networks – SCOTO¹⁹ (Scottish Community Tourism) for example and some community woodland groups are already members – with groups like Friend of Glenan Wood and others considering tourism opportunities, a tourism based project across community woods in general – not just native ones – is worth pursuing.

Enabling a better understanding of the community woodland sector

We recommend that CWA undertake a full survey of the sector to better understand the size, type and tenure of community woodlands across Scotland. Importantly this would also improve understanding of the type and scale of activities undertaken by community woodland groups across the country. For example, trading subsidiaries, contracts, work and infrastructure such as sculpture trails, MTB or other bike trails, hides, webcams, ancient settlements, other heritage eg. lime kilns and facilities or activities such as forest schools, outdoor nurseries etc. The work required to do this is significant as it is difficult to gather the information and would require dedicated resources to phone all 160+ CWA members.

FUTURE NATIVE WOODS PROJECT(S)

With this project only covering 4 organisations all based on the west coast of Scotland, we recommend that CWA undertake similar projects for different types of native woodlands in different geographical areas eg more east coast based or perhaps more urban policy woodlands

FUNDING

There is a conflict between the long-term nature of forestry management and the short-term nature of most funding available to communities. Overlay this with the complexities of often small remote communities distant from services in challenging economic times and it is amazing that so many regional and national strategic objectives are delivered so well by community woodland groups.

CWA works hard to give these organisations a platform and enable them to deliver their priorities for themselves. Our experience is that with support, time and crucially long-term funding especially of core costs, community woodland groups focussed on delivering locally for the benefit of their own communities contribute to national outcomes. Increased availability of long-term funding focussed on community woodlands would increase this delivery.

¹⁹ <https://www.scoto.co.uk>

A NOTE FROM US

Researching and writing this report has been a real joy. It has been an honour to witness the journey of these community woodland groups.

There are many expectations placed on communities and the pressure can be immense and yet the benefits from communities owning and managing their own land, forests, infrastructure and enterprises can make huge differences to the people living there.

The 4 groups studied during this research – although all part of Scotland’s fragile, temperate rainforest and all managing native woodlands - are all at very different stages of development and are all managed in different ways ensuring the research process and the results would be as diverse as the landscapes, flora and fauna within native woods themselves.

Both of us have previously worked for the Community Woodlands Association; Diane Campbell as Development Officer 2003-2010, then as a Board member 2013-2016 and Diane Oliver as Social Enterprise Development Officer 2010-2015. Between us we have over 60 years of experience in supporting, empowering, developing, running and managing community groups and organisations. This knowledge and prior working both within and outwith the sector has enabled us to apply a long term overview to some of our observations.

Diane Oliver and Diane Campbell

CWA Native Woods Project Officers

2023

Appendix 1

Strategic context

Much of the funding for community organisations comes through government initiatives and the funding that flows from them. It is important that we set the context of this report in the current strategic framework and be realistic that most community enterprises, including community woodland groups depend, at least initially on some form of outside assistance.

The climate crisis

We know with high confidence that climate change is happening today. Impacts from climate change are already being felt and will continue to increase in the future. Action to limit future global greenhouse gas emissions will help restrict future changes in the climate system. There is no clear threshold where climate change moves from safe to dangerous. We can expect some disruptions and irreversible losses of natural habitats and resources.²⁰

Climate Change Committee

Our governments have a legal duty to act and the Climate Change Act 2008²¹ is the basis for the UK's approach to tackling and responding to climate change. The Scottish Government recognises that environment and economy are intrinsically linked and claim that in direct response to the UN Paris Agreement²², Scotland's landmark Climate Change Act is one of the most ambitious legislative frameworks for emissions reduction in the world with Scotland's Climate Assembly set up as a result of a commitment in the 2019 Climate Change (Scotland) Act²³. Reflecting their increased ambition of the new targets set by this Act, they published their Climate Change Plan update in December 2020.²⁴

The Update Plan aspires to increase forest cover by 18,000ha/year, it doesn't specify what type of forest, focusses on peatland restoration and has no mention of community involvement, however, there is a focus on green jobs. The groups in the case study are within globally important temperate rainforest, some have peatland, some create new woodlands and are creating green jobs – albeit on a small scale but through grassroots determination and meeting the needs of their area – they complement some of the more large-scale aspirations.

Community wealth building

Community wealth building (CWB) is an internationally recognised model of economic development designed to tackle long standing systemic challenges facing local, regional and national economies by considering the ways in which wealth is generated, circulated and distributed. Through a defined five pillar model of deliberate and practical action, CWB seeks to direct and retain more wealth in

²⁰ <https://www.theccc.org.uk/what-is-climate-change/>

²¹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2008/27/contents>

²² <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>

²³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/15/contents/enacted>

²⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/securing-green-recovery-path-net-zero-update-climate-change-plan-20182032/>

communities by creating new fair work opportunities; helping local businesses and inclusive business models to expand; and placing more assets in the hands of local people and communities, ensuring that our collective wealth works better for people, place and planet.²⁵

‘The Scottish Government is committed to CWB as a key means of addressing the challenges posed by post-Covid recovery, the climate crisis, tackling child poverty and entrenched inequalities. Some individual local authorities have been trailblazers on CWB, with others in Scottish Government enabled pilots, developing Community Wealth Building action plans as part of their Economic recovery strategies. As part of the COVID Recovery Strategy: for a fairer future, the Scottish Government has committed to assisting all local authorities to develop tailored plans.’ *Implementing Community Wealth Building – A Guide*²⁶

CWB goes beyond local authorities and includes.

1. An explicit focus on increasing the role of local people and organisations in the ownership of assets and generation of wealth, through inclusive businesses models such as cooperatives and employee-owned enterprises.
2. An onus is placed on all local ‘anchor’ organisations – not only local authorities and economic development agencies – to collaborate and maximise actions which increase local investment and lock-in local wealth.
3. Coordination as part of an explicit CWB strategy (or ‘action plan’) which includes action across five pillars.
 - **Land and Property:** Growing the social, ecological, financial, and economic value that local communities gain from land assets and property.
 - **Spending:** Maximising community benefit through procurement and commissioning, developing good enterprises, fair work and shorter supply chain.
 - **Inclusive ownership:** Developing more local and social enterprises which generate community wealth, including social enterprises, employee-owned firms and co-ops
 - **Workforce:** Increasing fair work and developing local labour markets that support the wellbeing of communities
 - **Finance:** Ensuring that flows of investment and financial institutions work for local people communities and businesses.

Community woodland groups are often considered anchor organisations within their own communities. For example:

- Community woodlands frequently work with partners including environmental NGOs, neighbouring private landowners and are an important piece in the jigsaw of land ownership
- Much of the work by community woodland groups is publicly or grant funded and they are most often charitable organisations.

²⁵ <https://edas.org.uk/community-wealth-building-guide/>

²⁶ <https://edas.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Implementing-Community-Wealth-Building-A-Guide.pdf>

- Community woodland groups give local contractors work and create local jobs improving demographics and building their social capital.
- Sustainability and community wellbeing and resilience is a key focus for many community woodland groups. Often delivering projects for better health, family, and community cohesion, finding creative solutions to challenges and issues in their area through creating woodland crofts, woodlots, outdoor learning facilities and local housing. Many woodland groups are social enterprises, and some have trading subsidiaries.
- Community woodlands show that investment can remain local – ensuring a circular economy is a key focus for many woodland groups.

It is important to acknowledge that Community Wealth Building goes beyond direct investment into a community organisation – it's the added value, the how and why the money is invested of all partners across the wider community.

Community woodland groups have been delivering community wealth building for years.

Natural capital

Natural capital is a term that describes the habitats and ecosystems that provide social, environmental, and economic benefits to humans²⁷ ie. the stock of natural resources, including plants, soils, air, water and greenspace, which all combine to provide benefits to people. It is term used to attach a (complete life cycle) price tag to decision making assisting us to understand the full value - not just the economic benefit - for example the microclimates created by woodland - cooling urban environments; the carbon stored by trees – mitigating against climate change; the physical and mental health benefits of walking in a beautiful woodland – improving our health and taking pressure off health services etc.

Scottish Forestry's, Forest Sector Case Study – Applying the Natural Capital Protocol Forest Products Sector Guide²⁸ highlights the inter-dependence between the economy and wider social and environmental goals said:

“This is a fresh approach to working with businesses in the forestry sector by putting a value on a range of natural capital benefits from planting new woodlands. The survey provides important evidence about how woodland creation and nature supports a green recovery and will contribute towards our challenging climate change targets. The study will also be of interest to those in the forest products chain who will be able to see how well designed woodland planting is a win-win for the economy, local communities and nature”

Dr Pat Snowden, Scottish Forestry²⁹

The UK is one of only a few countries to have domestic carbon standards in place for woodland creation and peatland restoration: the Woodland Carbon Code (WCC)³⁰ and Peatland Code (PC)³¹. The

²⁷ <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/social-and-economic-benefits-nature/natural-capital>

²⁸ <https://forestry.gov.scot/publications/988-forest-sector-final-report>

²⁹ <https://forestry.gov.scot/news-releases/study-puts-a-value-on-natural-capital-of-new-woodlands>

³⁰ <https://woodlandcarboncode.org.uk>

³¹ <https://www.iucn-uk-peatlandprogramme.org/peatland-code/introduction-peatland-code>

WCC and PC adhere to the same core principles as global standards, including permanence and additionality. However, they are also tailored to the UK, based on research specific to UK woodlands and peatlands, and relate to domestic legislation such as the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS)³² to ensure each project is compliant with the relevant UK regulation.³³

Income from Carbon Credit sales only applies to newly planted woods and is therefore not suitable for most communities who protect and enhance existing native woodland. Where new planting is possible it must be on a large scale to qualify for forestry grants which are a requisite of regulation to sell carbon credits. i.e. planting must be over 5ha on bare land wholly owned by the community.

The purchase of carbon credits is not regulated to the same extent as selling. And communities are often concerned about investors wanting to vet potential investors carefully to ensure they are not simply buying carbon to 'let them off the hook;' to enable business as usual.

The Woodland Trust has established a Woodland Carbon scheme³⁴ which can in some cases select investors according to the needs of the sellers. It is also possible for communities to set up their own schemes, however this would be a major undertaking for individual groups. So far communities that own sufficient open land suitable for native woodland creation are working with the Woodland Trust or have not yet taken a decision on how to engage investors in their scheme.

CWA is in early stages of investigating a carbon credit scheme that works for our members.

relevant strategies and frameworks

Below are some of the key objectives from the main strategies related to the community forestry sector including:

- National Performance Framework
- Scotland's Land Use Strategy
- Environment Strategy for Scotland
- Scottish Forestry Strategy

Further strategies and plans are covered in the case study section where examples demonstrate that community woodland groups make a difference and contribute to the objectives and outcomes of a broader range of strategies including:

- Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation
- The Fairer Scotland Action Plan
- Public Health Strategy
- Mental Health Strategy
- Culture Strategy for Scotland

³² <https://forestry.gov.scot/publications/sustainable-forestry/uk-forestry-standard-ukfs/105-the-uk-forestry-standard>

³³ <https://www.forestcarbon.co.uk/knowledge-base/carbon-credits-and-offsetting>

³⁴ <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/partnerships/woodland-carbon-businesses/>

Scotland's National Performance Framework³⁵ aims to:

- create a more successful country
- give opportunities to all people living in Scotland
- increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland
- create sustainable and inclusive growth
- reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental and social progress

The framework sets out national outcomes and indicators to measure progress. The Framework is set against a backdrop of global Sustainable Development Goals³⁶ set by the United Nations³⁷.

Results from the interviews conducted as part of this research are referenced against the activities and benefits in the National Performance Framework measures. This demonstrates that there is a wide range of impacts and outputs from the groups as they contribute to delivering national outcomes.

Scotland's Land Use Strategy 2021-2026³⁸ envisions.

"A Scotland with a strong and dynamic relationship between its land and people, where all land contributes to a modern and successful country, and where rights and responsibilities in relation to land are fully recognised and fulfilled"

And outlines the following principles:

1. *The overall framework of land rights, responsibilities and public policies should promote, fulfil and respect relevant human rights in relation to land, contribute to public interest and wellbeing, and balance public and private interests. The framework should support sustainable economic development, protect and enhance the environment, help achieve social justice and build a fairer society*
2. *There should be a more diverse pattern of land ownership and tenure, with more opportunities for citizens to own, lease and have access to land*
3. *More local communities should have the opportunity to own, lease or use buildings and land which can contribute to their community's wellbeing and future development*
4. *The holders of land rights should exercise these rights in ways that take account of their responsibilities to meet high standards of land ownership, management and use. Acting as the stewards of Scotland's land resource for future generations they contribute to sustainable growth and a modern, successful country*

³⁵ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot>

³⁶ <https://globalgoals.scot>

³⁷ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

³⁸ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-third-land-use-strategy-2021-2026-getting-best-land/pages/4/>

5. *There should be improved transparency of information about the ownership, use and management of land, and this should be publicly available, clear and contain relevant detail*
6. *There should be greater collaboration and community engagement in decisions about land.*

The Environment Strategy for Scotland³⁹ vision and outcomes consistently refer to how improving the environment and biodiversity is inherently linked to improving the wellbeing and sustainability of people and communities.

The Scottish Forestry Strategy 2019-2029⁴⁰ restates the recognition and importance of the connection between a thriving environment and healthy communities.

“In 2070, Scotland will have more forests and woodlands, sustainably managed and better integrated with other land uses. These will provide a more resilient, adaptable resource, with greater natural capital value, that supports a strong economy, a thriving environment, and healthy and flourishing communities”

The Scottish Forestry Strategy contains the following objectives:

- *Increase the contribution of forests and woodlands to Scotland’s sustainable and inclusive economic growth*
- *Improve the resilience of Scotland’s forests and woodlands and increase their contribution to a healthy and high quality environment*

Scotland’s Forestry Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-2025⁴¹ has an action to develop a framework for increasing forestry’s contribution to the delivery of local community benefits (social and economic) and community wealth building, CWA will contribute to this priority.

“Engaging more people, communities and businesses in the creation, management and use of forests and woodlands” by ‘increasing the accessibility and use of forests and woodlands, and the diversity of users’ and ‘providing more opportunities for communities to influence decisions affecting their local forests and woodlands and benefit from them’ focusing on the following actions:

- *Increase the co-ordinated promotion of the opportunities for adults and children to engage in woodland-based activities that improve mental health and physical well-being as part of the nation’s covid recovery efforts.*

Develop and implement a framework for increasing forestry’s contribution to the delivery of local community benefits and community wealth building.

Scotland’s National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET), 2022⁴² vision is for a wellbeing economy which thrives across economic, social and environmental dimensions. It refers to the

³⁹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/environment-strategy-scotland-vision-outcomes/>

⁴⁰ <https://forestry.gov.scot/forestry-strategy>

⁴¹ <https://forestry.gov.scot/publications/forestry-strategy/1413-scotland-s-forestry-strategy-implementation-plan-2022-2025>

⁴² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-national-strategy-economic-transformation/>

importance of community wealth and natural capital and aims to encourage more, new entrepreneurial businesses.

The NSET aligns with the Scottish Government plan for a Fairer More Equal Society which includes Community Wealth Building (CWB). The economic benefits generated from community woodland directly connects to the 5 pillars of CWB, outlined in the introduction.

A recent Scottish Land Commission outlines a working definition for community benefits,

SLC discussion paper: Community benefits should be deliberate i.e.:

- delivered **to and with the geographically local community** that will be affected by, or can influence, the planned natural capital project.
- considered **early-on** in project development and integrated into natural capital projects
- rooted in **engagement** with the community and in an **understanding** of local needs and priorities.
- **agreed** with the local community – using **established and constituted community groups** where practicable – and aligned with local strategic and development plans, where available. Written agreements are recommended and seeking professional advice may be helpful.
- a **considered and deliberate** element of natural capital projects and in addition to the inherent public benefits, such as clean air and water.
- **proportionate to the scale** of the project and to the impact of the project on the local community.
- **clear and identifiable**, monitored and evaluated, with regular public reporting on progress.

The Fairer Scotland Action Plan, 2016⁴³ is a first government response to the Fairer Scotland conversation. It is based on five ambitions for 2030 and 50 selected actions over this parliamentary term. The plan will help build a better country - one with low levels of poverty and inequality, genuine equality of opportunity, stronger life chances, and support for all those who need it. This strategy links with the community wealth building pillars throughout.

The Scottish Government Public Health Strategy,⁴⁴ 2022-2025 recognises that health and wellbeing goes far beyond hospitals and states that they will increase their collaboration with local partners to improve the health of communities.

The Mental Health Strategy,⁴⁵ 2017-2027, states the that we face considerable challenge in improving people’s mental health with:

- only 1 in 3 people who would benefit from treatment for a mental illness currently receiving it

⁴³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.publichealthscotland.scot/our-organisation/a-scotland-where-everybody-thrives-public-health-scotland-s-strategic-plan-2022-to-2025/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/mental-health-strategy-2017-2027/pages/3/>

- people with lifelong mental illness likely to die 15-20 years prematurely because of physical ill health.

We know that the annual mental health benefits associated with visits to Scotland's woodlands are estimated to be £26m (at 2020 prices). The values are based on evidence of the reduced incidence of depression and anxiety as a result of regular visits to nature.⁴⁶

Why are there not more health and wellbeing activities run in and by community woodlands? The answer sadly is lack of resources and consistent funding which we believe is due to the fact that there is no one size fits all and that community run, and small local businesses are exactly that – small, busy and under the radar of large strategic bodies and funders.

There are many case studies and research papers demonstrating the health benefits of being outdoors and being in nature and we have begun to see this attempt to emerge into our day-to-day health care services. Social prescribing is commonly used in primary care settings and provides non-medical options for primary care staff to draw on to support their patients' health and wellbeing, including their mental health. It is primarily used for connecting people to non-medical sources of support or resources within their community. It can also be used by professionals working in other services and enhances the holistic approaches to addressing health, wellbeing, and mental health problems.⁴⁷ One aspect emerging from this is Green Health prescriptions where people are encouraged to go outside and benefit from green space. As part of this 'Natural Health Service'⁴⁸ approach, 4 Green Health Partnerships were piloted in 2018, one of which is in Highland – the Think Health Think Nature partnership⁴⁹ and are delivering training at Dunnet Forestry Trust⁵⁰ in March 2023.

Following the Procurement Reform Act in 2014, the Fair Work Procurement Guidance⁵¹ and the Public Health Scotland Strategy give emphasis to procuring from SME's and local sustainable businesses and organisations. Community social enterprises are often well placed to deliver health and social care outcome services and projects however, the constantly changing field of procurement and the impracticalities and challenges of enabling people to implement these policies and green gym or similar prescriptions on the ground ensures that this is not really delivered on a wide scale - perhaps this will change.

The peacefulness of woodlands is said to create a spiritual connection, a sense of tranquillity and release stress. CWA has a long history of successfully supporting and empowering community woodland groups to pilot, develop and deliver health and wellbeing activities in woodlands to read more about health in woods and people's personal experiences and Branching Out Highland and Argyll in particular.

"I've been an occupational therapist for 21 years. Branching Out has given us the best set of outcomes of any group work we've ever run"

Ella Ashcroft-Hill, specialist occupational therapist Argyll, NHS Highland

⁴⁶ Valuing the Mental Health Benefits of Woodlands; Saraev et al; Forest Research 2021

⁴⁷ <https://www.healthscotland.scot/publications/social-prescribing-resources>

⁴⁸ <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/contributing-healthier-scotland/our-natural-health-service>

⁴⁹ <https://www.thinkhealththinknature.scot/about-us/>

⁵⁰ <http://www.dunnetforest.org>

⁵¹ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/public-sector-procurement/fair-work-in-procurement/>

Kilfinan Community Forest – only 5 miles from Glenan Wood went on to develop and run programmes beyond the original Branching Out – called Moving On. The work at Kilfinan Community Forest, Stronafian Forest⁵² (Colintraive & Glendaruel Development Trust) and Bute Forest⁵³ (Bute Community Land Company) has inspired the Friends of Glenan Wood

Nature Scot writes that 30 min brisk walk 5 days a week reduces the risk of:

- Heart attack and stroke 20-30%,
- Diabetes 30-40%,
- Hip fractures 36-68%,
- Bowel cancer 30%,
- Breast cancer 20%,
- Depression/ dementia 30%⁵⁴

One of the main aims of all the groups in the study is to open up safe access to their woodlands. They have all created paths and trails, sculpture trails attract people, mountain bike trails allow other forms of transport.

A Culture Strategy for Scotland, 2020

Culture is integral to our ways of life, connecting people to place and helping them to understand and relate to environmental challenges. Culture and heritage projects are often local and place-based, presenting a unique opportunity to engage directly with communities across Scotland.

Culture improves places for individuals and communities. It plays a key role in maintaining good mental health and wellbeing and it has been shown to reduce levels of social isolation, strengthen social networks and increase self-confidence and resilience. It can support good health and wellbeing for all ages.

Place - community, landscape, language and geography - is important and reflects the creativity of the past and provides inspiration for cultural expression today⁵⁵

⁵² <http://stronafianforest.org.uk>

⁵³ <https://www.buteforest.org.uk>

⁵⁴ <https://www.nature.scot/doc/our-natural-health-service-leaflet-april-2020>

⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/culture-strategy-scotland/>