Chapter 12
The Push-Me, Pull-You of Forest Devolution in Scotland

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INTRODUCTION

The ‘push down’ of power through devolution and decentralization and the ‘pull down’ of power through action on the ground are reaching an exciting stage in Scotland. This is happening within a political context of devolution in the UK, with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 and Scotland’s forest estate now in the hands of the Scottish Executive (the government in Scotland). This chapter describes the political ‘push down’ and the people’s ‘pull down’ of power and tells the story of the people’s movement to get access to land and natural resources. The movement has led to the Land Reform Act, which gives communities the right to acquire ownership of land, including woodlands, and to the establishment of more than 100 community woodland organizations. It has also strongly influenced cultural and organizational changes within the national forest and rural development institutions. Local and sometimes radical efforts to pull down power can shape the decentralization process at the national level. Six examples illustrate the range of options for communities seeking to manage local woodlands.

BACKGROUND, CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

The people of Scotland have brought about a sea change in forest governance over the past few decades, shifting power towards the local communities for whom forests are part of their home environment. It demonstrates how revolutions at the local grassroots level can make a real difference in the way decentralization is implemented by a national government. Grassroots efforts create new possibilities, proving that ‘impossible’ things can really be achieved, thereby feeding the collective imagination of the country, building confidence in particular new forms of change and generating political will to create conditions that enable such changes to be replicated.

Once, Scotland was almost entirely covered by forest in which bears and wolves roamed; but over several thousands of years this forest was
destroyed, degraded and converted to agricultural and pasture lands. By the end of World War I, deforestation was all but complete, and efforts began to reverse the process with a massive state-run industrial afforestation programme. Today the emphasis has shifted towards a vision that includes environmental and social benefits as well as economic ones, and towards a model of reforestation and forest management that involves, rather than alienates, local communities.

**Political context**

Scotland is a nation of 5 million people that occupies the northern part of the island of Great Britain. Since the Labour party took control of government after a landslide victory in 1997, the UK is undertaking a major devolution process and thereby fulfilling a longstanding political promise.

In 1997, the Scottish people voted for devolution in a referendum, and in 1999, after nearly three centuries of centralized rule from London, the Scottish Parliament was established in Edinburgh. Domestic issues (such as health, education, justice, transport, local government, agriculture, environment and rural development, including forestry) were devolved to the new government in Scotland: the Scottish Executive. Ownership of Scotland’s national forests passed to Scottish ministers.

Until recently, despite devolved forest ownership, the national forest estate was still managed by the centralized Forest Enterprise as agent for the UK Forestry Commission. Following a review of the post-devolution experience, the management of the national forest estate was decentralized in 2003 with the creation of the Forestry Commission Scotland, answerable directly to Scottish ministers.

**Brief forest history**

Original (postglacial) forest cover in Great Britain about 7000 years ago is estimated to have been around 80 per cent. By 1000 years ago, land cover is estimated to have been reduced to 20 per cent. Recent estimates put the total figure of seminatural woodlands at around 2.5 per cent of land cover. Most of the ancient seminatural woodland areas are very important for biodiversity, and some are unique because of their relative isolation from mainland Europe and the strong oceanic influences of the North Atlantic.

The Forestry Commission was established in 1919 to develop a national timber reserve and, in particular, to grow enough timber to supply coal mines with pit props, without relying entirely on imports. Since then, afforestation has steadily increased tree cover to its current level of 16.4 per cent of Scotland. Total forest area (state and private) is now approximately 1.5 million hectares (ha) in Scotland. As a result of the timber orientation of the afforestation programme, the forests are mostly industrial plantations of non-native species. Now, however, the Forestry Commission has a strong commitment to make further increases in forest cover with native woodland.
To achieve its afforestation goals, the commission purchased large tracts of rural uplands and terminated hundreds of agricultural tenancies. Despite continued expansion of the national forest, estate employment in the forest sector dropped considerably over the years, largely as a result of the mechanization of forest operations, expensive labour costs and the availability of cheap imports. Rural communities who depended upon employment in the forest sector were affected, resulting in many 'ghost' villages.

During the 1980s, UK citizens were increasingly concerned about the equity of the government’s incentive schemes to private landowners, which included grants and tax breaks, as well as about the impact of the subsequent increased planting on areas of high natural heritage value, especially the peatlands. Between 1979 and 1997, some 100,000ha of the UK’s public forest were sold to the private sector. There was substantial public and private investment in the paper pulp industry. Planning and decisions on forestry were made by people living far away from the forests and by landowners from a different social and economic class than the rural population most affected by the decisions. It can be argued that the forest landscape we see today has been imposed upon rural communities rather than developed from within them.

In Scotland, only around 2 per cent of the land is covered by native woodland, and all of the land has been heavily modified by centuries of (mis)management. Scotland also has one of the most skewed and inequitable landownership patterns in the world, with nearly 60 per cent of the land controlled by as few as 1250 owners, many of them foreign nationals and institutions, and 13 per cent owned by 110 members of the British aristocracy (Wightman, 1996, 1999). The Scottish national forests cover 667,000ha (8.5 per cent of Scotland’s land area), forming Scotland’s biggest landholding and representing 36 per cent of Scotland’s woodland and forests. The remaining 64 per cent is privately owned.

The national forest programme

The global discourse on forest governance – Agenda 21, the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests (IPF) and Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IFF) – has a strong influence on UK policies. In 1994, the UK responded to its international commitments by publishing Sustainable Forestry: The UK Programme (The UK Government, 1994), which brought together various elements from government policies and programmes and set them in the context of international principles and guidelines. The programme covers all forests, including exotic plantations. However, there is now an increasing emphasis on the conservation, management and expansion of seminatural native woodlands. A series of policy statements and guidelines have been issued since 1985 to conserve and extend broadleaf woodlands and native pine-wood. These have been accompanied by targeted financial incentives for the
creation of new native woods and for the removal of exotic species from existing native woodlands.

The *Scottish Forestry Strategy* (Forestry Commission, 2000) is the Scottish Executive's forestry policy. It sets out five strategic directions for Scottish forestry:

1. Maximize the value to the Scottish economy of its wood resource available for harvesting over the next 20 years.
2. Create a diverse forest resource of high quality that will contribute to the economic needs of Scotland throughout the 21st century and beyond.
3. Ensure that forestry in Scotland makes a positive contribution to the environment.
4. Create opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests in Scotland.
5. Help communities to benefit from woods and forests.

Underpinning these strategic directions are five principles: sustainability; integration; ensuring positive value; securing community support; and recognizing local diversity and distinctiveness. The overall strategy recognizes that the environmental and social benefits sought from forestry do not necessarily generate cash income for the owner. Since Scotland’s national forests are managed in the public interest, the Forestry Commission is expected to deliver such social and environmental benefits. The Scottish Executive has allocated an average of UK£66.2 million per year for 2003–2006 towards the cost of running the national forests. Owners of private forests have access to grants to help meet the costs of providing non-market benefits.

**FOREST DECENTRALIZATION IN SCOTLAND**

**The push down of power**

The push down of power over forests in Scotland is driven by the devolution of selected political powers by the UK government to the newly created Scottish Executive in the new Scottish Parliament and by the decentralization of UK forest management to the Scottish Forestry Commission. International commitments have played a role in influencing the decentralization agenda. In parallel with the changes in UK forest governance, the government has begun to address historical inequities, particularly with respect to land tenure.

Scotland has implemented the decentralization of power over natural resources primarily by making forest governance more participatory and by the land reform process.
Participatory forestry

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio and the Council of Ministers meeting in Helsinki in 1993 focused attention on the non-timber benefits of forests, notably their ‘environmental, cultural, spiritual, economic and social benefits’ (UN, 1992). The UK government signed up to the Forest Principles and Agenda 21, thus committing to recognize the full range of forest benefits and to empower communities to enjoy them. In 1992, the government launched its *Rural Framework* for Scotland, in which it committed to ‘returning power to the people’ (Scottish Office, 1992).

In 1994 the UK Forestry Commission hosted a multi-stakeholder meeting on forests and people in rural areas and set up a forests and people in rural areas initiative. In 1996 it commissioned a study, *The Scope for Community Participation in Forest Management* (Slee et al, 1996). At the same time, the Forestry Commission began entering into formal agreements for co-management of some state forests with local communities.

In 1997, the New Labour party immediately began a political process to develop ‘community planning’ as a methodology, across all sectors, for involving communities in the decisions that affect them. Another immediate impact was a cessation of the privatization programme that had begun in 1989, with a moratorium on large-scale disposals of state forest.

Ownership of Scotland’s national forests passed to Scottish ministers in the new Scottish Executive in 1999; but the forests were still managed by a centralized UK Forest Enterprise. After wide consultation, a new *Scottish Forestry Strategy* (Forestry Commission, 2000) was published in 2000. That same year, a consortium of agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) published case studies of rural development forestry, along with a ‘toolbox’ for community participation (McPhillimy, 2000). Following one of its recommendations, the Forestry Commission set up a panel to advise on community participation in managing the Scottish national forest estate.

A major study on the level of community involvement within Forest Enterprise in Scotland followed (Hobley, 2002). Recognition of the importance of community involvement led to a programme of change within the agency, including staff training, seminars, networking, pilot studies and performance indicators. Each forest district now is required to develop a prioritized plan for involving communities using a ‘menu’ of options ranging from better consultation to ownership by communities.

In 2003, the management of the national forest estate was decentralized from the UK level with the creation of the Forestry Commission Scotland, which acts as the Scottish Executive’s forestry department. A grant scheme was established to provide financial incentives to private landowners (including community land trusts) that provided incentives specifically aimed at community involvement.

In August 2003 the Scottish minister responsible for forests convened a review panel to review the long-term role of Scotland’s national forest estate; the panel began consultations in December. Shortly, new local forestry fora
would be established to advise on taking forward the Scottish forest strategy at regional levels, marking the start of a formal process of decentralization below the country level.

Land reform

One of the unique aspects of land tenure in Scotland is the system of ‘crofting’, under which the indigenous population in the Highlands and Islands of north-west Scotland were granted security of tenure after a widespread programme of clearing the people off the land in the early to mid 19th century. The ‘clearances’ were the forerunner of colonization and displacement, carried out on a global scale by the UK government for 100 years.

Crofting is a form of land tenure in which an individual has heritable rights to dwell on and manage a small area of land, called the croft or inbye, typically less than 10ha. Crofts were originally subsistence holdings, but have evolved into part-time agricultural units. The tenure arrangement defines a relationship between the crofter (tenant) and the owner of the land (landlord), in which both have rights and responsibilities towards each other and over the land. The arrangements were originally enshrined legally in the 1886 Crofting Act.

Crofting tenancies are organized into townships. In addition to their personal inbye land, most crofters also have a legal share in an area of common land, called the common grazing, which is attached to each township and is managed by a grazings committee elected by the crofting tenants. There are about 1000 common grazings across the Highlands and Islands. Typically, 15 to 20 crofters share an area of common grazing, 400ha to 500ha, which is usually hill land unsuitable for cultivation. Each area of common grazing has a set of rules that regulate land use – for example, the number of stock each individual crofter may graze on the land. There are around 17,000 crofting tenancies occupying 800,000ha, or 20 per cent of the Highlands and Islands, or almost 10 per cent of the total land area of Scotland.

As part of a political process to increase individual private ownership, the Crofting Act was reformed in 1976 to grant individual crofters the absolute right to buy their house site and garden ground and a qualified right to buy their inbye croft land. To this day, only 20 per cent of crofters have taken up this opportunity. Then in 1990, the government offered to transfer at no cost the ownership of its seven crofting estates to a single Scottish land trust that would be owned and managed by the crofting tenants. The crofters rejected the plan as having no advantages over state ownership.

Although crofters have rights to graze livestock on the common lands, they have no rights to exploit fish, game, minerals, water or other resources of the land and, until 1991, had no rights to manage woodlands. During the late 1980s, the Scottish Crofters Union (now the Scottish Crofting Foundation) advanced a convincing case for the benefits of crofter forestry on social, economic, agricultural and, not least, environmental grounds.
Between the two World Wars, considerable areas of common grazings had been taken over by the Forestry Commission to develop plantations with the promise of employment to crofting communities. But with increased mechanization and contract forestry, the number of local jobs had been steadily declining, and nationalized forestry was not able to deliver any social benefits to crofting communities. There was, however, confidence that locally managed crofter forestry schemes would be able to deliver social benefits such as employment and training – both in the short term from new plantings, fencing work and so on, and also for future generations. Scenic and amenity values could also produce economic benefits through tourism – an important source of revenue. Crofters also saw significant benefits to diversifying land use to include forestry, together with shelter, soil rehabilitation and fencing.

A notable aspect of the crofters' campaign was their emphasis on native woodland, in contrast to the predominantly exotic softwood forestry. The environmental benefits of crofter forestry include proper management of existing native woodland remnants on the grazings, many of which are ancient and of great ecological significance, and development of new native woodlands. The consequent benefits to wildlife, soils, water quality and fish resources ensured the cooperation of vocal environmental NGOs, such as the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), government agencies including Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Landowners Federation (whose interests primarily are the ‘sport’ on their estate: both deer and fish would clearly benefit from native woodlands).

In 1991 the UK parliament passed the Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act of 1991 to extend the powers of grazings committees by granting three new rights:

1. the right of any crofter to request their grazings committee to pursue forestry activity on the common grazings;
2. the right of the grazings committee, subject to the approval of the landlord, to ‘plant trees on, and use as woodlands, any part of the common grazing’, as long as ‘not the whole of the common grazing is planted with trees and used as woodlands’; and
3. the right of the grazings committee to apply for grants for woodland management and afforestation.

Though falling short of actually granting ownership of the trees to crofters, this new law enabled crofting communities to become involved in afforestation and woodland management for the first time on a legal basis and to be able to share in the benefits of these activities. The primary financial benefit is in the form of government grants, without which crofter forestry would not be financially viable. These include establishment grants for new woodlands and annual premiums guaranteed for 15 years to compensate for any loss of income from grazing.

Since 1991, crofters have set up nearly 100 crofter forestry schemes
involving 1700 individual crofters and covering 9000ha mostly with new native woodlands. The total establishment grant has been more than UK£7 million, with management grants of around UK£0.5 million per year.

In 1995, the secretary of state for Scotland supported a new model of ownership of croftland by locally based crofting land trusts involving all of the crofters within a community. The Crofters Commission also set up a service to provide advice and financial support for crofting communities seeking to set up crofting trusts. In 1997, this landownership model was enshrined in legislation with the Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act, which allowed the transfer of state-owned croftlands to such crofting trusts. Government-sponsored advisers and a budget of UK£10 million to support community land purchases soon followed; but to this day, the legislation has never been used and the state still retains ownership of all its crofting estates.

The process of devolution involved significant commitments by the government to address historical inequities and anomalies and to modernize Scotland’s land tenure system. Inequities included the ancient feudal system in which ‘feu superiors’ could impose ‘burdens’ on land, such as restrictions on development, and retain rights to the land despite selling the title. In 2000, the Scottish Executive set up a committee to consult widely on land reform, and that same year, the feudal system of landownership was abolished in law.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act of 2003 created the opportunity for all rural communities, not just crofting communities, to have ‘first refusal’ on the sale of any rural land, including woodland, and granted all crofting communities the absolute right to buy their croftlands on a collective basis at independent valuation even against the wishes of the landowner. This was termed a ‘Mugabe-style land raid’ by opponents to the reforms. The next step in the modernization process is a crofting reform bill that will, among other things, enable new crofts to be created.

**The pull down of power**

Through a popular people’s movement, communities in Scotland are gaining greater control over their local natural resources. Injustice and the desire to put right past wrongs fuel this revolutionary activity and increase the motivation to bring about change. In many cases, historical and widely perceived injustices have been the driver of change: injustices including the inequitable land ownership pattern and historically forced relocations or ‘clearances’; a history of bad landlords; and tax breaks for game-show hosts and other rich investors to drain ecologically precious peat land and plant non-native tree plantations. Six cases demonstrate the influence of revolutionary grassroots activities; for other examples, see McIntosh (2002).
Assynt

In 1989, at the height of a buoyant land market, the owner of the 9000ha North Assynt Estate in a remote corner of the north-west Highlands sold the largest part of his croft lands to a Swedish-owned property company for more than UK£1 million. Three years later, the company went bankrupt. In a now-weakened land market shaken by the collapse in the Lloyds insurance market, the selling agent decided to offer the estate for sale in seven lots in order to maximize its sale potential. The 120 crofters were incensed at the proposal to break up their land, which was described in the sales brochures not as croft land, but as ‘sporting land’, ‘wildlife paradise’ and ‘where the people are perhaps alien’.

At a June 1992 meeting called by the Assynt branch of the Scottish Crofters Union, the crofters unanimously agreed to try to prevent the sale. The Assynt Crofters Trust was established as a company limited by guarantee – a legal entity that limits the financial liability of the members to a nominal sum – and the crofters made it clear that if anyone bought part of the estate, they would exercise their right to buy the land under the terms of the 1976 Crofters Act and nominate Assynt Crofters Trust to take the title. The individual crofters’ tenancies would remain intact, but the crofters collectively would own the land. The risk to potential buyers was real. It would suppress interest, leaving the selling agent with a virtually unsaleable asset and the liquidators unable to realize the asset.

However, rather than test the interest of potential buyers, the crofters decided to buy the estate complete with its fishing, game, woodland and mineral rights and so become the first crofting community to have the control, the opportunity and the responsibility of managing their land. They decided to offer a fair price based on a realistic valuation, not one based on the whim of millionaires, which is the usual form of evaluation for highland estates.

Their high-profile campaign lasted nearly six months, during which the resolve of the crofters was tested in a battle of wits with the selling agent, the liquidators and the Swedish bank. The crofters received significant media interest, huge popular support and the backing of key agencies.

The people of Scotland were hungry for a revolution and land reform. People sang in the streets to raise money. They sent stamps and took up spontaneous collections (‘whip-rounds’) in pubs. Fund-raising ceilidhs (gatherings for singing, dancing and storytelling) were held up and down the country. Crofters and their families dug deep into their own pockets and negotiated the support of several agencies, which agreed to provide grants to assist with the purchase in exchange for promises of development and conservation, including significant new native woodlands. In December 1992 the crofters bought the estate for UK£300,000 – less than one third of the price paid by the Swedish speculators only three years before – and so became the first Scottish community in modern times to take full control and responsibility for managing their land and its resources.
Those events, told in detail by MacAskill (1999), inspired many other communities and brought land reform to the forefront of the national political agenda. Ten years later, great strides had been made in agriculture, tourism and housing and a new company established to explore opportunities in renewable energy. The leading national daily newspaper, the Scotsman, wrote, ‘Ten years ago, a group of crofters in north Sutherland took control of the North Assynt Estate. It was a move described by some as bordering on the lunatic. But a decade later, it can be argued that the buy-out changed the shape of land ownership in Scotland forever.’

Treslaig

Treslaig is a small community of 11 crofts, reached by ferry, on Loch Linne in the west of the Scottish Highlands. Together with the neighbouring and even smaller township of Achaphubuil, the crofters of Treslaig wanted to buy a state-owned woodland of 66ha adjacent to their common grazings when the Forestry Commission programme of forest disposals was announced in 1989. When their interest was spurned, there ensued a five-year struggle to convince the government agencies that the crofters were credible as the future owners and managers. Meanwhile, the commission tried to sell the woodland to a national NGO, the Woodland Trust, without consulting the crofters, and then tried to give the woodland back to the descendants of the owner from whom it had purchased the land in 1961. In 1994, after five years of intense political lobbying, the crofting community finally succeeded in purchasing the woods.

The local institutional arrangement in this case is a company limited by shares, called Treslaig and Achaphubuil Crofters Woodland Trust. The members of the company each have shares in it corresponding to their crofts, which can be subdivided or amalgamated as the crofts change hands. The company makes decisions by one-person-one-vote regardless of the size of the member’s share holding, thereby operating as a co-operative. The objective of the company is to maintain the ecological value of the woods, increase habitat diversity, encourage ecological regeneration and discourage non-native species.

The ecological orientation of the trust has had a strong influence on both government agencies and some of the large national environmental NGOs. Prior to their struggle, the government agency responsible for nature conservation (now called Scottish Natural Heritage) believed that only environmental NGOs and the state had the competence and experience to be environmentally friendly land managers. The agency’s sponsorship was required for eligibility to purchase through the forest disposals programme, and the trust became the first community body to achieve this sponsorship. In this landmark case, the national conservation agency gave a clear signal that local communities were valid environmental managers. Scottish Natural Heritage has subsequently played a crucial and supportive role in many other community land buyouts.
Abriachan

Abriachan is a scattered rural community of about 120 people that sits high above the shores of Loch Ness, in the central Scottish Highlands. In 1998, Abriachan Forest became the largest community-owned forest in Scotland (although it has since been superseded by Culag; see below). It consists of a mixture of a commercial plantation of mostly exotic tree species, some remnant Scots pines and a substantial area of naturally regenerating open woodland. The community purchase came about as a response to a fear that it might lose its traditional access to the land. In 1990, Abriachan was included in the forest disposal programme, and community members said they wanted to retain access to the land, particularly the land that had been their traditional source of peat and wood for fuel. However, in 1995, when Abriachan Forest was actually put on the open market, there was no mention of community access in the sales particulars. The outraged community set about trying to buy the forest. In March 1998 they succeeded in buying a 534ha part of it.

Like the Assynt Crofters Trust, the Abriachan Forest Trust was established as a company limited by guarantee; but unlike both the Assynt and the Treslaig groups, membership is open to everyone in the community. The aims of the trust are environmental (to increase the diversity and amount of native species in the forest and restore wetlands for biodiversity), economic (harvesting commercial timber and encouraging use of the forest for tourism businesses) and, most notably, socio-cultural, with a strong emphasis on its historical and archaeological heritage and an educational component about forest use and community involvement in its management.

Abriachan has been an inspiration throughout Scotland for its inclusive and creative approach to forest management. Management has involved the whole community from schoolchildren to the oldest people in the village. It is an institutional model recommended for community landownership by the Community Land Unit and in the Land Reform legislation. Abriachan has also played a critical role in networking with other community forestry groups by hosting meetings. In addition, one of its founding directors became the first chair of the Scottish Community Woodlands Association when it was formed in 2002.

Laggan

Laggan is a small community in the central north-west Highlands in an area of intense forestry activity. In 1900 the population was 929; by 1990 it had sunk to 200. The surrounding 1400ha Strathmashie Forest was managed by the central Forestry Commission’s Forest Enterprise and was planted mainly with Scots pine and Sitka spruce between 1955 and 1964.

During the 1990s, a few individuals identified Strathmashie Forest as a potential source of employment if managed and worked by local people. When rumors circulated that the forest was to be sold as part of the disposal
programme, a team was assembled to look into the feasibility of community management of the forest, with a view to providing jobs that could stem further depopulation. The Laggan Forestry Initiative was set up.

From 1992 to 1996, Laggan Forestry Initiative sought to secure its objective of managing the forest. It worked to build local support through a series of community workshops and regular meetings. In the face of intransigence from the local forestry office, it lobbied not only Forestry Commission directors but also the Rural Affairs Department of the Scottish Office, the local member of parliament (and parliamentary candidates), various Highland councillors and the secretary of state. All of these activities attracted considerable interest from the media; but the Forestry Commission refused to consider any arrangement that would allow the local group to manage the forest.

Then suddenly in 1996, the secretary of state for Scotland visited Laggan and announced his support of the Laggan initiative. Later that year, the new Forestry Commission director-general personally handed Laggan Forestry Initiative a paper outlining seven options relating to Strathmashie: community ownership of land and timber; community ownership of land; community ownership of timber; community lease; use permits; partnership agreements; or an internal concordat.

Laggan Forestry Initiative’s preferred option was to buy the forest; but its valuation at UK£1.75 million made that impossible. To explore the option of partnership, the Laggan/Forest Enterprise Working Group was created. After lengthy and sometimes acrimonious negotiations, a formal agreement was drawn up that would allow the community an active part in the management of the Strathmashie Forest. To be able to sign a legally binding document, Laggan Forestry Initiative transformed itself into a new legal entity – the Laggan Forest Trust – a company limited by guarantee without share capital.

The Laggan experience forced the Forestry Commission to have direct experience of co-management and thereby learn from it. Subsequent engagement with other communities was undoubtedly informed by the Laggan experience. Laggan also demonstrates that although political will is vital in pushing power down, institutional inertia can, nevertheless, be difficult to overcome.

**Cairnhead**

The village of Moniaive forms the heart of the parish of Glencairn in Dumfriesshire, southern Scotland. At the top of the glen is Cairnhead Forest, a 1347ha plantation of Sitka spruce planted by the Forestry Commission during the late 1970s. When the forest was put on the market in 1996 as part of the disposals programme, the local community became alarmed at the prospect of having little control over its management, the effects of timber harvesting, associated job opportunities and preservation of traditional rights of access. They were reluctant, however, to buy the forest and instead encouraged the Forestry Commission to retain ownership. In 1999 the local
community signed a formal, legally binding concordat for co-management of the forest with Forest Enterprise.

The forest is managed by Forest Enterprise staff, as well as members of two community bodies: the Cairnhead Community Forest Trust (a company limited by guarantee with charitable status) and the Cairnhead Community Forest Members Association (an informal supporters’ group that allows people from outside the community to play a role in forest management). The management is business oriented, with a focus on maximizing employment opportunities for local people and diversifying the economic opportunities generated by the forest and the land. There is also a strong conservation thrust towards biodiversity and the water catchment.

The case of Cairnhead is notable for being much less confrontational than that of Laggan. The legal framework of the concordat is now one of the menu of options that Forest Enterprise uses to explore community involvement in forest management elsewhere. Cairnhead built agency confidence that negotiations with communities could be constructive and fruitful without becoming battles.

Culag

The parish of Assynt is situated in the remote north-west corner of Scotland and has a population of around 1100. The principal village is Lochinver, with a population of about 600. Culag woods stands on the edge of Lochinver, between the village and the sea, and extends to 36ha. It is owned by Assynt Estate, which also owns the huge sporting estate that covers most of the parish (and was the owner of the North Assynt Estate).

Culag woods is stocked with conifers interspersed with native trees – rowan, aspen, oak, holly, hazel, downy birch and willow. The woods have long been valued by the local community because it gives the village some shelter and has pleasant walks that lead to a rocky shore with quiet coves. By 1990, however, neglect and mismanagement had considerably reduced its amenity value. The paths were overgrown and needed maintenance. Some areas posed a danger to the public because hasty abandonment of felling operations a few years before had left part of the woods susceptible to wind blow.

In 1992, the community council considered taking on the management of the woods. In order to prepare a practical plan that would convince the owners and possible funding agencies that it could be entrusted with the task, the council commissioned a brief report, which recommended developing the wood as a community woodland. The Assynt Estate and Assynt Community Council came to a verbal agreement that the community could manage the Culag woods.

The Culag Community Woodland Trust is a company limited by guarantee. Membership is open to all residents in the parish. In 1996, after three years of sensitive negotiations between landowner and community, the estate and the trust signed a 50-year lease that allows the trust to manage the wood as a community woodland. Since then, the trust has attracted the
support of the Forestry Commission and other government agencies to restore the woodland, enhance its amenity value, offer training in forestry skills and create employment.

In 2000, an area of land 4.8 kilometres from the village came on the market. It extended to 1200ha, two-thirds of which had been recently planted as a new native woodland. The Culag Community Woodland Trust received funding from the government agencies to acquire the land and manage it as community woodland. It now has ambitious plans to build car parks, trails with all-abilities access and fishing facilities.

The Culag Community Woodland Trust broke new ground by leasing land from a private individual, thereby adding to the menu of options for achieving community involvement in the land. Its success in attracting support for its second land acquisition is unique in the community woodland movement so far and demonstrates the widespread support from the government agencies for community landownership and its benefits. The trust has demonstrated that as a community body builds its capacity, it can manage increasingly large land holdings.

**Impacts of decentralization**

The events in the case studies are relatively recent, and our account has focused on process and outcome rather than on social, economic or ecological impacts. However, some effects can be identified.

At the national level, these successes have stimulated other communities to enter into negotiations with the Forestry Commission Scotland and private landlords for a greater role in managing the local woodlands. Each success contributes to a growing pool of options for change and increasing confidence in the political will to create conditions for such changes to be replicated. To date, around 100 community woodland groups have formed, and a Community Woodland Association (www.community-woods.org.uk) has been established.

Within the communities, some antagonism has emerged between the crofters and those in the community without crofting status who have no say in managing the woodlands and do not share in any of the benefits. This is partly addressed in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act of 2003, which stipulates that any community land purchase made under the terms of the act must involve governance structures that are supported by the majority and are wholly inclusive.

The economic impacts of community ownership or management sharing are already becoming apparent and are now accepted by Forestry Commission Scotland as an incentive to community participation. The benefits include giving priority to local contractors, training local people in forest skills, opening up access to additional financial incentives for multipurpose forestry, such as access for recreation and health, and the creation of local project management jobs (Birnie, 2003).

Significant positive environmental impacts have arisen directly from
community ownership and community partnership arrangements. Virtually all of the crofter forestry schemes have involved the creation of new native woodlands on degraded grazing lands. The other community woodlands have all involved better management practices and significant restructuring to decrease the amount of exotic species and increase the native woodland component.

LESSONS LEARNED

Revolutionary grassroots activity that pulls power down to the local level can shape decentralization processes. Communities are not passive recipients of power pushed down from the centre; rather, power shifts are evolutionary, involving push-me-pull-you interactions.

A timeline demonstrates clearly how the local struggles of communities both set the pace and set the agenda for land reform and community involvement in forest management in Scotland:

- 1886: Crofting Act gives security of tenure to crofters.
- 1976: Crofting Act reform gives crofters the right to buy their crofts.
- 1987: Highlands and Islands Forum conference on Land, Wildlife and the Community is held.
- 1989: Treslaig crofters seek to buy Forestry Commission land surrounding their crofts.
- 1990: Government crofting estates are offered at no cost to crofters, but are rejected.
- 1991: Crofter Forestry (Scotland) Act gives crofters the right to establish and manage woods.
- 1994: Highlands and Islands Forum Community conference on The People and the Land is held.
- 1994: Grassroots Scottish Rural Development Forestry Programme is initiated.
- 1994: Treslaig becomes the first community to purchase forest from the Forestry Commission.
- 1994: Forests and People in Rural Areas Initiative is established.
- 1996: Culag arranges formal lease from a private owner.
- 1997: Transfer of Crofting Estates (Scotland) Act is passed.
- 1997: Community Land Unit is set up.
- 1998: Abriachan becomes the last community to purchase forest from the Forestry Commission.
- 1998: Laggan agrees to formal community partnership with the Forestry Commission.
• 1999: Cairnhead agrees to a formal concordat between the community and the Forestry Commission.
• 1999: Ownership of Scotland’s national forests devolves to Scottish ministers.
• 1999: Scottish Executive commits to land reform legislation.
• 2000: Culag purchases private forestland.
• 2000: Community Scottish Land Fund is established.
• 2000: Scottish Executive sets up Land Reform Group.
• 2000: Forestry for People Panel is established to advise the Forestry Commission on community participation.
• 2002: Scottish Community Woodland Association is formed.
• 2003: Forestry Commission is asked to make forestland available for new crofting communities.
• 2003: Forestry Commission Scotland is created.
• 2003: Land Reform (Scotland) Act is passed by the Scottish Parliament.
• 2003: Scottish Executive announces setting up Local Forestry Fora.
• 2004: Scottish Executive sets up major review of national forest estate.

Local revolutions in Scotland influenced the push down of power by bringing about results that were perceived to be impossible and thereby firing the collective imagination of the country. They have provided concrete examples of how big problems (such as land inequity, bad land management, rural depopulation, loss of access to land, disempowered communities and unemployment in the forestry sector) can be solved. By achieving unexpected and welcome outcomes, such as educational innovations, community benefits, social housing, better environmental management, increased tourism and other economic gains, they have spread optimism, gained credibility and attracted media attention. The political will thus generated creates a positive feedback loop: politicians direct agencies to replicate the process, thereby reinforcing the push down of power.

Despite political will, there may well be institutional inertia, cultural resistance within agencies and lack of skills in participatory and locally driven decision-making. Agencies such as the Forestry Commission still have much to do in implementing decentralization, listening to local people and including community representatives on decision-making bodies. These problems require institutional solutions.

It is difficult to assess whether the Scottish experience is transferable to other peoples and cultures. The ‘push-me-pull-you’ of devolution of forest management in Scotland is taking place in a specific cultural and legal context: a post-industrial society where forestry is a small part of the gross domestic product, there are no forest-dependant communities, and forest management for timber and pulp is uneconomic and highly subsidized. There now is an increasing recognition that forests in Scotland will serve the national interest best if they are managed as multipurpose forests catering to
health and recreation, as well as to environmental services and the production of timber. It is this shift in vision that is creating the space for community involvement in the management of the national forest estate and for community ownership—a space that many communities are now willing to occupy.

REFERENCES

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