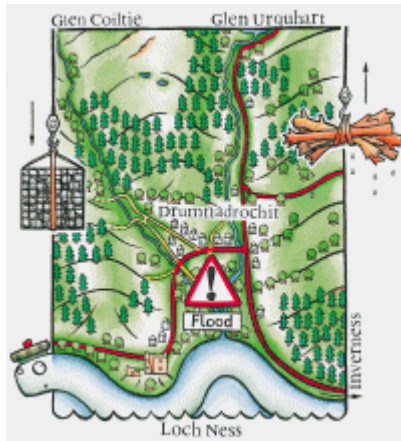


GLEN URQUHART



Summary

- Glen Urquhart runs westwards from Drumnadrochit on Loch Ness.
- One third of the glen is under trees, of which the majority are conifers.
- The management of the glen's forests and woodlands is influenced by the project.
- Glen Urquhart Land Use Partnership is a partnership between the Community Council and Forest Enterprise.
- The management group is a sub-committee of the Community Council.
- The key aim is sustainable land management for the entire catchment, leading to healthy fish populations and reduced flooding.
- The group was formed in October 1997.

Why ? There had been severe flooding in the village of Drumnadrochit, perhaps three times in ten years. Many homes and premises associated with the tourist trade had been affected. It was easy to look upstream and blame the forestry. The fact was that the rivers Enrick and Coillte were classic spate rivers and the village had been built in the danger zone. The community decided that steps had to be taken to alleviate the situation in as far as that was possible. The Glen Urquhart Community Council called a public meeting to discuss the problem and a sub-committee, consisting of five people, three of them riparian owners, was set up to explore the issue further and to take some action. The remit was to 'find ways to manage the river'.

The group started with a narrow focus on the riparian zone but soon realised that land use activities away from the rivers, such as drainage and tree felling, were also having a considerable effect on the rivers. Consequently the focus widened to include the whole catchment. The health of the fish population and the water flow characteristics are taken to be indicative of the health of the whole glen. A bellweather as one group member put it. The catchment approach has been very effective.

Who ? The project is for the benefit of the people who live and work in the glen, and indirectly for the many visitors. This community is largely the same as the Community Council electorate with the largest population centre being Drumnadrochit. The people who live in the glen work mainly in the tourist and service sectors. Many commute to Inverness and few work in agriculture or forestry these days. The CC has good support from the local community but, as usual, few attend its meetings.

The management group is still a sub-committee of the CC but has evolved into a partnership with Forest Enterprise and is now known as the Glen Urquhart Land Use Partnership. The link to the CC is seen to be very helpful in giving the group a democratic mandate and also confers practical benefits, such as using the Highland Council tendering system. The original five volunteers still form the group and include three riparian owners, the former CC chair and the local councillor. As well as the formal relationship with FE, good working relationships have been developed with other organisations such as SNH, SEPA and the Ness District Fisheries Board (which one of the group chairs). All the owners in the catchment have been contacted. As well as FE, there are a few private forests managed by forest companies, private estates, farms and crofts. Most have been supportive of the initiative.

What ? 33% of the catchment is forest (of which 15% belongs to Forest Enterprise), 15% farmland and the rest is open hill. The species balance for the whole of the Fort Augustus District is Sitka spruce 35%, lodgepole pine 27%, Scots pine 17%, other conifers 13%, broadleaves 8%. As the second rotation kicks in the proportion of lodgepole pine will decrease with increases in Sitka spruce and the broadleaves. The other species will remain about the same. In the Forest Enterprise plantations in Glen Urquhart, this process is already well under way and little of the first rotation is left, mostly as long term retentions. The private forests tend to be much younger and are probably less diverse. There are also substantial areas of semi-natural woodland on some of the estates and farms. The rivers themselves have very diverse riparian woodland, especially on the lower reaches. These woodlands are a concern as they haven't been actively managed in the past and natural regeneration is being prevented by heavy grazing.

Most of the FE forest has been through a restructuring process, based mainly on landscape considerations but with some benefits to the ecology. The age structure has widened from the narrow range of the first rotation. Together with the private forests in the glen there is a good range of tree ages but with really mature trees under-represented. There are few constraints to management. The types of forest in the glen are diverse, from semi-natural birch and riparian woodland to purely commercial plantations with much in between of a multi-benefit nature. The objectives for the various blocks will vary accordingly.

Vision ? The vision for the project is sustainable land management within the catchment. This takes in natural woodland, a diverse ecology, a stable river system and increasing fish populations. Both of the rivers provide important nursery areas. Local employment and supporting the local economy are major concerns of the Community Council. The vision has been summarised as ensuring that the glen stays beautiful and habitable, and the village isn't damaged by flooding.

How ? The project started with a public meeting in October 1997 called by the Glen Urquhart Community Council to which Forest Enterprise and other riparian owners were invited. At this meeting, five local people with some knowledge and interest in this matter were appointed to a sub-committee. The CC owns no land but seeks to influence the management of all the land in the catchment, particularly that which is covered with trees. As representatives of the community, the Glen Urquhart Land Use

Partnership has found that most owners are very willing to comply with the project's aims and advice.

The **milestones** have been:

1. The formation of the group in October 1997.
2. A site meeting with Forest Enterprise in January 1998.
3. A presentation by the Forestry Commission's hydrologist, Tom Nisbet, to explain forest hydrology in February 1998.
4. Survey of the majority of the river with a photographic record by February 1998.
5. All known riparian owners written to by February 1998.
6. Considerable amounts of timber removed from the river by FE and other riparian owners.
7. Repairs made to river banks and excess gravel removed from a major site by September 1998.
8. Good working relationship developed between the partners and associated organisations and individuals.
9. A flood warning system has been developed and is currently being implemented.

The Partnership facilitates action by encouraging owners, finding funds to help pay for the work and obtaining permissions, for example for the extraction of gravel from the river. It has decided to put the emphasis on action rather than on commissioning expensive consultants' reports.

The work has been divided up into three phases:

1. Short-term. Survey of the river to determine areas where prompt action is required to clear debris such as fallen tree roots in order to reduce the risk of log jams in the event of spate floods.
2. Medium-term. Establishment of a basic management system for the river and tackling of some of the more serious erosion problems which exist.
3. Long-term. Establishment of a viable and ongoing system to monitor the river and its catchment, ensuring that steps are taken to minimise damage to the environment (with all that that term implies), bearing in mind that the two rivers are natural spate rivers.

This work will largely be carried out by local businesses and individuals so there will be some economic benefits to the local community.

The biggest **challenges** were (and continue to be):

- Obtaining funding, especially the chore of form filling. The **solution** is to get on and do it but the suggestion was made that this could be a service provided by a support person should a Community Woodland Association come into existence. Fundraising tends to be a seasonal activity, best suited to the winter when tourist related activities are at a lower level. Unfortunately, this doesn't always coincide with funding deadlines.
- Apathy in the local community. The same people do things but most express a willingness to help. The **solution** is to keep everybody informed of progress with regular updates.

Greatest achievements ? The greatest achievement has been getting almost all of the individual riparian owners working for the good of all and for the benefit of the local

community. The partnership with Forest Enterprise has become very positive. It is now clear that this concerted effort is likely to achieve the project's objectives of reduced floods and improved fish stocks. The horizons of the project have expanded to include land-use within the whole catchment as it has become clear that many activities outside the riparian zone, such as drainage and clearfelling, impact upon the river. The work has only started and it will be a challenge to keep the momentum going.

Sources of help and advice ? There are many skills within the Partnership- farming, forestry, river management and engineering. Perhaps the greatest skill is local knowledge, both of the river and of the way local people think, their perspectives and needs.

Some technical skills have been brought in, mainly through associated organisations such as SEPA and SNH. A forestry consultant was employed to survey a section of the river and advise on felling licences. The FE Civil Engineer provided advice on erosion sites together with possible costs. Various technical reports, such as that on the Urquhart Bay woods, have been consulted.

Helpful organisations have included SEPA, SNH, the Ness District Fisheries Board, Highland Council and the Forestry Commission (as distinct from FE which is the partner organisation).

The funds raised to date have been limited and further funding is being actively pursued. The principal contributors have been the riparian owners themselves (in addition to their own costs) and Highland Council. No training has taken place to date.

Future Activities ? The short-term proposals have been largely completed and work is developing on the medium and long-term phases. The project can be summarised as on-going monitoring and constructive intervention in catchment management. There is no end point. The project is building up to a higher level of activity, defining key areas for action and obtaining funds to enable operations to take place. A target of 5-10 years has been set to sort out the major problems on the two rivers.

The Partnership group is able to co-opt new members should someone with the right skills make themselves available. If the group membership drops, the Community Council could call another public meeting and recruit some additional members. At present, the current group is functioning well and is pleased with progress. The members are pragmatic and realise that it will take time to improve the river to the optimum state.

Lessons for others ?

- Don't give up.
- Be prepared to compromise.
- Be prepared for a long haul.

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