

# INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN LAND REFORM AND REWILDING IN SCOTLAND

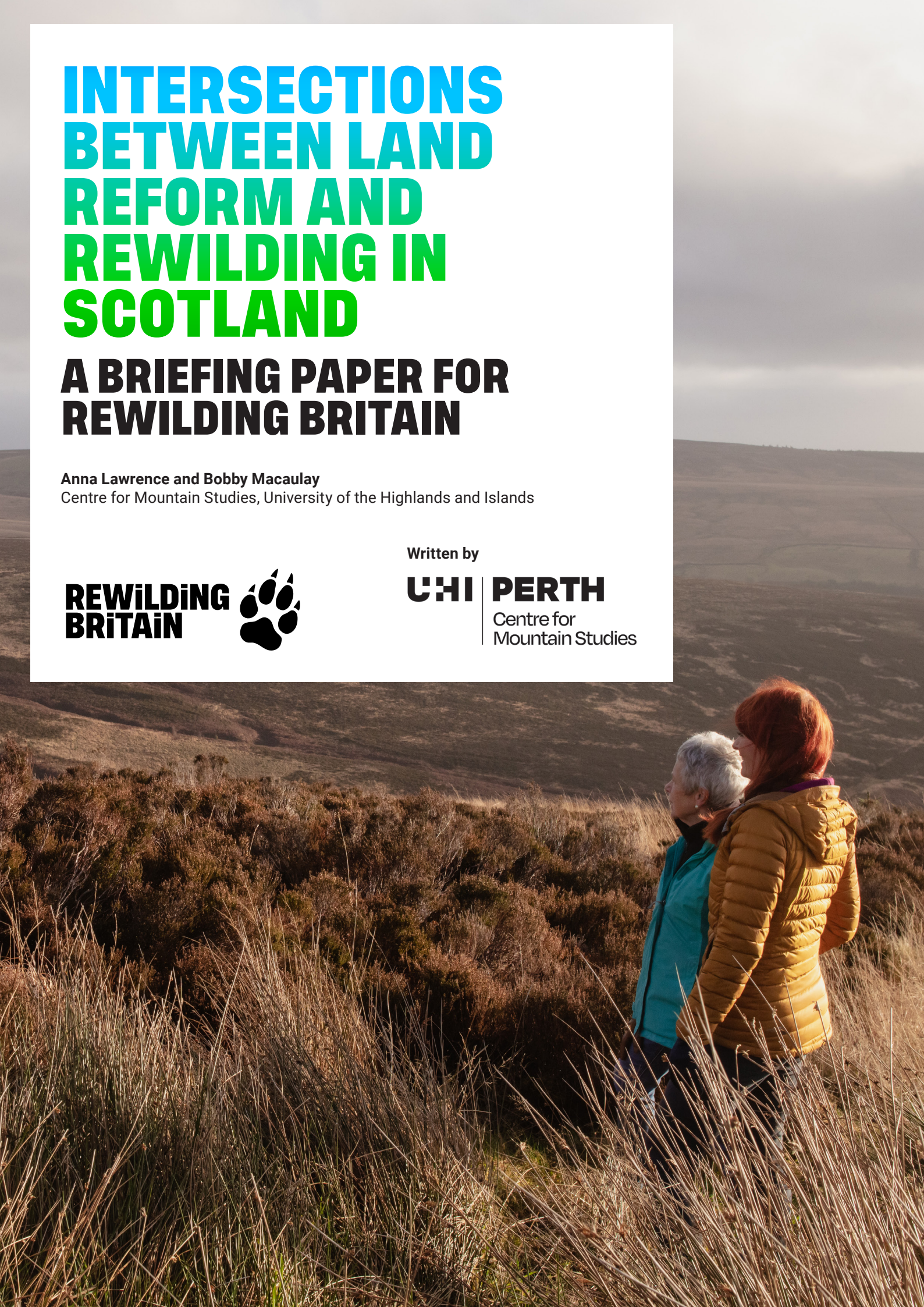
## A BRIEFING PAPER FOR REWILDING BRITAIN

Anna Lawrence and Bobby Macaulay

Centre for Mountain Studies, University of the Highlands and Islands



Written by





# CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>1. Foreword</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>2. Land reform and rewilding</b>  | <b>4</b>  |
| 2.1 Aims and definitions   | 4         |
| <b>3. Executive summary</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>4. Land reform in the modern Scottish context</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| 4.1 High-level review of post-devolution, community-focused land reform policy developments      | 7         |
| 4.2 Summary of upcoming developments in land reform in Scotland                                  | 10        |
| <b>5. Assessing the available evidence</b>   | <b>11</b> |
| <b>6. Discussion: relevance of land reform to the future of the rewilding agenda in Scotland</b> | <b>13</b> |
| 6.1 Ecological restoration is increasingly understood as also being social                       | 13        |
| 6.2 On evidence and terminology  | 13        |
| 6.3 What community-focused land reform brings to rewilding                                       | 15        |
| 6.4 Limited implementation of land reform – and other options                                    | 16        |
| <b>7. Acknowledgements</b>   | <b>19</b> |
| <b>8. References</b>   | <b>20</b> |
| <b>9. Appendix 1. Cases reviewed: ownership status and role of land reform mechanisms</b>        | <b>22</b> |
| <b>10. Appendix 2. Aspirations and achievements in relation to rewilding or biodiversity</b>     | <b>25</b> |
| <b>11. Appendix 3. Sources for Appendices 1 and 2</b>  | <b>32</b> |

# 1. FOREWORD

We face an uncertain future. Escalating climate breakdown and continued biodiversity collapse put us, our livelihoods and the natural world at risk.

With our partners in the Scottish Rewilding Alliance, Rewilding Britain wants to see Scotland strive to become a Rewilding Nation – where the natural world is healing, where biodiversity is recovering, where people feel connected to nature and where everyone is involved in the mission to create a greener, fairer Scotland.

Scotland is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries. Alongside that, just a few hundred people own half of Scotland's privately owned land. These issues are entwined, and both must be addressed urgently.

A growing number of communities want to see the natural world around them restored, which would create a cascade of benefits for nature as well as local people. For some, ownership of land is their route to rewilding; almost 3% of Scotland is now owned by communities. Elsewhere, where direct ownership of land is not possible or not wanted, meaningful engagement in land use change – such as rewilding – is essential.

This briefing paper was commissioned to inform Rewilding Britain's work on land reform as the Land Reform Bill passes through the Scottish Parliament. It aims to take an empirical approach to the question of whether land reform and rewilding are the polarising opposites they are often portrayed to be, or whether, in fact, common principles underpin both.

We hope it will spark conversations about how the latest land reform legislation must help empower more people to tackle the nature and climate emergencies.

To create a Rewilding Nation we need to use every tool we have to restore nature and reconnect people with the land.



Kevin Cumming  
Rewilding Director





## 2. LAND REFORM AND REWILDING

Over the past 25 years there has been a concerted legislative push for land reform and community ownership, but change remains slow. Land reform and rewilding are not mutually exclusive and can share many of the same objectives. There is much anecdotal evidence indicating that motivations for, and outcomes of, community ownership enhance biodiversity (and thereby contribute to rewilding efforts).

However, empirical evidence is often lacking, difficult to locate or not comparable between cases. The qualitative ‘story’ of changing ownership, leading to changed management objectives and different outcomes, may be sufficiently robust if thoroughly studied. The more quantitative assessment of outcomes, based on a standardised and participatory approach to monitoring ecological outcomes, requires a new and accessible method for measuring, mapping and evaluating the results of community management in order to draw wider conclusions. Additionally, further work is needed to make the ‘language’ of rewilding accessible to communities, and to broaden awareness of the social-ecological approach implicit in the rewilding ‘spectrum’ articulated by Rewilding Britain. With clearer communication and evidence in both directions, the role of community-focused land reform in contributing to landscape-scale ecological restoration will be strengthened.



### 2.1 Aims and definitions

Rewilding has at its heart a focus on reinstating natural processes such as free-flowing rivers or predator-prey relationships, and, where appropriate, missing species – allowing those species to create dynamic, constantly changing habitat mosaics. It brings people and communities together to find ways to work, live and prosper within healthy, flourishing ecosystems. The five principles of rewilding (Box 1) reflect this.

#### FIVE PRINCIPLES OF REWILDING

##### adopted by Rewilding Britain

1. Support people and nature together
2. Let nature lead
3. Create resilient local economies
4. Work at nature’s scale
5. Secure benefits for the long term

Box 1

It is important to understand how communities can be more involved in rewilding. Scotland’s approach to land reform has the potential to contribute to these flourishing ecosystems. Yet there is still a need to better understand how communities, through land reform, meet and influence these rewilding goals and outcomes.

As a first step towards understanding the opportunities for and limitations of collaborations between community-focused land reform and rewilding, Rewilding Britain commissioned the Centre for Mountain Studies to conduct this review of current experience.



## 3. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Objective:** Rewilding Britain commissioned University of the Highlands and Islands' Centre for Mountain Studies to write a briefing paper looking at the intersection between the land reform agenda and rewilding in Scotland. The paper includes: an introduction to the meaning of land reform in the modern Scottish context, and to recent policy developments; a review of where rewilding has intersected with land reform over the past two decades in Scotland; and discussion of the relevance of land reform to the future of the rewilding agenda in Scotland, focused on the question 'How does land reform as currently constructed restrain or enable rewilding?'

**Land reform legislation:** over the past two years a range of legislation has sought to redistribute the control of Scotland's land and the wealth that derives from it. Much of this has been aimed at increasing the amount of land owned by community groups through providing funding, support and mechanisms that encourage community landownership. Such mechanisms have provided pathways to follow and changed the power relations between groups, allowing communities in some instances to apply pressure for a seller to enter negotiations for the sale of the land.

**Land reform outcomes:** community groups in Scotland own over 750 assets of which around two-thirds comprise land covering more than 200,000 hectares (494,200 acres). Despite this, less than 3% of Scotland's land is in community hands, however, and there are signs that the unusually concentrated pattern of landownership in Scotland may be becoming even more concentrated. Communities continue to face barriers to acquiring land, including high prices and complex and time-consuming requirements, and weak legislation.

**Current legislative developments:** the most recent Land Reform (Scotland) Bill, the third in just over 20 years, is currently making its way through the Scottish Parliament. The Bill has been criticised for omitting many of the recommendations made by the Scottish Land Commission (tasked with

providing evidence-based land reform policy recommendations) and doing little to benefit local people or the environment.

**Social-ecological integration:** ecological restoration increasingly recognises the duality of social and ecological elements, integrating community engagement and acknowledging that humans are part of ecosystems. This integration is essential for the success of large-scale restoration projects. The idea of 'wild' landscapes without humans is rightly challenged in Scotland, where historical land use has influenced current ecological conditions. The romanticisation of empty landscapes often overlooks both the history of and potential for human involvement in restoring biodiversity. Both 'rewilding' and 'land reform' can be polarising and can trigger hostile reactions among some stakeholders. This can unnecessarily stall or distract conversations about a more integrated social-ecological system.

**Rapid evidence assessment:** our approach collated readily available information to help understand whether community ownership or management is associated with a shift towards rewilding or ecological restoration objectives, and whether those objectives lead to outcomes that register on the 'spectrum' of rewilding. Our sample included 21 data-rich cases, which provided an indication of some of the aspirations and outcomes of community groups working in this area. As such they were a purposive not representative sample.

**Evidence and outcomes:** community ownership is often motivated by a wish to see more nature-friendly management objectives and ecological improvements and all our examples included some element of narrative indicating that the community aimed to improve nature outcomes. However, there is a scarcity of robust and consistent evidence for the outcomes. This can be attributed to: short timeframes for community ownership; lack of resources for data collection; other priorities for time and money; and diversity of community land assets, objectives and approaches. More robustly evidenced outcomes are typically associated with long-term projects and larger landholdings.



The role of community ownership in ecological restoration may be better evidenced with the development of an accessible toolkit that matches community scope and allows flexibility for participatory design of targets and indicators.

The Rewilding Journeys toolkit developed by Rewilding Britain, which outlines the rewilding 'spectrum', is a helpful tool for understanding and communicating the range of relevant ecological actions and outcomes. Even within our sample, however, most are at level 1 or 2 on the scale, with few beyond or aiming to move beyond that. There are other important ways in which community-managed land contributes to biodiversity while enhancing the asset to provide other community benefits, such as jobs and income from timber.

**Property rights are multidimensional:** international research treats community (and other) land ownership as part of a 'bundle of rights'. This moves beyond seeing legal owners

as the only decision-makers regarding, or beneficiaries of, land. The rights to access, use, make decisions, remove or sell a resource do not need to sit exclusively with one entity. Furthermore, nature restoration and ecological connectivity require better support for collaborative work across ownership boundaries to facilitate connected initiatives and reduce tensions resulting from competing objectives.

**Land reform constraints:** the expansion of community ownership is limited by high land prices, complex processes and scepticism (despite the evidence) about community groups' capacity to manage land. Some policies support trends that further undermine that capacity. Current incentives for rewilding, such as carbon credits, may drive land prices up, adding a further barrier to expanding community ownership. This review suggests that policy improvements and support for innovative governance models could enhance the contribution of land reform to rewilding.





## 4. LAND REFORM IN THE MODERN SCOTTISH CONTEXT

Land reform is an attempt to curb the influence of market forces on land ownership and use in order to benefit local communities and broader society (Dovring, 1987). In Scotland today, land reform considers issues of access, rights, leases, taxation, management and transparency with regard to land ownership and use. The following section outlines the central elements of post-devolution, community-focused land reform policy in Scotland.

### 4.1 High-level review of post-devolution, community-focused land reform policy developments

The following are the main developments in community-focused land reform over the past 25 years. These are grouped thematically rather than chronologically, to reflect the fact that some elements have been amended and developed through subsequent legislation.

In Scotland, land reform is often erroneously conflated with community landownership. While community landownership is one facet of land reform, its expansion is an important community-focused element that is at the heart of many of the legislative developments described below. The concept of community landownership is not unique to Scotland (Moore and McKee, 2012). Aside from two outliers, community landownership in Scotland began in the early 1990s and has been facilitated through funding, legislation and organisational support over the past 30 years (Wightman, 2013).

Today, community groups in Scotland own over 750 assets, of which around two-thirds are land. Over 200,000 ha (494,200 acres), or 2.8% of land in Scotland, is owned by community organisations, including more than 20 estates with a resident population (Scottish Government Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services (RESAS), 2023).

#### 4.1.1 Community Right to Buy

One of the central elements of community-focused land reform legislation is the Community Right to Buy (CRtB). There are now a range of different types of CRtB but they all fundamentally provide appropriately constituted community groups with the right to request ownership of land or assets. If this right is granted (see different mechanisms below), the community has the opportunity to purchase the asset within a specific time period at a price defined by an independent district valuer.

The 'original' CRtB was introduced in the 2003 Land Reform (Scotland) Act (LRA). Through the mechanism, community groups can 'register an interest' in an asset, regardless of owner, which imposes a condition on the sale of that asset whereby the community group must be offered first refusal if the asset is listed for sale. The 2003 LRA restricted the CRtB to rural areas, but the 2015 Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act extended it to cover the whole of Scotland. The CRtB mechanism is now mostly applied to privately owned assets, following the introduction of the Community Asset Transfer mechanism for the acquisition of public sector assets (see below), although it remains possible for any owner to use this mechanism.

Accompanying the CRtB in the 2003 LRA was the Crofting Community Right to Buy (Crofting CRtB). This right is only available to crofting communities and goes further than the CRtB by facilitating the acquisition of a crofting estate without requiring a willing seller. There have only been two instances of this mechanism being used and on both occasions the buyer and seller reached a negotiated sale prior to the formal execution of the mechanism. In this sense, the Crofting CRtB has acted as more of a threat or bargaining chip than a practical process.

The 2015 Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act (CEA) introduced a new CRtB for 'Abandoned, Neglected or Detrimental' land (CRtB AND).



This mechanism recognises the impact that proximity to such land can have on individuals and communities. As with the Crofting CRtB, this is a compulsory purchase right, meaning that so long as the community can demonstrate that a piece of land or asset is abandoned or neglected, or that the current ownership and management is presenting a risk to or is harming the local area, ownership can be assumed without the requirement for a willing seller. However, the requirements to enact this mechanism are very stringent and fewer than five attempts (three attempts by two groups) have been recorded, none of which were successful (Mann, 2023).

Finally, the 2016 LRA introduced the Right to Buy Land to Further Sustainable Development. As with the CRtB AND, this is a compulsory right of purchase dependent on the current ownership or use negatively affecting the sustainable development of the community and requiring the applying group to demonstrate how their ownership would, conversely, lead to a positive impact. This mechanism has also been criticised for the 'high bar' required to trigger it and to date only one organisation has applied through this process, with no indication of whether this was successful or not.

#### **4.1.2 Right to responsible access**

The 2003 LRA introduced the right to responsible access to land, alongside the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which sets out the guidance through which this is to be managed. These wide-reaching rights give members of the public the right to access and traverse most of Scotland's land, regardless of owner and with a few exceptions pertaining to some uses. Those accessing the land are responsible for doing so in a manner that respects other people and the environment, and landowners and managers are responsible for facilitating such access and not placing undue restrictions on the public's ability to traverse and recreate on land.

#### **4.1.3 Public and Common Good land and assets**

The 2015 CEA introduced procedures for Community Asset Transfers (CATs). A CAT may be made in order for a community to deliver a service (Participation Request) or for the lease or ownership of a publicly owned asset (Asset Transfer). The latter mechanism pertains to assets owned by a range of 'relevant authorities', including local authorities, the National Health Service, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Forestry and Land Scotland, the Ministry of Defence and many others. A process exists for an appropriately constituted community organisation to request the asset, following which the onus is on the owner to transfer unless they can provide a specific reason why this should not happen. Unlike the CRtB mechanisms, CATs are available to 'communities of interest' and do not require a geographically defined organisation. A community organisation has the right to appeal any decision made by a relevant authority, and this must be considered by the Scottish Government.

For their part, all relevant authorities are required to publish an accessible and accurate register of all assets they own, and to respond to requests from community organisations in a timely manner. If a price for the sale of the asset cannot be agreed, the value will be defined by an external third party. Most 'place-based' community groups can apply to the Scottish Land Fund to enable the purchase of these assets.

'Common Good' assets are not owned by the council in the traditional sense, but are held and managed by it on behalf of local people. These assets may have come to such stewardship through a range of means but should not simply be agglomerated into the asset register of local authorities. The 2015 CEA places a duty on local authorities to maintain an accessible register of assets held for the common good and engage with community organisations prior to disposing of any of these assets. Common Good property is subject to Community Asset Transfer, so such a disposal may be to a local community group.

#### 4.1.4 Rights, responsibilities and community engagement

Land rights have been a consideration of human rights internationally for many years (Hunter, 2014), including the declaration that “land rights are fundamental to addressing the common challenges of humanity” (International Land Coalition, 2013). The human rights focus of the 2016 LRA included a commitment to draft a Land Rights and Responsibilities Statement (LRRS), the first of its kind in the world (International Land Coalition, 2018), to outline the respective responsibilities of those who work, own, live on and interact with land. Following the assertion that “land reform is about finding a mix of rights and responsibilities which will facilitate the development of a healthy society and a healthy environment” (Warren and McKee, 2011, p21), the LRRS is explicitly based on The Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the UN Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Hunter, 2014; MacInnes and Shields, 2015; the Scottish Government, 2017).

These guidelines recognise that “no tenure right, including private ownership, is absolute” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2012, p. 6) and must be balanced against the social, economic and cultural rights of those living on the land (MacInnes, 2019; Wightman, 2013). This allows the economic, social and cultural rights of those living in rural communities in Scotland to justify, in certain circumstances, a change in landownership without the need for a willing seller (McKee et al., 2013). It also places human rights and the common good at the heart of future land reform (Dalglish, 2018; Shields, 2018), and in pursuit of “inclusive and sustainable economic growth and... social justice” (The Scottish Government, 2017, p4).

One of the Principles within the LRRS was the effective community engagement in decisions on land use and management. The Scottish Government published guidance on engaging

communities in decisions relating to land in 2018. This was followed by a protocol developed by the Scottish Land Commission. Consisting of ‘expectations’, ‘recommendations’ and practical suggestions, the guidance is ultimately voluntary and non-binding, and studies suggest that its implementation is weak (Lawrence and Paterson, 2022). However, the guidance and protocol do outline the expectation that local people should be consulted and engaged in decisions about land that may affect them.

#### 4.1.5 Research, transparency and ongoing land reform policy development

The introduction of the 2016 LRA also increased optimism that there would be permanent institutional infrastructure implemented because a “sustained approach is needed to achieve the necessary modernisation and reform of Scotland’s system of land ownership” (Elliot et al., 2014, p. 238; Peacock, 2018). This infrastructure came in the form of the Scottish Land Commission, which was created in 2017 and tasked with driving forward land reform through evidence-based policy recommendations and knowledge exchange. While protection of the United Nations’ Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is not enshrined in law (Hunter, 2014) the Scottish Land Commission has placed it at the heart of its work (MacInnes, 2019); it underpins the Commission’s Strategic Plan and Programme of Work (Shields, 2018).

Also introduced by the 2016 LRA, the Register of Controlling Interests in Land (launched in April 2022) aims to improve transparency around who owns and/or makes decisions regarding the management and use of land. An accessible register, maintained by the Registers of Scotland, requires that all land holdings be registered or face a financial penalty. In recognition that the owner of the land may not be the person who controls its use, the register is to include all of those who are “able to exert significant influence or control” over land or property.



## 4.2 Summary of upcoming developments in land reform in Scotland

At the time of writing the 2024 Land Reform Bill has been tabled and is going through its first committee stage. It currently includes three main facets relating to community engagement:

- Community engagement obligations in relation to large land holdings. This provision requires an owner of land over 3,000ha (7,400 acres) – or slightly different on islands – to engage with the local community in the development of a compulsory land management plan. Further, such owners must consider a reasonable request for a community organisation to lease some of their land.
- A new Land and Communities Commissioner position will be created within the Scottish Land Commission. This individual will

have a regulatory role in adjudicating on the compliance of landowners with these provisions.

- Communities will be given additional time to register an interest in purchasing a large landholding through the existing CRtB provisions.

These provisions have been criticised for doing little to challenge the concentrated landownership pattern, for being insufficiently robust to require meaningful community engagement, and for the leniency with which those transgressing the provisions will be punished.

Finally, a review of the range of CRtB mechanisms began in the summer of 2024 and will report by the end of 2025. This review will consider the function of existing mechanisms and whether any new legislation is required.





# 5. ASSESSING THE AVAILABLE EVIDENCE

To better understand how communities involved with land reform are engaged with rewilding we used an approach called ‘rapid evidence assessment’ (Government Social Research, 2010), which is designed to understand trends using available information, without making demands on communities. We assembled a sample of cases through a web search, our own networks and a call-out for examples on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter (X). We focused on those where the story included something about biodiversity and/or rewilding. We identified 21 examples, ranging from those where the community had purchased large areas of land explicitly for rewilding, to others where they aimed to save small areas from housing developers.

We wanted to find out whether the evidence tells a useful story about *change* in management following land reform measures (such as community acquisition); and then whether that change in management had led to an evidenced change in biodiversity or rewilding.

To understand change in management following change in ownership, we analysed published blogs, media articles and newsletters from before and after the acquisition, and any available statement of management objectives (usually from the community group’s website).

To understand outcomes, we used the ‘spectrum’ of rewilding as described in Rewilding Britain’s Rewilding Journeys and assessed where the efforts of each case might contribute. These are summarised in Box 2.

## REWILDING JOURNEYS: REWILDING BRITAIN’S ‘SPECTRUM’ OF REWILDING

### Levels 1-3

In these semi-wild areas a diverse range of natural process-land uses and enterprises are supported while allowing nature to heal and flourish. Local communities have an increasing involvement in – and sense of ownership of – rewilding decisions, which deliver shared benefits.

### Levels 4-5

In these core rewilding areas nature is driving change as much as possible. Local communities are meaningfully involved in the long-term governance, stewardship and protection of the land.

Box 2





To summarise this in an easily comparable way we split the information into the following queries:

1. Has ownership changed to community ownership and/or to some form of community engagement that involves meaningful decision-making?
2. Is that change attributable to land reform?
3. Has the change in ownership or engagement been associated with change in management objectives?
4. Has the change in ownership or engagement been associated with change in outcomes?
5. What might the effect on rewilding outcomes look like, represented using the Rewilding Britain 'spectrum' of rewilding?
6. How good is the evidence for outcomes?
7. How good is the evidence for a link between ownership and outcomes?

Each question is a column heading in Appendices 1 and 2. Sources for the information in the tables are provided in Appendix 3.

We also tried to assess evidence for the role of 'community process' – the decision-making structures, consultation with wider community, volunteering involvement in management work. However, information available on websites and reports was insufficient to address this. Community processes are an important part of the analysis of *why* community ownership does or does not intersect with rewilding, and a deeper dive into the experiences of communities would be required to populate this part of the analysis.

Naturally, at this level, the scope of evidence is highly variable. The tables represent a simple assessment of the information available, within the scope of this study, to help answer the questions linking land reform with rewilding. They are not an assessment of the achievements of any given project or organisation. A more detailed and

proactive approach would be needed to acquire that evidence, probably with the collection of new data.

Rewilding Britain's 'spectrum' of rewilding was used to indicate our interpretation of actual or aspirational outcomes.

The gaps in the tables, particularly in Appendix 2, draw attention to several factors: communities do not necessarily prioritise the collection of data to evidence outcomes (especially as this is often a costly activity); even where they do, reports and data may not be published on websites; many community assets are in the early stages of ownership and have shifting management objectives; biodiversity or habitat restoration is often only one of several objectives, and other more 'people-orientated' activities need more immediate publicity to ensure participation.

Nevertheless, because the assessment of evidence took a consistent approach, some trends can be identified. These are discussed in the next section.



## 6. DISCUSSION: RELEVANCE OF LAND REFORM TO THE FUTURE OF THE REWILDING AGENDA IN SCOTLAND

The study addresses the question of how 'land reform as currently constructed' restrains or enables rewilding. We summarise the results of our review here.

### 6.1 Ecological restoration is increasingly understood as also being social

The way that social and ecological processes are intertwined has been described as the "scientific and social duality of modern ecological restoration" (Martin et al., 2021) and we see increasing attempts to integrate that duality in Scotland. A number of researchers have emphasised the fact that people are part of the ecosystems where nature is being restored (e.g. Barnaud et al., 2021; Deary and Warren, 2017; Atchison et al., 2024; Lawrence, 2020). The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforests commissioned new guidelines on community engagement in 2023, justified on the grounds that "Landscape scale ecological restoration takes place across large areas, including places where people live ... whose livelihoods depend on the land .... People are part of the landscape and restoration needs to include them in order to be successful." (Lawrence and Paterson, 2023.) Community Land Scotland and the Scottish Rewilding Alliance recently wrote: "Scotland has a rich history of understanding how deeply people, the land, nature, and culture are intertwined." (Raeburn and Cumming 2024.) This is part of a much wider literature on local and indigenous knowledge, and on democratising conservation (e.g. Dotson and Pereira, 2022), which is beyond the scope of this brief review.

There is a pragmatic component to this depolarisation as well. For example, the period 2021–2030 is the United Nations Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. It includes community engagement as one of its aspirations (Fischer et al., 2021), and recognises that community engagement is important because it can help to ensure that restoration efforts are effective and

sustainable. We see an increasing sense that good practice in rewilding includes community ownership or community engagement. For example: the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforests' recent good practice guidelines, which now have to be included in any new projects; Highlands Rewilding and The Barraholm Trust at Tayvallich and Yearnstone in the uplands of Renfrewshire, both of which now include communities from a motivation of ecological and social renewal; and several large-scale, private estate owners. Community Woodlands Association conducted a study with four member woodlands to increase awareness of the potential economic and social benefits of native woodland management in addition to the more widely perceived environmental benefits.<sup>1</sup>

In the Scottish context there is a particular need to address a perceived opposition between 'people' and 'wild', owing to the romanticisation of the empty landscapes of the Highlands and elsewhere (Hunter, 2017). This dichotomy is not unique to Scotland – the "myth of a wilderness without humans" has underpinned many tragic evictions of indigenous people from their lands (Dowie, 2019) but the result in Scotland is to conflate the consequences of past land use changes with current low population densities. There has been an explicit interpretation of 'wild' as 'without people' and yet "much of what we call wild land is ecologically knackered ... grazed-out, barren, unproductive. Wild land's like that because, in many instances, that's how its owners like it." (Hunter, 2017.)

### 6.2 On evidence and terminology

Our review of evidence is based on cases brought to our attention either through prior knowledge and an online search, or through responses to a call-out on social media. As such, it is not a representative sample but nonetheless provides us with a flavour of some of the achievements of community

<sup>1</sup> Published: CWA Native Woods Project Findings – Community Woodlands Association (communitywoods.org)



ownership, some of the causal connections that need to be unpacked by deeper analysis, and a host of issues with language and categorisation of 'community ownership', 'land reform' and 'rewilding'.

We distinguish between evidence of outcomes and evidence that those outcomes can be attributed to community (or any other form of) ownership – and whether that ownership is the outcome of land reform.

In terms of evidence of outcomes: within the scope of this review the depth of evidence varies. A few cases provide robust quantitative evidence of rewilding or biodiversity outcomes at the accessible level of a rapid review. These are mostly the larger landholdings owned by more loosely defined communities (e.g. Highland Perthshire Community Land Trust; Carrifran Wildwood). It is reasonable to conclude from these examples that the existence of evidence is attributable to the change of ownership and to the nature-recovery objectives of the landowning group. For some community owners there is also a notable increase in citizen science – broadly defined – including participatory monitoring and evaluation (Glenan), school-led surveys (Abriachan) and training in biological recording (Glenmidge).

In terms of evidence of the influence of change of ownership on outcomes: here we would rely on narrative, on 'before' and 'after' stories, on stated constitutional objectives, and (with much more depth of research) on full multi-method case studies (including interviews). Without the latter, which were not feasible within the scope of this study, we saw a repeated and convincing pattern of narrative supporting the generalisation that change to community ownership (broadly defined) has in most of these cases been accompanied by a shift to more nature-friendly management objectives, and, where time has allowed, to more nature-friendly outcomes. Further data could be analysed.

For example, the application forms and feasibility studies of all the CATS applications to Forestry and Land Scotland offer a source of qualitative data that could extend this study.<sup>2</sup>

On terminology: the terms 'rewilding' and 'land reform' have a tendency to trigger hostile reactions among some stakeholders. This can unnecessarily stall or distract the conversation about a more integrated social-ecological system. Some respondents advised us to avoid these terms while others understood the words to be socially constructed and interpreted them as meaning different things to different stakeholders. This can be linked to an abundant wider literature on different understandings and definitions of the term 'rewilding'. Individuals' perspectives on this term are determined by their (often unspecified) interpretations of its meaning, and they support or oppose the term accordingly. This ambiguity might lead to conflicts over rewilding projects, even in circumstances where certain rewilding practices are unanimously supported (Dolton-Thornton, 2021).

The 'spectrum' elaborated by Rewilding Britain in their Rewilding Journeys (summarised in Box 2, page 11) is one such tool that could be widely used to facilitate this understanding. While this has helped to take a nuanced look at the outcomes, there are other nature-friendly actions that could be taken into account that match the language used by stakeholders. These include 'conservation', 'biodiversity improvement', 'nature restoration', 'ecological restoration'. We have tended to use the phrase 'nature restoration' as a broad term to embrace both rewilding and the aspirations of community owners.

Similarly, the phrase 'land reform' can induce resistance among landowners. Within some landowner sectors we see scepticism about the capacity of community groups to manage land.

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2. All FLS CATS applications are listed here and at a link from this page to past applications: Community Asset Transfer Scheme (CATS) - Forestry and Land Scotland

Some of the sceptical landowners are, nonetheless, happy to consider the creation of new crofts, donating small areas of land to communities or partnerships with community groups. In this regard, landowners may be more willing to engage in facets of land reform short of community ownership, such as increased community engagement.

### 6.3 What community-focused land reform brings to rewilding

This paper is based on a rapid evidence review of available evidence, as discussed above, within the limits of 'sampling', as also discussed above. Within those limits a careful assessment suggests that many community acquisitions are associated with new land management objectives that include biodiversity conservation, nature recovery or rewilding. For some, those are the primary objectives (e.g. Dùn Coillich, Carrifran, Langholm). For others, the aim to 'improve' the land (often, for example, a woodland) includes access and education about the land, and those improvements are intended to enhance diversity and ecology as part of the benefit for the community (e.g. Abriachan, Cormonachan, Teuchean). Few do not mention some form of ecological improvement. Others, while making important contributions to ecological restoration, were explicit about the focus being on the benefit for people; this is seen for example in the North Harris Estate's regret about the loss of sheep.

Time is important in demonstrating outcomes. Not surprisingly, some of the examples that have demonstrated most nature restoration are those that have existed for longest. In 24 years, Carrifran Wildwood has planted more than 750,000 native trees and the return of woodland birds is recorded in detail (see Appendix 2). Similarly, Knoydart Forest Trust has had 25 years to achieve celebrated results.

Those that have been rated as a '3' on the rewilding 'spectrum' (Appendix 2) are all large

scale in themselves. However, smaller community-owned landholdings can make landscape-scale contributions. For example, Inchinnan Development Trust bought first one small wood threatened by house building and then acquired Sandieland Wood. It plans to create habitat corridors in an area subject to much development pressure.

We have taken a broad approach to the concept of 'community' and included all those examples nominated by responses to our call for evidence. As Appendix 1 shows, not all fit the requirements of land reform legislation: some, for example, are not geographically defined. But these definitions have shifted in the legislation itself, with the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 allowing for 'communities of interest'. While an initial sweep of the evidence might suggest that some of the more ecologically orientated groups are more akin to communities of interest (e.g. Carrifran), it's clear that some of the most important achievements (whether acquisition or subsequent restoration) have been owned and steered by communities of place in the narrow sense (Knoydart, Langholm).

Communities can also achieve landscape-scale impact through partnerships with larger organisations, whether through necessity or because community momentum is good at bridging different relationships and leveraging funding. For example, the John Muir Trust supported North Harris Trust in the purchase and management of the North Harris Estate; the Scottish Wildlife Trust played a similar role in the acquisition of Eigg for the community; Woodland Trust Scotland and the John Muir Trust supported the Langholm Initiative in the Tarras Valley case. There are examples of successful partnerships between public bodies or private landowners, and communities. Sometimes outcomes for biodiversity can be attributed to the community role in the partnership (i.e. those objectives and outcomes originated with the community).

In other cases investors want to bring community benefits as part of good practice, and allow



for new crofting arrangements or create an Memorandum of Understanding (Highlands Rewilding and commercial forestry developers not listed in Appendix 1 and 2). Some have even donated small areas of land to the community. These approaches enable a range of parties to lead on rewilding objectives, although the evidence is not yet available to compare such outcomes with change in ownership.

A number of other CATs have enhanced biodiversity, for example where commercial woodland has shifted to more biodiversity-friendly management (including many not listed here such as Dronley Community Wood, now under continuous-cover forestry). Clearly managing for more biodiversity is not the same as rewilding and these examples may not warrant even a '1' on the rewilding 'spectrum', but the change to community ownership has precipitated changes in management objectives and practice that are favourable to biodiversity. As such, community ownership may be 'better' for natural processes than the ownership it replaced.<sup>3</sup> However, more research is needed (and possibly co-designing new action research/participatory monitoring and evaluation) with community groups to explore the contribution of these examples to wider rewilding goals.

Reiterating the initial point made above, that the social is increasingly understood to be part of the ecological, a range of research highlights the values and knowledge that different people bring to the ecosystem. An excellent resource on 'marginalised narratives in biodiversity research and management' (Brown et al., 2023) says that "biodiversity enhancement and conservation will be more effective and inclusive if we pay serious and analytical attention to narrative, particularly in identifying and addressing how narrative and story work to marginalise particular people, ecologies and ways of knowing". The authors unpack three ways in which marginalisation is linked to biodiversity: marginalisation of

people, ecologies (including particular species, species assemblages, habitats) and ways of knowing. Thus, barriers to community ownership or engagement may also limit approaches to particular biodiversity priorities and ecological initiatives.

#### **6.4 Limited implementation of land reform – and other options**

In reviewing the wide range of examples offered to us we noted a range of interpretations of both 'land reform' and 'community ownership'. Several of the examples with most impact pre-date 2003 and the first land reform legislation (e.g. Carrifran, Assynt Crofters Trust, Knoydart Forest Trust); others, while labelled as 'community forests' or 'community trusts', are organisations formed by supporters who bought land using a wide range of funding sources, outwith the definition of community conforming with contemporary land reform legislation (e.g. Highland Perthshire Community Land Trust). They are, nevertheless, part of (indeed, pioneers in) an overall shift of ownership structures and should be understood as part of the land reform context in Scotland.

It is one of the significant constraints of land reform as currently constructed that it is so difficult for communities to acquire land. The area of land now in community ownership (212,342ha [524,708 acres] in 2022, the latest published statistics)<sup>4</sup> indicates the scale of effort and willpower that communities will apply to gain land. Research shows that communities have to overcome a range of hurdles including the requirement to make complex and multiple applications, funding requirements, multiple agendas of sellers (including some public bodies) and the potential for burn-out among volunteers. The fact that community groups do jump those hurdles, often with biodiversity as one of their objectives, shows their commitment to those objectives (Mc Morran et al, 2018).

3. This is not to say that private landowners are not achieving rewilding. Clearly, large-scale private landowners and NGOs, where they have the will and the resources, are achieving important outcomes in terms of landscape-scale ecological restoration. Our focus here is on the difference made when communities acquire an asset.

4. Community ownership in Scotland 2022. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/collections/community-ownership-in-scotland/>

Because of rising land prices it is becoming increasingly difficult to acquire large areas of land. Thus, while communities may have been successful in making pro-nature land use decisions, they are limited in the area of land they have to make these decisions over.

Other forms of tenure exist but are more rarely adopted. The management agreement (and now lease) between Cormonachan Community Woodlands and Forestry and Land Scotland is one such example with tangible impact on biodiversity, particularly in the removal of non-native conifers. But these examples are few. Other possibilities created through land reform legislation are less tested. Commons have been an important refuge for biodiversity in other contexts, but two experiences identified through this review suggest that communities are finding it difficult to gain control of Common Good land from local authorities and, specifically, have found it challenging to steer Common Good management towards nature restoration. Here, a failure of land reform can be said to have undermined nature restoration. Other relatively untested mechanisms include acquisition by communities of interest (as provided for by the Community Empowerment Act, 2015), the CRtB Abandoned, Neglected or Detrimental and the CRtB to Further Sustainable Development.<sup>5</sup>

While numerous legislative mechanisms exist through which communities can acquire land and assets, many still pursue negotiated sales with the seller. This may be due to the workload involved in navigating these “cumbersome” mechanisms (McMorran et al., 2018) or the high bar required to trigger them (Mann, 2023). However, these mechanisms can serve as a strong bargaining chip when negotiating with potential sellers (Braunholtz-Speight, 2015). Hence, the climate created by changing expectations, experience and examples, backed by legislation, is also part of the land reform context in Scotland. This changing background of expectations and tone arguably has other side effects: respondents cited examples

of landowners being increasingly interested in innovative arrangements (such as management partnerships) and/or landowners (including public landowners) being keen to demonstrate improved land management, such as councils starting peatland restoration in response to a community organisation showing interest in buying. Specific examples were cited where received opinion was that the landowner (including public bodies) had changed their stated land management objectives to avoid a community acquisition bid. The extent to which this is seen as a success or failure of land reform legislation in encouraging rewilding is worthy of consideration but is beyond the scope of this study.

The issue is not just whether land reform enables or constrains rewilding: evidence reviewed repeatedly indicated that the current incentives for rewilding (in a very broad sense, including, for example, carbon credits for peatland restoration, and perhaps, the expectation of further offsetting incentives) are reinforcing incentives for private ownership, and for Scottish land as an investment prospect. Along with the attractive subsidies for commercial forestry, these factors have contributed to inflating land prices beyond the reach of communities and their funding sources, as well as disincentivising community engagement in land use decision-making. One community forest in the south of Scotland, for example, had to reduce its aspirations for land acquisition because the valuation of the forest increased by more than 500% in the time it took to process a CAT application. As one source indicated, “the acquisition of land to support rewilding, nature restoration, and natural capital investment has been a challenge to land reform and community ownership aspirations in recent years. Broadly, this is due to the resources investors can bring to bear, the often private/off-market nature of transactions, the speed at which they take place, and portfolio building by some (new) landowners.”<sup>6</sup>

While community ownership is a significant focus of land reform, it is but one aspect of attempting

5. In addition to specifically community-focused aspects, other elements of land reform including taxation and incentives, land use policy and ownership requirements may have implications for rewilding. These are beyond the scope of this report.

6. James MacKessack-Leitch, Policy and Practice Lead at the Scottish Land Commission, on LinkedIn, April 2024



to alter the relationship between land and communities in Scotland. For example, the Right to Responsible Access has significant implications for the ways in which people can engage with nature and what that means for rewilding spaces. The voluntary guidelines on community engagement are widely perceived as being ignored by landowners in particular sectors (e.g. Lawrence and Paterson, 2021). It could be argued that there would be less of a requirement for community ownership if the model of community engagement were more robust and binding, indicating that more emphasis on this aspect may negate the need for full ownership by communities and the additional pressures this brings. These are all past aspects of community-focused land reform, which are within the gift of policymakers to strengthen.

Others focus on the range of tenure and partnership arrangements as innovative but somewhat overlooked. For example, Martin et al. (2023) “identified varied and emerging governance arrangements advocated by rewilding proponents and practised across an increasing number of rewilding projects ... [highlighting] a growing interest in partnership and interaction within rewilding with participatory processes involving communities, the public and landowners”. There has always been a dynamic interplay between ‘bottom up’ and ‘top down’ in shaping the land reform agenda in Scotland (Ritchie and Haggith, 2008) but there is a sense in some of the material reviewed here that real reform is stagnating and missing opportunities to learn. This would need further research.

However, many consider that only ownership brings real empowerment. Bryden and Geisler (2007) call this “the hollowness of community participation if devoid of property rights, a key form of empowerment”. Land reform in Scotland could be enriched by analysis with a wider (international, and academic) focus. For example, while attention has shifted to a human rights perspective on land reform, there is scope to expand this by explicitly deconstructing property rights.

Commons theory views rights in natural resources as a bundle, identifying six components (Schlager and Ostrom, 1992): access, withdrawal and exploitation (all use rights) and management, exclusion and alienation (all control rights). All these factors (ownership, governance, community) are affected by state and market influences, including the power of donors and investors (Lawrence et al., 2021). By considering these more clearly as components of ownership, the issue of land reform need not focus so divisively on ownership. In addition, there could be support for governance mechanisms that transcend ownership structures and align with the ecological requirements in a certain place or landscape. For example, to deliver nature restoration that contributes to ecological connectivity requires better support for collaborative work across ownership boundaries, to facilitate connected initiatives and reduce tensions resulting from competing objectives. This then requires community engagement at multiple scales.



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## 9. APPENDIX 1. CASES REVIEWED: OWNERSHIP STATUS AND ROLE OF LAND REFORM MECHANISMS (SUMMARISED FROM WEB SOURCES)

| NAME OF PROJECT/SITE                      | OWNER                       | TYPE OF OWNER (NOTE 1) | TYPE OF LAND (NOTE 2)   | WHAT CHANGED: OWNERSHIP/ MANAGEMENT RIGHTS (NOTE 3)   | CHANGE LINKED TO LAND REFORM LEGISLATION? (NOTE 4) |
|---|-----------------------------|------------------------|---|---|--|
| Abriachan                                 | Abriachan Forest Trust      | CLG                    | 540ha   | Bought from Forestry Commission before land reform legislation/ funding.  | No – buyout prior to legislation                   |
| Assynt (Glencanisp and Drumrunie estates) | Assynt Foundation           | CLG                    | Nearly 18,000ha of mountains, moorland and loch                 | In 2005 purchased the two estates from private seller with support from Scottish Land Fund, Big Lottery Fund and Highlands & Islands Enterprise.                                | Yes – CRtB   |
| Bute Community Forest                     | Bute Community Land Company | CLG                    | 142.42ha mixed woodland   | In 2009, 93% of 2739 people voted in favour of purchasing the forest at the north end of the island – largest community buyout of privately owned land in Scotland.             | n/e  |
| Carrifran                                 | Borders Forest Trust        | SCIO                   | 1,600ha degraded hill pasture, scree, cliffs, high blanket peat | Purchased by group of volunteers; managed through grassroots steering group as part of Borders Forest Trust.  | No   |
| Cormonochan Community Woodlands           | Forestry and Land Scotland  | Public body            | 63.9ha PAWS Atlantic oak & hazel                                | Manages the woodlands with a 20-year lease from 1 April 2021 from Forestry and Land Scotland.   | n/e  |
| Culduthel Community Woods, Inverness      | Culduthel Community Woods   | SCIO                   | Urban, 5–6ha  | Housing developer made woods ownerless; community took in management.   | Yes – not clear which mechanism                    |
| Douglasdale Community Wood                | Douglasdale REAL Group      | CLG                    | 18ha woodland planted on former coal spoil                      | CAT from South Lanarkshire Council  | Yes – CAT  |
| Doune Ponds                               | Moray Estates               | Private                | Nature reserve in an old sand and gravel quarry                 | Management agreement: Community Management Group created to hold overall responsibility for management; Moray Estates hold a permanent place along with two CC representatives. | n/e  |

| NAME OF PROJECT/SITE | OWNER  | TYPE OF OWNER (NOTE 1)        | TYPE OF LAND (NOTE 2)  | WHAT CHANGED: OWNERSHIP/ MANAGEMENT RIGHTS (NOTE 3)   | CHANGE LINKED TO LAND REFORM LEGISLATION? (NOTE 4)                       |
|----------------------|--|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Dùn Coillich         | Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust           | CLG                           | Central Highland estate formerly 'run down'  | £205,000 'raised locally' to purchase in 2002 for HPCLT, which is also a partner in the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership: seven organisations working together to connect woodlands across Highland Perthshire. | n/e  |
| Etrick Marshes       | Etrick and Yarrow Community Development Company      | CLG                           | Marshes and woodland with high biodiversity value  | Etrick Marshes formerly owned by FES and managed by Borders Forest Trust; EYCDC purchased from FLS for nominal sum.   | Yes – CAT  |
| Glenan Wood, Cowal   | Friends of Glenan Wood                               | SCIO                          | 146ha temperate rainforest   | Community acquisition from FLS.   | Yes – CAT  |
| Glenmidge            | Glenmidge Burn Project                               | SCIO                          | 12ha   | Purchase based on donations.  | No   |
| Jedderfield          | Scottish Borders Council                             | Common Good                   | Farm on edge of Peebles  | No change – unsuccessful attempt by community group to purchase lease. The experience highlights challenges of leasehold applications and of variable local authority engagement with CATs.                         | Yes – CAT (unsuccessful)   |
| Kinghorn Loch        | Rio Tinto/Kinghorn Community Land Association        | Mixed (private and community) | Polluted waterbody   | Consultant's view that land reform contributed to success. 4ha now owned by Kinghorn Community Land Association and 2ha owned by charity (Ecology Centre).  | n/e  |
| Knoydart Foundation  | Knoydart Foundation                                  | CLG                           | 7,100ha remote NW Highlands estate   | "Years of mismanagement and decline had left the estate in a poor state. In 1999, the community successfully purchased the run-down estate for £850,000."   | No – buyout prior to 2003 legislation                                    |
| Loch Arkaig          | Arkaig Community Trust<br>Woodland Trust<br>Scotland | Mixed (eNGO and community)    | 1,000 hectares of forest of native broadleaf, Caledonian pine forest and non-native conifers | ACT bought from FES through National Forest Land Scheme, financed by immediate sale of 90% of the area to Woodland Trust.   | Indirectly – government programme developed in parallel with land reform |
| North Harris Estate  | North Harris Trust                                   | CLG                           | 25,900ha croft land, common grazing and open hill ground                                     | Bought by the NHT in 2003 from the previous owner, Jonathan Bulmer, for £2.2 million, with much of the money coming from charitable trusts.   | No   |



| NAME OF PROJECT/SITE | OWNER                           | TYPE OF OWNER (NOTE 1)                         | TYPE OF LAND (NOTE 2)   | WHAT CHANGED: OWNERSHIP/ MANAGEMENT RIGHTS (NOTE 3)  | CHANGE LINKED TO LAND REFORM LEGISLATION? (NOTE 4)     |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Tarras Valley        | Langholm Initiative             | SCIO since 2020, formerly CLG established 1999 | 4,250ha moorland; ASNW; river meadows; peatlands and sheep farm   | "Following two epic community land-buy-outs, helped by thousands of people from all walks of life ... we are now creating the Tarras Valley Nature Reserve which is one of the biggest projects of its kind in the UK for people, nature and climate." .   | Negotiated sale, shaped by CLS / SLE protocol (Note 5) |
| Tayvallich           | Tayvallich Initiative           | CLG  | Some owned (total not clear); 3500ha under Memorandum of Understanding with Highlands Rewilding                                       | Some properties gifted to the community; others were purchased with an award from the Scottish Land Fund. Mix of direct management (of owned land) and management agreement (through MoU with Highlands Rewilding). Half of the estate is owned by a charitable trust, The Barraholm Trust, who will hold it in perpetuity for nature restoration and community prosperity, but managed by Highlands Rewilding | Highlands Rewilding attributes the MoU to land reform  |
| Teucheen Wood        | Inchinnan Development Trust     | CLG  | 6ha semi-natural woodland "similarly high biodiversity and cultural value" as ancient woodland  | In May 2019 the woodland was put up for sale – community concerned about risk of it being purchased by a housing developer that already had a major development nearby. Established IDT and purchased woodland.  | n/e  |
| Yearn Stane          | Renfrewshire Council and others | Various  | c 10,000ha "wild land ... scarred by long history of peatland drainage ... very little native wood-land and no natural regeneration." | In 2021 the Yearn Stane Project joined with the Lochwinnoch Community Development Trust to work towards obtaining a Community Asset Transfer of the portion of the park within Renfrewshire (known as Tandlemuir) c. 1500ha of which 500ha rough grazing and 1,000ha of partly degraded peat bog.  | Yes – not yet successful                               |

### 8.1 Notes

1. Where possible, the constituted form of the owning body. Sources include organisations' websites and Companies House.
2. Areas are from available information, converted to hectares where published in acres.
3. Quotations are from the organisations' websites (see Appendix 3).
4. n/e = not evident from the available information
5. A voluntary process developed by SLE and CLS: <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Guide-2016-Protocol-notes-to-flow-charts.pdf>

### 8.2 Acronyms/initialisms:

|      |   |
|------|---|
| CAT  | Community Asset Transfer  |
| CLG  | Company Limited by Guarantee  |
| CLS  | Community Land Scotland   |
| CRtB | Community Right to Buy  |
| eNGO | Environmental Non-Government Organisation                                       |
| FES  | Forest Enterprise Scotland (public body responsible for national forest estate) |
| FLS  | Forestry and Land Scotland (public body successor to FES)                       |
| SCIO | Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation                                   |
| SLE  | Scottish Land & Estates   |

## 10. APPENDIX 2. ASPIRATIONS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN RELATION TO REWILDING OR BIODIVERSITY

Note: rewilding aspirations and outcomes (columns 2 and 3) are inferred from the available information and highly summarised. They should not be interpreted as a representation of the formal objectives or achievements of each project; they are included as examples of what can be evidenced.

Text is in many cases from the respective websites, which are listed in Appendix 1.

\*The code for rewilding changes is based on Rewilding Britain's rewilding 'spectrum' (see Box 2). Codes (in brackets) indicate stated aspiration rather than outcome.

| NAME OF PROJECT / SITE                    | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING ASPIRATIONS   | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING OUTCOMES   | REWILDING CHANGE* | EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES | EVIDENCE OF LINK BETWEEN OWNERSHIP AND OUTCOMES |
|---|---|--|-------------------|----------------------|---|
| Abriachan                                 | The site had been planted in 1970 and 1980 with predominantly lodgepole pine and sitka spruce. (2015 text) Community aim was to "improve the amenity value for the general public, to naturalise the forest with native species and in the process to create jobs". Retaining part of the forest for commercial operations to help sustain the Trust, while replacing monoculture spruce and lodgepole pine blocks with native species. | (2024) "over 200,000 native trees have been planted, riparian zones have been restored and the black grouse population has increased. Increase in species of ground flora and fauna."<br>A mosaic of Scots pine, downy birch, rowan, oak, aspen, alder and larch has been planted as well as sitka spruce in different blocks of the forest. "Standing dead wood has been left to provide raptor perches and des res invertebrate niches." | 2                 | Not seen             | Narrative                                       |
| Assynt (Glencanisp and Drumrunie estates) | Objectives include "1. To manage community land and associated assets for the benefit of the community and the public in general as an important part of the protection and sustainable development of Scotland's natural environment."   | "Sustained deer culls have allowed the natural regeneration of native trees around pockets of existing woods."<br>Native woodland planting<br>"We are now concentrating on joining up the fragments [of woodland]."  | 3                 |                      | Narrative                                       |



| NAME OF PROJECT / SITE          | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING ASPIRATIONS   | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING OUTCOMES  | REWILDING CHANGE* | EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES   | EVIDENCE OF LINK BETWEEN OWNERSHIP AND OUTCOMES                       |
|---------------------------------|---|---|-------------------|--|---|
| Bute Community Forest           | <p>Aspiration to manage the community forest in a responsible and environmentally sensitive way, to increase environmental education and to enable greater access to the Forest by residents and visitors.</p> <p>“They felt strongly that the forest should be managed environmentally, with clear felling avoided if possible, new jobs created and better recreational facilities developed for local people and to attract new visitors to the island.”</p> <p>A comment on our LinkedIn call for evidence: they are “exploring an at-scale restoration (temperate rainforest) project”</p> | [evidence not found]  | 0-1               |  |   |
| Carrifran                       | <p>“The vision was to restore the ecology of one entire catchment in the Southern Uplands of Scotland to approximately the state it would have been in before people began practicing [sic] settled agriculture, about six thousand years ago.”</p> <p>“We are currently focussing our efforts on ‘enrichment planting’, that is filling in the gaps of where we have had dead or dying trees, planting more shrub species such as hawthorn and hazel, re-introducing plants such as honeysuckle and ivy and continuing to expand our areas of montane scrub.”</p>                              | <p>“Since purchase on 1 Jan 2000, over “750,000 native trees, all from local provenance stock, have been planted.”</p> <p>Among many surveys and reports, Savory (2015) reports that following “intensive planting of native trees and shrubs” there has been:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ a significant increase in woodland bird species</li> <li>■ the sequential colonisation of various bird species as the tree cover became denser</li> <li>■ an increase in the total number of all woodland birds recorded from four individuals in 2007 to 262 in 2015</li> <li>■ no observed changes in bird diversity at Black Hope, where sheep continued to graze and no trees were planted</li> </ul> | 3                 | Evidence, well documented with ecological surveys, bird records, bio-blitzes etc. Savory (2015) is one example of the quality of impact evidence | Strong qualitative and quantitative (before and after, over 24 years) |
| Cormonochan Community Woodlands | <p>“Conservation of the 63.9-hectares including a 8.9ha PAWS [Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site] area (planted by FLS in 2014) in the woodlands is ongoing year by year with adult volunteers and school groups undertaking the majority of the work required to reclaim, preserve and maintain the ecology of the woodlands for future generations.”</p>   |   | 1                 | Much information on website; impact not clearly identifiable   | Strong narrative linking community management with outcomes           |

| NAME OF PROJECT / SITE               | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING ASPIRATIONS  | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING OUTCOMES  | REWILDING CHANGE* | EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES                                     | EVIDENCE OF LINK BETWEEN OWNERSHIP AND OUTCOMES                              |
|--------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------|--|--|
| Culduthel Community Woods, Inverness | "We want to undertake surveys and make records of all the plants, animals and fungi that are found in the area. This will help inform our approach to management of the woods. We will upload special survey information here. We also hope to set up a system so that it is easy for people to submit their own records of what they see."  | Initial actions focus on removing dangerous trees.<br><br>"Plant List: A preliminary botanical survey has been undertaken by one of our knowledgeable and enthusiastic Trustees. This will be invaluable as we prepare our Management Plan and monitor change in the woods over time."                        | (0-1)             | Surveys exist; not yet evidence of impact                | Strong aspirational narrative  |
| Douglasdale Community Wood           | "The group has carried out feasibility studies on the land, and our main aim is making the woodland more accessible, and create opportunities that will be of significant benefit to the wider community."   |   | 0                 |  |  |
| Doune Ponds                          | "Since the new management agreement with DCWG started the transformation has been remarkable... There are both well-managed meadow and picnic areas alongside areas that have been left wild to encourage biodiversity of all types."  |   | 1                 |  | Strong narrative attributing outcomes to community management agreement      |
| Dùn Coillich                         | One of HPCLT's Charitable Purposes is to advance environmental improvement by the restoration of native woodland and other habitats. In pursuit of this, much of the activity at Dùn Coillich has been the planting of native trees and improving the circumstances for regeneration.<br><br>A management programme aims to restore a "healthy ecosystem, including the planting of native trees, such as Scots pine, downy birch, rowan and sessile oak, and other species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, juniper and eared willow". | "Perimeter fencing is necessary to keep out deer, and the results can now be seen: young trees are growing well clear of the heather and bracken and a wealth of plants, fungi, birds, insects, spiders and mammals is to be found. It is heartening too to see extensive regeneration, especially of birch." | 3                 | Dùn Coillich is well documented with surveys and reports | Qualitative and quantitative evidence of change effected by HPCLT management |

| NAME OF PROJECT / SITE | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING ASPIRATIONS   | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING OUTCOMES   | REWILDING CHANGE*                        | EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES                     | EVIDENCE OF LINK BETWEEN OWNERSHIP AND OUTCOMES  |
|------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|
| Ettrick Marshes        | From CLS case study: "EYCDC plans to fell the commercial timber and replant it with broadleaved species. And with Forestry and Land Scotland also looking to replant an adjoining section of forest with a mix of native species, the woodland that fringes the marshes will, in years to come, extend far up the hillside."  |  | (1) (2 with FLS landscape-scale impacts) | Qualitative, aspirational, 'light touch' | None as yet  |
| Glenan Wood, Cowal     | "Friends of Glenan Wood are committed to the ecological restoration of Glenan wood ... as an essential piece ... of landscape scale habitat restoration across South West Cowal. We are committed to mitigating all the threats identified in the Plantations on Ancient Woodland Survey; and to further identifying the distinctiveness that we have here, what condition the wood is in; and how we can best support it." Specific actions include removing <i>Rhododendron ponticum</i> ; reducing deer population; removing invasive non-native conifers; habitat improvement especially for lichen and bryophyte populations and other ecological markers of Atlantic rainforest." |  | (2)                                      | None as yet                              | Strong motivational narrative of community aspiration; not known whether would have happened if FLS had sold to private sector |
| Glenmidge              | We aim to protect, enhance and maintain for biodiversity.   | "We conduct activities to further public environmental understanding and engagement such as participatory ecological surveys, workshops and training." | 1  | New                                      | New  |
| Jedderfield            | Primary aspiration of community group was to improve biodiversity.  | None because attempt to secure lease was unsuccessful.   |  |  |  |



| NAME OF PROJECT / SITE | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING ASPIRATIONS  | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING OUTCOMES  | REWILDING CHANGE* | EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES  | EVIDENCE OF LINK BETWEEN OWNERSHIP AND OUTCOMES           |
|------------------------|--|---|-------------------|---|---|
| Kinghorn Loch          |  | Restoration of heavily polluted loch in world-class example.  | 1                 | Not seen – but global attention implies data exists                               | Strong narrative linking community management to outcomes |
| Knoydart Foundation    | <p>“Our land management team effectively manage the deer population and recently embarked on the ambitious landscape scale Black Hills Regeneration project which seeks to regenerate biodiversity and strengthen community resilience.”</p> <p>impact on wider landscape including neighbouring private owners: “The Black Hills Regeneration project offers the opportunity to make changes in how we manage a sizeable area of land (3,000ha) to achieve a wide range of benefits including nature-based solutions to the climate and biodiversity crises.</p> <p>“The reduction in deer impact was anticipated to lead to a cascade of positive changes:<br/>                     Regeneration of habitats from sea level to mountain tops.<br/>                     Re-establishment of native species like the Black grouse.<br/>                     Native woodland planting without extra fencing. Natural regeneration of woodlands within an open landscape.<br/>                     Peatland restoration and montane habitat regeneration.<br/>                     Maintenance of old field systems and iconic views with controlled livestock grazing.”</p> | <p>Reported as being ‘on track for completion’ in directors’ meeting minutes June 2023</p> <p>600,000 trees planted since 1999 – including the Black Hills project.</p> | 3                 | Good – well documented and verifiable (trees planted, deer numbers reduced, etc.) | strong quantitative and qualitative evidence              |

| NAME OF PROJECT / SITE | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING ASPIRATIONS  | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING OUTCOMES  | REWILDING CHANGE* | EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES                                     | EVIDENCE OF LINK BETWEEN OWNERSHIP AND OUTCOMES                                  |
|------------------------|--|---|-------------------|--|--|
| Loch Arkaig            | <p>Starting in 2021, began removing non-native tree species from the Arkaig Forest.</p> <p>"In 2022 we constructed our tree nursery, in order to produce locally grown trees to aid in the reforestation of the Arkaig Forest and other similar projects."</p>   | <p>Surveys are understood to exist and the positive outcomes are described in various websites and case studies.</p>  | 2(-3)             | None seen  | Strong narrative link  |
| North Harris Estate    | <p>The CLS case study suggests it is unlikely the NHT would use the language of 'rewilding' and their objectives are a mix (e.g. maintain/reinvigorate livestock; reduce deer; enhance native woodland). "While the North Harris Trust (Urras Ceann a Tuath na Hearadh) is committed to enhancing this rich natural heritage, the land is seen as very much for its people rather than simply as land in of itself. The loss of sheep in particular has happened over the course of our ownership but we don't necessarily see it as a good thing."</p> <p>Control of invasives, e.g. gunnera. Plans to halve red deer population.</p> | <p>"The Trust has initiated a range of projects that have greatly increased the amount of native woodland in North Harris. By encouraging regeneration around fragmented areas of remnant woodland, supplemented with planting in suitable areas, the intention is to create a network of native woodland habitat across the estate."</p> | 1-2               | Some quantitative e.g. helicopter counts of deer numbers | Strong narrative link between community ownership and management change          |
| Tarras Valley          | <p>The Langholm Initiative's objectives include "Large-scale ecosystem restoration, restoring degraded and lost habitats across the Tarras Valley."</p>  | <p>Management change is at early stages.</p>  | (2-3)             | Not yet.   | Strong narrative link between community ownership and change in objectives       |
| Tayvallich             | <p>"Restoring native Atlantic rainforest where grazing is less valuable would increase biodiversity and sequester carbon. Carbon credits can be valuable. Livestock farming can also store carbon in soil. This is compatible with woodland regeneration when managed carefully."</p>  | <p>None yet</p>   | (1)               | Not yet  | Narrative attributes rewilding component to Highland Rewilding not the community |

| NAME OF PROJECT / SITE | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING ASPIRATIONS   | WHAT CHANGED: REWILDING OUTCOMES  | REWILDING CHANGE* | EVIDENCE OF OUTCOMES | EVIDENCE OF LINK BETWEEN OWNERSHIP AND OUTCOMES     |
|------------------------|---|---|-------------------|----------------------|---|
| Teucheen Wood          | <p>IDT staff are consulting with the community on a draft 10-year Woodland Management Plan that will inform long-term ambitions for managing the woodland and enhancing its biodiversity.</p> <p>Funded by the National Lottery's Together for our Planet H21 programme, IDT has worked with an ecological consultancy on a Nature Networks and Habitat Connectivity project. The plan now is to create a habitat corridor between Sandieland and Teucheen Wood, and to enhance a valuable area of wetland between the two sites.</p> | <p>Joining the dots has already started, with IDT convincing another housing developer to gift it a section of nearby Sandieland Wood that was due to be swallowed up by a further housing development.</p> | (1-2)             |                      | <p>Strong narrative link to change of ownership</p> |
| Yearn Stane            | <p>The wider Yearn Stane Project was set up "to restore a functioning ecosystem to the upland area of the Renfrewshire Heights".</p> <p>We aim to encourage sustainable land use practices that will boost biodiversity, reduce flooding and capture carbon. It is our hope that this will lead to resilient, nature-based solutions.</p>   | <p>Since 2017: working with the local community and landowners to plant trees.</p>  | (1-2)             |                      | <p>Change of ownership hasn't happened yet</p>      |



# 11. APPENDIX 3: SOURCES FOR APPENDICES 1 AND 2

The following list includes the main information sources for the cases included here. Further documents, blogs, reports and legal documents such as articles of association have been sourced from the websites listed.

|                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Abriachan                       | Testing a framework to describe models of community woodland case studies: six case studies of Scottish community woodlands [communitywoods.org]<br><a href="https://www.abriachan.org.uk/">https://www.abriachan.org.uk/</a>  |
| Assynt                          | <a href="https://www.assyntfoundation.scot/">https://www.assyntfoundation.scot/</a>  |
| Bute Community Forest           | <a href="https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-10793224">https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-glasgow-west-10793224</a><br><a href="https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/bute-community-forest/">https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/visiting-woods/woods/bute-community-forest/</a><br><a href="https://www.visitbute.com/the-forest/">https://www.visitbute.com/the-forest/</a><br><a href="https://www.buteforest.org.uk/">https://www.buteforest.org.uk/</a>   |
| Carrifran                       | <a href="https://bordersforesttrust.org/wild-heart/carrifran-wildwood">https://bordersforesttrust.org/wild-heart/carrifran-wildwood</a><br>Ashmole, P. and M. Ashmole, Eds. (2020). A Journey in Landscape Restoration: Carrifran wildwood and beyond, Borders Forest Trust<br>Adair, S. and P. Ashmole (2022). Rewilding case study: Carrifran Wildwood. Routledge Hand-book of Rewilding, Routledge: 160-169.  |
| Cormonochan Community Woodlands | <a href="https://cormonochan-woodlands.co.uk/">https://cormonochan-woodlands.co.uk/</a>  |
| Culduthel Community Woods       | Culduthel Community Woods   Home ( <a href="http://culduthelwoods.org">culduthelwoods.org</a> )  |
| Douglasdale Community Wood      | Community Woodland ( <a href="http://douglasdalerealgroup.com">douglasdalerealgroup.com</a> )  |
| Doune Ponds                     | <a href="https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/our-work/good-practice/diversification-of-ownership-and-tenure-negotiating-transfer-of-land-to-communities/doune-ponds-managing-the-land-in-partnership-moray-estates-and-doune-community-woodland-group">https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/our-work/good-practice/diversification-of-ownership-and-tenure-negotiating-transfer-of-land-to-communities/doune-ponds-managing-the-land-in-partnership-moray-estates-and-doune-community-woodland-group</a><br><a href="https://www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk/helping-it-happen/case-studies/doune-ponds-doune-community-woodland-group-and-moray-estates">https://www.scottishlandandestates.co.uk/helping-it-happen/case-studies/doune-ponds-doune-community-woodland-group-and-moray-estates</a> |
| Dùn Coilich                     | <a href="https://hpclt.org/sites/default/files/Restoring%20native%20woodland.pdf">https://hpclt.org/sites/default/files/Restoring%20native%20woodland.pdf</a><br><a href="https://hpclt.org/index.php/sites/default/files/Natural_History_Survey_2002-4.doc">https://hpclt.org/index.php/sites/default/files/Natural_History_Survey_2002-4.doc</a>   |
| Ettrick Marshes                 | Community ownership and biodiversity Ettrick & Yarrow Community Development Company ( <a href="http://communitylandscotland.org.uk">communitylandscotland.org.uk</a> )   |

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Glenan Wood         | <a href="https://www.glenanwood.org.uk/about-us/our-ambition/">https://www.glenanwood.org.uk/about-us/our-ambition/</a><br><a href="https://forestryandland.gov.scot/images/corporate/pdf/cats-asset-requests/glenan/CATS-Glenan-Public-information-leaflet.pdf">https://forestryandland.gov.scot/images/corporate/pdf/cats-asset-requests/glenan/CATS-Glenan-Public-information-leaflet.pdf</a>  |
| Glenmidge Burn      | <a href="https://glenmidgeburnproject.com/">https://glenmidgeburnproject.com/</a>   |
| Jedderfield         | [unpublished application document]  |
| Kinghorn Loch       | Kirsty Tait, unpublished case study<br><a href="https://www.ceh.ac.uk/kinghorn-loch-uk-lake-restoration-case-study">https://www.ceh.ac.uk/kinghorn-loch-uk-lake-restoration-case-study</a><br><a href="https://kcla.org.uk/about-us/">https://kcla.org.uk/about-us/</a>   |
| Knoydart Foundation | <a href="https://knoydart.org/2021/10/20/knoydart-foundation-announce-community-consultation-on-landscape-scale-regeneration-project/">https://knoydart.org/2021/10/20/knoydart-foundation-announce-community-consultation-on-landscape-scale-regeneration-project/</a><br><a href="https://knoydart.org/about-the-knoydart-foundation/">https://knoydart.org/about-the-knoydart-foundation/</a><br><a href="https://dtascommunityownership.org.uk/case-studies/knoydart-foundation">https://dtascommunityownership.org.uk/case-studies/knoydart-foundation</a> |
| Loch Arkaig         | <a href="https://arkaig.org/">https://arkaig.org/</a><br><a href="https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/give/appeals/loch-arkaig/">https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/give/appeals/loch-arkaig/</a>  |
| North Harris Estate | BBC NEWS   Scotland   Islanders celebrate buy-out [BBC NEWS   Scotland   Islanders celebrate buy-out]<br><br><a href="https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/resources/north-harris-trust-biodiversity-case-study/">https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/resources/north-harris-trust-biodiversity-case-study/</a>  |
| Tarras Valley       | <a href="https://www.tarrasvalleynaturereserve.org/our-work/">https://www.tarrasvalleynaturereserve.org/our-work/</a>   |
| Tayvallich          | <a href="https://www.tayvallichinitiative.org/#vision">https://www.tayvallichinitiative.org/#vision</a>   |
| Teucheen Wood       | <a href="https://www.inchinnandt.com/about-teucheen">https://www.inchinnandt.com/about-teucheen</a><br><a href="https://www.inchinnandt.com/teucheen-wildlife">https://www.inchinnandt.com/teucheen-wildlife</a><br><a href="https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Case-study-2023-Inchinnan-biodiversity.pdf">https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Case-study-2023-Inchinnan-biodiversity.pdf</a>   |
| Yearn Stane         | <a href="https://lochwinnochtrust.org.uk/yearnstane/">https://lochwinnochtrust.org.uk/yearnstane/</a><br><a href="https://www.eadha.co.uk/projects/yearnstane-project/">https://www.eadha.co.uk/projects/yearnstane-project/</a>  |

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