

# **STRATHNAIRN COMMUNITY WOODLAND**

## **Management Plan**

**Covering the Period 2004 - 2009**

Compiled  
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Draft 19/05/04

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## **SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION**

**Name of Wood:** School Wood/Milton wood

**Date of Plan Finalised:** First Draft 19/05/04

### **Introduction**

The Strathnairn Community Woodland Project began as a desire by the local residents to ensure continued access to the woodlands around the village of Farr . It has since matured into a community project embracing the whole of the Strathnairn Community area culminating in the purchase of 40.58ha of woodland from the Forestry Commission in 2003.

Strathnairn itself is a scattered rural community with approximately 600 residents stretching from Dunmaglass in the west to Clava Cairns in the east. The Community is socially active and the construction of the community hall in xxxx and the widespread consultation and fundraising to enable the purchase of the woodlands demonstrates their active concern for the local environment.

The Strathnairn Community Woodland Project(a company limited by guarantee and with charitable status) was formed in 2003 and whose overall objective as stated in the memorandum of association is “ to conserve, regenerate, and promote the restoration of predominantly native woodland in the geographical area of Strathnairn as an important part of Scotland’s native environment for the benefit of the public” This is the vehicle which the Strathnairn residents have used to purchase the plantations from the Forestry Commission and to manage the transition into a genuine community resource

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), the Forestry Commission (FC), local authority and enterprise companies and Scottish Executive central and local staff have all helped financially or in other ways to realise the ambitions of the community.

Particular support has been received to maintain and enhance the natural assets, in particular the riparian and wetland aspects, to improve community involvement and public recreation and to carry out woodland management that is in line with the latest management guidelines.

Even for a forward thinking community such as Strathnairn the process of acquiring and managing the land around the village of Farr has been a daunting prospect given the capital sums and responsibilities involved. However the success of the community has been another landmark in the social history of Scotland with local communities exercising more control over their immediate environment.

Sponsorship and funding for the purchase of the area and various woodland operations has been secured from SNH, Scottish Land Fund, New Opportunities Fund, FC, Inverness and Nairn Enterprise (INE) and the community itself.

The next stage in the development of the Forest involves implementation of the proposed projects in line with the community objectives and the deadlines of the various funding agencies.

This plan sets the framework for describing the woodland area, its evaluation and appropriate implementation of the long term aims and management objectives.

The proposed operations are also outlined and the achieved projects to date listed.

The period covered by the plan is 2004-2024, with detailed prescriptions for the first five years (till the year 2009) and a review of the project thereafter.

## SECTION 2 : GENERAL INFORMATION

### 2.1. Site Data

- 2.1.1.Name of Site:** Strathnairn Community Wood( School Wood/Milton Wood)
- 2.1.2.Area:** Total: 40.58ha
- School Wood – 12.13ha (29.97 acres)
  - Milton Wood – 28.45ha (70.30 acres)
- 2.1.3.Grid Reference:** NH 685 332
- 2.1.4.Location:** Milton & School Woods are located 11 miles south of Inverness and on the outskirts of Farr . The woods are on the edge of the B851 which links Daviot and Fort Augustus.(see appendix 1)
- 2.1.5.Date Plan Finalised:** First Draft 19/05/04
- 2.1.6. Review Date:** T.B.C
- 2.1.7.Access:** Access is directly off the B851.  
School Wood lies immediately adjacent to Farr primary school and is accessed via a forest road which extends approximately 50m into the wood.  
Milton Wood lies approximately 200m west of Farr and is again served by a forest road which extends 200m into the property before terminating at a turning bay.
- There are inspection racks in both woods which have been used for previous timber extraction.  
The woods are well used for informal pedestrian access as evidenced by the well worn paths in the area.  
Future management input would require only minor upgrading for timber extraction but there is scope for upgrading or construction of footpath access.
- 2.1.8.Contact Person:** Duncan Scott (Chairman of SCWP),, Iain MacLennan(Forestry consultant), Kiltarlity IV4 7JP (01463 741572).
- 2.1.9.Map and Photographic Coverage:**
- Maps: 1:50000 OS Landranger Sheet No. 26,  
1:10000 NH63/73,  
1:625000 Geological Map (1979),  
1:250000 Soil Survey Map,
- Aerials: 1989 Black and White Full Coverage,

**2.1.10. Compartments:** See Section 3.2.2. & 6.1. for details.

## **2.2. Land Tenure**

The woods are owned by SCWP and mainly bounded by farming interests and private householders. Farr primary school form part of the boundary of school wood and the western boundary of Milton Wood is the River Nairn. SCWP own to the banks of the river.

The various proposals (especially recreational facilities) have been discussed with the various neighbours and a series of public meetings have been held since receiving notice from Forestry Commission of the disposal of the properties. Linkage and close liaison is encouraged within the community as far as development of educational and recreational interests.

## **2.3. Site Status/Classifications**

There are no formal designations within the woodlands. However a diversity of important habitats has been identified, including the riparian woodland along the River Nairn and the wetland area within School Wood.

The presence of habitats of high heritage value and rare and protected species has been confirmed by SNH .

The presence of highly important habitats and key species requires a sensitive management approach considering the needs of the various species and habitats and the impact proposed woodland operations might have.

The HC Indicative Forest Strategy classifies the site as potential for commercial woodland development with sensitivities being archaeology and landscape.

Within the local plan both woods are classed as existing commercial woodland. School wood also has an amenity woodland designation.

## **2.4. Site Definition**

Boundaries of the site are clearly defined by existing stock fences.

The woodlands extend close to the fence line (10m) in most places.

## **2.5. Legal and Other Constraints**

The following constraints affect the site:

- 11kv powerline crosses Milton Wood.
- Scottish Water Mains on roadside at both School and Milton Woods.
- Milton Wood contains Ancient Woodland of semi natural origin and Long established woodland of plantation origin.
- Plan Preparation Grant for Long Term Forest Plan approved by FC and due for completion 10 2004

- Forest & Rural Development Scheme funding approved for detailed woodland inventory.
- Close proximity to major tourist road.
- The River Nairn is a salmonid river.
- School wood is adjacent to Farr school and is regularly used as an open air classroom.
- Significant archaeological features exist within particularly Milton Wood

## **SECTION 3 : ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION**

### **3.1.Physical**

#### **3.1.1.Climate:**

Climate is dominated by South Westerly winds through Strathnairn resulting in moderate temperatures and an annual rainfall estimated at 1100mm; due to the high altitude of the woodland there is regularly snow in the winter months. Using Wind Risk models for British Forests the DAMS score has been calculated at 11 with a Windthrow Hazard of 2/4. See appendix 4 for details of DAMS assessment.

#### **3.1.2.Geology:**

Quartz-feldspar-granulite from the Moine series

#### **3.1.3.Soils:**

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

#### **3.1.4.Altitude/Topography:**

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

#### **3.1.5.General Landscape:**

The area forms part of a landscape that consists of a mixture of commercial and native woodlands, open (rounded) hills and agricultural small holdings, settlements on the lower slopes.

The variation in texture, scale and colour provides an attractive backdrop to the glen.

## **3.2. Biological**

### **3.2.1. Historic**

The woodland areas were former rough grazing land and were part of the expansion of woodland cover after WW2. Areas of Ancient Woodland and Long Established Woodland ( of plantation origin) are recorded within Milton.

The land was purchased by Forestry Commission in 1944. The woods were planted between 1950 and 1958 and management has followed standard silvicultural practices over the past 50 years.

The areas were stock fenced prior to planting and cultivation was restricted to ploughing of the wetter areas of Milton. The woods have been selectively thinned with extraction racks cut for machinery access.

### **3.2.2. Key Habitats:**

The following key features have been identified by SCWP and confirmed by SNH:

An NVC Community Report has been carried out as part of the overall study and is appended as appendix 3.

The area is generally classed as W18 (Scots pine woodland with heather) and W11 (Upland oak-birch woodland with bluebell/wild hyacinth).

The dry heath areas on which the bulk of the Scots pine is established exhibits typical native pinewood flora with species such as heather, blueberry, cowberry, and tormentil present(W18).

The W11 areas would be expected to be naturally dominated by Sessile oak and Birch. The absence of the Oak is probably due to exploitation of the site for timber, fuelwood or charcoal production. Indicator species found within this area include wavy haired grass, sweet vernal grass, woodrush, dog violet, wood sorrel and tormentil

The wetland areas are classed as M18 within both School and Milton woods with the clearfelled area along the River Nairn classed as M23.

These areas form another valuable habitat and are home to a large variety of mosses and lichens.

The Riparian woodland within Milton has been highlighted by SNH as being of particular interest. Species are mainly Alder and Birch

### 3.2.3. Summary of Habitats/Compartment Information:

The area consists currently of 31.78 ha woodland and 8.8 ha unproductive/open ground/other land.

Compartment	Area (in ha)	Habitat	NVC Class
School Wood	12.13	Non Native Scots pine with areas of broadleaf regeneration throughout. Two areas of boggy ground	Generally similar to W18 (For Conifers) (90%) M18b in Wetlands (10%)
Milton Wood	28.45	Mixture of Existing Plantation Woodland, with Birch Alder woodland along the riparian zone. Felled areas colonised by Soft rush and Tufted grass	W18 (75%) W11(5%) M18(1%) M23(19%)

### 3.2.4. Flora:

#### 3.2.4.1. Existing Woodland Types:

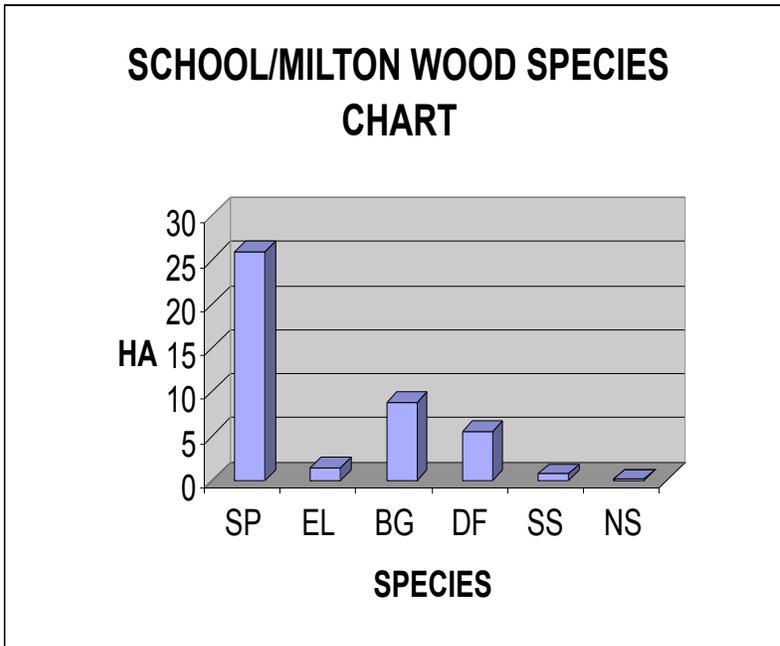
The woodlands are uniform in terms of age class, structure and species.

Past management has been sensitive in terms of thinning and clearfelling practice resulting in woodlands of high recreational, scenic and environmental value.

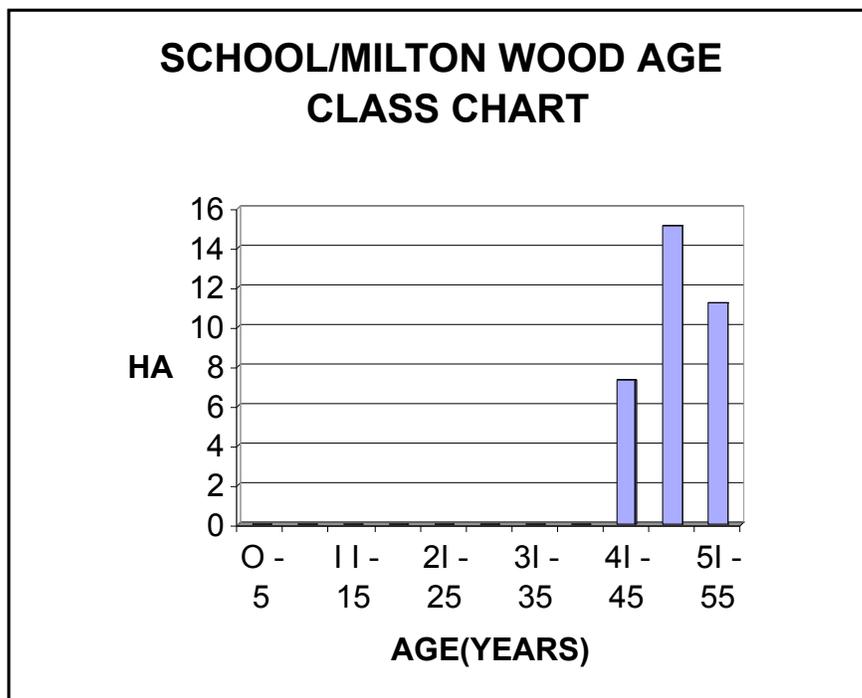
The tables overleaf illustrate the species and age class diversity.

(a) Key

- SP – SCOTS PINE
- EL – EUROPEAN LARCH
- BG – BARE GROUND
- DF – DOUGLAS FIR
- SS – SITKA SPRUCE
- NS – NORWAY SPRUCE

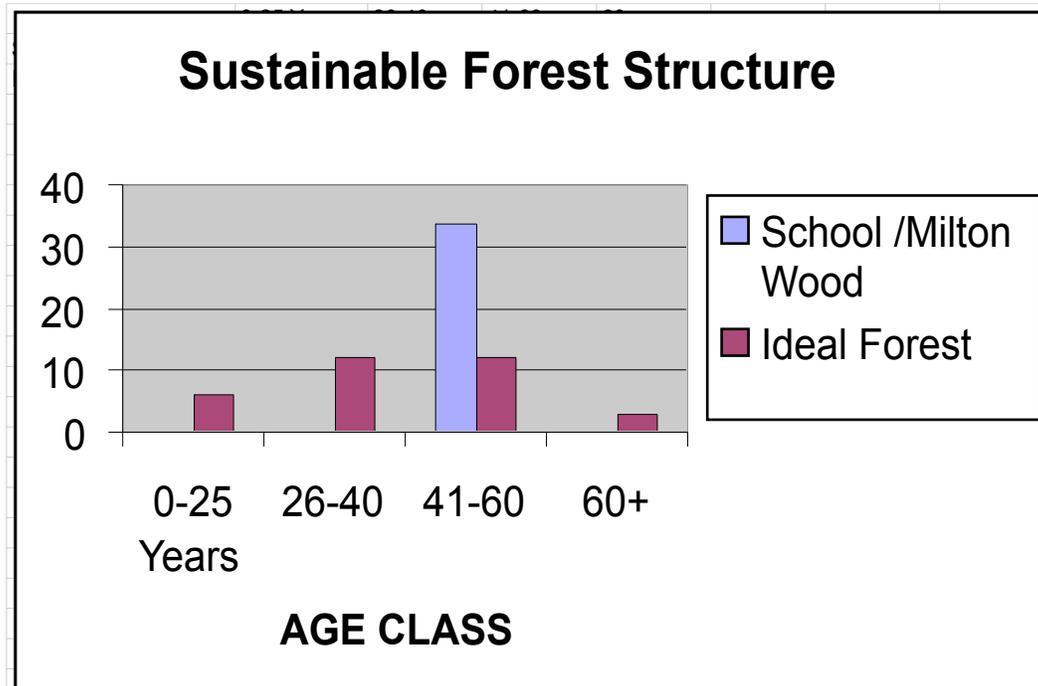


Sheet1![SPECIES CHART.xls]Sheet1 Chart 2



The woods at present do not meet the criteria for a natural forest where the full range of age classes are present.

The chart below outlines the age structure of the woodlands as opposed to the ideal.



The age structure of the woodland is dominated by relatively young crops with a lack of mature trees, which are of higher environmental value as well as timber value.

The woodland is composed mainly of Scots pine with elements of European larch, Sitka spruce, Norway spruce and Douglas fir in Milton Wood . Within Milton wood there are also two mature Beech trees adjacent to ruined buildings and Alder/ Downy birch along the riparian corridor which follows the River Nairn and forms the western boundary of Milton Wood.

There are significant areas of natural regeneration within School wood consisting of Scots pine and broadleaf regeneration in small patches particularly at the northern end of the wood.

Regeneration within Milton is restricted to Birch and Rowan on the fringes and some small areas of Sitka spruce within the more open Scots pine stands. Gorse is also present in the wayleave corridor.

The open ground elements totaling 8.8ha are made up of a quarry site and wetland area in School Wood and a felled area and agricultural field in Milton Wood

The yield class( measurement of tree growth in m<sup>3</sup> per ha per annum)for the species are estimated at 8 to 10 for the Scots pine, 16 for Sitka spruce, 14 for Norway spruce,10 for European larch and 10 for Douglas fir.

The trees in general are of good form and growth rates are average.

Wind Hazard Class(WHC) is estimated at 2 to 4. WHC 2 applies to the majority of the site. WHC 4 is confined mainly to the gleyed areas which have been planted with Sitka spruce.

Wind damage can be a serious problem resulting in both direct costs i.e. the additional cost of harvesting windblow and indirect costs i.e. loss of amenity, visual deterioration of the area and danger to users of the woodland.

It is one of the major limiting factors in the development of a normal forest structure within British forests.

WHC 2 in effect means that the risk of wind damage is low and management planning to achieve continuous cover forestry( maintenance of forest cover over all the woodland as against the large scale felling coupes which are the norm in Scotland) is possible.

The WHC 4 areas which form approximately 16% of the site consist of 6.35ha of open ground which formerly carried a Sitka spruce crop felled in 1996/99 and 0.73ha of existing Sitka spruce plantation.

### **3.2.5.Fauna:**

The site hosts a species range typical for high ground, woodlands and wetlands of the Highlands.

Milton wood is of particular note for its Red squirrel population and raptor interest with Buzzard common. Badgers are also active within the woodland. Roe deer are present and while the numbers are not considered to be excessive they do pose a threat to future regeneration if not controlled.

Otters have been seen within the riparian corridor

Rabbits are also numerous within Milton.

### **3.2.6.Grazing:**

The area is fenced against stock

Fences are of variable condition and sheep are frequently seen within Milton Wood.

Roe and red deer are seen in the area although numbers are generally thought to be under stable.

There has been no formal assessment of grazing within the woodland although a visual assessment would indicate that regeneration is ongoing within School wood even with current grazing levels.

Milton wood does suffer from occasional sheep grazing and carries a high rabbit population which contributes to the relatively poor distribution of ground flora and little to no woodland regeneration.

## **3.3.Cultural**

### **3.3.1.Land use:**

#### **3.3.1.1. Past:**

The area was formerly part of the estate of Lt Colonel W.A.D.Mackenzie before being sold to Forestry Commission in 1944. The 1870 OS map did indicate an area south of Woodside as having tree cover and a mill, sawmill and smithy with a millpond were all located within what is now known as Milton Wood.

#### 3.3.1.2. Recent past:

The Woodland was established by Forestry Commission between 1950 and 1958. There followed little in the way of active management until Cpt C within Milton containing a Sitka spruce crop was clearfelled in 1996/99 to improve and extend the riparian habitat through natural regeneration. During the time of active expansion by Forestry Commission Farr contained a number of FC owned properties that have been gradually sold off as part of FC policy from the 1970's onward.

#### 3.3.1.3. Present:

The local community purchased the woodlands from the Forestry Commission 2003 . There is a very strong community involvement in woodland management issues . Employment opportunities in Strathnairn are currently very dependent on agriculture and most people commute to Inverness.

#### 3.3.1.4. Surrounding land use

Mainly agriculture although the village of Farr is expanding on the western edge of School Wood. Part Of School wood has been zoned for housing within the draft Local Plan. There is no formal planning approval in place.

In the Community Consultation exercise there was generally a favourable response to Community based housing projects particularly affordable housing projects for local residents.

### **3.3.2. Archaeology**

The area is rich in archaeological features and an archaeological assessment has been carried out .

Please see appendix 2 for details.

The archaeological assessment noted a farmstead with associated structures, a building , features associated with a water mill and various dykes and tracks within Milton.

The features found within School Wood are mainly stone and turf dykes.

### **3.3.3. Landscape Interest**

Strathnairn is a broad low lying Strath with rolling relief and sculptural glacial landforms. Within the Strath there is a mosaic of forested ridges, rolling pastures and heather moorland but dominated by swathes of commercial forestry.

The area around the Milton and particularly School Wood is a comparatively densely settled landscape with Farr village the focal point. The B851 is a strong communication and service corridor and both woods are highly visible from this road.

Broadleaf woodland along the riparian corridor and improved pasture are characteristic of the Strath floor and are well represented in the immediate locality.

### **3.3.4. Recreation/Access**

The woodlands are well used by residents of the area and the Strathnairn 2001 Draft Local Plan(see appendix 5)specifically mentions School Wood and Milton Wood as having potential for improvement of the footpath system and the creation of car parks for amenity use. In general terms it also mentions opportunities for woodland trails and routes to be taken in the riparian woodland interest and archaeological features.

A Community Consultation Exercise held in August 2001 outlined the aspirations of the local community with regard to a number of interests.

The consensus of the exercise was a desire for improved access provision in the area.

The B851 which forms the eastern boundary of both woodlands is part of the Loch Ness tourist route and offers the potential for development of visitor facilities in the woodland. The proximity of School Wood to the primary school and safe access from the village to the school through the wood gives the area added value as an educational resource. The current drive towards curricular based environmental projects and Life Long Learning projects in which all age groups are offered a sense of ownership to their immediate environment are well served by the adjacent woodlands.

The relatively good accessibility of School Wood and Milton Wood, their proximity to the increasing population of Strathnairn ; particularly Farr and Inverarnie, their location being approximately 11 miles from Inverness and close to a major tourist route make the woodland well placed to attract both residents and tourists alike. The Wade road attracts significant amounts of walkers each year and is an indication of the potential in the area. There are a number of tourism based businesses in the area which would benefit from the development of the recreational and access features

Forest Enterprise are increasingly promoting the recreational value of the state forests and the Strathnairn Community Woodland Project have discussed a partnership approach with FE involving a wider network of footpaths using School Wood and Milton Wood as the focal point for interpretation and signage material.

The main challenges with regard to visitor access are as follows:

- The woods are not promoted as a recreational area and visitors tend to be local residents or informed visitors.
- There is no obvious car parking.
- The existing tracks are not being are not being maintained.
- There is no interpretation or signing of any form to inform walkers of preferred routes or features of interest

The Strathnairn 2001 Draft Local Plan(see appendix 5)specifically mentions School Wood and Milton Wood as having potential for improvement of the footpath system and the creation of car parks for amenity use.

Both woods are classed as existing commercial woodland but school wood also has an amenity woodland designation.

In general terms it also mentions opportunities for woodland trails and routes to taken in the riparian woodland interest and archaeological features.

A Community Consultation Exercise held in August 2001 outlined the aspirations of the local community with regard to a number of interests.

The consensus of the exercise was a desire for improved access provision in the area.

Within the Highland Council Indicative Forest Strategy(IFS) the area falls on the boundary between Potential and Sensitive. The constraints are landscape and archaeology. The IFS identifies key issues in relation to forestry which include landscape

sensitivities, existing recreational features, recreational opportunities and mentions the changing recreational scene and the continuing boom in outdoor pursuits including walking, cycling, backpacking etc.

The IFS draws attention to the importance of major tourism corridors including the in terms of provision of recreational facilities and forest design.

Community Woodlands are also identified as an important means of integrating forest management with recreational provision.

## **SECTION 4 : EVALUATION**

### **4.1. Summary of Key Features**

- There is a strong community spirit, which has enabled the purchase of the woodlands for the benefit of the local community and wider public recreation,
- Aspiration by the community to improve recreational facilities, aesthetic value and provide local employment opportunities (remit of sustainable forestry),
- Remnants of semi ancient native woodland within plantation,
- Presence of key species such as red squirrel, badger and otter,
- Presence of key habitats such as riparian woodland and mire communities,
- Nature Conservation value is recognised by SCWP and SNH. SCWP sponsored by SNH during the acquisition of the woodland.
- Dominance of non native species and lack of age/structural diversity of plantation,
- Lack of open ground within the plantation,
- Lack of past management for anything other than timber production,
- High landscape sensitivity particularly adjacent to Farr and the public road
- The Plantations does not conform with the latest FC environmental standards or the UK forestry standards,
- Archaeological features that require protection,
- Grazing pressure from deer and rabbits,
- The Indicative Forest Strategy classes the area as potential for commercial woodland development with sensitivities in the form of landscape and archaeology,
- The project is supported financially and with expertise by a number of agencies, organisations and private individuals.

## **4.2.Evaluation**

The area hosts a number of important habitat and key species and is an important local landscape feature.

Currently the woodland does not meet the latest environmental guidelines in terms of overall design, sound silvicultural and habitat management and species diversity.

There is a great need to improve the woodland for the benefit of man and nature alike by increasing species and age structure, providing ample recreational facilities and meeting current management standards, whilst working within a financial framework.

A balance has to be found between open heathland/mire and established woodland. To achieve this more active management in terms of restructuring of the woodland is required.

There is also the opportunity to improve the management of the land by working in close liaison with neighbouring landowners and developing woodland skills within the local community.

The conversion to predominately native woodland would be in line with the drive to maintain and increase Native Woodland cover in the vicinity and the stated aims of SCWP.

School Wood and Milton Wood offer a diversity of habitat within easy access of the major population centres and tourist routes. The woods offer a range of experiences from a Caledonian pinewood type habitat through riparian woodland to well managed commercial coniferous plantation. The woods have the potential to attract visitors to the area to experience first hand the attractions of this area.

In business terms the woods are a sound recreational product in a strategically well placed location offering a unique experience within this area and perhaps more importantly supported by a resourceful community group which is enthusiastic about having a greater influence over its own economic future.

The key elements in realising the potential of the woods as a community resource are:

- Raising the profile of the forest as a visitor destination with the attendant benefit of increased visitor spend in the area.
- Improving and extending existing facilities and introducing new activities and services which have an economic spin off to the local community.
- Safeguarding and enhancement of the amenity and conservation value of the forest environment.
- Introducing innovative management and training measures to ensure a greater involvement by the local community in the future management of the forest resource and ensure that the economic benefits are retained within the area.

These elements are described in more detail below.

- Raising the profile

If more visitors are to be attracted this area there must be a promotion into appropriate marketplaces likely to be interested in what the area has to offer. The Highlands in general rely on tourism as a major part of the economic well - being of the area and nearby Loch Ness and Glen Affric are magnets for visitors who come to enjoy the natural beauty of the area and participate in a wide range of active and passive recreational pursuits, including hill walking, wildlife observation, fishing and many more.

We suggest raising the area's profile using the following methods:

1. Preparing promotional literature for Strathnairn with possible links to initiatives within the district which highlights the attractions of the area and particularly the Milton and School Wood. It should also include information highlighting the key historical and environmental attributes of the area and list the main activities, facilities and services available.
2. Clearly signposting features of interest within the area including linkage with adjacent sites of general interest. Potential partnership with Forest Enterprise and local landowners to extend access routes.
3. Improving the existing facilities through the construction of further parking facilities and upgrading of existing paths along with appropriate interpretation and signposting. Improvement of the facilities must be in the context of visitor demand for the resource and be sympathetic to the environmental and scenic qualities of the area.
4. Promoting the scenic and environmental qualities of the area in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage(SNH), Royal Society for The Protection of Birds(RSPB), Woodland Trust etc.  
The wood at the moment is of high environmental and wildlife value and care must be taken to balance the desire for improved access opportunities with the maintenance and enhancement of these other qualities.
5. The promotion of local training initiatives and voluntary work days will forge closer links between the local community and the work being undertaken in the wood. The professional management and supervision of these operations will be required as a condition of many funding initiatives and ensure a high quality product is forthcoming

## **SECTION 5 : MANAGEMENT AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **5.1. Long Term Aim (2004-2024)**

**“ to conserve, regenerate, and promote the restoration of predominantly native woodland in the geographical area of Strathnairn as an important part of Scotland’s native environment for the benefit of the public**

### **5.2.General**

The project is focused on long term and several of the objectives cannot be fully realised in less than 20 years especially in any areas designated for natural regeneration.

The following objectives relate to the overall management aim. Their ranking does not place any order on them, as sustainable woodland management aims to balance the needs of all.

### **5.3.Management Objectives (2004-2024)**

The principle objectives are:

- To ensure the local community was empowered within the decision making process, local sensitivities were considered and the community views were fully explored and incorporated into future plans,
  - To ensure that the unique scenic amenity and environmental value of the area is both respected and enhanced through the development of a sensitive Management Plan plus completion of FC Long Term Management Plan in 2004,
- 1 To secure amenity access for both the local residents and wider public to an attractive and varied stretch of woodland. This will be achieved by providing on site interpretation, easy access paths, and paths/tracks for walkers,
    - To bring the woodland up to the highest environmental and recreational standards,
    - To provide local employment potential and establish local “add-on” operations where possible by utilising local labour and embarking on a training programme,
    - To provide improved local access and provide linkage with other community groups, visiting interest groups, and educational establishments,
    - To work in a partnership programme by involving the local woodland owners ( FE or private individual), funding agencies and statutory agencies,
  - 2 To gather baseline data and monitor impact of the new management approach. This will be achieved by recording visitor numbers, amount of employment opportunities created, and basic floral and faunal surveys (focusing on key species and including deer survey) and records of management work carried out,
  - 3 To safeguard archaeological features. This will be achieved by identifying archaeological features, liaising with the HC archaeologist and incorporating their views into on site interpretation,

## **SECTION 6 : PRESCRIPTIONS**

### **6.1.Zoning**

To aid the production of a long term plan the woodlands has been zoned into three long term management units with the following primary objectives: (see appendix for map)

- **Zone 1: Production Area**

Area which is designated for timber production, and situated in the more productive and potentially more accessible parts of the blocks,

- **Zone 2: Access and Recreation Area**

Area with high visual prominence in the landscape and potential for the development of recreational infrastructure.

- **Zone 3: Conservation Area**

Area which has a high nature conservation element and may require a sensitive approach to recreational features. e.g riparian area.

The zoning of the woodland sets priorities for each zone, but does not exclude other activities from it.

#### **6.1.1. Conservation Zone**

This consists of the mire area within School Wood and the riparian woodland along the River Nairn in Milton Wood.

The proposals seek to maintain and increase the conservation value of both those habitats. Key elements of future management are the blocking of drains leading from the mire area and the removal of any invasive natural regeneration.

The riparian area will be protected and enhanced through control of grazing animals through replacement of derelict stock fencing and the extension of the woodland area by planting of native broadleaves and natural regeneration.

#### **6.1.2. Access and Recreation Zone**

Both woodlands are of high recreational value. School wood is currently well used by locals and being adjacent to the school is often used for educational projects. Its proximity to Farr makes it a priority as far as the development of the woodland for daily regular use by local residents.

Milton wood offers more variety as far as landscape, archaeological and recreational experience goes. The terrain is more challenging and a more robust infrastructure is required to meet the demands of more public access.

#### **6.1.3. Production Zone**

Timber production is an essential to the financial well being and job creation aspirations of the project. The long term aim of the Management Plan is to gradually convert the woodlands to a continuous cover system where sustainability is the major objective. Developing a continuous cover forestry system will enhance both recreation and conservation values in the medium term.

## **6.2.Resources**

The Strathnairn Community Woodland Project has been able to secure funding and sponsorship for the various woodland and community proposals from a number of organisations including:

- The Forestry Commission (via the WGS)
- Forestry and Rural Development Scheme,
- Scottish Natural Heritage,
- Scottish Land Fund
- HIE (Land Unit), INE,
- Donations by commercial institutions,
- Private donations and extensive fundraising by the local community.

In addition there has been strong advisory/moral support from many organisations such as RSPB, Forest Enterprise, Highland Council etc.

IM Forestry currently acts as the forestry consultants and woodland managers on behalf of the community.

Expert advice for particular skills will be recruited where necessary.

In order to achieve one of the management objectives of creating local employment opportunities, local contractors and residents will be invited to tender for various operations where ever possible.

## **6.3. Management/Monitoring/Training**

The following operations are proposed:

- To secure funding by preparation of a Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme application, Forestry and Rural Development Scheme(FRDS) Application, Rural Challenge etc.
- To prepare Management Plans for the various funding agencies.
- The surveying of the area and presentation of a detailed restructuring and woodland management plan for the community, FC, SNH and FRDS.
- Monitoring of vegetation development (via fixed point photography and transects).
- Monitoring of Grazing levels (via visual counts, dung counts and vegetation response).
- Monitoring of visitor numbers at regular intervals.
- Preparation of risk assessment for all operations/hazards.
- The supervision of contractors and involvement of the local community in any of the proposed operations.
- Administration and Project management by the local community and local consultants (monthly SCWT committee meetings).
- The organisation of various training days (ranging from First Aid, basic forestry skills, chainsaw certification).

#### **6.4. Reviewing/Liaison with Statutory Agencies**

The plan will be reviewed in year 4 of the SFGS contract - **Year 2008** and revised for the Year 2009.

Regular site visits together with the FC woodland officer, SNH and FRDS staff, any other consultees and the community are actively sought to evaluate the success of the site proposals.

#### **6.5. Access/Recreation/Publicity**

To fulfill the desire of the community to provide ample facilities for recreation and education and to provide good quality public access the following comprehensive programme is proposed (please see appendix . for details of location of facilities):

- Erection of kissing gates and stiles for access at entrance points.
- Upgrading of timber loading points at both School and Milton Wood for car parking
- Interpretation at entrance points and adjacent to interesting features (e.g. archaeology, nature conservation aspects). This would consist of wooden signs with illustrations and maps. Interpretation will also be established adjacent to the newly created carparks.
- Production of quarterly newsletter by the local community to inform the public of events and progress relating to the woodland.
- Erection of wooden building in School Wood for use by the school and as an interpretation facility
- The creation of 2500m of new woodland paths/tracks for access to various parts of Milton Wood.
- Strimming of tracks within School Wood and construction of decking across poor surfaces.
- The regular maintenance of these paths to comply with the Health and Safety regulations.
- Additional signing of the various paths with wooden posts to ease orientation.
- Installation of picnic benches at car park areas.
- Regular litter picking along paths and entrance points to maintain the appearance of the woodland.

SNH, HC, and FC will be closely consulted in relation to construction of new roads/tracks and design/location of public access interpretation.

## **6.6.Environmental/Woodland Management**

### **6.6.1.Community**

One of the major aims of the project is to involve the community in the day to day management of the site and maintain and develop a feeling of ownership of the project. To achieve this a series of monthly woodland workdays will be held where community volunteers are actively involved in carrying out some of the proposals outlined in the following text. Potential operations include brushing of paths, track maintenance/construction, removal of redundant fencing, small scale felling, tree planting and maintenance, removal of Rhododendron.

### **6.6.2.Overall Design**

The design of the woodland is based on the desires of the community, the findings of the various site surveys (e.g. vegetation), site analysis (e.g. landscape appraisal), silvicultural needs and the recommendations of the latest management guidelines.

The overall design of the site will create mixed woodlands composed of open ground, varied stocking densities and a dominance of native species except for the area zoned for production and a wide range of recreational/educational facilities. The preferred method of achieving this aim is the gradual introduction of a continuous cover woodland system where a variety of woodland structures co-exist through careful manipulation of stocking densities and timing of felling.

### **6.6.3. Management of Open Ground**

Areas of open ground within the sites will be actively maintained (i.e. kept free from regeneration or planting) for:

1. Maintaining valuable heathland habitats for key species,
2. Increasing habitat diversity (increasing spatial diversity, wetland areas and regenerating peat areas/mire communities),
3. Landscape purposes (in accordance to the visual force analysis),
4. Benefit to the walking public and views out from the woodlands towards e.g Brin Crags
5. Ease of future management (deer and access glades),
6. For the safeguarding of archaeological features (retention zones).

### **6.6.4.Grazing Control – Deer/Rabbit Management**

The woodland requires grazing to be controlled in order to allow the development of ground vegetation and the successful regeneration of native species. At present there is ongoing natural regeneration within openings in School Wood but very little evidence in Milton Wood with the exception of Sitka spruce regeneration on track sides. Rabbits are considered to be the main problem in Milton with Deer and sheep being secondary issues. As part of a grazing management programme the following operations are proposed:

#### **6.6.4.1.Fencing**

In Milton Wood existing degraded stock fences (3200m) will be removed and replaced with new rabbit fencing. Fences around School Wood are generally in

good condition and rabbits are not considered a major problem at present. Fences will be regularly checked and repaired/replaced as required to prevent livestock from entering the woodland. Rabbit control within Milton wood will be a priority and numbers will be controlled as required.

#### 6.6.4.2. Deer Management Plan

SCWP proposes the following procedures as part of an overall deer management plan:

1. Stringent control (by rifle) of resident and marauding deer (all species) within the woodland area (40.58ha),
2. Reduction of Deer population to sustainable levels,
3. Subsequent and regular monitoring of deer population numbers by visual and dung counts.
4. Nomination of a suitable person(s) responsible for deer management issues (D. Lambie).
5. The DCS will be informed of locally based controller once appointed.
6. Regular consultation with the DCS and FC regards the success of the management plan (annual event).
7. Amendments of the plan implemented as necessary (after consultation with DCS/FC) to allow the successful establishment of the new woodland.
8. Liaison with the local deer management group to coordinate efforts of deer control (biannual meeting).

#### 6.6.5. Regeneration/Existing Woodland

Natural regeneration is the preferred method of woodland establishment. The existing pockets of woodland will be protected from grazing and any other damage. No planting will take place within 20m of existing native woodland.

It is anticipated that birch, rowan, Scots pine will be the main regenerating species. Regeneration of Sitka spruce and larch is evident in Milton wood and should be accepted in all but the most sensitive of woodland areas i.e the riparian corridor along the River Nairn. The existing vegetation and soil is a suitable growing medium and an average stocking density of 1100 plants per ha should be achieved. The exception being the areas felled within Milton work where a dense grass sward is inhibiting regeneration and planting is the preferred option. If the desired stocking density is not achieved by year 4 a report will be submitted to the FC and further action agreed.

Areas of existing woodland have been mapped in relation to aerial photographs and site surveys.

#### 6.6.6. Removal of Non Native Species

It is proposed to fell 3.0ha of Douglas Fir which forms a long narrow strip on the edge of the River Nairn flood plain in Milton Wood. This Cpt is unthinned, timber quality is poor and it forms an unnaturally harsh transition from the broadleaf flood plain woodland to

the Scots pine on the heathland. An area of Lodgepole pine (0.5ha) is also proposed for felling Rhododendron is present in Milton and will be removed.

#### 6.6.7. New Planting and Replanting

The initial planting opportunities are limited to Milton wood and the restocking of the area along the River Nairn previously felled by Forestry Commission.

The general proposed woodland will be a mixture of the NVC classes W18 (pinewood) on the drier heathland soils and W11 (upland oak-birch woodland) on the more fertile slopes along the burn edges.

Trees to be planted or regenerated at a minimum average density of 1100 trees/ha.

Planting varied according to ground conditions and designed to reflect the structure of natural woodland as described in Bulletin 112 “Creating New Native Woodlands “.

In general the planting density will vary from 3000 trees/ha in the core woodland areas with potential for timber production down to 200 trees per/ha on internal and external margins particularly adjacent to the River Nairn.

Scots pine will be planted at higher stocking densities (averaging 3000/ha) on suitable drier soils, whilst downy birch and alder will be established in the wetter soils. Silver birch, aspen and sessile oak will be used along in more fertile soils.

Areas along burns will be left unplanted to create dappled shade (beneficial to water quality) and to maintain open areas for the benefits of raptors (as suggested by RSPB).

Broadleaved planting stock to be of Scottish and local origin ( Zone 201 where possible), Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris var. Scotica*) from the East Central Biochemical Region, Abernethy preferred.

Suitable Native Species for the area include:

Species	
Caledonian Pine ( <i>Pinus sylvestris var. Scotica</i> )	
Ash ( <i>Fraxinus excelsior</i> )	
Downy Birch ( <i>Betula pubescens</i> )	
Silver Birch ( <i>Betula pendula</i> )	
Common Alder ( <i>Alnus glutinosa</i> )	
Rowan ( <i>Sorbus aucuparia</i> )	
Aspen ( <i>Populus tremula</i> )	
Sessile Oak ( <i>Quercus petraea</i> )	
Grey and Eared Willow ( <i>Salix cinerea and Salix aurita</i> )	
Common Juniper ( <i>Juniperus communis</i> )	
Holly ( <i>Ilex aquifolium</i> )	
Hazel ( <i>Corylus avellans</i> )	

Species to be planted in groups and intimate mixtures.

Group planting of shrubs and lower grown broadleaves will be carried out along burn-sides and woodland edges.

The general presumption is for woodland establishment through natural regeneration of existing native seed sources rather than planting. Within School wood the indications are that conditions are suitable for natural regeneration and with a little manipulation of light levels an under storey will be able to develop successfully.

Milton wood has a higher level of browsing and generally has a dense woodland canopy. The woodland margins along the River Nairn have been colonised by Soft rush and Tufted hair grass which forms a dense sward making natural regeneration unlikely. This area is potentially important from a recreational point of view and there is a proposal for reinstatement of this area to remove the plough furrows which make the majority of the area inaccessible. This ground disturbance in conjunction with improved grazing control may result in the development of natural regeneration within this riparian corridor.

The proposal within the riparian corridor is to plant groups of trees, which add to the species diversity and will also provide future seed sources for ongoing natural regeneration. 3000 trees will be planted by the local community in 2004/05 and protected by 0.6m tree shelters.

The positioning of the planting areas will be determined in detail with the FC and SNH on the ground.

The restocking of the 3.0ha of Douglas fir proposed for clearfelling in Milton Wood will provide the transition from the predominantly broadleaf riparian area to the Scots pine dominated heathland plateau. Species used will be a mixture of native broadleaves, predominantly Sessile Oak with an element of Scots pine to ensure a natural transition phase. Open ground will be maintained for views down to the river and more distant views to the Brin Craggs and beyond. Planting density and protection similar to riparian area.

#### 6.6.9. Maintenance of Planted Trees.

Weed control, loss replacement and any other maintenance operations to be carried out as required to provide an established minimum stocking density to satisfy SFGS requirements.

Watercourses managed as per the FC Forests and Water Guidelines.

#### 6.6.10. Ground Preparation

Ground preparation will consist of hand mounding/screefing. Fragile areas and wet flushes outwith the riparian areas will be left undisturbed.

Ground preparation will be kept to the minimum possible to reduce the impact and maintain and improve the recreational value of the woodland

#### 6.6.11. Removal of Non Native Regeneration

It is expected that non native species will regenerate into the felled areas. Within the riparian corridor removal of new seedlings will be carried out on a regular basis and include a survey of target areas and hand pulling of seedlings. Spraying of regrowth is not anticipated.

#### 6.6.12. Restoration of Bog Habitats

In consultation with SNH, restoration of bog/wetland habitat will be carried out by damming of drains within School Wood and the felling and removal of Lodgepole pine within Milton Wood. Future natural regeneration to be removed from the area to preserve the wetland character.

#### 6.6.13. Removal of Vegetation from Archaeological Features

In order to preserve existing archaeological features trees and encroaching vegetation will be removed. This is in line with the latest FC and HC Archaeology management guidelines. The community and local school can be actively involved in this project.

#### 6.6.14. Thinning

Silvicultural thinnings of non native species will be carried out in all suitable areas. Thinning intensity will be carried out in accordance with the FC recommendations but increased adjacent to existing native broadleaf and Scots pine cover. This will allow for natural regeneration of these species and add further diversity.

Sample areas will be marked by axe or paint.

Early thinnings will provide additional opportunities for the later restructuring programme and the stated aim of converting the woodlands to a Continuous Cover management system.

Within the period 2004- 2009 it is proposed to thin all of School Wood and Milton.

#### 6.6.15. Felling

There is a general presumption against large scale felling within the Community and in order to meet the UK Forest Standard a higher proportion of native woodland and open ground is required.

After widespread discussion the felling proposals in the initial 2004-2009 period are restricted to Milton Wood . 3.0ha of Douglas Fir and an area of approximately 0.5ha of Lodgepole pine planted within a wetland area and adjacent to a major archaeological feature has been highlighted for removal and replacement with native species or retention as open ground.

Within Milton Wood there is a further 3ha of Sitka spruce/Norway spruce P 1953 proposed for felling in 2006-2014.

Felling would be carried out by Harvester/Forwarder with timber being made available for local use as required.

#### 6.6.15. Erection of Fire Fighting Equipment

In order to combat the increased risk of fire danger due to more intensive usage by the public firebeaters will be erected at strategic points. They will be positioned adjacent to the new young crops and open ground.

#### 6.6.16. Recreation/Interpretation

The following operations are proposed as part of the overall plan to develop the recreational value of the area for the benefit of residents and visitors alike:

- Produce a detailed Recreational Plan
- Upgrade the timber loading bays in both School and Milton woods for car parking. Up to 10 cars would be catered for at each car park.
- Strim 1200m of path in School Wood and construct approx 30m of timber decking across wetland areas.
- Construct 2500m( including easy access area) of footpath in Milton wood to provide a circular route from the car park along the River Nairn.
- Construct Forest Classroom in School Wood
- Produce 500 leaflets detailing walking routes and features of interest.
- Design and install interpretative sign at each car park
- Install picnic bench at both car parks
- Continue links with Highland Council Warden service and assess the possibility of appointing a part time warden for guiding visiting parties, litter picking, recording visitor numbers etc.

#### 6.6.17. Educational

Develop the project links with Farr school to the point where the woodlands are though of as an open air class room. Educational packs are available which could be tailored to the features within the woodland and stimulate the interest in nature conservation.

#### 6.6.17. Monitoring

Monitoring of visitor numbers will be carried out during two annual surveys (at weekends; one during spring and one during peak season i.e. summer).

The SCWP chairman will estimate records of employment figures on an annual basis.

Basic floral and faunal surveys of key species will be carried out at appropriate seasons and recorded on maps and spreadsheets.

Deer counts will be carried out by visual and dung assessment in accordance to the DCS recommendations.

Records of management approach will be kept by the SCWP chairman (diary of operations) and the forestry consultant (record of pathwork carried out plus instruction sheets to contractors, site visit reports, risk assessments etc).

#### 6.6.17. Insurance

A minimum of public liability and insurance against fire damage is required.

## **6.7.Operations Completed**

The following operations have been completed to date

- Community Consultation exercise in 2001/02
- Production of Feasibility Study in 2003
- NVC survey in 2003
- Archaeological Survey in 2003
- Crop survey in 2003
- Purchase of Woodland in 2003
- Completion of funding applications to FC for production of a Long Term Forest Plan in 2004,
- Production of draft management plan for SNH in 2004
- Completion of FRDS application in 2004
- Wide consultation of proposals with FC, SNH,, other statutory agencies and the local community (meetings, presentations) over past 24 months

**SECTION 7 : APPENDICES**