



## Background

After the Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act 1991 was passed there was an upsurge in planting of new croft woodlands. By 2007 approximately 11,000ha of new forests and woodlands had been planted on croft land and common grazings. However, over the following 7 years, coinciding with the closure of the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme and the introduction of the Scottish Rural Development Programme, only 600ha was planted.

From 2011 to 2013, Woodland Trust Scotland and Forestry Commission Scotland (now Scottish Forestry & Forestry and Land Scotland) delivered a pilot croft woodlands project in the Western Isles to gain a better understanding of the interest in croft woodlands and the need for professional advice and assistance. Findings from the Western Isles pilot project highlighted the lack of accessible information on croft woodland planting, with an absence of communication networks, and suggested that many crofters have little opportunity to learn about the benefits croft woodlands. The pilot project generated considerable interest and demonstrated a clear need for greater knowledge and promotion of the benefits of woodland in the crofting landscape.

In 2014 Forestry Commission Scotland commissioned a follow-up study to identify and better understand the barriers to crofter forestry. The report, A Study of Barriers and Possible Solutions to Encouraging New Crofter Forestry Projects (Rural Analysis Associates, 2014), identified the following as key barriers to crofter forestry:

- **Cultural** – woodland creation and management is still an alien concept to many crofters - traditionally forestry is the landlord's asset.
- **Capability & Confidence** – a general lack of understanding about the benefits of trees, and a lack of knowledge and skills in woodland establishment and management.
- **Finance** – as noted in the report 'this is potentially a show stopper'. Crofters and common grazings typically do not have significant financial resources, and are generally risk averse.

These barriers were partially overcome, or more accurately circumnavigated, during the first flush of plantings after the 1991 Act by the involvement of forest management companies who took the financial and technical burden off crofters and delivered mostly large-scale schemes.

When the new SRDP grants were introduced in 2007, forest management companies moved away from crofter schemes. Grants could no longer be assigned directly to agents, and changes in support for marginal sites meant that many of the large common grazings were no longer financially attractive.



## Croft Woodland Project

In response to the decline in planting and the findings of the Barriers Report, the Croft Woodlands Project was established in 2015 to run for a 5 year period with a budget of £1.1m. The Project is a partnership lead by the Woodland Trust that aims to engage crofters and smallholders in the creation and management of woodlands on their holdings, thus delivering multiple benefits in terms of shelter, agricultural diversification, forest products, landscape and the environment.

Initially the partnership included Scottish Crofting Federation, Woodland Trust Scotland, Scottish Forestry (formerly Forestry Commission Scotland), Cogiach & Assynt Living Landscapes (CALL), Point & Sandwick Trust and the Woodland Croft Partnership. Since its launch 2015, several other organisations have joined the partnership, including Shetland Amenity Trust and Orkney Woodlands Project, both of which help to deliver the project in their respective islands; the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and the Argyll Small Woodlands Co-op.

The Woodland Trust Scotland employs a project manager and 3 regional covering the Highlands and Northern Isles, the Western Isles and Argyll & Lochaber respectively. The project manager also carries a case load within Highland.

The Project offers free support to crofters, common grazings committees and smallholders within the crofting counties. Advisers carry out site assessments, offer technical advice and assist with access to funding. Advice is mainly focussed on new woodland planting but also includes management of existing woodland.

Where a site has clear potential to succeed as an application to the Scottish Government Forestry Grant Scheme, the Croft Woodlands Project will engage an independent forestry agent to develop a funding proposal on behalf of the crofter. This is a part-funded service; initially CWP paid 90% of the agent's fees, and the crofter/grazings committee paid 10%. From 2019, the respective contributions were 80% and 20%. In the Western Isles, due to additional support from Point and Sandwick Trust, the full costs of agent's fees have been covered.

Small sites, or sites which are suitable for woodland creation but for which the FGS is inappropriate, are offered assistance through the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods scheme. MOREwoods offers trees, tubes and stakes at reduced costs to the crofter but does not assist with fencing or site preparation costs. MOREwoods can also support planting of hedgerows. The CWP supports MOREwoods schemes from as few as 300 trees up to about 3ha (funding for 3ha and above is generally more cost effective through FGS).

Advice and assistance with accessing CAGS grants for shelterbelt planting is also provided.

The Barriers Report highlighted access to finance as one of the key issues for the delivery of forestry projects on crofts (FGS grants are paid in arrears once works are completed). In order to ease cashflow problems, a Croft Woodland Loan Fund has been established by the CWP. The scheme is administered by HSCHT and offers interest free bridging loans of up to £6000 (from an available £30,000) to pay for the establishment costs of FGS schemes. The loans are repaid from the first FGS claim.



As well as assistance with the delivery of new planting and woodland management, a programme of training events and knowledge transfer has been delivered as part of the Project. This included the **first** Croft Woodland Conference held in Boat of Garten in May 2019, in partnership with the Scottish Forestry. The conference, held over two days combined a series of talks and workshops on a variety of topics from agroforestry to mycorrhizal fungi and woodland crofts to croft diversification with field visits to look at a variety of crofting and woodland enterprises. The event was fully booked with 180 delegates, and included the launch of the [Highlands & Islands Woodland Handbook](#) by Bernard Planterose, commissioned and published by the Croft Woodland Project.

### Hedgerow Jelly Project

As part of Scotland's Natural Larder project, the Croft Woodland Project, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Crofting Federation and Pam Rodway (formerly of Crofting Connections) worked in partnership to deliver the Hedgerow Jelly Project. Schools and community groups in the crofting counties who wish to participate receive a hedge pack, sufficient to create 8 metres of mixed hedge along with planting instructions; a teaching resources pack, and; posters detailing the recipe for Hedgerow Jelly.

To date 127 hedgerow jelly packs have been distributed and planted throughout the crofting counties.

### School and Community Tree Packs

In 2019 free tree packs specially tailored to local conditions were piloted in the Western isles. Thirteen have been distributed to date and it is planned to expand this programme in the next phase of the project.

### Other outcomes:

The close working partnership between Scottish Forestry and Croft Woodland Project has resulted in a number of positive outcomes for small woodlands on crofts and smallholdings throughout the crofting counties:

- Croft woodland operational plan;
- Successful use of FGS co-operation grants;
- Extension of the Western and Northern Isles planting grant to suitable sites in all the crofting counties;
- Increased successful planting of marginal/challenging areas;
- Recognition of hazel as a 'tree'/ Atlantic hazel as a woodland type for grant aid in the west coast.

*'The [Croft Woodland] Project is the most effective mechanism in Scotland for bringing forward small woodland creation applications and I think it is the most important partnership project that we are involved in in the H&I'.* John Risby, SF Conservator H&I



## Project Outputs Phase 1 (at May 2020)

*\*Due to COVID-19, reporting for May is not complete for Western Isles and part of Highland & Northern Isles.*

Total FGS schemes to date (all areas)	No. of schemes	Hectares
Planted	52	444
FGS contract but not yet planted	28	107
FGS application in progress	18	92
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>642.78</b>

Total FGS schemes by region	No. of schemes	Hectares	Average ha
Highlands & Northern Isles	63	520	8
Argyll & Lochaber	9	86	10
Western Isles	26	36	1

MOREwoods to date	No. of schemes	Hectares
Planted	186	71
Approved but not yet planted	32	9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>80.64</b>

Total MOREwoods schemes by region	No. of schemes	Hectares	Average ha
Highlands & Northern Isles	94	38	0.40
Argyll & Lochaber	36	26	0.72
Western Isles	88	17	0.19

MOREhedges to date	No. of schemes	km
Planted	30	8
Approved but not yet planted	8	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>10</b>



Woodland Management	No. of schemes	Hectares
Advice given	82	1007
FGS WIG/SMF	26	244

Total enquiries	1136
total site visits	829
conversion site visits to FGS/MW schemes	41%

Training	
Total courses delivered	30
Total attendees	678