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Connecting Communities and Boosting Biodiversity: Be Part of Ardura Community Forest's Story

Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) UK

1. INTRODUCTION

Forests provide us with so much more than wood and paper, they sustain life on earth.



They help to regulate our climate by absorbing and storing carbon dioxide.



They purify the air we breathe and filter the water we drink.



They are incredibly diverse ecosystems, home to 80% of the world's terrestrial biodiversity.



They support our health and wellbeing, providing recreation and connection to nature, and are an important part of our culture.



According to scientists, and as evidenced by Covid-19, their conservation can help us to prevent future pandemics.

Taking care of forests

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), an estimated 420 million hectares of forests were lost due to deforestation between 1990 and 2020. If we want to preserve forests for future generations and tackle the climate and biodiversity crises, we need to manage forests in a way that maintains their ecological, social, cultural and economic functions.

FSC's mission is to promote environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests. We're guided by a vision for a world where the true value of forests and the fundamental services they provide are recognised and appreciated by all.

2. FSC VERIFIED IMPACT

FSC Verified Impact, formerly known as the Ecosystem Services solution, is a collaborative solution by FSC that matches private and public-sector businesses to ecosystem services projects in FSC-certified forests under a sponsorship model. The framework covers five types of ecosystem services, from which high-integrity data can be extracted for sponsors to use.

Impacts can be verified for the following ecosystem services:



Biodiversity



Carbon



Water



Soil



Recreation

3. ARDURA COMMUNITY FOREST

Ardura Community Forest, on the Isle of Mull, has long been an important part of the lives of islanders, central to the way of life for generations of families. The Gaelic name for the forest, Doir a' Chuilinn, or 'holly grove' goes back to medieval times and the forest still supports some ancient hollies and gnarled old oaks.



The forest is a special place for people and nature. It covers **200 hectares**, comprising **rare Atlantic rainforest**, which is as internationally important as tropical rainforest but even more unique. There are also areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, grassland, heathland and mire (swamp/bog), plus some areas of plantation forestry, which are now being replaced by native woodland.

It's home to a diverse array of birds, mammals, fungi and plants, including marsh fritillary butterflies, pine martens, the very rare hazel glove fungus, spotted flycatchers, iconic birds of prey, and even the elusive otter. The areas of Atlantic rainforest provide just the right conditions for some of the **world's rarest mosses and lichens** to thrive.

In 2019, the forest was purchased by Mull and Iona Community Trust (MICT). MICT is a Scottish charity (registration number: SC025995). Their mission is to enable thriving connected communities and to sustain the economic, cultural, and natural environments on the remote islands of Mull, Iona, Ulva and Gometra on the Scottish West Coast.

MICT set out 3 main objectives for Ardura Community Forest:

- **Protect:** Protect and conserve ecologically important and biodiverse priority habitats and the flora and fauna associated with these.
- **Restore:** Intervene to return degraded priority habitats to a healthy, functioning condition.
- **Connect:** Develop opportunities for individuals, communities and businesses to engage with nature and contribute to nature recovery.

In 2020, Ardura Community Forest received FSC Forest Management certification, and with the help of the sustainable forestry consultancy Treestory, MICT was able to achieve FSC Verified Impact for the forest in 2023, in recognition of the positive impacts of its enhanced forest management practises.

Verified Impacts

MICT have achieved the following Verified Impacts for Ardura Forest:



Biodiversity



Recreation

Biodiversity

Restoration of natural forest cover: **200ha**

Conservation of natural forest characteristics: **200ha**

Ardura Community Forest is home to isolated pockets of **rare and ancient native Atlantic rainforest habitats** and associated lichen communities, veteran oak and holly trees, plus UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority open habitats: species-rich grassland; wetlands; and heathland. MICT's aim is to restore and protect the entire forest area, moving away from extractive management practices towards the maintenance and **restoration of habitats, species and healthy ecosystems**. Only one small area of Sitka spruce remains, which is being felled in 2025 to make way for the planting of native trees.

Ardura Community Forest will become 'wilder', developing natural forest characteristics, protecting soils, sequestering and storing carbon and providing a home for an array of species. Bog habitat will develop to provide **water filtration** and act as a **carbon sink**. Species-rich grassland will provide opportunities for **wildflowers, pollinators and other invertebrates** which in turn support the wider food web and ecosystem. Heathland and scrub will flourish to provide important habitat for invertebrates and birds.

Verification method

- **Standards applied:** Remote Sensing and Biodiversity Metric Tool.
- **Sampling frequency:** Annual for most surveys, and every 5 years for the Biodiversity Metric Tool.
- **Coverage:** Total, given the area is relatively small
- **Analysis of data:** Reviewing detailed maps to determine the increase in natural forest cover across the management unit. Reduction in invasive species will be used in the Biodiversity Metric Tool.
- **Test duration:** Monitored over sufficient time to detect positive (improved management) or negative changes.



Recreation

Maintenance/conservation of areas of importance for recreation and/or tourism: 200ha

In a small and remote community, where indoor leisure facilities are limited, **the forest provides a much-needed space** for islanders to meet and socialise. It enables children and their families to play and learn together, connecting with each other to **reduce loneliness and boost wellbeing**. MICT has undertaken activities to support nature-based recreation in the Ardura area through:

- Construction of a footpath/track network providing recreational and nature connection opportunities for local people and tourists
- Construction of a public car park, improving access to the site
- Construction of a forest shelter to provide an outdoor classroom and additional facility for visitors, improving opportunities for outdoor learning and connection with nature
- Construction of a compost toilet
- Ranger led walks and workshops
- Outdoor education sessions for local children
- MICT have established a volunteer working group who are meeting regularly to get hands-on in the forest.

Community volunteers are an important part of the restoration of the forest. **Volunteering improves the mental and physical health of the islanders, reducing loneliness by bringing people together for a shared purpose**

Verification method

- **Standards applied:** Remote Sensing and electronic counters at entrance to forest.
- **Coverage:** Total, given the area is relatively small
- **Analysis of data:** Reviewing detailed maps to determine the increase in recreational facilities and access. Number of visitors entering from car park entrance.



4. INVESTING IN NATURE

Be part of Ardura Community Forest's story

Until recently forest management and conservation has been financed purely by the extraction of forest products, providing a greater incentive for deforestation and forest degradation than for responsible forest management. FSC Verified Impact provides forest managers and owners with a framework for protecting the forests' vital ecosystem services and scientifically measuring the impacts of their efforts.

It offers an additional economic incentive and provides a sponsorship model, allowing companies and government agencies to support projects that help tackle the climate and biodiversity crises. In return, sponsors receive credible, quality data to demonstrate their impacts, contributing to their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts or Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) strategies.

FSC Verified Impact roadmap

01

Forest Commitment

Forest managers commit to protect or restore a vital service provided by their forest. In collaboration with FSC and third-party certification bodies, they collect scientific data verifying the impact of their efforts.

02

Sponsorship

Organisations and businesses volunteer to sponsor forest managers and their initiatives. Many forest managers are smallholders, Indigenous communities, or public-private associations that need financial support to ensure the long-term viability of their projects.

03

Evidence

Your business receives clear, verifiable evidence quantifying the impact of your sponsorship.

04

Communication

Share your verified impact data. These results show your customers, employees, and investors that you're backing up your sustainability promises with actions that make a measurable difference.

5. FIND OUT MORE

Spend a few minutes immersing yourself in a bright and balmy September day in Ardura Community Forest by watching [our short film](#). Meet Moray Finch and Sandy Brunton of [MICT](#), Claire Whiteman from [TreeStory](#) and Simon Webb from the [UK Forest Certification Group](#) (UK-FCG) as they explain the roles they and their organisations play in expanding native woodland, connecting with the local community and how they've used FSC Verified Impact to demonstrate the outcomes of their forest restoration activities for biodiversity and recreation.

To learn how your business can benefit from our Verified Impact Solution [visit our website](#) or contact FSC UK via info@fsc-uk.org.



About FSC

The Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) is an international, non-governmental organisation. FSC's pioneering certification system, which now covers more than 160 million hectares of forest, enables businesses and consumers to choose wood, paper and other forest products made with materials that support responsible forestry.

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