

1. Part A - Description of Woodlands

1.1 *Location*

School and Milton woods are located 11 miles south of Inverness at either end of the outskirts of Farr. The woods lie on the western edge of the B851 which links Daviot and Fort Augustus (see Map 1).

The woods extend to 40.09 hectares in total.

School Wood – 12.14 hectares

Milton Wood – 27.95 hectares.

Ordnance Survey grid references:

School Wood NH 684 335 (access NH 684 336)

Milton Wood NH 675 320 (access NH 676 315)

1.2 *Background*

The woodland areas were former rough grazing land and were part of the expansion of woodland cover after WW2. The land was purchased by the Forestry Commission in 1944. Both woods were planted between 1950 and 1958 and have been selectively thinned over the intervening years. The 1870 Ordnance Survey (OS) map did indicate an area south of Woodside in Milton as having tree cover and a mill. A sawmill and smithy fall within the boundaries of what is now known as Milton Wood. The associated millpond is located outside Milton. Management followed commercial silvicultural practice (thinning and clearfell) over the 50 years prior to purchase by the community.

After two years of consultation, fund-raising and planning by the local community the woods were purchased from Forestry Commission Scotland and community management of Milton and School Woods commenced in 2002. Strathnairn Community Woodland Project was the Company set up to purchase the woods. This company is registered in Scotland at Companies House, No. SC 228026, and is also a registered charity, Charity No. SC 033499. To reflect the established status of the community woods the registered name was, in 2009, changed to Strathnairn Community Woodlands.

The woods are currently managed by eight volunteer trustees / directors with office bearing roles including chair, treasurer, and company secretary. All management members are appointed as per the company rules and constitution. Membership of the company is open to anyone resident in the Strathnairn Community Council area and non-voting members from outside Strathnairn. There is no annual membership fee. A core group of local volunteers are involved in day to day management and maintenance of the woods, and in raising funds to carry this out.

The Trustees have made significant improvements to the infrastructure since the purchase: over 5 km of footpaths have been installed; approximately 4.5 ha replanted with broadleaves and practical conservation measures introduced. A woodland cabin has been built which acts as a meeting place for events. The woodlands are now widely used for recreation as well as being an educational resource for the wider community and the local primary school, which uses the woods as a 'Safe Route to School' and as an outdoor classroom. A summary of Activities and Achievements to date is given at Appendix 1.

Management general meetings and volunteer work days are publicised and open to all.

1.3 *Stakeholder Engagement*

1.3.1 Scoping Meetings

Scoping meetings, with invitations sent to all local stakeholders, were held on 2 April and 7 May 2011. Written scoping consultation was sent to public bodies and Non-Governmental Organisations. The Scoping report is included in Appendix 2.

1.3.2 Informal Liaison

Regular informal liaison takes place with neighbouring landowners / tenant farmers. Issues arising e.g. livestock, dogs, fallen trees, fences have been addressed promptly by SCW. The wider community is kept informed by regular articles in the Strathnairn Community Council newsletter, use of woodland notice-boards and through SCW participation in local events such as Farr Gala.

1.3.3 Issues

The following brief notes summarise the issues identified through consultation with the local community and through discussion with Trustees. Awareness of these issues will help identify management prescriptions and action plans. These include balancing potential conflicts between conservation and protecting wildlife whilst improving access, recreation and education facilities in both woods. Specifically:

1. Biodiversity awareness
 - a) A good amount of information has already been gathered but the best method of disseminating this to the wider community has yet to be decided;
 - b) It would be useful to involve the community in gathering more information about wildlife in the woods;
 - c) Continue using subject experts to undertake studies and run activities as training exercises and inviting people from the community to participate.
2. Non-native species invasion
 - a) Bracken is encroaching in some areas in Milton Wood. However, it may also provide habitat for certain species of butterfly such as small pearl-bordered fritillary so control measures will only be used where regeneration is being affected;
 - b) Rhododendron control is necessary in one small area in Milton;
 - c) Non-native tree species regeneration needs to be managed e.g Sitka spruce, sycamore and beech.
3. Wetland habitat
 - a) Conserve and improve wetland habitat in both woods;
 - b) Avoid draining wet areas unless mature trees are already rooted there;
 - c) Remove tree regeneration from wetland areas;
 - d) Identify potential wetland areas in Milton after felling unstable spruce on wet soils.
4. Habitat expansion
 - a) Opportunity to plant fruiting broadleaves in Woodside field e.g. oak, hazel, rowan, gean;
 - b) Opportunity to encourage a mosaic of rush pasture and woodland in the riparian area.
5. Fauna
 - a) Nesting and roosting sites for birds and bats: an assessment of current bird and bat box usage is desirable;
 - b) Badger protection: an assessment of was carried out in 2005. No live setts were found;
 - c) Red squirrel protection: an assessment of current populations could be made and ways of extending their habitat, including accepting Norway spruce regeneration in Milton, identified. School Wood is included in the Forestry Commission Red Squirrel Hot Spots project;
 - d) Deer control: A deer management plan was requested by, and is being compiled in consultation with, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Forestry Commission in accordance with the Code of Practice on Deer Management (Jan 2012).

6. Access, Education and Recreation
 - a) Woodland cabin: extend management and development to maximise use of the facility and to support ongoing maintenance;
 - b) Farr Primary School: continue to develop existing links wherever possible e.g. Partnership working;
 - c) Daviot Primary School: foster links where possible;
 - d) Car park areas: maintenance of car parks to encourage visitors and discourage unauthorised motor access;
 - e) Seating: lack of seating and rest points discourages elderly and infirm to visit. Seating could be increased but at selected locations and distances apart;
 - f) March fencing: maintenance of existing fencing at bordering housing;
 - g) Archaeology (Milton): to be integrated into access planning, invasive regeneration to be removed and interpretation of some features could be improved;
 - h) Visitors: lack of knowledge of visitor numbers using the woods. Information could be gathered on numbers and frequency of visitors to the woods to aid future planning and potential fund raising;
 - i) Overdevelopment: inappropriate management could have a negative impact on the woodlands. In particular over development of path network, too many additional structures or internal fencing, or too much felling could threaten the overall biodiversity of the woodlands. A balance needs to be struck between aspirations and impacts;
 - j) New access footpath into Milton from Corrieknowe requested by neighbouring residents.

1.4 Site and Species Description

1.4.1 Climate

The Woods are dominated by south westerly winds through Strathnairn resulting in moderate temperatures and an annual rainfall estimated at 1100mm. Due to the altitude and geographical location of the woodlands there is regularly snow in the winter months. Windthrow hazard class is 2-4 (Forestry Commission Research Information Note 230).

1.4.2 Geology and Soils

Milton and School Wood are located in Strathnairn, the floor of which has been formed out of the debris left when the glaciers melted. A large amount of the sub-soils are free draining gravels overlaying a glacial till but there are isolated areas where the free draining gravels are absent and the underlying material is a glacial till which prevents drainage. This has created wet areas. The melting ice also carried large blocks of rock (erratics) that are now resting on the ground surface to form a distinctive feature within the plantations.

Soils derived from Quartz-feldspar-granulite from the Moine series; there is a dominance of podzols with small areas of humic gleys along the water courses.

1.4.3 Topography and Altitude

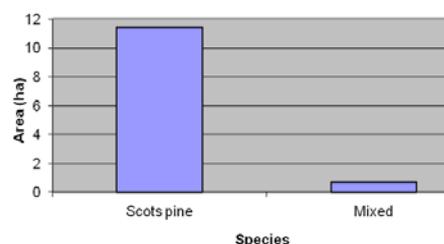
The woodlands lie 200 to 210m above sea level. Slopes are mainly gentle with locally steep slopes within Milton Wood along the bank of the River Nairn.

1.4.4 Tree Species Description

Also refer to the Tree Species Maps 2a and 2b

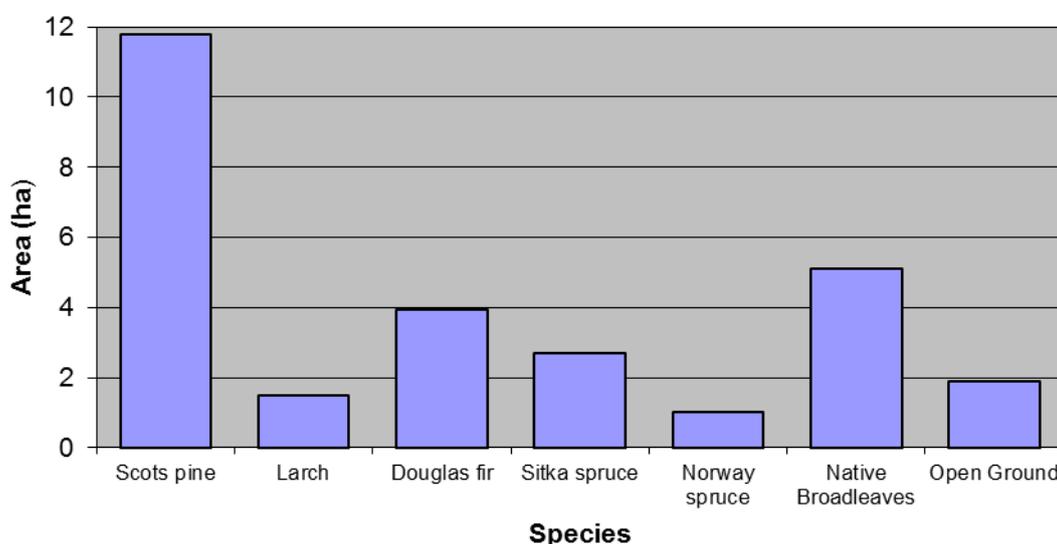
- i) School Wood consists almost completely of Scots pine with some naturally regenerating broadleaves (Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* and Silver Birch *Betula pendula*) under the canopy (see Figure 1);

Figure 1: School Wood - Current Species Mix



- ii) Milton Wood is more mixed: the woodland is dominated by Scots pine but there are areas of Douglas fir, Sitka spruce, Norway spruce and European larch (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Milton Wood - Current Species Mix



A previously felled area in Milton along the River Nairn was replanted by SCW in 2005 with 6000 broadleaves in tree shelters. Approximately 80% success has been achieved although some spruce regeneration is also taking place. There are mature beech trees *Fagus sylvatica* along the roadside edges of School Wood and adjacent to ruined farmhouse building in Milton. Although not native species to this area, these trees were evidently planted by the house occupier, and have cultural value. Ash *Fraxinus excelsior* regeneration is underway at the farmhouse site. Alder *Alnus glutinosa* and downy birch *Betula pubescens* is regenerating along the riparian corridor.

1.4.5 Plant Communities

A National Vegetation Classification ¹ (NVC) survey of plant communities was carried out for both woods. The full report is included in Appendix 3 and is summarised below:-

- i) School Wood: Mainly Scots pine woodland with heather (W18) with insufficient species diversity to define a sub-group. The dry heath areas on which the bulk of the Scots pine is

¹ Rodwell: British Plant Communities – Volume 1 Woodlands and Scrub

established exhibits typical native pine wood flora with species such as heather, blueberry, cowberry, and tormentil present. Two areas of blanket mire (M18) and fragments of upland Oak-Birch woodland with blue bell / wild hyacinth (W11). Relatively few exotic tree species present with some cotoneaster behind Forestry houses.

a) Opportunities And Threats

Thinning will increase the poor species diversity e.g. blaeberry, but lodgepole pine and spruce regeneration will out-compete Scots pine. Cotoneaster and other exotic tree species are present but not a threat.

b) Areas of Conservation value

M18 blanket mire should be left open and fragments of W11 should be regenerated.

- ii) Milton Wood: Relatively poor in ground cover under the denser plantation. Rowan and birch around the edges of the Scots pine woodland with heather (W18) grading to upland oak-birch woodland with blue bell / wild hyacinth (W11) to the north with a fragment of W11 linking to neighbouring farm woodland with greater diversity. The W11 areas would be expected to be naturally dominated by sessile oak and birch. The absence of oak is probably due to exploitation of the site for timber, fuel-wood or charcoal production. Indicator species found within this area include wavy haired grass, sweet vernal grass, woodrush, dog violet, wood sorrel, and tormentil. These areas form another valuable habitat and are home to large variety of mosses and lichens. Small open bog areas may be blanket bog (M18) but these are presently too small with limited species to be classified definitely. The riparian areas may be rush pasture (probably M23) – but lacking enough species diversity to define accurately.

a) Opportunities And Threats

Thinning will improve the poor species diversity. The area of W11 under Scots pine is likely to be undergoing transition to W18 ground flora.

b) Areas of Conservation value

Few habitats to damage and little or no ground flora present. Small areas of mire and fragment of W11 with neighbouring farm woodland are worthy of conservation to maintain diversity in the wood.

1.4.6 Open ground

Approximately 2.5 ha open ground comprise a former borrow pit, now a car park, and a wetland area in School Wood, and an agricultural field to pasture in Milton Wood.

1.5 Long Term Vision

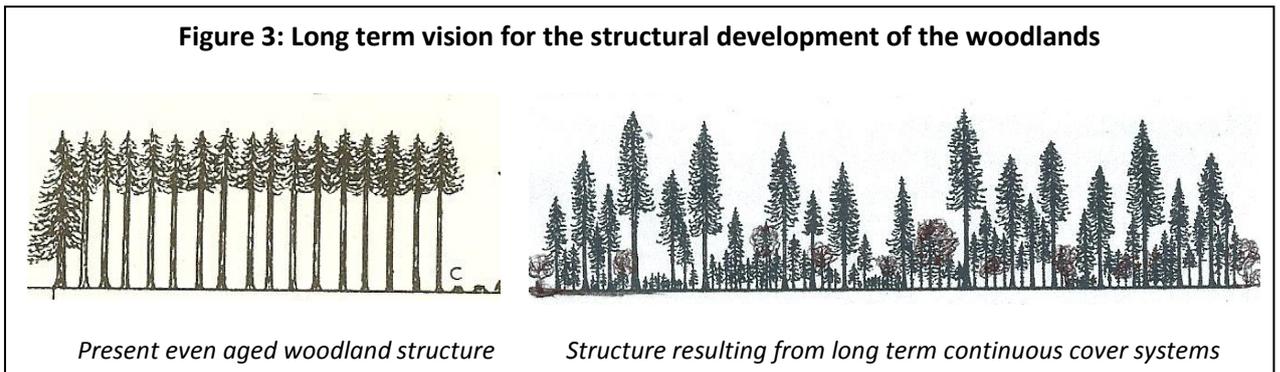
1.5.1 Aims

The long term aims of Strathnairn Community Woodlands are to:-

- a) Conserve, regenerate and promote the restoration of native woodland habitat and enhance the biodiversity of flora and fauna in the area through restructuring, regeneration and management.
- b) Ensure continued open and inclusive access to the woods for cultural, educational and informal recreational use to the benefit of the wider public.

1.5.2 Method of Achievement

This is to be achieved through planned felling and replanting and by increasing the amount of native broadleaves and designed open ground in Milton Wood, combined with a thinning and natural regeneration programme in the stable Scots pine areas selected for long term retention in both School Wood and Milton Wood. These areas will be increasingly managed using continuous cover silvicultural management to produce an uneven aged mixed Scots pine and broadleaved native woodland. See Fig 3 below



School Wood is a Scots pine plantation in the thinning stage and the changeover to continuous cover management will be very gradual.

Looking ahead the exact forest composition of Milton cannot be precisely quantified due to the changeover in silvicultural system from clearfell / restocking to continuous cover / natural regeneration which makes it more difficult to predict the exact proportions of Scots pine, native broadleaves and open ground. The data shown in Figs 4-7 and Maps (2b, 7 and 8) indicate how it is envisaged the woodlands will develop over time under the management proposals in this plan. Specific details of planned felling and restocking are given in Figs 8 / 9 plus Maps 7 and 8.

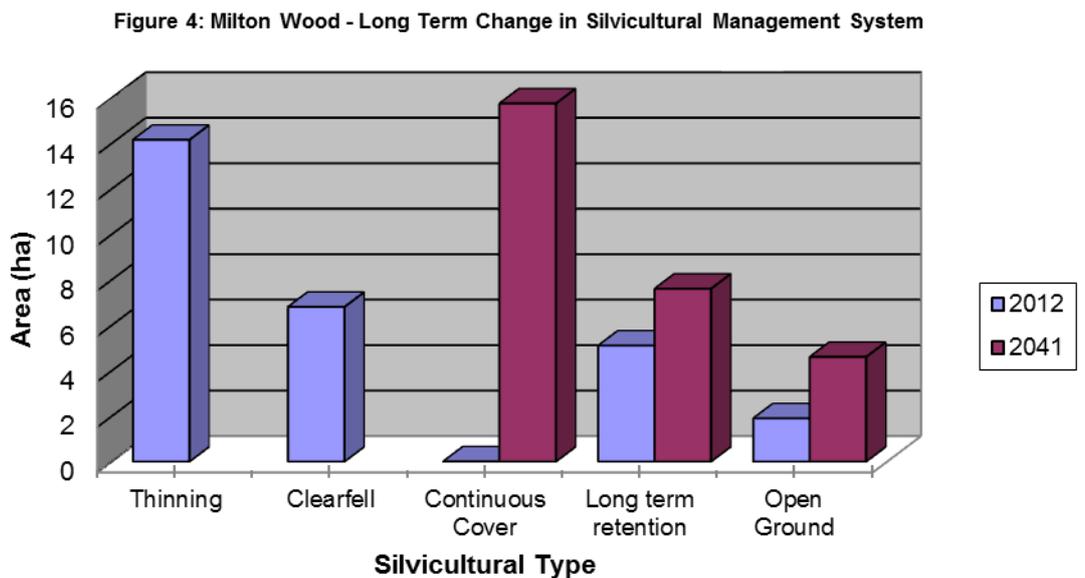


Figure 5: Milton Wood - Long Term Changes In Species Composition

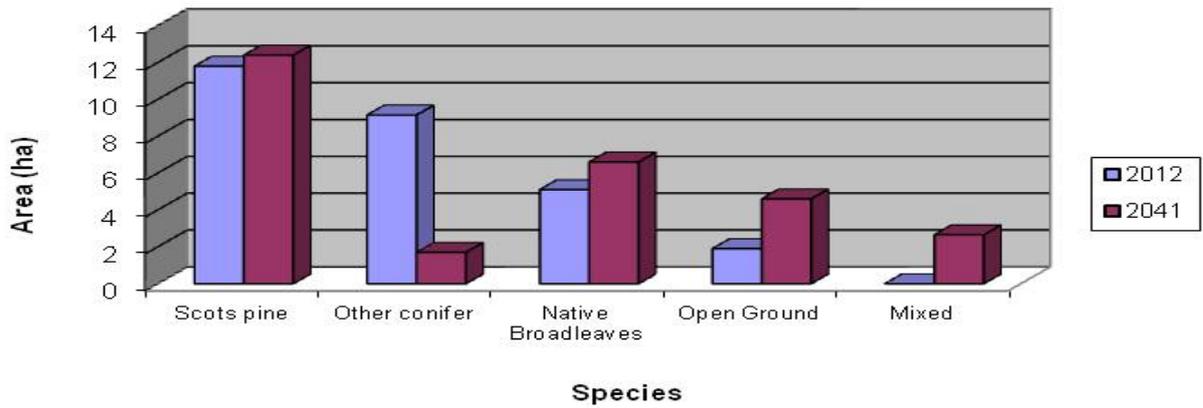


Figure 6: Milton Wood - Current Species Category Composition

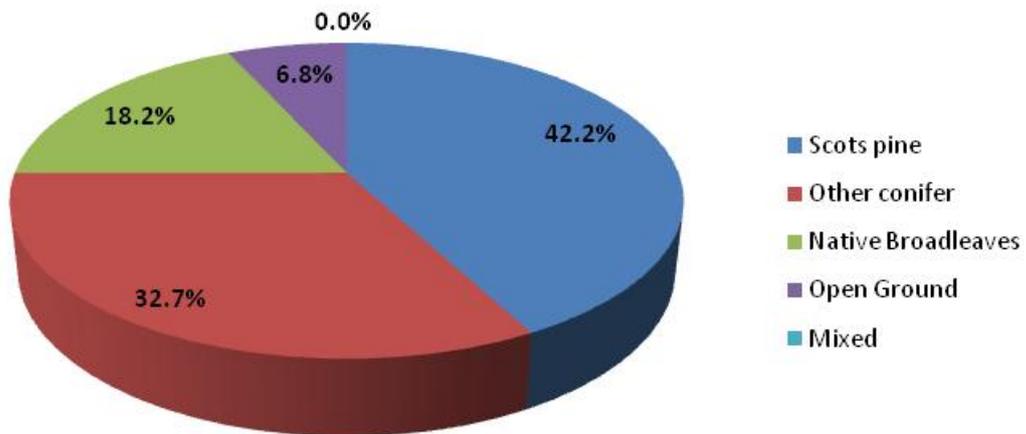
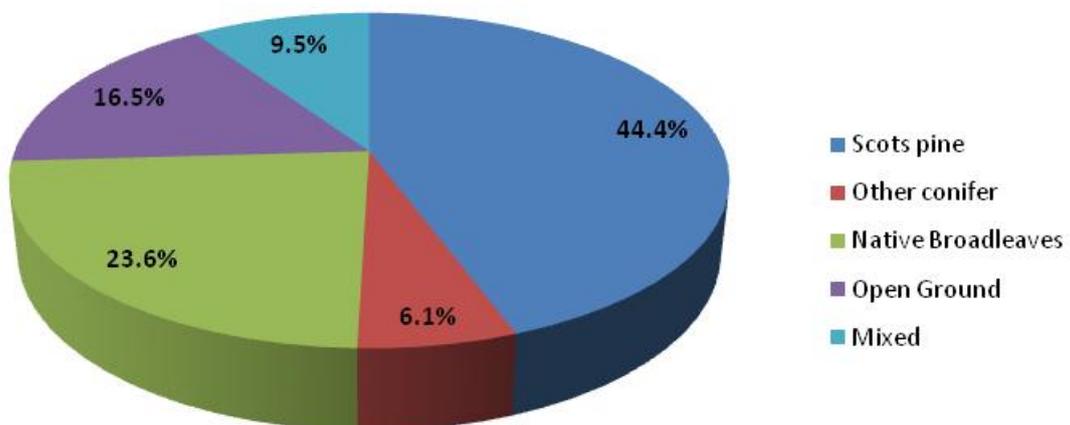


Figure 7: Milton Wood - Planned Species Category Composition



2. Part B - Survey Data

2.1 *Map and Photographic Coverage:*

Maps: 1:50000 OS Landranger Sheet No.26
 1:10000 NH63/73
 1:625000 Geological Map (1979).
 1:250000 Soils Survey Map

Aerials: 1989 Black and white.
 2011 Colour photos (SNH) – see Photos 1a and 1b

2.2 *Habitat and Vegetation*

An NVC (National Vegetation Classification) Community Report was carried out for both woods and the summary is included at Appendix 3.

2.3 *Flora and Fauna Surveys*

Surveys have been carried out by visiting experts over the last 10 years, summarised as follows:
Flora survey (2008/9) – Summary data is included as Appendix 4, the full report is available on request;
Lichen survey (2009) – Appendix 5;
Moss survey (2004) – Appendix 6;
Badger and Red Squirrel Assessment (2005) – Appendix 7.

2.4 *Archaeology*

A full archaeological survey was undertaken in 2002 prior to purchase of the woods. The relevant maps are included as Maps 3a and 3b. A full copy is available on request.

2.5 *Community Land Unit Evaluation*

During 2008 a mandatory five year review of Strathnairn Community Woodlands was carried out by the Community Land Unit (see section 3.3). A full copy is available on request.