



Cumbria Woodlands
Working together to make our woods prosper



Community Woodfuel Case Study

Background:

Cumbria Woodlands have been working with Cumbria Action for Sustainability to establish two community Woodfuel groups in Eden, as part of Sustain Eden. The idea behind community Woodfuel schemes is that members of a community can obtain Woodfuel in exchange for working in undermanaged woodlands. This not only increases the woodland productivity, it also increases wildlife habitat and biodiversity within and surrounding work sites.

Generally, practical woodland management is conducted by the landowner engaging contractors to undertake specific tasks within a woodland. This is an efficient way of achieving high volume extraction of timber in a short space of time. As part of this, the larger timber (e.g. above 10cm diameter) is taken from the site, lop and tops are generally left on site to decompose or in some cases it is burned. Some of this smaller diameter timber can still be used as Woodfuel, but it simply isn't always efficient for the contractor to extract it. In some instances, woodlands require work where the material is predominantly of a smaller nature or the site conditions mean that conventional forestry equipment cannot be used to extract; this means contractor costs increase and subsequently this work is sometimes neglected. Community Woodfuel offers an opportunity for this work to be done manually, to the benefit of both the landowner and to those involved who do the work.

What we did:

To assist in establishing the Sustain Eden community groups, Gareth Thomas (Woodmatters) was contracted to identify suitable sites and liaise with landowners. Gareth runs a similar "woodshare" scheme with the National Trust in the south of Cumbria. Four sites in Eden were initially identified, two of which are now being worked. One of these sites (Comet Wood, Morland) is privately owned, the other (Dobbin Wood, Ullswater) is owned by the National Trust. This pays homage to the idea of community Woodfuel showing that it can work for a range of landowners, rather than a specific sector. ECO (Eden Community Outdoors) have also been working with Cumbria Woodlands on the Morland Woodfuel scheme, the charity objective being to promote education and recreation outdoors; community Woodfuel is a great example of learning while working.

Lessons we learnt:

Both groups now have a similar level of interest, presently attracting around 7-10 households to the working meets. Word of mouth is very important in order to set up the groups initially. Of equal importance, some people are prepared to travel to be part of the community – this is partly because there are currently only two such schemes in Eden. There is scope for the schemes to grow, the present woodlands will sustain further households, however if the groups should become larger still, other worksites would be required to sustain activity for years to come.

Future plans:

The groups have been active with coppicing and felling in the winter months, this will be followed with some extraction and processing in the summer, when the material in the woodlands has had a chance to lose some moisture and therefore weight. Both sites have relatively poor access, however a low impact machinery or horse loggers could well be the answer to extract, with dry weather being necessary to allow extraction.

With a great start to both community groups, the aim is to continue the work for years to come. What better way to heat homes than to do so with community spirit, some healthy outdoor work to improve our woodlands and perhaps a slice of well earned cake?



The Ullswater group show the fruits of a couple of days work on a cold January afternoon.



To find out more: Speak to Jamie at Cumbria Woodlands on 07974 446106.

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