



Laggan Forest Trust Highlands, Scotland

A pioneering woodland group combining partnership management of a 1400 ha woodland with development of social enterprise on 18 ha in their own ownership

This case study is one of a set written as part of a Forest Research project. Some case studies are written by the community group, others by researchers who visited and interviewed group members, but they have all been validated and endorsed by the community groups.

Forest Research developed a standard method for describing the case studies, outlined in Lawrence and Ambrose-Oji, 2013 "A framework for sharing experiences of community woodland groups" Forestry Commission Research Note 15 (available from www.forestry.gov.uk/publications).

The case study comprises three parts:

1. The **Group Profile** provides essential information about the form and function of the community woodland group. Profiles were prepared following the methodology
2. The **Change Narrative** which documents key moments in the evolution of the community woodland group with a particular focus on the evolution of engagement and empowerment
3. The **Engagement and Impacts Timeline** documents milestones in the development of the community woodland group, its woodland and any assumed or evidenced impacts.

The case studies collectively provide a resource which documents the diversity and evolution of community woodland groups across Scotland, Wales and England. The method ensures that the case studies are consistent and can be compared with each other. We welcome further case studies to add to this growing resource.

For further information, and for the detailed case study method, please contact:

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1. Group profile

Woodland: Laggan Forest Trust
Map ref: NN 583 915
Webpage: <http://www.lagganforest.com>
Date of profile: June 2014
Resources: Website Laggan Forest Trust, LFT group feedback.
Lawrence, A. (2009). *Community experiences of the National Forest Land Scheme*. Forest Research, Farnham, Surrey.
Lawrence, A., & Molteno, S. (2012). *Community forest governance: A rapid evidence review*. Forest Research, Farnham, Surrey.
Solution Management Limited (2013). *Review and Evaluation of Laggan Forest Trust*. Steve Westbrook, Nairn.

1. Institutional context	
1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)	<p>Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) owns 1329 ha of woodland in the Strathmashie Forest. In 2004 a 25 year Management Agreement was signed between FCS and Laggan Forest Trust (LFT), in order that this woodland would be managed in partnership with LFT.</p> <p>In 2007 Laggan Forest Trust (LFT) purchased 18.1 ha of the woodland from FCS in three parcels: one a bare parcel suitable for building on and two wooded areas (Gorsteane and Blackwood).</p> <p>Classification of tenure: Ownership, Formal agreement (public)</p>
1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)	<p>The Forestry Commission has a car park at Wolftrax, and LFT has a car park at Gorsteane, but otherwise there is no access for motorised vehicles.</p> <p>Mountain bikers and walkers are welcome to access the Strathmashie Forest, including LFTs two areas of woodland. However, access to the Blackwood woodland is currently not particularly easy, and there are no</p>

	<p>established footpaths.</p> <p>Forestry Commission Scotland has mountain biking trails at Wolftrax, and there are also established paths for walking. Semi-permanent orienteering courses, set up by LFT within the Forestry Commission land are a recent addition. These recreational facilities are used by both local residents and visitors, and the importance given to recreation is reflected in the management of the whole of Strathmashie Forest.</p> <p>Responsible public access (by foot, bicycle, horse or canoe) is guaranteed by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003.</p>
<p>1.3 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)</p>	<p>As part of the public forest estate the publicly owned land is subject to Forestry Commission operational restrictions and public access rights, including the preparation of a Forest Design Plan. Management of the woodland conforms to the UK Forestry Standard.</p> <p>The management of the LFT woodland is subject to the normal legal constraints and obligations.</p>
<p>2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise</p>	
<p>2.1 Group members, representation and decision making</p>	<p>LFT represents the people of Laggan, a dispersed population of around 220 people. All residents within the specified postcode areas are eligible to become members of LFT, while people living outside the area can become associate members. In 2009 the Trust had 88 members, and this had risen to 133 by 2013 (i.e. around 75% the adult population are members of LFT).</p> <p>Decisions are normally made by LFT's Board of Trustees. The members of LFT elect a maximum of 12 Trustees at the AGM (the majority of whom are required to be local Laggan residents). The Board is responsible for deciding on the subscription fee for membership, but currently no subscription is payable.</p> <p>At times the entire Laggan community can become involved in decision making, such as in 2003, when the community was balloted about the purchase of the parcels of woodland.</p>

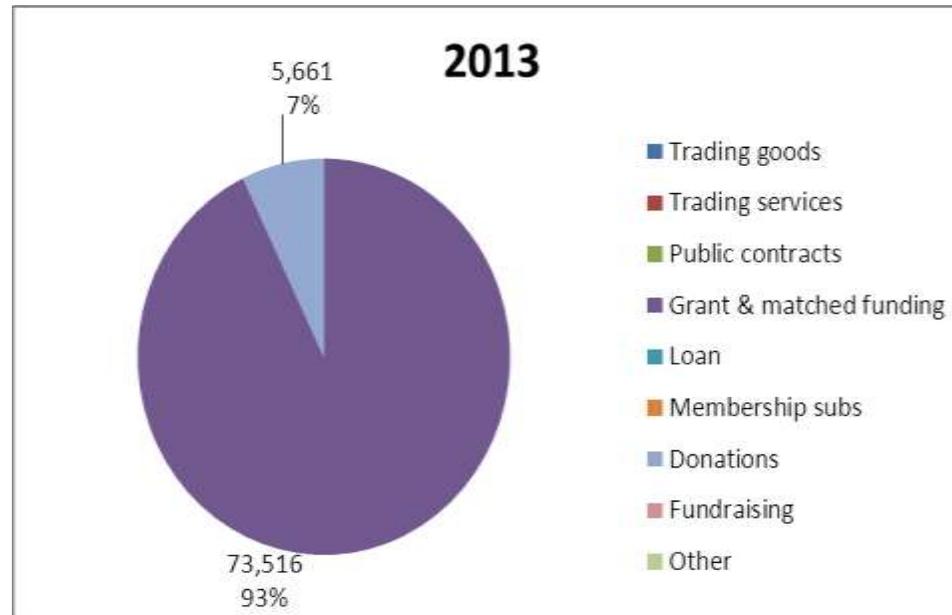
	<p>LFT has a trading arm, the Laggan Forest Trust Forestry Company Limited, which has directors appointed by the LFT board, who are responsible for running the company.</p>
<p>2.2 Communication and learning processes</p>	<p>LFT communicates electronically with the public on a regular basis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The website is updated regularly, has a blog and e-news is emailed to subscribers. Minutes of the LFT Board meetings are available on the website. • LFT also has a Facebook page and Twitter • LFT news is emailed to Laggan residents using the Residents email list <p>LFT is also involved in more traditional forms of communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LFT is represented on the Laggan Community Association • The LFT Board hold monthly Open Forums where members of the community can meet the LFT Board and raise issues. • LFT puts a regular update article in the quarterly local magazine, the Splash. • An LFT newsletter was published and distributed from 2011 to 2013 but since the material is on the web and in the Splash magazine, this is no longer deemed to be cost effective. <p>As regards less regular activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drop-in days in the Village hall have been held to gather views about the future of LFT, the woodland and the forest centre. • The community has been consulted on a number of occasions, including the ballot on buying the woodland in 2003 and a Review and Evaluation of LFT in 2013. <p>The learning and evolution of LFT has also been informed by a number of studies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feasibility study – on the feasibility of purchase and development: Purchase and Development of Sites in Strathmashie Forest, Brian Burns Associates et al, December 2005 • Options appraisal – assessment of the options for delivering the required outcomes from development of the sites purchased: Laggan Forest Initiative Options Appraisal, Amanda Calvert, February 2009 • Laggan Wolftrax Evaluation, Hall Aitken, January 2012 (commissioned by FCS)

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Laggan Forest Trust Business Plan for: Laggan Forest Centre, Robin Jackson, September 2012 • The Laggan Forest Trust Forest Centre Business Plan for: 2013-2018, Robin Jackson, July 2013 • Review and Evaluation of Laggan Forest Trust, Solution Management Limited, July 2013
<p>2.3 Structure and legal status</p>	<p>Laggan Forest Trust is constituted as a company limited by guarantee (SC189325). This trust was formed from the Laggan Forest Initiative and was created to allow for signing a legally binding agreement. The Forest Trust has charitable status (SC029029).</p> <p>The trading arm of LFT, Laggan Forest Trust Forestry Company (LFTFC), is a limited liability company (SC189326), wholly owned by LFT. It has a separate Board consisting of two or more Directors appointed by LFT and LFT is its sole shareholder.</p> <p>LFT and LFTFC each have separate bank accounts, and their books and accounts are kept separately. In the event of running a surplus, LFTFC donates funds to LFT.</p> <p>The objectives of LFT are to safeguard local community interests and provide local employment, to promote restoration of native woodland and to promote use of the woodland for sporting, recreational and educational activities.</p> <p>In the past LFTFC has been involved in forestry work and it is anticipated that it will take this role again in the future. Over recent years LFTFC focused on managing and delivering a wood fuel project (2012-13), on planning the building of a Forest Centre (built during late 2014 and early 2015), and on running a bike hire and café for mountain bikers and other visitors to the forest (summer 2014). LFTFC has responsibility for running the Forest Centre and for developing other business activities.</p> <p>Classification of legal form: Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee (+Trading Subsidiary)</p>
<p>2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities</p>	<p>LFT is bound by the normal regulatory responsibilities imposed by Company Law and Charity Law.</p>

<p>affecting the group/ enterprise</p>	
<p>2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</p>	<p>The objectives of managing the woodland are set out in LFTs Memorandum and Articles as being to: Conserve, regenerate and promote the restoration of native and other woodlands and to maintain, improve and extend paths within and linking such woodlands in the geographical region of Laggan as an important part of Scotland's natural environment for the benefit of the public.</p> <p>The Strathmashie Forest Management Agreement, which came into effect on 1st April 2004 and is binding on both parties for a period of 25 years, states that the Forestry Commission and LFT will together manage the 1332 hectares of the Strathmashie Forest "with the aim of producing the economic, social and environmental benefits which sustainable forestry can provide for all the inhabitants of the community of Laggan".</p> <p>The Agreement further states that the parties will have a jointly prepared five year management plan, which will be reviewed and revised annually, though this has not always been done consistently.</p> <p>The main rationale for partnership management of the forest was, and remains, to regenerate the Laggan community socially and economically.</p> <p>LFT has its own management plan for the areas of woodland it owns, which was developed in 2010, with the assistance of Scottish Woodlands. In 2014 this was due to be revisited.</p> <p>Overall aim of plan: Public access and recreation, productive woodland and employment</p>
<p>2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan</p>	<p>Who is employed or who does the implementation of the management plan (e.g., felling, silviculture)? Is it the CWG or contractors? How is this funded?</p> <p>Since 2004, when FCS built the mountain biking trails in the Strathmashie Forest, at Wolftrax, LFT's focus moved somewhat away from forestry work. However, a felling licence was obtained with the assistance of Scottish</p>

	<p>Woodlands, and an area of LFT’s own woodland was felled by Scottish Woodlands, partially using a local contractor, in 2010. LFT does not currently employ any forestry workers.</p> <p>The number of staff employed by LFT and LFTFC in other roles has fluctuated over recent years. In 2013 the team comprised seven people, including a Development Manager, an Operations Manager, and a Project Officer, (funded by grants from LEADER, CPNA and the Robertson Trust), two woodfuel workers (funded by the Scottish government’s Enterprise Growth Scheme), a Community Recreation Assistant (funded through the Community Jobs Scheme), and a post funded by the Natural Communities Programme from The Conservation Volunteers (TCV). The funding for these posts ended during 2013 and early in 2014.</p> <p>None of these posts were directly involved with implementation of the woodland management plan, rather focusing on setting up a woodfuel business (to trade wood from LFT’s own woodland), and running activities in the forest, including nature study, music and theatre.</p> <p>In 2014 LFT used residual funds and support from Leader to appoint a Support officer for ten months, and the Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS) provided funding for a Business Development Officer to be employed for 2 years, as part of the Scottish Government’s Strengthening Communities Programme.</p>
<p>2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability</p>	<p>Over recent years LFT has mainly relied on grants to fund its activities (>90% in the past 3 years), for development of the Forest Centre and other projects. The small amount of remaining income has been received from fund raising (through events organised by LFT), from LFTFCs woodfuel business and from donations.</p> <p>The pie chart below provides a breakdown of LFT’s income for 2013 (it does not include LFTFC’s income):</p>



2.8 Benefit distribution rules	There are no tangible benefits to membership of LFT. Any surplus income from LFTFC is donated to LFT, and LFT’s income is used to finance its projects.
3. External linkages	
3.1 Partnerships and agreements	Following a 5-year partnership agreement, signed in 1998, in 2004 the LFT and FCS signed a 25 year partnership agreement for management of the Strathmashie forest. LFT also works in partnership with FCS around running the Wolftrax mountain bike centre.

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	<p>When the original partnership agreement was agreed with FCS, Laggan Forest Trust was something of a pioneer of the concept of community woodlands, and became a well-known and much visited case study, and even the focus of international networking and learning approaches. Forest Research has reported on Laggan as a case study in its review of Community Partnerships on the national forest estate in Scotland and has evaluated the impact of the NFLS on the community process.</p> <p>After this innovative beginning, however, LFT had some difficulty maintaining momentum, and has lost its place as a pacesetter within the community woodlands community, and has somewhat lost its way, in terms of generating employment for Laggan residents. The group hopes that reinvigorating its partnership with the Forestry Commission, and the work of the new Business Development Officer, will enable LFT/LFTFC to refocus on these objectives.</p>
3.2 Associations	LFT is a member of the Community Woodlands Association (CWA) and Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS).
4. Resources	
4.1 Forest/ woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Strathmashie Forest covers 1,401 hectares comprising three very different woodlands in the Central Highlands (between Grampian and Monadhliath Mountains), surrounding the A86 connecting Spean Bridge with Newtonmore, the majority of which is owned by the Forestry Commission. • There is a renowned mountain biking centre (Wolftrax) within the woodland which belongs to the Forestry Commission, and this is the main reason for people to visit the woodland. There is also a good internal path network and a leaflet describing local walks has been produced by the Cairngorm National Park Authority. • Sixty-five percent of the forest is planted with Scots pine (<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>) and Sitka spruce (<i>Picea sitchensis</i>). About 25 per cent can be classified as open space and the remaining 10 percent are broadleaf species

- The stands were planted between 1955 and 1964 after the forest was felled during the Second World War, and some felling and replanting has taken place since then, notably in autumn 2014.

LFTs own woodland consists of:

Achduchil – 0.8 hectares of largely bare land adjacent to the Wolftrax car park, the location of the new Forest Centre. This parcel also includes a small burn, which circles the building site, and the area between the Forest Centre site and the road, which may be suitable for small scale amenity development, a play park, pond and paths.

Blackwood – 13 hectares of woodland and bare land across the A86 from Wolftrax. The site includes an old quarry, rough ground, a mature bog and stands of trees of varying species quality. The site is bordered by the A86 on one side, a track on another, and the small River Mashie on a third. There are no internal paths.

When purchased, this woodland was considered to have potential for development as a tree nursery, for community composting, willow coppicing and/or growing organic vegetables (with poly-tunnels). Part of this site was felled in 2010, and is due for replanting in 2015. Another area is in check, Sitka Spruce having been planted on an entirely unsuitable boggy area. This woodland also includes a pleasant area of mature Scots Pine, and offers some potential for the development of an interpretation trail, passing through different habitats (native woodland, cash-crop plantation, bog), for both recreational and educational purposes. It also provides the opportunity for restocking with native species, in line with LFT's objectives.

Gorstean – 4.3 hectares of woodland located adjacent to the A86, two miles from Wolftrax. The site has a car park, which provides parking for walkers, and is connected to Wolftrax by a low level cycle path. Reportedly, this woodland should have been felled some years ago and windblow is currently a significant problem. When purchased this site was considered suitable for small business ventures such as a forest burial site and pet cemetery, however there are no plans to take these enterprises forward.

A Baseline Ecological Survey of the whole area was undertaken in 1999, which found that, although the Scots

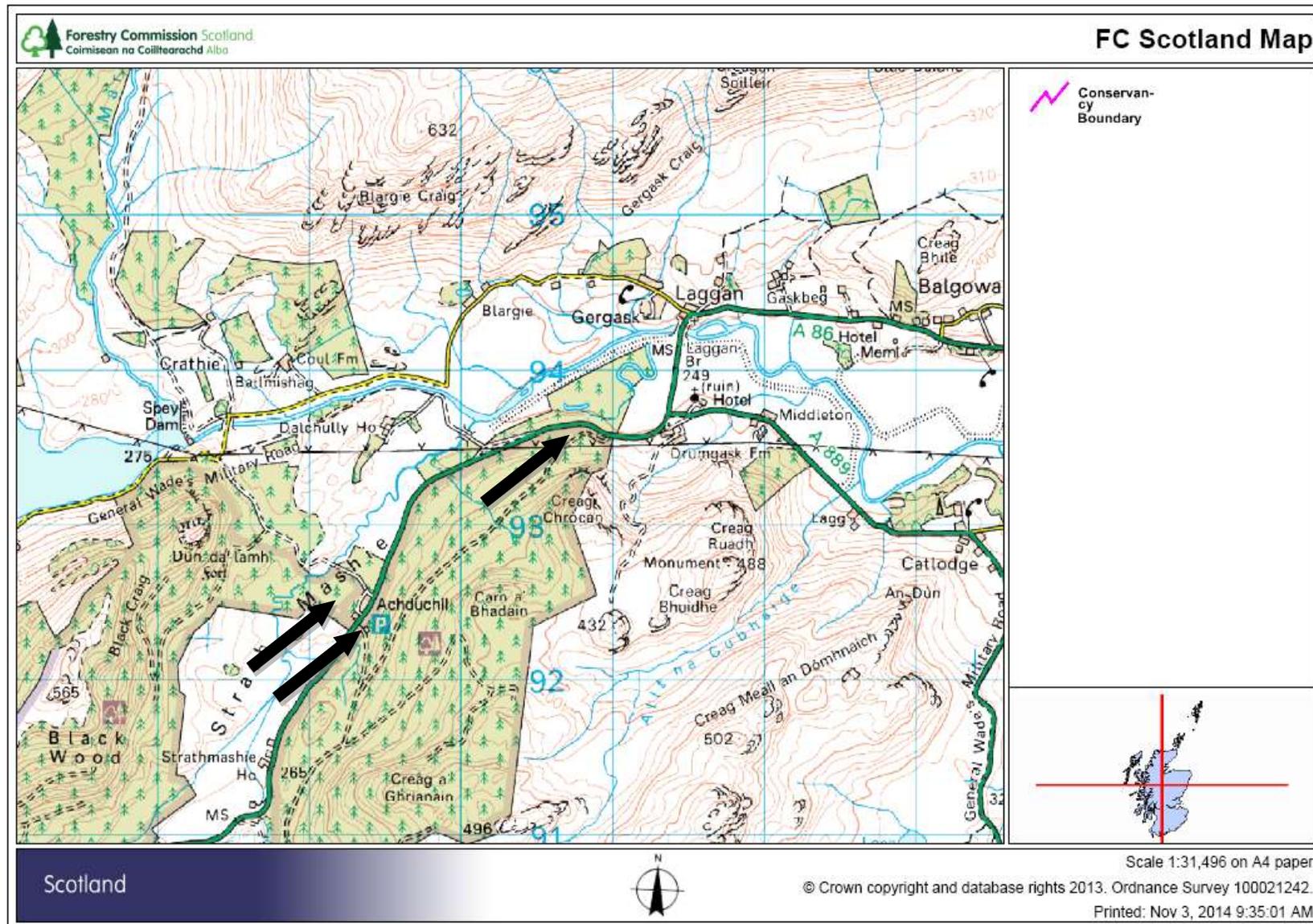
	<p>Pine woodland in the area are largely of planted origin “at least some of the distinctive fauna associated with this habitat, such as black grouse and crested tit, have been found to occur here” (Strathmashie Forest Baseline Ecological Survey, James Gordon, 1999 p.12).</p> <p>Classification of woodland type: Mixed mainly conifer</p>
<p>4.2 Woodland and group funding sources</p>	<p>The Scottish Land Fund provided funding for the LFT to purchase three parcels of land in 2007. The total land cost was £75,000.</p> <p>Since the organisation was established, LFT has obtained funding from a variety of sources, including: the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund; Highlands and Islands Enterprise; Highlands and Islands Enterprise’s Community Land Unit; the European LEADER II Programme; Moray, Badenoch and Strathspey Enterprise; Rural Challenge Fund; Scottish Natural Heritage; Millennium Forest for Scotland Trust; The Highland Council; World Wildlife Fund; Cairngorms LEADER programme; Cairngorms National Park Authority; Forestry Commission Scotland; the Robertson Trust; Awards for All, the Bank of Scotland and others. These funds mainly covered the costs associated with employment, events, appraisals and feasibility studies.</p> <p>In 2012 LFT was awarded £142,000 through a grant from the Scottish Government’s Enterprise Growth Fund to support the establishment of the woodfuel business. Initially it was also planned to set up a campsite, and trail-building company, but these projects did not go ahead; the Cairngorm National Park Authority rejected the option of a campsite.</p> <p>£425,000 has been granted by the Cairngorm National Park for the construction of the new Forest Centre. This will provide bike hire, a café, a learning space and showers and toilets, as well as a permanent base for LFT.</p>
<p>4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital</p>	<p>LFT is run by a voluntary board of trustees who come from a range of backgrounds and have a range of knowledge and skills. The trustees on the board change at regular intervals, with resulting changes in the knowledge and skills available to the organisation.</p>

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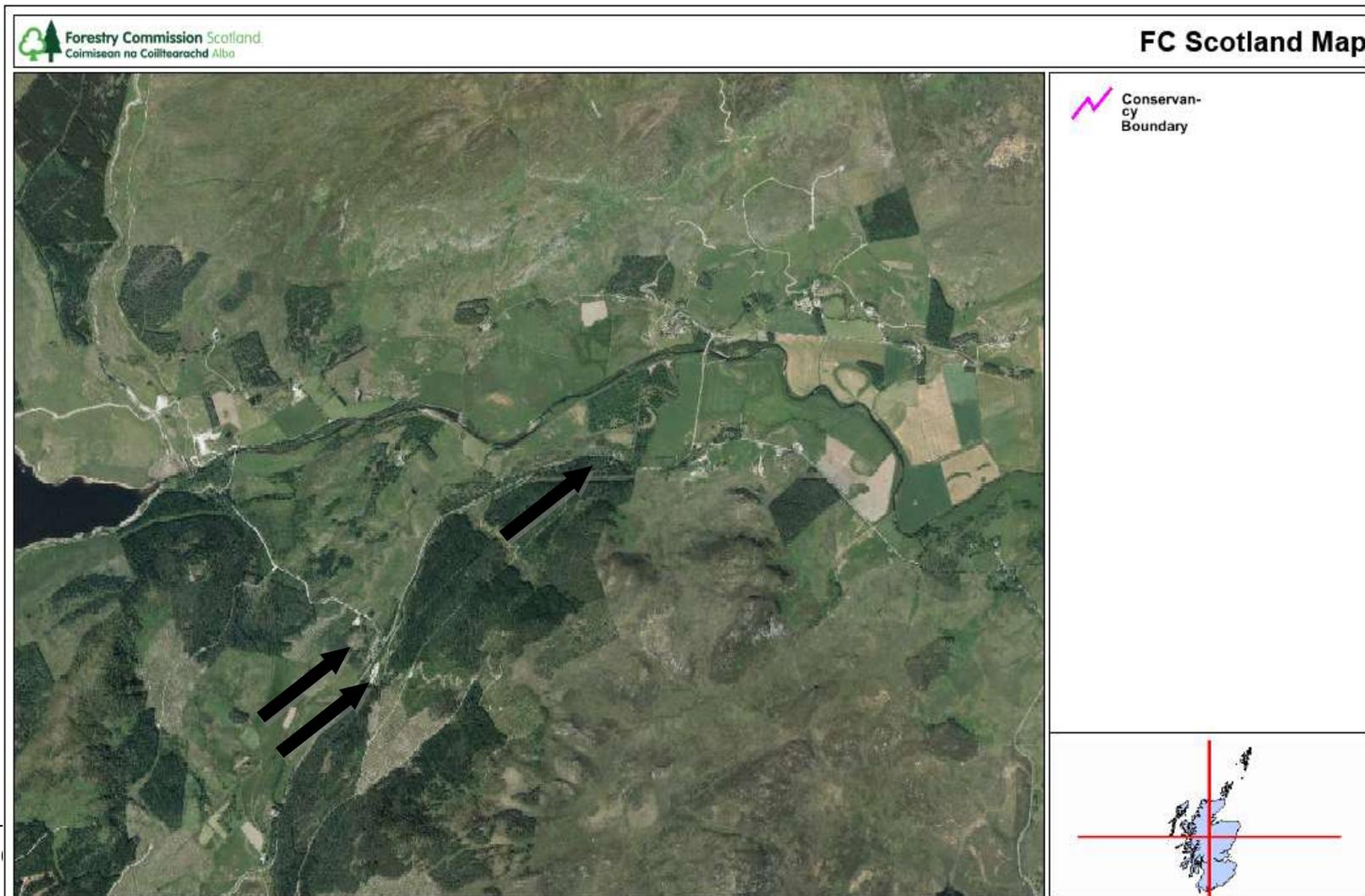
	<p>LFT has sought technical assistance from a range of sources including FCS and Scottish Woodlands, as well as the assistance of researchers and consultants (who have produced a number of appraisals and feasibility studies – see section 2.2 above), lawyers, architects, construction companies and employees (including administrators, bookkeepers, development officers, project officers, woodfuel workers, etc.).</p>
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	<p>Amongst the current board of trustees, and LFTFC's board of directors, there is currently a lack of knowledge or expertise in forestry and forest management. However there is expertise in running small businesses, management, committee skills, and local community activities.</p>
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2. Change Narrative

1. Group History. Moments of change, motivations and engagement

Introduction

In 1900 the population of Laggan was 929; by 1945 it had fallen to about 650, and in 1990 it had sunk to 200. The Laggan Community Association (LCA) was established in 1974 to help stem this population drift. The priorities in the community at that time were the need to provide local jobs for local people and to prevent the younger generation from moving away.

In 1992, rumours of the potential sale of the Strathmashie forest by the Forestry Commission (FC) triggered LCA to form a community action group, the Laggan Forestry Initiative, with the aim of buying the forest (**informal enjoyment to group formation**). The average household income in Laggan was low, estimated to have been £11,000-£15,000 per annum around that time and the main concern, and reason for wanting to be involved in managing Strathmashie forest, was to safeguard local employment. However, the Laggan Forestry Initiative was unable to raise the estimated value of the Strathmashie Forest, £1.75 million, and was therefore unable to make the purchase.

Strathmashie Forest Management Agreement

At the time, community involvement in forestry was unknown, and FC was unreceptive to any request for community involvement in forestry at Strathmashie. In response to this, representatives of the Laggan Forestry Initiative approached politicians and government officials and gradually succeeded in winning the support of key political figures, culminating in the Secretary of State for Scotland urging FC to devise a scheme allowing for community involvement in forestry.

As a result, a team from FC worked on establishing a partnership agreement with the Laggan community. In September 1998, a five year partnership agreement was made between FCS and the newly formed Laggan Forest Trust (LFT) to jointly manage the

forest (**group formation to decision-making**). This was the first co-management arrangement between the Forestry Commission and a community and acted as a pilot scheme for community involvement elsewhere. An important element of this agreement was the provision of employment opportunities for local people through forestry operations. However, due to mechanical innovation within the forestry sector, in practice, there was very little scope for chainsaw operators over the following years.

In 2003 to 2004, LFT and FCS negotiated and signed a new, 25 year, partnership agreement for management of Strathmashie forest.

During this period LFTFC was contracted to harvest almost 20,000 tonnes of timber in Strathmashie, using local labour. Due to changes in the forestry industry, however, the original emphasis on finding work for hand-cutters trained in chainsaw use gave way to machine harvesting using local self-employed contractors. LFTFC also built up a strong relationship with Scottish Woodlands, and raised some funds through felling some timber on the LFT land.

Wolftrax

In 2004, the opportunity arose for a new mountain biking centre to be developed, by FSC, in the Strathmashie Forest (the site originally proposed, at Glenmore, having to be rejected to protect local wildlife). This project was considered to have potential for delivering jobs both on- and off-site due to supporting tourism. Following consultation, LFT agreed with the proposal and Wolftrax opened in September 2004, with the mountain biking trails being further extended during 2008 to 2010. FSC provided temporary accommodation for a café and bike hire at Wolftrax, and a successful business was operated by Base Camp (an independent business run by a husband and wife team) for several years. The LFT office was also moved into a portakabin on the Wolftrax site, and the Forestry Commission extended the trails at Wolftrax between 2008 and 2010.

Purchase of forest parcels

Following introduction of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, 2003 and the FCS National Forest Land Scheme, three small areas of

the Strathmashie forest, totalling 18.1 hectares, were purchased by LFT (**decision-making to full management**). The motivation for this was based on a concern that FCS could sell the woodland, and the efforts of the community would be lost. In addition, it was believed that land purchase could provide a permanent site for a Forest Centre and would help to create local jobs, local enterprise, affordable housing and a sense of ownership. In 2003, the whole community was balloted (with a 66% response rate) and 85% voted in favour of buying three parcels of land, which had been identified as having development potential.

Purchase of the whole Strathmashie forest was not feasible, due to lack of available funding, and purchase of a fourth parcel, to provide affordable housing, did not proceed. Following the ballot, a study was commissioned to examine the feasibility of the purchase and development of the three sites. Following a positive report in 2007 the purchase went ahead, with funding from the Scottish Land Fund. One of the conditions of this sale was for LFT to build a Forest Centre on the Wolftrax site, however, there were considerable delays to this project.

Business developments

With changes in personnel, within LFT and LFTFC and also at both Scottish Woodlands and the Forestry Commission, both the partnership agreement with the Forestry Commission and the relationship with Scottish Woodlands fell into abeyance. From 2011 to 2014 little forestry work was undertaken, though a local contractor did undertake small scale beat-up, spraying and fencing contracts, under the Forestry Commissions' Framework Agreement. During this period, LFT did not undertake any active management of its own woodland.

Nevertheless, in other respects this period was a busy one for LFT, with several members of staff being employed in non-forestry roles. Activities undertaken include:

- Organisation of educational activities in the forest, including nature study, music and theatre, with assistance from funding provided by the Bank of Scotland Foundation.
- Development of a wood-fuel business on LFT's Blackwood site, including building a "wood shed" to house tools and cut wood, using a substantial grant from the Enterprise Growth Fund (**full management to social enterprise**). This was to trade wood from LFTs own land and provided employment for two local people for a year, both of whom have

subsequently taken up other employment. However, the business itself has not proved to be profit making or to be viable in the longer term.

Meanwhile, the Base Camp café and bike hire business was closed in 2012, leaving Wolftrax with only basic toilet and shower facilities, and making the need for the Forest Centre originally planned for the site all the more pressing. LFT worked towards realising the Forest Centre project for several years, with a great deal of effort going into planning it, and obtaining the necessary funding. Funding was finally secured late in 2013, from the Cairngorm National Park Authority, with the centre being built during the final months of 2014.

The Forest Centre provides space for a café, bike hire shop, learning centre, toilets, showers and a permanent base for the LFT and LFTFC office. The café and bike hire businesses are to be run by a tenant, and once the centre is formally launched, in spring 2015, it is expected that it will help to attract more visitors to Wolftrax for mountain biking, and for other local activities, and will provide employment and business development opportunities.

The employment of a new Business Development Officer, in June 2014 (funded by Development Trust Association Scotland (DTAS), from the Scottish Government's Strengthening Communities Programme) marks the beginning of a new phase for both LFT and LFTFC. The Business Development Officer has been tasked with putting the activities of LFT and LFTFC on a sustainable financial footing and will be developing a new operating model for the organisation, in conjunction with the board of trustees (LFT) and directors (LFTFC). This will include revisiting the woodland management plan (and arranging for necessary felling and restocking), reinvigorating the woodfuel business, administering the recruitment of the tenant to run the Forest Centre café and bike shop, developing use of the Forest Centre and Wolftrax mountain biking trails through organisation of events and activities, and development of other business activities.

2. Challenges, barriers and opportunities for change: Key issues in evolution

Facilitating factors:

- **Small groups of trustees and directors** who have put in huge amounts of work at certain points.
- **A number of hard working members of the community** who showed ongoing faith in tangible outcomes, despite initial setbacks.
- **NFLS and associated funding mechanisms** and the availability of **good contacts within FCS**, who can be called upon for advice. In addition, at some stages during its history, the FCS Forest District Manager attended many community group meetings and supported skills development.
- **A handful of incomers who have business management skills** have contributed positively to the management of LFT and LFTFC
- **Extensive grant funding** has enabled most of LFT and LFTFC's activities over recent years
- The step to purchasing the woodland was facilitated by means of **conducting a feasibility study** that outlined risks and benefits of different land purchase options (the whole forest or smaller packages).

Barriers and Challenges:

- **The small size, limited income and geographically scattered nature of the community**, has limited the opportunities for, and potential level of, local and internal fund raising. It also presented challenges for continued and sustainable recruitment of volunteers able to take an active part in running the organisation.
- LFT board members can remain for two terms of three years (and return after a gap of one year), while there is no

requirement for LFTFC directors to retire after a set time period. However, the commitment required of board members (including the considerable responsibilities it involves), and difficulties of maintaining active membership, has resulted in a **lack of continuity of personnel**.

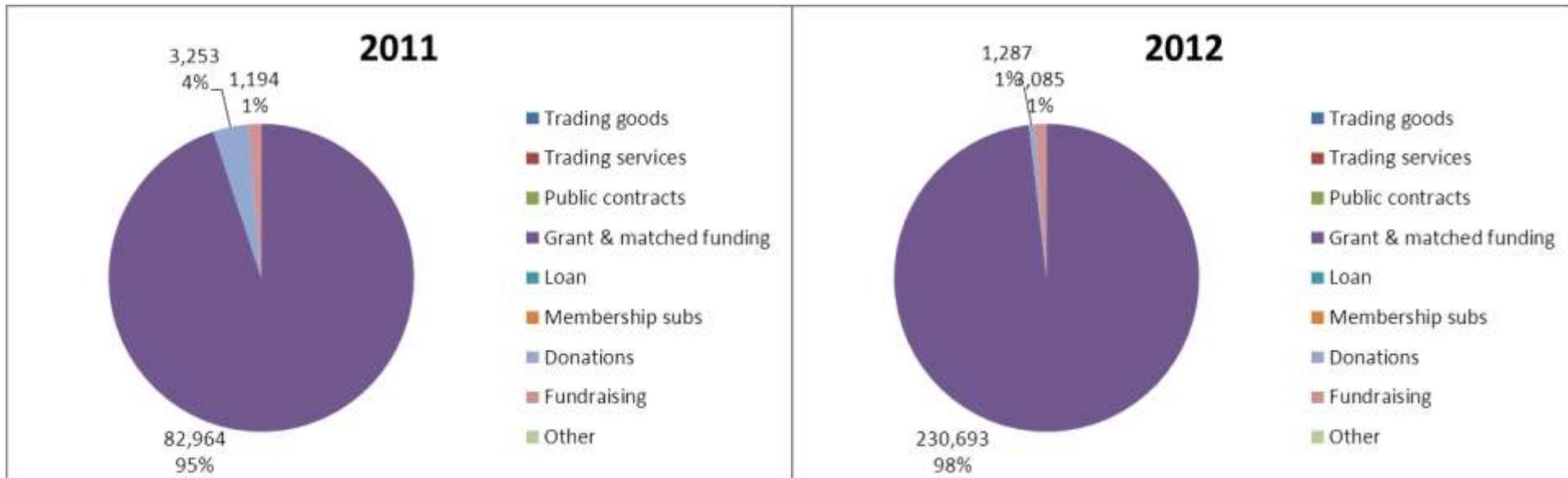
- This **lack of continuity** has also been experienced where paid employees are concerned. This has had a number of consequences, including the repeated loss of valuable knowledge, expertise and “corporate memory”, repeatedly having to relearn and “reinvent the wheel” rather than building on past developments, repeatedly having to build up social capital and relationships of trust, and re-engaging in joint management activities with partnering organisations.
- **Conflict within the community** has been aggravated around decisions made by the LFT board. This includes (but is not limited to), the existence of a café at Wolftrax, which some local people feared would be in competition with existing private businesses, and the fact that the original contracts to run the café and bike hire were given to “outsiders” rather than to local people. These decisions are believed by some members of the community to be incompatible with the aims of LFT, and have caused some considerable bad feeling.
- At some points in its history, there has been **resentment about the prominent role of incomers** within LFT amongst a few longstanding community members, resulting in a negative attitude towards LFT, and its achievements, by some members of the community. This has not influenced group functioning in a significant manner.
- At some points in the organisation’s history there has been a **lack of suitable knowledge and expertise** amongst board members, including lack of awareness of woodland management principles, and potential income generating activities, and lack of commercial, administrative and technical skills.
- At times, these factors have resulted in the trust being largely run by employed staff, with **trustees losing touch** with day to day issues and the direction of the organisation.
- At one time a considerable amount of training in practical forestry skills was provided by LFT. However, this resulted in many of the newly trained staff moving on to jobs elsewhere, so their skills were lost to the community, and hence to a **poor return on the investment in training**.

- **Lack of belief** in some of the woodland objectives (e.g., attracting young people to live in Laggan) within some sectors of the community.
- The **slowness and bureaucracy** around implementing woodland change, resulting in low morale.
- **The need to maintain sufficient working capital** in order to pay wages despite funding bodies paying in arrears and **the need to prepare risk assessments** around forest-based activities.
- Because LFT has relied heavily on grant funding, **reduced availability of public sector funds** as a result of the economic downturn are a cause for concern.

3. Evolution of income streams

As detailed above, income from forestry work, which was important to LFT/LFTFC in the early years, ceased almost totally after 2010, due to a combination of changes to the forestry industry, and changes to personnel (trustees, directors and employees) within LFT and LFTFC.

Consequently, over recent years grant funding has accounted for a very considerable majority of the organisations funding.



4. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts before group involvement

Little is known about the history of the woodland, prior to its purchase by the Forestry Commission in the 1950s or 1960s.

The Forestry Commission managed the area as productive woodland, planting it largely as a plantation of non-native species. At that time the woodland provided large-scale employment to local people. However, the number of local employees in the forest decreased markedly over the years (from about 34 in 50s/60s to 1 in 80s), resulting in an interest on behalf of the community to take forest management into its own hands.

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
? to 1950s	Not known	The area was not woodland prior to its purchase by the Forestry Commission		
1950s-1998	Forestry Commission	Productive woodland	Tree planting and felling	Right to roam

5. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts since group involvement

The original aims of LFT were to stem depopulation and provide local employment. Where stemming depopulation is concerned LFT may have had some success, since it was reported in 2000 that Laggan has seen the first upturn in its population for at least 150 years. However this may have been because of natural population increase, or the general trends in retirement to countryside locations or some other social factor.

The group has also had some success in creating local employment. For some years LFT carried out the majority of work in the woodlands themselves, under their trading arm, Laggan Forest Trust Forestry Company Limited (LFTFC). In the years immediately after 2000 some 20,000 tonnes of timber were harvested by LFTFC in Strathmashie, under contracts tendered by FCS¹. However, due to ongoing mechanisation of timber enterprise, there was only limited scope to create additional jobs in the timber business, and over recent years the forestry work has been limited to small scale contracts for individual foresters to undertake pesticide spraying and planting.

¹ Although no firm evidence exists, it is likely that FCS would have also used local contractors without community involvement.

Due to a combination of circumstances, including the community involvement in Laggan, the limited success in creating additional jobs using the timber enterprise, FCS chose Strathmashie forest as their location for developing the Laggan Wolftrax mountain bike centre in 2004, with the mountain biking trails being further extended during 2008 to 2010. FSC provided temporary accommodation for a café and bike hire at Wolftrax, and a successful business was operated by Base Camp (an independent business run by a husband and wife team) for several years. Laggan Wolftrax has brought a considerable influx of new visitors into the area, though whether this has supported local businesses or been in competition with them is an issue of some dispute within small sectors of the community

In 2010 LFT obtained a felling licence, with the assistance of Scottish Woodlands, and part of the Blackwood site was felled. No further forestry work has been undertaken since then.

The period from 2011 to 2013 was very active in other respects, with LFT employing several members of staff, to organise educational activities in the forest, including nature study, music and theatre, with assistance from funding provided by the Bank of Scotland Foundation. Amongst activities hosted in recent times have been an autumn forest forage, a birds, bugs and beasties identification event, a forest-based theatre performance by The Walking Theatre Company, an overnight survival skills course and a lantern parade. These activities were well supported by the wider community, but came to an end at the end of the funding period.

During 2012 to 2014, a substantial grant from the Enterprise Growth Fund was used by LFT's trading arm, Laggan Forest Trust Forestry Company Ltd (LFTFC) to support the development of a wood-fuel business on the Blackwood site, including building a "wood shed" to house tools and cut wood. This provided employment for two local people for a year, both of whom have subsequently taken up other employment, however, the business itself has not proved to be profit making or financially sustainable in the longer term, although wood fuel is currently being sold. Planning permission for a campsite was not obtained.

Meanwhile, the Base Camp café and bike hire business were closed in 2012, leaving Wolftrax with only basic toilet and shower facilities, and making the need for the Forest Centre originally planned for the site all the more pressing. Funding for building the Forest Centre was secured, from the Cairngorm National Park Authority, in late 2013, and the centre is expected to be complete by early 2015.

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Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
1998	FC / LFTFC, FC	Local employment (harvest of 20,000 tonnes of timber by local contractor in 2000-2005 period) Productive woodland Stem depopulation (population records)	Tree felling	Right to roam Use rights to timber
2004	FCS	Creation of a mountain bike trail centre, when plans for a centre at Glenmore had to be abandoned to protect local wildlife	Construction of mountain bike trails and car park	
2007	LFT	Community ownership of woodland	Purchase of three parcels of woodland from FCS	
2008-10	FCS	Improving recreational opportunities	Extension to mountain biking trails at Wolftrax	
2009/10	LFT / LFTFC	Woodland management	Tree felling	
2011-13	LFT / LFTFC	Creation of employment opportunities and income; recreational and educational activities	Setting up woodfuel business; programme of forest activities	
Summer 2014	LFTFC	Avoid decrease in visitor numbers to Wolftrax due to the lack of mountain biking and café facilities	Bike hire, service to transport bikers uphill (uplift) and basic café facilities provided.	
2013-15	LFT	Provide facilities for the local community and mountain bikers. Provide job and business opportunities.	Planning and building the Forest Centre	

6. Future Plans

The new Forest Centre, due to be opened early in 2015, will include a bike shop, café, office and other facilities, and is expected to act as a catalyst for local enterprise through enhancing the attractiveness of the area as a tourist destination. The Forest Centre will also include a learning centre, for educational purposes, and provide a space for local artists/craft workers to display their work.

A post for a Business Development Officer, to be employed from June 2014 until March 2016, has been funded by the Scottish Government's Strengthening Communities programme and aims to make LFT financially sustainable. The Business Development Officer will be responsible for making the most of the business opportunities offered by the woodland itself, the new Forest Centre, the wood shed built for the wood-fuel business, and partnership with the Forestry Commission.

Plans for all future activities will be progressed by the Boards of LFT and LFTFC together with the Business Development Officer and the Support Officer.

3. Engagement and impacts timeline

The engagement table serves to collect detailed evidence of impact and how this relates to engagement and any economic, social and ecological benefits of the woodland. The table measures impacts since the community group has become involved.

Year	Event	ENGAGEMENT	Reasons (Barriers and challenges)	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Social	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Woodland	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Financial /Economic
1992	Formation of The Laggan Forestry Initiative	INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to GROUP FORMATION	Rumours over sale of forest by FCS leading to fear of losing the asset.	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
1998	A 5-year partnership agreement between FC and the newly formed LFT was signed	GROUP FORMATION to DECISION MAKING	Secretary of State for Scotland exerting pressure on FC to devise a community forestry scheme and build-up of local support for community action group.	FCS-funded local employment in forestry; Increased visitor numbers		Income from timber harvest by LFTFC
2004	Construction of Wolfrax mountain bike centre and associated trails		FCS was looking for a location for a mountain bike centre and Strathmashie forest provided an ideal venue			
2004	25 year partnership agreement between FCS and LFT					

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Year	Event	ENGAGEMENT	Reasons (Barriers and challenges)	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Social	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Woodland	Changes /Impacts and outcomes Financial /Economic
2007	Purchase of three small forest areas	DECISION MAKING to FULL MANAGEMENT	Ongoing concern over forest sale by FCS and desire to further support local employment.			
2008-10	Extension to mountain biking trails at Wolftrax by FCS		Improving recreational opportunities	Improved recreational opportunities		
2009/10	Tree felling		Woodland management			Income from felled trees
2011-13	Setting up woodfuel business; programme of forest activities	FULL MANAGEMENT to SOCIAL ENTERPRISE	Creation of employment opportunities and income; recreational and educational activities	Engagement of community	Minor tidying up – much more required	Employment of 2 local people for 1 year
2014	Bike hire, service to transport bikers uphill (uplift) and basic café facilities provided.		Avoid decrease in visitor numbers to Wolftrax due to the lack of mountain biking and café facilities	Creation of goodwill amongst mountain bikers		
2013-15	Planning and building the Forest Centre		Provide facilities for the local community and mountain bikers. Provide job and business opportunities.			