

Lower Ardochy Forest – update

Around this time last year, we commissioned a renewable energy consultancy to look at the business case for a small hydro scheme on the Allt a' bhiora burn which runs through Ardochy Forest. The study concluded that the burn itself was suitable for such a scheme; there was an adequate and stable flow rate, and access to the site would have lent itself easily to the construction of a small hydro scheme. However, the recent removal of the 'feed in tariff' – the subsidy which has made so many small hydro schemes in Glengarry possible, means that a scheme on the Allt a' bhiora would not generate enough revenue to warrant the high capital costs. The study looked at a range of different approaches to selling the electricity, such as direct purchase agreements to local energy consumers, but unfortunately local energy demand is not high enough to make this work. The outcome of the study is a disappointment; it could have been a community-owned hydro scheme. The study concluded that had the feed in tariff remained in place the scheme would have been viable.

Woodland Crofts and Community Housing

The Community's request to transfer ownership of Lower Ardochy Forest from public ownership to community ownership is under assessment. Some last minute changes at the request of Forestry and Land Scotland have resulted in the request now covering a larger area than it had previously. The new powerline wayleave which traverses the site has been included, resulting in an additional 14ha of land, which will be managed as common access to grazing for crofters. Once established, the project will result in up to 6 new crofts, and 4 new affordable homes. There will be a mix of owner-occupied and rental properties, and all of these properties will be subject to an allocations policy, drawn up by the community to reflect the community's local housing priorities.



Lower Ardochy Forest: the project area outlined in blue will support new crofts and community housing

Eco-tourism cabins

The next stage in the eco-tourism cabin project is to raise the finance for the main and final capital construction phase. This phase will include the construction of 5 cabins and the new amenity building, (proposed for the lower area), and all associated landscaping. Its likely that financing this stage will require a mix of grants and loans, but we are assessing all options with a view to beginning some of the works in the summer/autumn of this year. One of the first steps will be to bring in a mobile sawmill, so that where ever possible we can use our own timber in the buildings. Doing this will help us to keep costs under control. As well as milling cladding and decking from our own trees, we will also cut other pieces of oak, Douglas fir, ash and birch that we have been saving to use in the internal fittings.



Oak logs that were saved from the old tree near the Invergarry Post Office will soon be milled and used for internal fixed furnishings in the amenity building and cabins



This Douglas fir log is leftover from our timber harvesting operation in 2018 when it didn't fit on the last lorry to leave the site! With a bit of work it'll be turned into furniture

Firewood

Sales of firewood had to briefly stop recently after we sold out of all dry and seasoned wood. In the 2020-21 winter we more than doubled our firewood sales, and even though we started the winter with all available shed space full to the top with logs, we still managed to sell it all. Planning is already underway to make sure we don't run out again next winter. The main solution is to build another shed, which is already under construction. The new shed will house all our machinery and create more space for log storage. In the meantime, if you are a firewood customer, please help us manage our stocks by filling your logshed in the summer – this means we can refill our sheds and begin winter with as much dry wood as possible.

As of 1st April 2021 our firewood prices have risen by approximately 8%. A trailer load of wood has risen from £82 to £90, and the price for 4 barrow bags has risen from £85 to £92. This is the first time ever in 3 years we've raised our prices. In a couple of years, new regulations on the sale of firewood are expected to be introduced in Scotland. The regulations were introduced in England in April 2021, and will shortly be introduced into Wales. The aim is to reduce air pollution caused by burning wet firewood. There will be an obligation placed on firewood traders to certify that wood is below a certain moisture content. You can find out more about the regulations here:

<https://deframedia.blog.gov.uk/2020/02/21/government-takes-bold-action-to-cut-pollution-from-household-burning/>

We will have oak logs to sell later this year, get in touch if you are interested!

Upcoming events

With the continuing uncertainty around coronavirus, it is unlikely there will be any events in the community woodland until the autumn.

Sheep-dog training in the community field

The field opposite the community woodland was sold to Glengarry Community Woodlands in September 2020. Because we already have our hands full with existing projects for the community, we have rented out the field to local sheepdog trainer Mike MacNally. Mike keeps 10 Hebridean sheep in the field, which he uses to train sheepdogs.



Mike working with Ash in the April sunshine

Until recently he organised the Invergarry Sheepdog Trials, and he also works as a contract shepherd, gathering sheep on hill farms throughout the Highlands. Mike said: *"I have been training my own collies, both for work and sheepdog trials, for the best part of thirty years. The challenge of starting with a totally green dog, and seeing it develop into a useful working animal is something from which I take a great deal of satisfaction. There is a demand for training other peoples' dogs, and giving tuition to first time sheepdog handlers, and this is what I am hoping to tap into"*.

For any enquiries about Mike's work contact: mamacnally@talk21.com or 07740 983 270

Glengarry Community Woodlands is keen to find a new name for the field, which was sold to us by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) as 'Drynachan 2'. The name Drynachan is usually associated with the other end of the village near Loch Oich, and it is not clear why FLS gave the field the name 'Drynachan 2'. It might be related to the large FLS forest above Invergarry which is called Drynachan. We're keen to give the field a local Gaelic name, if anyone has any ideas of what it was referred to in the past - or suggestions for a new name - please get in touch.