

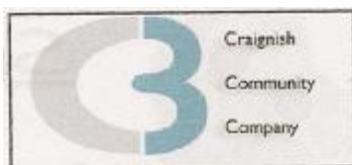
Salachry Forest

Woodland Management Plan

March 2009



**Plan prepared for
Craignish Community Company Ltd**



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Introduction

Salachry Forest is a 208 ha. conifer forest south of the Craignish peninsula, Argyll. Craignish Community Company (CCC) are seeking to purchase 121 ha. of the forest and this management plan outlines the vision for their management of the forest over the next 25 years, with detailed proposals for the first five years after community purchase.

CCC wish to purchase the forest and manage it as a community woodland, building on the work of Forestry Commission Scotland, the present owners, in order to:

- create a multi-purpose forest that produces timber for income, using low-impact silvicultural systems.
- enhance the existing biodiversity values of the forest and associated open spaces by creating a more diverse woodland structure.
- create employment and training opportunities through the creation of woodland crofts and the provision of space for community enterprise.
- provide recreational opportunities such as woodland walks and wildlife interpretation.

The plan has been written by Bob Black, Argyll Woodlanders, based on the findings of a woodland survey and feasibility study, also commissioned by CCC, and on subsequent discussions with company directors.

There are two maps at the end of the report. Map 1 shows current land use and the areas of compartments referred to in the text. Map 2 shows proposed land use.

Description

General description

The forest was fully described in the Salachry Forest Woodland Survey (Black and Quelch, 2008). The forest can be divided into three physically distinct blocks, of which the community proposes to purchase two (referred to as 'the forest' from here on). Both consist primarily of commercial conifer plantation that is in the process of being restructured by Forestry Commission Scotland, the current owners of Salachry Forest.

Restructuring has resulted in two contrasting types of timber stand, one of unharvested and mostly unthinned conifers that are of a marketable size, the other of felled stands that are either open and awaiting restocking or have been restocked with conifers. Most planted tree species, both in the first generation of planting and the more recent plantings, are Sitka spruce with small stands of hybrid larch on steep, relatively well-drained slopes.

The two areas of the forest are separated by the Oban to Lochgilphead public road. Included in the forest is an area of grazed land above Salachry farmhouse, a small strip of native woodland up the Bealach Mor and an area of wetland adjacent to the main road along the Abhainn Airidhcheoduis. The forest boundary runs through the middle of a small hill lochan, Lochan na Goirt.

Physical aspects

Geology is varied and complex, consisting mainly of north to south trending bands of old (Dalradian) metamorphic rocks, primarily metamorphosed basalts and quartzites. There is a broad band of limestone south of Salachry farmhouse.

Soils are as variable as the rocks. The slopes south of the main road support substantial areas of well-drained, neutral or mildly acidic, brown earth soils. Other slopes generally have more acidic soils, often peaty gleys, with some rock outcrops to the north of the public road. Block scree occurs on the steep slopes above the Bealach Mor.

Most of the forest consists of hillslope, some of it steep. Flat ground is scarce. Three small burns flow along the edges of the forest but no more than small watercourses or seepages flow through the interior of the forest. The climate is oceanic with mild winters, fairly high rainfall and frequent strong winds, especially on higher ground.

Land use

There is abundant archaeological evidence of settlement stretching back hundreds of years.

The forest was acquired by the Forestry Commission in 1959 and planted with conifers between 1962 and 1964. Restructuring commenced at the end of the 1990s and involved the construction of two short access roads and the harvesting of the first coupes. Currently approximately 70% of the forest is in the process of being restructured.

The 6.8 ha. of rough grazing north of Salachry farmhouse is sheep-grazed.

Evaluation

Labelling the forest areas

To help in referring to specific areas, the forest has been divided into compartments (cpts.), broadly on the basis of present land use.

Cpt. 1-4 Existing economically mature timber stands.

Cpt. 5 Harvested land, restocked with conifers.

Cpt. 6 Ground currently not supporting conifers.

Compartment areas are shown on the map of current management, map 1.

Existing economically mature timber stands

The conifer stands planted around 45 years ago are all economically mature, i.e. they can be harvested now or over the next few years. All stands have areas of windblow, a result of the age of the stands and the increased exposure caused by the felling of adjacent stands. These areas of windblow are likely to grow until the crop is harvested.

The stands are largely unthinned, though small areas were experimentally thinned a few years ago. It is not considered silviculturally advisable to attempt to retain into the long-term more than a few windfirm trees or groups of trees, nor to thin stands at this late stage in their development. Thus with the exception of selected windfirm trees, all standing timber will be coupe felled.

It is commercially advantageous to fell relatively large coupes. Four compartments represent the planned felling coupes and are numbered according to the proposed order of felling. It is estimated that cpts. will be harvested at approximately four yearly intervals, though the timing of felling will depend on several factors, including the cash flow requirements of the community company and market conditions at the time.

Estimated yield figures are given in appendix 1. Estimated timing of operations are given as 'year 1', 'year 2' and so on, with year 1 being the first year of community ownership.

Areas to be restocked with conifers will be planted with commercial species, e.g. Sitka spruce and hybrid larch. Less commercial species such as Douglas fir and Scots pine will also be planted, where appropriate. Trees will be thinned where ground conditions permit, enabling a more flexible approach when the time comes to harvest the second rotation crop.

Cpt. 1 (c. 5.0 ha.) This stand is suffering from severe windblow on its western side. It will be the first cpt. to be harvested, in year 1 or 2. It will be restocked with a commercial conifer crop, leaving the burn-side at the south-eastern end adjacent to the public road unplanted with conifers (see map 2) to allow for the natural regeneration of native tree species.

Timber will be forwarded to the existing forest road-end, avoiding the old track that currently marks the western edge of the cpt. The road-end will require some minor upgrading work.

Cpt. 2 (c. 16.4 ha.) This includes two sub-cpts that will be felled in c. year 5.

Timber in cpt. 2a will be forwarded to the existing forest road. Approximately half the area will be restocked with a commercial conifer crop, the other half has been designated as part of the woodland croft land (see map 2). Restocking details will be subject to discussions between CCC and the relevant crofters but it is possible that a less conventional silvicultural system will be employed in this area. A broad strip approximately 50m. wide will be left open round the edge of the lochan for biodiversity and amenity purposes.

Cpt. 2b is a strip of standing timber between the forest road and the main road. Timber will be extracted to the forest road and the area planted with native tree species.

Cpt. 3 (c. 10.3 ha.) As for cpt. 2, this cpt. is divided into two sub-cpts. They will both be felled c. four years after cpt. 2. Care will be needed in this cpt. to conserve archaeological remains.

Cpt.3a will be a straightforward harvesting operation but cpt. 3b will be more challenging as it is partly on a very steep bank above the main road. Timber will need to be extracted uphill away from the public road.

There are two main options for extraction, one (option A) being to construct a built forwarder track of c. 500m. along the line of an existing ride along the north-eastern side of cpt. 3a then diagonally uphill to gain access to the uphill side of cpt. 3b. The disadvantages of this option are that it potentially impacts on the water supply for Salachry farmhouse and where it benches into the hillside between cpts 3a and 3b it will be highly visible from the main road. The water supply would need safeguarding and the benched section would need

significant re-instatement to make it less visually intrusive. However this option does have the advantage of becoming a valuable link in the proposed footpath network once harvesting is complete.

The other option for extracting timber from 3b (option B) is to extract round the southern side of cpt. 3a. This would involve an extraction route to the forest road-end of c. 600m. and would necessitate at least some built forwarder track. Part of this track would also be needed for extracting timber from cpt. 4.

A decision on how best to harvest and extract timber from cpt. 3b will be subject to further discussion nearer harvesting time.

Cpt. 3a would be restocked with a commercial conifer crop, cpt. 3b would be planted with native tree species.

Cpt. 4 (c. 11.6 ha.) This cpt. has been designated as part of the woodland croft land. Details of harvesting and restocking will be subject to discussions between CCC and the relevant crofters, but it is possible that a less conventional silvicultural system will be employed for both harvesting and restocking in this area.

Cpt. 5 Harvested land, restocked with conifers This cpt. contains all the land that has already been harvested and replanted with conifers, mostly Sitka spruce. It is divided into five sub-cpts. Planted trees range from c. 30cm. in height (e.g. cpt. 5d) to 1.5m. or more in height (cpt. 5c).

A small area along the eastern edge of cpt. 5a will be felled-to-recycle to maintain the amenity and biodiversity value of the naturally regenerating native woodland in the wetland of the Abhainn Airidhcheoduis and a small area of 5b will be retained for community enterprise purposes. Young trees on and for a radius of c. 50m. around a proposed hilltop viewpoint area in cpt. 5c will be felled to preserve the view. Cpts. 5d and 5e have been designated as forest croft land and management will be subject to discussions between CCC and the relevant crofters.

Cpt. 6 Ground currently not supporting conifers This cpt. has been divided into two sub-cpts, land that was part of the forest and land that was excluded and retained as grazing land.

Cpt. 6a is the non-grazing land. Native woodland and areas currently regenerating naturally with native trees will be managed as native woodland. Non-native regeneration will be cut out.

Open ground where native woodland is sought will be designated as natural regeneration areas where there is an adequate seed source nearby. Natural regeneration areas total 9.0 ha. Some enrichment planting with native species may be appropriate in these areas.

Areas where native woodland establishment is sought but there is not a sufficient seed source will be planted. It is planned to plant a total of c. 14.6 ha., of which 11.3 ha. will be planted above the Bealach Mor within the first five years. An additional 3.3. ha. will be planted in cpt. 3b.

Areas more than 50m. from a seed source where planting is not envisaged will remain as open ground.

Cpt. 6b is the grazing land. This has been designated as woodland croft land.

Herbivore control

Deer, both red deer and roe deer are abundant in the forest. Deer fences are no longer functional and there is significant browsing damage to young trees, including to recently planted Sitka spruce in cpt. 5a. Locally, natural regeneration of broadleaves is getting away, though in other areas it is being suppressed by deer.

Effective deer control will be necessary and the monitoring of deer browsing damage essential. In the case of areas planted with native trees, protection in the form of deer fencing will be necessary. Map 2 shows an indicative line for c. 3000 metres of deer fencing, 1900 m. above the Bealach Mor and 1100 m. in cpt. 3b. Deer fences may be required elsewhere depending on the outcome from deer control and monitoring.

Recreation

The forest roads are used occasionally by pedestrians arriving by car, mostly to walk dogs. It is proposed to develop two footpath circuits from these access points to allow local people and visitors to the area to enjoy forest walks, viewpoints and quiet places. Visitor use will be encouraged by low key signage and interpretation of the natural and social history of the area. If demand is sufficient, these paths could be designed as multi-purpose pedestrian and cycle tracks and additional paths could be constructed.

Ideally, the timing of footpath construction should relate to the timing of conifer harvesting and the establishment of associated forwarder tracks. Map 2 shows an indicative line for 2000 metres of footpath. The footpath to the north of the main road (c. 850m.) gives access to the lochan and could be built around the time cpt. 2 is harvested in year 5, possibly earlier.

There will be an opportunity to link the footpaths to the old but still usable footpath to Ford that starts in the adjacent FCS forest. A long term aim would be a footpath linkage to Ardfern village.

Constraints

Community management depends on CCC securing sufficient funding to purchase the land.

Assuming the purchase is successful, woodland management costs will need to be met by the sale of timber, other grant aid, community fund raising and contributions from crofters, either in cash or kind. Significant funding should be available through the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP). A small annual payment will be available automatically through the SRDP Land Management Option (LMO) but most would be through SRDP Rural Priorities payments. Entry into the Rural Priorities scheme is competitive and there is no guarantee of success.

Planning consents should not affect the forestry proposals though they will be critical for woodland croft proposals. There is a need to ensure the integrity of the Salachry farmhouse water supply and to leave powerline wayleaves unplanted.

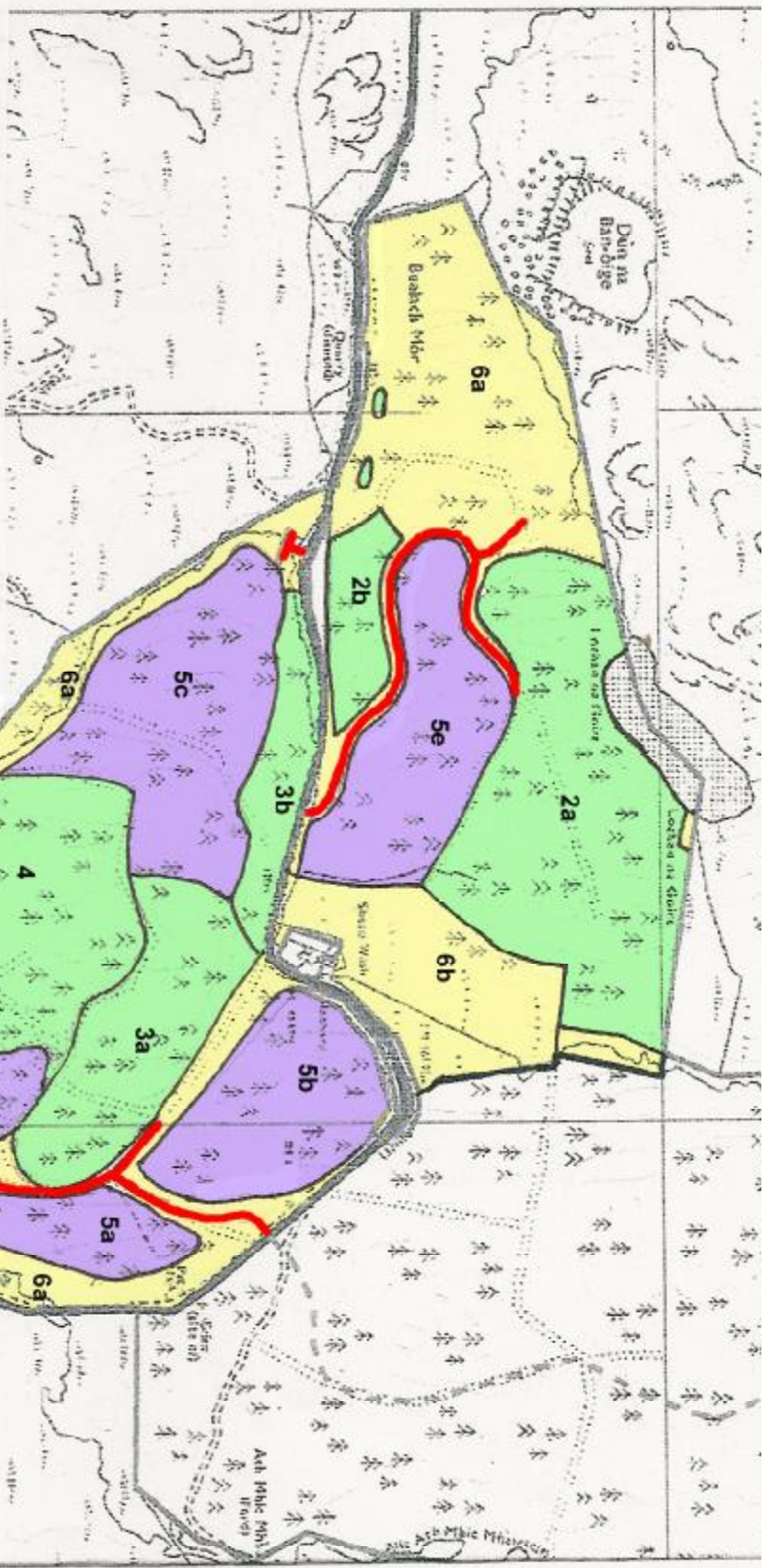
Management Aim

To develop a multi-function forest integrating commercial, low-impact forestry operations with biodiversity enhancement, recreational usage, woodland croft development and other community activities.

Management objectives for the next five years

1. Commercial forestry operations will include harvesting cpt. 1 in year 1 and cpt. 2 in year 5. No additional forest road building will be required in order to harvest these cpts., though work to the road end will be needed for forwarders to access cpt. 1. Cpt. 1 will be restocked in year 3 or 4.
2. Management and timing of operations in cpts. 4, 5d, 5e and part of 2a will be resolved by discussion between CCC and the woodland crofters.
3. Management of the grazing land will be resolved between the grazing tenant, CCC and the woodland crofters.
4. A footpath to Lochan na Goirt will be constructed.
5. The felling-to-recycle priority areas will be cut.
6. Selected open ground areas will be planted with native trees. Areas for planting will be enclosed with a deer fence prior to planting.
7. Deer will be controlled and deer browsing damage monitored.

Prescriptions for the first 5 years					
Prescription	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5
Register for LMO payments and apply for Rural Priorities grant	x				
Upgrade the forest road-end to facilitate timber extraction from cpt. 1	x				
Harvest cpt. 1	x				
Restock c. 4.2 ha. of cpt. 1 with conifers			x		
Harvest cpt. 2					x
Cut small areas of fell-to-recycle conifers in cpts. 5a, 5b and 5c	x				
Determine woodland management details for forest that will become woodland croft land, cpts. 4, 5d, 5e and part of 2a	x				
Determine the management of the grazing land, cpt. 6b	x				
Cull deer, monitor browsing damage and adjust cull as necessary	x	x	x	x	x
Erect additional deer fences round 9.0 ha. of natural regeneration and carry out enrichment planting, if necessary.		x			
Remove regenerating conifers from 9.0 ha. of natural regeneration		x			x
Plant c. 11.3 ha. of native woodland & construct c. 1900 m. of deer fence		x			
Construct c. 850 m. of footpath to Lochan na Goirt					x
Review management requirements for next five year plan					x



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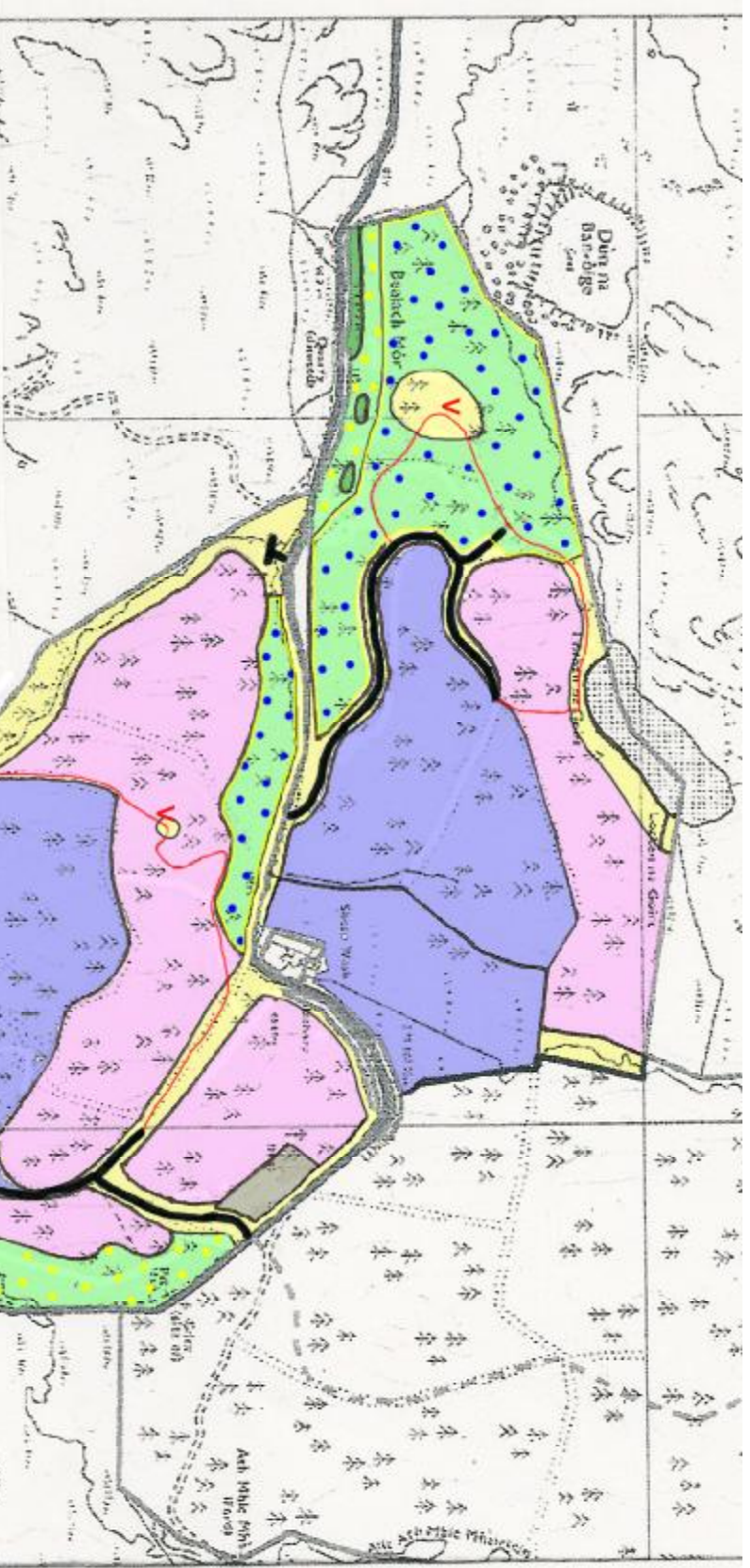
Map 1: Current land use

- Mature conifer stands (cpts. 1-4)
- Harvested land, restocked with conifers (cpt.5)
- Ground currently not supporting conifers (cpt. 6)
- Forest roads

Refer to management plan text for explanation of compartment numbers

Scale 1: 10,000

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Map 2: Proposed land use

- Existing native woodland
- New native woodland, natural regeneration
- New native woodland, planting
- Open ground
- Commercial conifer forest
- Woodland croft ground
- Community enterprise area
- Deer fence
- Footpaths
- Viewpoints

Scale 1: 10,000

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