ARKAIG
Community Forest

Chairperson's report October 2026

Since October last year ACF has been as busy as ever, with lots of ups and downs. Funding streams have been challenging but this has meant we have had to look at other alternatives sources and have had some successes and also had generous assistance from partners. Our main source of project funding at the moment is NatureScot for the partnership activities which we are involved with WT and Achnacarry. The second round of which was due to begin in April, unfortunately administrative issues meant that there was a delay in the approval of this and in the start date. This resulted in a hiatus between April and June where we had to find money to cover all our outgoings. Fortunately we were able to secure funding from the Pebble Trust, Corrour Trust, Scotland the Big Picture, Lochabar Mor, Woodland Trust, and the Climate Hub. Which has enabled us to continue to run the tree nursery and to manage our other activities. For which we are very grateful

Staff

This year again has seen a number of personnel changes. An extension to NRF phase 1 funding meant that we were able to keep a TN assistant on until April but although Bryony Lewis moved on we welcomed Sarah Lewis. Unfortunately phase 2 of NRF funding 2026 - 28 did not include anything for the tree nursery so we were unable to retain an assistant after March. We also had to lose Madeleine as volunteer coordinator but were able to incorporate some of this role into Jared's position and are grateful to Mike Pegman for coordinating volunteers on a voluntary basis. Tighter finances also meant the Operations manager position was reduced to 2 days with 2 days for volunteering and community engagement . Thankfully we still have Cat funded for 3 days per week as deer larder manager. On a more positive note we secured Pebble Trust funding for a tree nursery intern - 3 days per week for 8 months. We are very pleased to welcome Cameron Craig who started this month.

Unfortunately we must also say goodbye to Jared, who's hard work and good humour has made a step change to the way we operate and brought our policies and procedures up to where they needed to be. They will be big shoes to fill but we look forward to welcoming him as a community member.

Changes too in Woodland Trust staff as Georgie Pelly left at the beginning of the year and was replaced by Kate Heightman in April who has really hit the ground running. We look forward to continuing working productively with her.

Deer Larder

The NatureScot funding awarded this year has enabled us to employ Cat for 3 days per week (from 2) and with the help of our board member Sandy Williamson they have been developing community

stalking and community butchery as well as the venison output. Protocols have been developed for community stalking and larder hire. Sandy has signed a contract with the WT on behalf of ACF to stalk on their land on Glen Mallie.

- The deer larder operation continues to produce high quality sustainable meat for the local community as part of the management of deer numbers in Glen Mallie and the Gusach on both ACF and Woodland Trust land.
- From April 2026 the deer larder manager has increased the number of days employed from 2 days a week to 3 days.
- Working on marketing, deliveries, communications, finance and the health and safety of the deer larder.
- Our contracted butcher continues to work in the larder up to 4 days per month.
- Again this year, the larder has hosted visits from 10 different groups or individuals (80 people) interested in learning about its operation, including Nick Halfhide, CEO – NatureScot and various NatureScot staff members, Alastair Seaman – Director for Scotland – Woodland Trust Scotland and various Woodland Trust staff members, Appin Community Development Trust, Loch Abar Mor, FLS staff members and Community Woodland Association members.
- 2 online knowledge sharing meetings with Galson Estate Trust and Comrie Development Trust who were interested in information regarding ACF's deer larder.
- Sales have increased and diversified as we have forged good relationships with new customers within the local community, restaurants and shops, generating excellent feedback.
- We worked in partnership with British Deer Society and have 5 local people undertaking their DSC1 - online based training.
- We have expanded our opportunities to the local community through creating a community stalking initiative and offering the ability to hire the deer larder, which we soft launched in September.
- The Deer Larder manager attended 2 training courses organised by NatureScot.
- Funding from NRF for deer larder manager and Loch Abar Mor/SBP for equipment.
- October - October: 25 deer in larder

<u>Tree Nursery</u>

Despite managing from April with only volunteer help and with funding uncertainty, Anna has kept the tree nursery going and production levels up. From sowing 1kg of pine seeds, collected by WT, 28,000 seedlings were potted up in May/June and doing well. An unexpected health issue for Anna meant that most of the potting up was done by volunteers. Cameron is now taking good care of them.

- Trees sold winter 25/26 – ~12,000
- 7,000 pines ready for Achnacarry this winter
- Volunteer events – most Saturdays , including, tree ID, tree care, seed collecting
- Volunteer hours – 740, including UHI ranger students.
- Staff training - Aspen propagation training at Dundreggan for TN assistant
- LAM wee trees project – montane willow orchard
- Scot Gov Health inspection passed.

- UKISG inspection passed.
- Cameron Craig - tree nursery intern started 1st October 2026

Thanks to WT for continuing support. 20 Scots pines were purchased from the nursery for a ceremonial planting to mark the last non-native conifer felled.

Volunteering

We had Madeleine as volunteer coordinator until the end of March at which point Mike Pegman took on the coordination as a WT volunteer leader until NRF funding was confirmed for one day. Many thanks to Mike who has continued on a voluntary basis to work with Liam and Jared and put in many hours volunteering as well as keeping the volunteers up to date.

Regular volunteer days are Tuesdays with Saturdays in the tree nursery. There have been some special events such as RBGE surveys of translocated plants, more ant translocations and dragonfly habitat creation. It is hoped to continue to have monthly events like this.

There were 264 LAPF volunteer hours, excluding the ranger students. There were over 1300 volunteer board hours.

Events

- Christmas market - Jared and Cat attended with venison, cards, calendars, wreaths and trees
- Christmas wreath making
- Christmas gathering - staff, board, community and volunteers were invited for a great evening in the Forest School
- Climate Festival BBQ - September, Cat and Sandy set up a stall to publicise community stalking initiative and larder hire. As well as supplying excellent venison burgers. 23 people attended
- CWA conference ceilidh - 50 people attended and made through CWA contribution, Jared's doggedness and people's generosity with raffle prizes we made a profit of £624

Visits/media

Our successful collaborative working with WT, and more recently Beo Airceig has brought a lot attention to ACF and we receive many requests for visits and studies, including:

- January 6th - Radio 4 'In Other News'
- Feb 4th - Scottish Forestry/ Alliance for Scotland's rainforest visit - to all Beo Arceig partners
- Feb - Presentation to Highland Environment Forum - Jon Mercer
- April - WTS PR and social media team visit
- April - NatureScot leadership team visit , CE Nick Halfhide, Director of Green Economy Robbie Kernahan, Deputy Director GE Claudia Rowse and Director of Nature and Climate Change Stuart McQuarrie
- Also Woodland Trust Scotland team gathering - 47 people
- October 3rd - CWA conference site visit - we had the most popular site visit with 21 people. Thanks to Jared, Anna and Kate for their help.

We have also been included in two special designations by NatureScot: Nature30 site (with LAPF) and a Landscape scale nature restoration SBS exemplar project (as Beo Airceig)

Operations

IT shift - partly as a cost cutting exercise and partly to improve cyber security we moved all our IT, including emails and web site to Google not-for-profit (which is free). We could never have done this without the support,expertise and patience of Mike Pegman to whom we are extremely gratefully grateful. Needless to say this has been a time consuming exercise requiring Jared to manually move all our files over and to put up with the rest of us trying to keep up.

Community Resilience - the grant from CLLD(Community Led Local Development) awarded this time last year to begin to address issues of flood and fire was used

1. To get hydrology survey done on tree nursery and surrounding drainage, assessment of borehole supply as back-up water supply for forestry houses and as water resource in case of fire. More funds would be needed to completely address both.

2. Training in wildfire awareness and safety (LANTRA certified) - 9 participants, free to local community and subsidised places for partners. WT has subsequently paid for a Fire Plan and Risk Assessment for the area.

Subsequently following issues with water testing in the DL Sandy Edmond has switched over all ACF water supply to the borehole.

Landscape Restoration

- Glen Mallie - ATV track completed and non-native conifers removed by end March to meet NRF deadline.
- Ard Nois – WT removed all slipways except the one adjacent to here which was much smaller. A group of lodgepole pine not felled as were too near to a badger set were ringbarked by volunteers.
- Peatland restoration - JM and AM looked at possible areas for dragonfly habitat improvement and suggested making some pools deeper. A couple of trial areas were dug during a recent volunteer event.
- Ant translocation - Another 6 part translocations from Ard Nois to Glen Mallie

Forest School

Full Plans including business plan now completed, last phase would be planning application. On hold at present as we discuss possible areas of collaboration with ABC. An application to the Regeneration Capital Grants Fund didn't get past the first round as deemed not to have enough wider community benefit. We were invited to put in an EOI to the Community Regeneration Fund, but for a far lower amount. This has been submitted.

In the meantime Sandy E continues to keep the old buildings going and amongst running repairs there is now hot water and a new door on the workshop.

Advisory Board

The LAPF advisory board met twice this year and we welcomed Iain Jenner and Rob Coope to join. This broadens the scope of the board which now consists of: Jessica Boucher (chair), James Rainey, Gus Routledge, Iain and Rob. Therefore we now have expertise in forestry, deer management, ecology and socioeconomics.

10 year anniversary plans

14th December this year will mark 10 years since the purchase of Loch Arkaig Pine Forest by ACF and Woodland Trust and a number of celebratory events are being planned beginning with a ceilidh in February 2027.

Thanks

Arkaig Community Forest wouldn't be able to continue without the generosity of its supporters whether it's financial or with time or resources. Special thanks must go to our staff for bearing with us through so much uncertainty this year. Also to our board for stepping up to keep things going and for holding the faith. To all our volunteers and the local community.

Thanks to Woodland Trust for continuing support and also Lochabar Mor and CWA. To Mary Cheadle for donating her osprey calendars. To our funders The Pebble Trust, Scotland the Big Picture, CLLD, Corrour Foundation, NatureScot and A.B.C.

Angela Mercer October 2026.

A. Mercer 29/10/2026.