

# Woodland Crofts Partnership response to Draft Cairngorms National Park Forest Strategy 2018

## The Woodland Crofts Partnership

The Woodland Crofts Partnership (WCP) is a partnership of 4 third-sector organisations, seeking to promote and develop woodland crofts. It comprises the Scottish Crofting Federation, the Community Woodlands Association, the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust and Woodland Trust Scotland. We welcome this opportunity to comment on the Draft Cairngorms National Park Forest Strategy 2018 (the Strategy).

The Scottish Crofting Federation is the only member-led organisation dedicated to promoting crofting and it is the largest association of small scale food producers in the UK. Its mission is to safeguard and promote the rights, livelihoods and culture of crofters and their communities. Tel: 01599 530 005, [www.crofting.org](http://www.crofting.org)

The Community Woodlands Association is the direct representative body of Scotland's community woodland groups. It helps community woodland groups across the country achieve their aspirations and potential, providing advice, assistance and information, facilitating networking and training, and representing and promoting community woodlands to the wider world. Tel: 01309 674 004, [www.communitywoods.org](http://www.communitywoods.org)

The Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust is a registered charity helping rural communities secure long term solutions to their local housing needs. It represents a wide range of interests including communities, local government, landowners, crofters and housing associations. By helping rural communities meet their needs for additional affordable housing it plays an important role in actively supporting their long term viability. Tel: 01463 233 549, [www.hscht.co.uk](http://www.hscht.co.uk)

Woodland Trust Scotland is part of the Woodland Trust, the UK's leading woodland conservation charity. Its vision is a UK rich in native woods and trees, enjoyed and valued by everyone. In Scotland it is currently leading the Croft Woodlands Project. Tel: 01738 635544, [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk)

## Introduction

Overall, we very much support the proposals in the Strategy, and its Vision and Strategic Objectives. It is clear, balanced and well-argued. We particularly welcome the reference to 'forest culture' in the useful pen portraits of future Cairngorm forests in 20 & 100 years' time, and the emphasis in the vision on delivering more diverse & enhanced landscapes, more high quality timber and greater opportunities for local business development.

**However, we are disappointed that there is no reference to woodland crofts at any point in the Strategy.**

It is for this reason we are providing this bespoke response rather than using the prescribed form: we aim to highlight some of the key attributes of woodland crofts and illustrate those areas of the Strategy which can be supported by them. This seems to be a more logical approach than simply answering each question with a reference to the lack of consideration of woodland crofts.

## What is a woodland croft?

We define a woodland croft as a registered croft with sufficient tree cover overall to be considered a woodland. Note however that this is a descriptive term and there is no distinction in law between a woodland croft and any other kind of croft. Nevertheless, it is useful to highlight woodland crofts as a separate entity not least in terms of the opportunities and benefits they bring to the forestry sector.

Woodland crofts integrate small-scale woodland management with other land management activities and offer opportunities for housing and business development, thereby contributing to livelihoods and lifestyles.

They are supported by Scottish Government (for example being included in the Scottish Forestry Strategy and referenced in the current Programme for Government), by Forestry Commission Scotland, and by various Local Authorities in the crofting areas, such as Highland Council and Argyll & Bute Council.

Further information on woodland crofts can be found from various sources, in particular our website [www.woodlandcrofts.org](http://www.woodlandcrofts.org)

## The Cairngorms National Park (CNP) Context

Crofting is available as a form of land tenure in almost half (ca 45%) of the CNP area, either in the former county of Inverness-shire, or in the new crofting parishes in the local government area of Moray, designated by the Scottish Government in 2010. These two areas together comprise the bulk of the north and west of the CNP.

Throughout this part of the CNP, it is possible to create new crofts under the provisions of the Crofting Reform etc Act 2007. This opportunity, together with the extensive & unique nature of the CNP's woodlands, means that the Park has significant potential for woodland crofts – something which is not currently reflected in the Strategy. Further, some existing crofts within the CNP in the former county of Inverness-shire may be suitable for conversion to woodland crofts by the establishment of new woodland on them

## Woodland Crofts in the Cairngorms National Park

The Strategy highlights 10 Strategic Objectives to support its vision for forestry in the CNP. We reproduce these below with comments (in italics) as to how woodland crofts can contribute to these objectives:

- **promote the creation of new woodlands that complement other land use**

*Woodland crofts by their nature integrate multiple management activities, and being generally smaller-scale, new woodland established on them necessarily complements other land use.*

- **enhance the condition of existing forests**
- **restore lost or vulnerable forest ecosystems**
- **encourage natural regeneration of native forests**

*The personal stewardship and high levels of management input & attention to detail potentially provided through woodland crofts result in high quality management with a corresponding improvement in woodland condition. These same attributes also assist in the restoration & management of vulnerable forest ecosystems, and can maximize the chances of successful regeneration of native forest.*

- **promote the creation and enhancement of productive forests**

*Most woodland crofters will expect their woodlands to make a contribution to their incomes. As a result they will manage them productively.*

- **protect forests from disease and invasive species**

*A key element in controlling disease and invasive species is regular surveillance and prompt action to address any issues discovered. The woodland crofts model involves a frequent presence in the woodland and an intimate knowledge of it, both of which provide an essential basis for forest protection.*

- **increase employment in the forestry sector**

*A woodland crofter will typically manage their own woodlands directly and spend a proportion of their working week doing so. This represents increased employment in the forestry sector, albeit on a self-employed basis. The crofter's forestry skills and experience are however potentially available to other employers.*

- **encourage innovation in the use and marketing of native forest products**

*Woodland croft management is typically small-scale, yielding low volumes of timber in commercial terms. This is most productively utilised when the crofter's time and skills can be used to add maximum value. Native timbers are especially suited to adding value, often in innovative ways, hence it is highly likely that crofters will take advantage of growing, converting & marketing them.*

- **promote responsible access and active enjoyment of forests**

*Croft enterprises are often highly diversified and many crofters offer tourism facilities and services. A woodland croft is an opportunity to provide such services, based on the woodland resource.*

- **promote community involvement in forest management**

*The community woodland movement has been one of the successes of the community empowerment agenda. Community woodland owners have been at the forefront of the creation of woodland crofts (eg in Mull, & Tighnabruaich), and there is no reason to believe this cannot also be the case in the CNP. The significant area of woodland managed by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) provides a resource potentially available to community groups via the FCS Community Asset Transfer Scheme – and woodland croft creation can be a part of that.*

## **CNP Forestry Strategy Policy Guidance**

The distinct approach to management provided by the woodland crofts model is consistent with much of the policy guidance outlined in the Strategy. In particular, the personal stewardship and high management input highlighted earlier delivers sensitive and targeted management, especially appropriate to native woodlands and rare and designated habitats, including ancient woodlands.

High Nature Value Farming & Forestry (section 4.1) can be delivered through woodland crofts; clearly they also support the aspiration to 'maintain the culture of crofting' in the CNP noted in the same section. **This mention of crofting in the guidance could be strengthened by explicit reference to the need for the creation of new woodland crofts.**

The policy support (section 4.2) for Low Impact Silvicultural Systems (LISS) can be delivered through woodland crofts – indeed whereas LISS can pose challenges for traditional forest managers, it is actually the *modus operandi* of woodland crofters, and includes low impact extraction as the norm.

The delivery of rural development opportunities (section 4.3) is one of the USPs of woodland crofts: small business activity based on timber & woodlands; adding value; local woodfuel etc are all essential features of woodland croft enterprise. Importantly too, woodland crofts provide a 'pipeline' of young people for future employment in the forest industry – having been raised on a woodland croft, immersed in forest culture, it will be an obvious career path for them.

The Strategy omits one key opportunity from the Low Carbon section – that of **housing**. As well as woodfuel, timber construction – especially using local timber - has a strong role to play in delivering low carbon housing. In this respect, woodland crofts provide an opportunity for self-built affordable housing – something in critically short supply in all rural areas, including the CNP. Crofting generally is recognized for offering housing opportunities, tied to land management, and woodland crofts extend this by offering a woodland setting which can readily absorb houses and their impacts, plus the opportunity to build with timber.

Finally, woodland crofts are very much about forestry and people – indeed they are forestry *for* people.

### **Targeting woodland creation**

We support the approach outlined in Section 5 to incentivise targeted woodland creation. However, we propose that the particular, multiple benefits delivered by woodland crofts are recognised within the methodology used, such that the creation of new woodland crofts through new planting can benefit from the enhanced rates for establishment, even in non-target areas. This may require discussion with FCS for an appropriate adjustment to the Forestry Grant Scheme.

### **Conclusion**

Woodland crofts deliver against most of the key issues in the Strategy. Due to the smaller-scale, more intensive approach employed, their development will not impact on the 'traditional' forestry sector. Indeed, they can add value to it by offering solutions to 'problem' woodlands where an industrial approach is found wanting, and are well suited to the management of native woodland, especially on sensitive or designated sites. They also generate new entrants for the industry 'grown' from their 'family forestry' approach. They can also play their part in woodland expansion, where woodland crofts are established through planting bare land.

**With the unique nature of its woodland resource, much of it native, the CNP offers better prospects for the development of woodland crofts than many other crofting areas. Given the benefits they bring, and the support for the model from the Scottish Government, we recommend that they are included as key priorities in the Strategy.**