

**Report on Community Woodlands Association seminar:  
Leases, licences and charges in community woods  
February 2016**

**Gary Servant, Development Officer, Glengarry Community Woodlands  
([www.glengarry.org.uk](http://www.glengarry.org.uk))**

This one-day event focused on the various ways that community woodland groups and other community land owners can generate income through leases, licences and charges to others for using their woods. The programme covered long term leasing arrangements for woodland crofts and woodlots, as well as private and public sector approaches to charging for activities such as organised sporting events, car parking, sporting rights and filming.

### **Welcome and Introduction – Jon Hollingdale (CWA)**

Jon introduced the day and emphasised the fact that although 'forestry has always depended on selling lumps of wood' that it is really a much complex and wide-ranging business sector than this, and that forest ownership might involve many other income streams such as: providing public benefits (linked to associated government subsidies), selling 'carbon -offsets' achieved through tree planting and woodland management, non-timber forest products (NTFP's), shooting pheasants, renewable energy installations (especially hydro) and many other things - as we would find out through the rest of the day.

### **Laggan Forest Trust - Ian Hall**

Ian welcomed us to their new building and venue and outlined his role as Chair of Laggan Forest Trust ([www.lagganforest.com](http://www.lagganforest.com)), which started out as a partnership project between the community and the Forestry Commission back in the 1990's with a strong emphasis on creating and retaining local forestry based livelihoods in a remote rural area. In 2003 the Trust signed a 25 year management agreement with the Forestry Commission relating to the management of the whole of Strathmashie Forest, and giving the trading arm of the Trust (the Laggan Forest Trust Forestry Company Ltd) preferential status in relation to bidding for any forest management works within the forest. In 2004 FCS set up the Wolftrax mountain bike centre on the site (due to Capercaille issues at their preferred site in Glenmore in the Cairngorms!); car parking fees from the car park here are used to defray the costs of upkeep and maintenance of the mountain bike tracks. In 2007 the Trust also purchased 3 parcels of land (19 hectares in total) from FCS with funding from the Land Fund, and in 2014/15 the new Laggan Wolftrax centre was built - with £400k funding from the Cairngorms National Park.

On a separate note Ian made it clear that he would be very happy to provide any help or support he could to Glengarry Community Woodlands, he can be contacted by email at 'ian@glentruim.com', and by phone on 01540 673821. He also mentioned that his partner (Jo Cumming) was involved in a grant-giving trust called **The Pebble Trust** ([www.thepebbletrust.org](http://www.thepebbletrust.org)) which was keen to support community woodlands and similar initiatives.

### **Private sector experience – Dietrich Pannwitz (Sylvestrus Ltd)**

Dietrich presented his take on forestry in Scotland in the 21st century. He emphasised a few of the challenges (e.g. climate change/windthrow/disease, ageing workforce, extensive red tape, fluctuating timber demand/prices, erratic grant schemes and a skills shortage) before going on to talk about the opportunities to make money from forests. The first priority for a community, as

for any forest owner, is to **be clear about your objectives for the woodland** and to ensure that this is well documented. The next question to ask is - 'are you getting a benefit' for any given activity - if not why do it? Dietrich ran through a variety of potential income sources - timber, NTFPs, sale/lease, firewood, sawn timber, renewables, events, utility companies/wayleaves, cafes, sporting/grazing lets, outdoor activities etc. He further emphasised the need for communities to address the basics of any contract in relation to these activities - who? where and what? for how long? what payments/benefits? The benefits of regular/annual payments rather than one-off deals was noted, as was the benefit of engaging someone with more experience to represent your interests, as was the value of seeing what others are doing in similar fields - and trying to do better yourselves!

## **The Forestry Commission approach – Brian Duff (FES)**

Brian outlined the FCS approach to leases and charges, with a particular emphasis on recreation and events. He discussed the need to factor-in (and charge for) your time when dealing with locations for filming and events; he talked about the general willingness of tourists/visitors to pay for car-parking (especially if facilities are present); he discussed the fact that FCS can't really seem to make firewood pay for itself, and he suggested we should think of ways to 'monetise the volunteer resource'.

## **Discussion – ideas and proposals from participants**

We discussed the challenges and opportunities of **leasing out space for e.g. craft workshops** - there seemed to be a need for a balance between the need for a major upgrade of the building fabric to attract tenants and to comply with duties and responsibilities as a landlord, and the need to ensure that any such leases were affordable and sustainable. Lorna Schofield mentioned that the trading arm of the Knoydart Foundation ([www.knoydart-foundation.com](http://www.knoydart-foundation.com)) leased out a number of fairly basic older buildings/premises to arts and craft businesses in Knoydart - and we would be welcome to get in touch to discuss further.

There was further discussion about **firewood**, and how it could be made into a viable income stream. Again Knoydart provided an example of this in action (although it was noted that the firewood processing and drying shed required initial investment of around £70 000).

The topic of **green burials** was mentioned as another income stream - people are willing to pay up front for a 'lair' in a desirable woodland site, which can provide a means of financing the venture. Not without its share of planning issues though - as ongoing work at North West Mull Community Woodland Company can testify. For more info - look out for the next CWA seminar on this topic in March 2016 (<http://www.communitywoods.org/event-details.php?id=453> ).

Ian Leaver from the Isle of Eigg Heritage Trust ([www.isleofeigg.net/eigg\\_heritage\\_trust.html](http://www.isleofeigg.net/eigg_heritage_trust.html)) discussed their situation in some detail. As owners of the whole island (some 4000 ha, most of which is leased or under crofting tenure) since the mid 1990's, the trust has focused on supporting sustainable development of the whole place, providing opportunities for numerous individuals and businesses in a variety of different ways. The current focus is however on generating a sustainable income stream for the Trust itself from the land which it retains (some 300 ha - most of which is forested). One of the key short term aims is thus to establish **tourist accommodation** of their own - initially a 'glamping' enterprise consisting of 3 camping pods or wooden 'wigwams' which will be let out as camping/holiday accommodation. They estimate that the initial cost of establishing these is £25 000, and that this will be repayed in 3 years. It was noted that tourist accommodation of this kind can often include woodstoves or fireplaces/BBQ sites - and that these in turn can provide a ready on-site market for firewood.

## **Tour of the Wolfrax site**

We had very limited time to stretch our legs - only getting far enough to see the new Laggan Forest Trust shed and location of the firewood operation. Might be worth a trip back to look at this in more detail in future.

## **Woodlots and Woodland crofts – Jamie MacIntyre**

Jamie gave us a good overview of the potential rural development benefits of the establishment of woodland crofts (<http://www.woodlandcrofts.org>) and woodlots ([www.scottishwoodlotassociation.co.uk](http://www.scottishwoodlotassociation.co.uk)) on community-owned land. Both models are designed to facilitate individuals and families to access woodland in order to support their livelihoods and in turn to support rural communities. Each model is quite different (basically short term renewable leases for woodlots vs long term transferable crofting tenancies) and each is suitable for different circumstances and situations, but both enable landowners to make good use of undervalued and undermanaged woodlands in supporting rural livelihoods and rural communities.

## **SLF considerations and HIE support – Pam Noble (HIE)**

Pam outlined the support which HIE provides to rural communities, and the potential support available from the newly announced Scottish Land Fund (SLF 3). She also recommended the support available from 'Just Enterprise' ([www.justenterprise.org](http://www.justenterprise.org)) in relation to the establishment of trading subsidiaries and social enterprises. Pam also reminded us all to be aware of the 'standard security' terms which funders attach to their grants for capital items, and recommended that we discuss with our funders before we rent/lease out community assets to third parties.

## **Appendix I**

### **Comments and advice on managing small woodlands for high quality timber - David Griffiths, Craggach Wood (via Donnie Chisholm, Development Officer, Aigas Community Woodland)**

'I am very happy to help the Glengarry community in any way I can. I am keen to promote the idea of bringing small woods into profitable production as you know.

Scottish foresters are very dismissive of the idea of making small woods pay. I suspect that this is mainly because they have only dealt with the usual clear fell Sitka spruce scenario. In contrast French foresters are obliged to find ways of earning money for their client owners who on average own around 7/8 hectares. The French AFI network have about 100 study sites of this type of size on which they average an income of £150 per ha. per year for their clients. If you want to be a French forester this is what you must do as 3 million French people own 70% of French woodland mostly in small parcels. The AFI results are on land managed by single tree selection and growth of high value species and logs and fuel wood is sold on without processing.

As you know we reckon that our site of 40 ha. ( when fully developed in 3-4 decades ) will make one full time job equivalent. This will depend on growing high value species on a CCF system producing an annual harvest of about 200 tons of timber. About 100 tons of this will be sawlogs which will mill to produce about 50 cubic metres of sawn timber. Currently sawn and kilned birch sells for around £1000 per cube and oak, ash, sycamore a bit more. There will also be about 100 tons of firewood which when processed sells around here for between £100 and £150 a ton if delivered.

Clearly there is a substantial cost in machinery to cover which is hard to estimate. I reckon the basic kit required would be a 75hp. Tractor with forest guarding with a 5 ton winch and a 5/6 ton driven trailer and crane. The tractor would also power a firewood processor and be used with a trailer for deliveries. Processing sawlogs would require a mill ( eg. Woodmizer) and drying kiln.

All the above is predicated on the assumption that the site is fairly rich and will grow decent broadleaf timber or the high value conifers such as Douglas fir and western Red Cedar and that it is not too steep or wet. Sawn timber from these conifers will sell for about 75% of the broadleaf figures above.

Getting a system like this up and running will involve a lot of work and thought.

Where I would agree with Scottish Foresters is that it is not be economically viable to grow Sitka spruce on a small site. You cannot possibly compete with the big industrial forests who produce 10's of thousands of low value logs per year.

Hope this gives a (very) rough idea of my thinking.

I would be very happy to show the Glengarry folk around our place and expand on the above.

Hope things are progressing well at Aigas - JLK is coming over here soon to see our management system so it will be interesting to see how he responds.

Best wishes,

David.'

Email: [craggach@doctors.org.uk](mailto:craggach@doctors.org.uk)