Cree Valley Community Woodlands Trust (CVCWT) Local Provenance Tree Nursery Final Report

Background to the project

1. How was the idea for the project developed?

CVCWT now manages over 1800 hectares of woodland and other habitats as it strives to create a Forest Habitat Network from 'Source to Sea'. This will link together remnants of ancient semi-natural woodland, former afforested land, and riparian (riverside) woodland to form an invaluable woodland wildlife corridor in the Cree Valley north from Newton Stewart to the Upper Cree bordering Ayrshire. This will not only support a wide biodiversity, but will also greatly improve the landscape value of the area. Improved access and interpretation by CVCWT will mean that this landscape and its wildlife can be enjoyed by everyone.

CVCWT is also involved in a partnership project with Forestry Commission Scotland, which aims to restore tree-line and montane scrub habitats using plants such as specialist dwarf Willow tree species and Juniper.

To achieve all of the CVCWT’s aims, thousands of native, broad-leaved tree species are needed for planting every year. It is widely recognised that the planting of native tree species of local provenance is most desirable as these are adapted to local environmental conditions and can be more resistant to diseases such as Birch dieback. However it has been identified that it is not always possible to buy suitable trees from large national tree nurseries. Montane tree species such as Juniper and Downy Willow of local provenance are simply not grown by large nurseries and are therefore unavailable.

As CVCWT already manages areas of native woodland containing mature trees, including the Glentrool Oakwoods which is a registered seed orchard for Sessile Oak, sources of seed and seedlings are readily available.

It was therefore decided that a tree nursery was required so that we could grow our own trees. The aim was not to be able to supply our total tree needs, which would require a major undertaking outside our capabilities, but to supply unavailable local provenance tree species and to grow more specialist tree species for our needs.

2. Who was involved in the project? Individuals and Organisations.

The project involved CVCWT staff, CVCWT volunteers, Volunteer Action Scotland, Supported Employment Services, Newton Stewart Activity and Resource Centre (ARC), Penninghame Primary School, Newton Stewart, New Galloway, Newton Stewart Scout Group, FCS staff and Volunteer Task Force Group, Aberlour Childcare Trust staff and members.
3. What were the aims and objectives of the project?

The aims of the project were to:-

- Create an internal growing area and facilities to propagate and grow locally collected tree seed and cuttings.
- Create an outside garden area with raised beds suitable for cuttings propagation and growing-on seedlings.
- Buy and maintain a stock of tools suitable for seed and cutting propagation.
- Collect and propagate seed and cuttings from local sources for use in CVCWT projects.
- Grow species with suitable provenance, increasingly difficult to source externally.
- Grow seed and cuttings of montane species from local montane scrub areas.
- Stimulate awareness, involvement and participation with local community groups, schools, volunteers and small nurseries.
- Create facilities suitable for aspects of horticultural training and experience.

4. How was the funding package assembled?

Leader provided 50% of the funding for the project with the match funding coming from The Robertson Trust, The Hugh Fraser Foundation and an in-kind contribution from CVCWT volunteers. A small shortfall was underwritten by CVCWT.

5. How much money did LEADER provide?

Leader provided 50% of the funding which was £9868.

The project experience

6. When did the project take place?

The project began on 1st January 2010 and finished on 31st December 2011.

7. What actually happened? How was the project delivered?

A piece of land owned by the RSPB was leased to set up the nursery. CVCWT volunteers and the Aberlour Childcare Trust were involved in building a polytunnel and outside raised beds to house the tree seeds and seedlings. The polytunnel was fitted out with staging and an automatic watering system. An area was rotavated to provide further space for seedlings. Root trainers, compost and
nursery tools were purchased to enable volunteers to carry out the tree nursery work.

Contractors prepared a parking area and an all ability access to the polytunnel and nursery area.

Seed, seedlings and cuttings were collected by CVCWT volunteers and school children and planted by these groups and the Newton Stewart Scout Group and the Newton Stewart Activity and Resource Centre.

Seeds were also given various pre-treatments to enable them to germinate and then stored for future use.

Seedlings were grown on and pricked out into root trainers and cuttings were taken, especially of *Salix lapponum*, a specialist mountain willow. These were taken as 3" cuttings and potted up into individual pots. All plants were maintained and fed with organic chicken pelleted fertiliser.

A compost heap was made using the turf dug out for the polytunnel area and all organic waste from the nursery was added to this to form a future supply of compost.

Volunteers, school children, scouts and members of the ARC were instructed in various tree nursery skills and the use and maintenance of hand tools. These skills were provided in a safe working environment with health and safety issues addressed.

An educational programme, the 'Seed to Tree Project' was set up with Penninghame Primary School, Newton Stewart and this has been running for the two years of the project. The children were actively involved in collecting acorns, learning about the wildlife associated with oak woodlands. Follow up visits to the classroom involved interactive sessions with the children to learn more about how trees grow from seeds and the importance of woodlands for wildlife and the community. The children created multi-media posters showing the wildlife that they had seen and been taught about connected with oak trees, fulfilling part of the school’s curriculum for excellence.

The Newton Stewart scouts were given similar talks and each of them potted a hazel nut to look after at home. The scouts will be planting their hazel seedlings in Cree Valley woods during March. The ARC has also reared several species of tree from seeds, some of which have now been planted in Caidons Wood by CVCWT volunteers.
8. What marketing was undertaken?

Information about the project can be found on the CVCWT website and project progress has been featured in our blog. The project has also featured in the CVCWT Newsletter. The project featured in a regular article written by CVCWT's ecologist in the Stranraer and Wigtownshire Free Press. The project was featured in the Autumn 2010 edition of the Rural House News and seed collecting events were included in the calendar of events. A seed collecting event was also advertised in the D&G Wild Seasons website. An article in the July 2011 issue of D&G Life featured CVCWT and talked about the tree nursery project. An article was written and included in the Green Handbook for South West Scotland.

A permanent plaque recognising the Leader funded project is at the nursery site. Discussions with school and community groups have been held to let them know about the project and schools and community groups were also written to initially to invite them to take part in the project.

Regular updates were given on the project at CVCWT steering group meetings attended by representatives from many community and conservation organisations.

A tour of the nursery facilities was given to the Wigtownshire Ramblers Group whilst on a walk past the nursery.

9. Who benefited from the project?

CVCWT volunteers were taught new skills and gained satisfaction from being involved in the process of growing trees from seed and being able to plant the resulting saplings out into the woods. Tree identification skills and habitat recognition whilst collecting seeds were also new skills gained. The skills involved in building the polytunnel and being involved in the planning of the nursery etc has also benefited volunteers.

The Newton Stewart ARC were given the opportunity to plant and grow seed at their own centre and it is hoped to organise a visit to see where the trees they raised were planted and hopefully involve them in the planting process. The staff at the ARC said that their members very much enjoyed the processes involved.

School children had the opportunity, under the supervision of CVCWT staff and school helpers to get out into the countryside and get physical exercise whilst learning about their environment. The follow up educational visits by CVCWT staff fulfilled part of the curriculum for excellence.

The Aberlour Childcare Trust gained new skills and the opportunity to get out and do some active exercise in a secure environment.
Scouts similarly benefited from nursery skills and the responsibility of looking after their own trees, as well as the educational aspects of the project.

A small tree nursery business involved in the project was given some new tree stock to propagate, as a precaution against CVCWT's stock being lost.

The FCS volunteer task force gained planting skills and exercise from planting the *Salix lapponum* produced from the project in the woodland fringe areas of the Merrick.

The local provenance trees planted in the Cree Valley will be more robust and ecologically beneficial to the landscape, enhancing the visitor experience.

The establishment of the tree nursery will benefit CVCWT and its partners in the longer term by being able to supply local provenance stock not readily available from commercial nurseries.

10. How did the final budget turn out?

The budget was adhered to, but the volunteer in-kind input value was substantially higher than the allowable amount claimed.

11. What lessons have been learnt?

- The erection of a commercial size polytunnel was a major undertaking which took longer than expected
- The current financial situation is making it difficult for schools and other organisations to afford to travel and be involved in external projects
- A large time commitment is required to collect seed and run a successful tree nursery
- Planning ahead and good communication with volunteers, other organisations and partners is essential when carrying out this sort of project

12. Will the project be mainstreamed or transferred?

The project will continue as funding allows, with the continued involvement of CVCWT and its volunteers and partners.

13. Detail the sustainability of the project and/or the exit strategy.

Volunteers have collected large amounts of local provenance tree seed and seedlings during the project period, which have been stored and/or pre-treated for sowing in the Spring of 2012 and beyond. The trees grown during the project will be planted out over the next few years.
The quality of the commercial quality polytunnel will ensure an enduring, functional and easy-maintenance facility for many years to come.

CVCWT volunteers have been involved in the nursery project from its beginning and are keen to see its continued success. Exchanges of plant material and seeds between CVCWT and FCS and other conservation partners will help to sustain the nursery in the future.

The continued interest from schools and community groups involved in the project will be sustained, using the nursery and its produce to run future educational events etc.

The nursery will be integral to future CVCWT tree planting projects, saving money and promoting self reliance.

14. Detail how the project has addressed the LEADER issue selected in the application.

The project was set up to tackle the issue of 'Link communities and land together'. The project has achieved this through involving volunteers, schools, scouts, community groups and CVCWT partners in all stages of producing and planting trees to enhance the biodiversity, habitats and landscapes of the Cree Valley. This has enabled people to get out into the countryside and where this is not possible or physically challenging (ARC), to bring aspects of the land to them through active participation such as seed sowing. The results from the project (trees produced and planted) will have an impact on the landscape for generations to come.
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Final Report

Storybook of the project

Initial discussions on site

Proposed site (North west)

Proposed site (South west)

Raised beds construction

Path preparation

Laying path

Rolling path

Ground work for Polytunnel

Levelling up for Polytunnel

Building the framework

Covering with polythene

Constructing doors/benches

Construction complete

Counting & recording numbers and type of seed planted

Planting oak seedlings in beds