**KINLOCH WOODLANDS SCIO**

**REPORT AND ACCOUNTS APRIL 2017 – APRIL 2018**

**SCOTTISH CHARITY NUMBER SC 031020**

**BACKGROUND**

This is the second set of report and accounts for the new Kinloch Woodlands SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) which took over the responsibilities and assets of the former Kinloch Woodlands Charitable Trust on 30 September 2015. The accounts cover the period 6 April 2017 – 5 April 2018.

**GENERAL**

Restoring a native woodland on poor quality, exposed ground in the West Highlands of Scotland is a long and slow process. Once the main and supplementary planting has been completed, as it was in Kinloch Woodlands case around 2010, the key to success has to be a year by year determination to keep up good standards of deer management and to eke as many years of life out of the perimeter fences as possible. So far this has been achieved and there has been a slow but steady improvement in woodland cover, albeit one which is more marked at lower levels than higher up the hill. Assuming that the fences can be successfully maintained and kept in service for about 30 - 35 years, in other words kept in effective use for another 5 – 10 years, the test will be whether by 2025 – 2030 the new woodland will be strong enough to cope with the re-entry of deer in larger numbers when the fences reach the end of their useful lives and are removed.

**COMMUNITY AND WIDER ISSUES**

The Kinloch Woodlands SCIO and its predecessors over the past 25 years have always seen the estate and its woodlands in terms of how they can benefit the local community and wider public interests, in both the short and the longer term. This was the main reason why the SCIO, with its increased number of community trustees, was set up in 2015.

The longer term benefits will come in the form of a richer natural habitat to be enjoyed by local people and visitors as well as the potential for small scale, local, woodland based enterprises. But there have been and will be opportunities in the shorter term as well. One example 5 years ago was the decision to release land on the estate to Scottish Water to enable the construction of a new water treatment plant to meet Shieldaig’s need for more and better quality drinking water. Another was the decision in 2001, to allow the Scottish Government, through Marine Scotland, to set up its only sea-trout research centre in Scotland on the Shieldaig river to try to learn more about the impact of salmon aquaculture on the migration runs of wild sea-trout. And as we shall report in more detail next year, the Shieldaig Primary School has just completed a successful 6 week forest school programme which was funded by Kinloch Woodlands SCIO.

**DEER MANAGEMENT**

An important measure of good deer management is the ability to keep deer numbers, and particularly densities, within reasonable limits. The SNH helicopter count of deer numbers on Kinloch Woodlands’ open hill ground which was carried out in February 2017 found 28 deer in total; 15 stags, 9 hinds and 4 calves. This gives a density of 2 deer per sq. km. which is well within acceptable limits – the average density for the SW Ross deer management group as a whole was 7 per sq. km. The estate count on the same ground which was carried out in April 2018 found slightly fewer deer - 20 in total; 7 stags, 11 hinds and 2 calves. 16 deer were shot in 2017 ; 10 stags, 3 hinds and 3 calves. This was well up on the 2016 cull of 7 deer but very much in line with the 10 year average cull of 18 deer. This suggests that the aim should be to take about the same number of deer in 2018.

In contrast, and as reported in previous years, red deer incursions into the lower fenced woodland area are becoming more common. This may be a result of improving tree cover and browsing opportunities or a reflection of increasing numbers on the neighbouring Ben Shieldaig estate – or both. However regular stalking within the block seems to be keeping damage within acceptable levels. Unfortunately there was a further incursion of a red deer stag into the upper (easterly) fenced area in May 2017. The deer was eventually shot in mid June but not before it had done significant damage to many of the planted rowans.

The management message is that regular checks and rigorous deer management are likely to be needed within the fenced areas for the foreseeable future. The small population of roe deer within the fenced areas still appear to be doing little damage and none have been shot. No sika were seen on any of Kinloch Woodlands ground in 2017. The whole of the fence line was walked in 2107 and minor repairs carried out as necessary. Although a number of the posts had rotted and some of the netting was rusting, the overall condition of the fence was good.

**WILDLIFE**

Although few red squirrels were sighted during the year monitoring, by the Trees for Life project officer Becky Priestly, suggested that numbers were good and that the reintroduced animals were breeding successfully.

Loch Dughaill remained an important focus for water birds, with sightings of mallards, red throated divers and whooper swans.

Sea eagles are still seen frequently in the Shieldaig area and were seen on the open hill feeding on deer carcases.

2 adders were seen in the lower fenced area in August 2017.

**WILDFIRES**

Wildfires in the West Highlands are increasing in number. The main period of risk is from March to May before the new growth has come through properly and a lot of dry dead material is left from the previous year. While no fires have yet occurred on Kinloch Woodlands ground, the risks are serious particularly if there is a prolonged spell of hot dry weather during the late spring.

Kinloch Woodlands has tried to be as pro-active as possible in its approach to fire planning. It was instrumental in conjunction with the Applecross and Ben Shieldaig estates and the local Fire Service in setting up a local wild fire planning group. It has an up to date fire plan for the estate which is reviewed annually. And it carries insurance to cover the cost of fire-fighting helicopters should a fire occur and the Fire Service officer in charge of the incident decides that a helicopter is the best way of tackling the fire. This is invariably the case once a fire has spread to the open hill.

However with the significant increase in visitors to the area over the last 2-3 years and a concomitant increase in wild camping and camp fires, the SCIO may need to consider, through the wild fire planning group, whether further steps are needed.

**FISHERIES RESEARCH AND RESTORATION**

The assessment of marine losses of sea-trout remains the core of Marine Scotland’s work at Shieldaig. In contrast to the excellent survival rates in 2016, the results from 2017 were disappointing. The smolt run in 2017 was severely impacted by prolonged drought periods, resulting in low numbers of fish being tagged descending the river. Only 316 fish were tagged, of which 259 were sea-trout smolts, 47 were brown trout and 10 were adult sea-trout. Due to the low numbers migrating, the numbers of returnees were low with only 22 fish caught in the up-stream trap. The marine survival rate at 2.6% was low but this not unexpected because plankton samples indicated high levels of infective salmon lice copepodids in line with a second year of production on the marine salmon sites. This was also reflected in post-smolt electrofishing where high levels of lice infected smolts were caught in the lower river; 71% of smolts caught were carrying lice. It is hoped that results will improve in 2018.

**HYDRO-ELECTRIC SCHEME ON THE INVERBAIN RIVER**

Output from the Inverbain hydro-electric scheme for the period August 2016 to July 2017 was 3699 MWh compared with 3762 MWh in 2015 – 2016. Both year’s figures represent a significant reduction on the 4000 – 4500 MWh generated over the previous 4 years. It remains to be established which figures represent more typical generation levels in the light of current levels of rainfall. In any event the £9691 net income from the hydro-electric scheme in 2017/18 remains of crucial importance to the responsible running of the Kinloch Woodlands SCIO.

**FINANCE**

During the year, the SCIO’s expenditure exceeded it’s income by the sum of £405. The deficit was the result of a one off item of expenditure to upgrade the telescope on one of the estate rifles (£2517) without which there would have been a surplus of over £2000. The deficit was more than covered by the funds in the savings account - £81,117 at the year end.