

Saving Scotland's Rainforest

Progress report
June 2025



**Alliance for
Scotland's
Rainforest**

SCOTLAND'S RAINFOREST VISION

By 2045, we want all of Scotland's rainforest to be restored, and its size doubled, so it becomes a better functioning and more resilient ecosystem



Moss (Philip Formby/WTML), Walking in the rainforest (John MacFerson)

REVITALISING THE RAINFOREST



Lochs and woodland, Drumbeg
(John MacPherson/FLS)

“““

What surprises and delights me is the growing number of new rainforest projects that have been initiated at community level. We're witnessing a growing rainforest movement.

Five years of collaboration: five years of progress

Five years ago, few people knew that Scotland had temperate rainforest. Today, people across the country are talking about it. And they're not just talking – they're taking action to save it.

These special woodlands are one of Scotland's most precious resources, some of them more than 8,000 years old, and all of them bursting with life. Hundreds of different species are found here, in exceptional quantities, many of which are rare elsewhere. We have an international responsibility to care for these places, ensuring they are here for the next generation.

The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest was formed to do just that. Our partnership is a unique assembly of conservation organisations, government agencies and others who have been working with one aim, and speaking in one voice.

Together, we have adopted 11 community-focused, landscape-scale projects that cover more than 15% of Scotland's rainforest zone, with more coming soon. We're helping to tackle some of the big issues, such as deer management and invasive non-native species. We're helping to build jobs and skills in rainforest communities. We've inspired research, volunteering, community events and even folk festivals! We're working together to address the huge challenge of finding long-term, substantial funding. However, we can't continue to do this work without support.

Restoring Scotland's rainforest will take decades, and the vision of a healthy network of woodlands across west Scotland is the work of generations. Yet, with so many people and organisations now working together, that possibility feels closer than ever.

*Julie Stoneman, Saving Scotland's Rainforest
Programme Manager*

SCOTLAND'S RAINFOREST IS UNIQUE

What is temperate rainforest and why is it under threat?

“““

We asked a group of 27 primary-age children if they knew of the Amazon rainforest and most put their hands up. But when asked if they knew about Scotland's rainforest, only two hands went up.

– Sophie Zych-Watson, Community Engagement Officer, Scottish Rainforest Education Centre



Pearl-bordered fritillary
(Iain Leach/Butterfly Conservation)

Across Britain's west coast, conditions are ideal for temperate rainforest to flourish. This type of woodland is found in places influenced by the sea, where rainfall is high and temperatures are relatively mild all year round. It is an incredibly rare habitat and can only grow on about 1% of our planet's land surface.

The west of Scotland is one of those special places with just the right conditions for temperate rainforest to grow. Here, there are ancient, native woodlands of oak, birch, ash, Scots pine and hazel. These woods are peppered with open glades, crags, boulders and river gorges – dappled by sunlight and dripping with rare lichens, mosses, liverworts and fungi.

Birds, mammals and insects thrive among this lush vegetation. Resident jays and woodpeckers are joined in the warmer months by migrant pied flycatchers and wood warblers. Butterflies are also abundant in summer, including rare pearl-bordered fritillaries and chequered skippers. Badgers, red squirrels and pine martens hide among the trees and crags.

Much of Scotland's temperate rainforest has been lost over the centuries. Fragments remain, but they are often isolated in a wider landscape where other land uses take precedence. This makes them vulnerable to climate change and other threats.

An estimated 30,000 hectares of rainforest remain in Scotland – a mere 2% of our woodland cover and only a fraction of the area that could support rainforest

The two major threats to the rainforest are overgrazing by deer and the spread of invasive non-native species like *Rhododendron ponticum*. This shrub colonises woodland fast, choking the habitat. Other threats include the spread of exotic conifers; pests and diseases, such as ash dieback; climate change; and air pollution.

THE RAINFOREST PROVIDES FOR US

Rainforest meeting (John MacPherson)

Rainforest management provides jobs and skills, and contributes to rural economies and community wealth building



Red squirrel (Aileen Loudon/WTML)



Rainforest offers nature-based solutions to soil erosion, flooding, carbon storage and restoring natural processes

Looking at lichens (Jillian Donachie/WTML)

Rainforest provides spaces for people to enjoy, improving health and wellbeing



Why do we need to protect our rainforest?

Temperate rainforest is internationally rare, as are many of the species it supports. Yet, Scotland's rainforest isn't just important for biodiversity. It's also an important place for the people that live and work in the west of Scotland.

Scotland's rainforest can help us to combat the climate and biodiversity crises. This ecosystem provides a 'nature-based solution' to these problems as it locks up carbon, prevents flooding and soil erosion, and provides a vital home for globally significant species.

Restoring and expanding Scotland's rainforest will provide jobs and protect the environment now and into the future. It may take decades for the rainforest to fully recover from the current level of damage and neglect, so we must start this work now for the benefit of all those who will come after us.

“““

I am actually being paid to be part of the process of saving and restoring some of the most fantastically awe-inspiring forests the world has to offer. Just to play a small part in this amazing, wet, lush, green system is an absolute honour.

– Gus Routledge, Ecologist



SAVING SCOTLAND'S RAINFOREST

Ariundle National Nature Reserve
(Lorne Gill/NatureScot)

The Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest

The **Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest (ASR)** launched its first strategy in 2021 after a development phase. We now have 25 diverse partner organisations and work collaboratively with 20 more, all of whom are committed to pooling their resources for the benefit of Scotland's rainforest. Our partners include a range of conservation and environmental organisations, specialist societies and government agencies.

Much of our work is about coordinating landscape-scale projects, securing long-term funding, building capacity to deliver on-the-ground work, and communicating about the rainforest and the threats it faces. Our partners work together with local people to provide the expertise, resource and capacity needed to deliver the vision for Scotland's rainforest.

Scotland's rainforest can only be successfully restored at a landscape-scale. We need to work across habitats and boundaries, collaborating with land managers, local communities, businesses, and the public and private sector.

Working with government

The Scottish Government and its agencies have been involved in ASR from the start, with Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) and NatureScot all contributing to establishing the evidence base for the *State of Scotland's Rainforest report*, and developing the ASR collaborative strategy.

In 2021, the Scottish Government made a commitment to expand and restore Scotland's rainforest, and then worked closely with ASR to develop a strategic approach to deliver on that commitment, published in 2024. To date, it has contributed £3.8 million towards ASR's projects.

The Scottish Government has also provided £6.3 million in funding to FLS, which has been used to develop a Rainforest Team and put more than 2,000 ha of rainforest habitat on the road to recovery, including controlling invasive non-native species and restoring Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites. NatureScot has also recruited two new collaborative deer management roles in the rainforest.

We will continue to work with the Scottish Government to help build on its commitment in the future.

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

Tree planting (WTML)



FUNDING RESTORATION WORK

A **Rainforest Restoration Fund**, blending private and public money, is one of ASR's key aspirations. ASR partner, Argyll & Isles Coast and Countryside Trust, is leading work to explore how natural capital finance could support rainforest restoration, and the Woodland Trust is leading a project to develop a collaborative fundraising model.

Red deer (John MacPherson/WTML)



GAINING CONSENSUS

The **Common Ground Forum**, launched in October 2023, was instigated through ASR and has brought together more than 500 people across Scotland's upland deer management sector to build consensus and trust. The Forum promotes a more collaborative approach to deer management, enabling stakeholders to build self-sustaining solutions.

Lichen identification (John MacPherson)

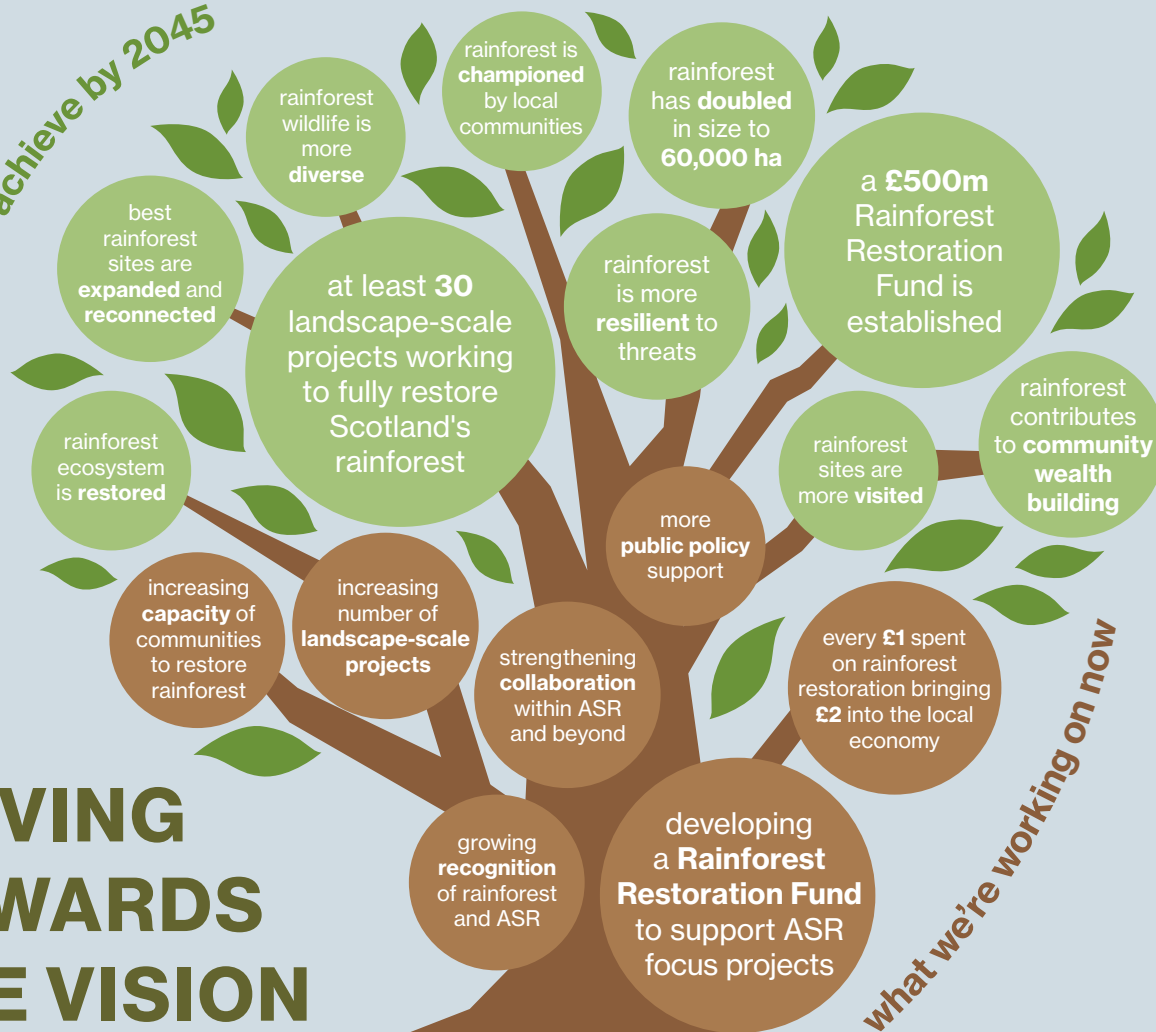


BUILDING CAPACITY

ASR's **Our Rainforest Futures** project aims to build the capacity of local communities to deliver long-term habitat restoration work across the west of Scotland by bringing new jobs, skills and knowledge-sharing opportunities to key areas. It is supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

MOVING TOWARDS THE VISION

what we want to achieve by 2045

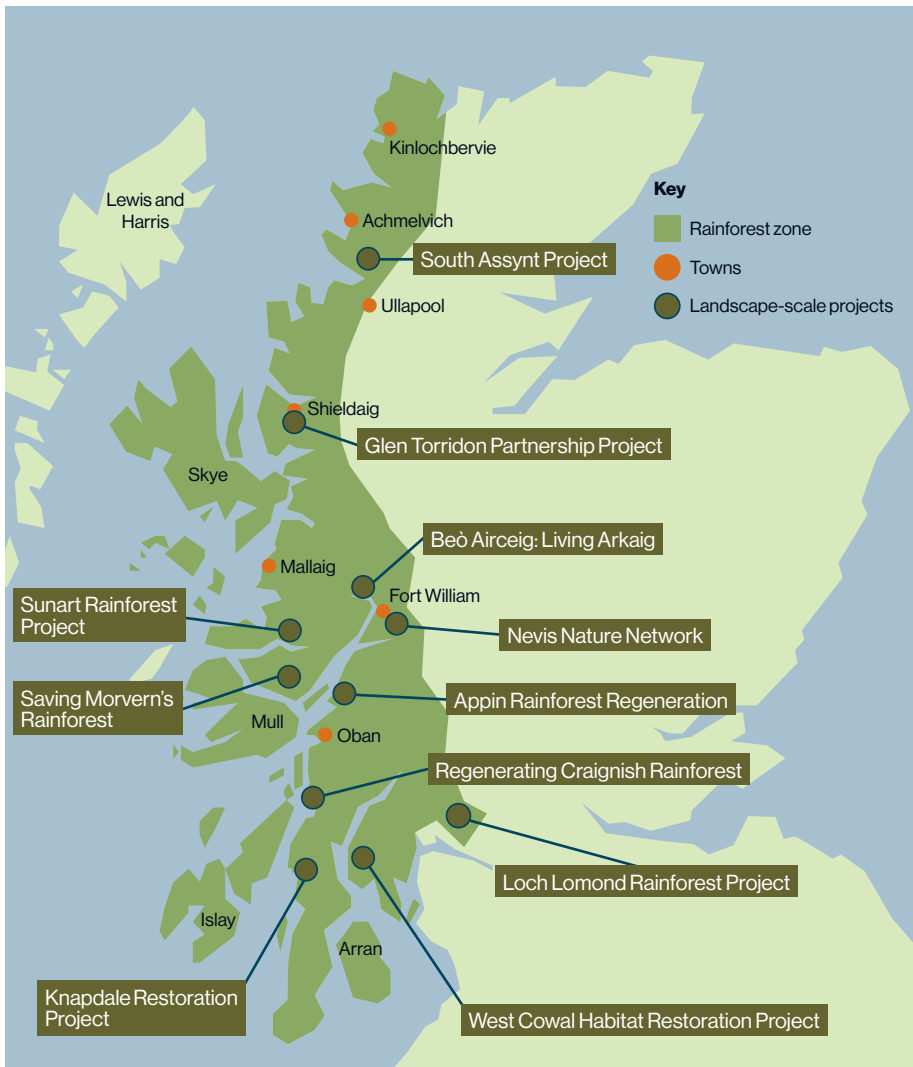


what we're working on now

where we've got so far



WORKING AT A LANDSCAPE-SCALE



Scotland's rainforest zone contains the highest quality and quantity of rainforest anywhere in Europe. Within the area, ASR has 'adopted' a number of landscape-scale projects, led by ASR partners and other organisations, to help facilitate and enable exemplar rainforest regeneration.

Spotlight projects

BEÒ AIRCEIG

An ambitious 30,000-ha landscape-scale collaboration between the community and landowners in the glens surrounding Loch Arkaig. Partners are working together to expand and connect the surviving rainforest.

APPIN RAINFOREST

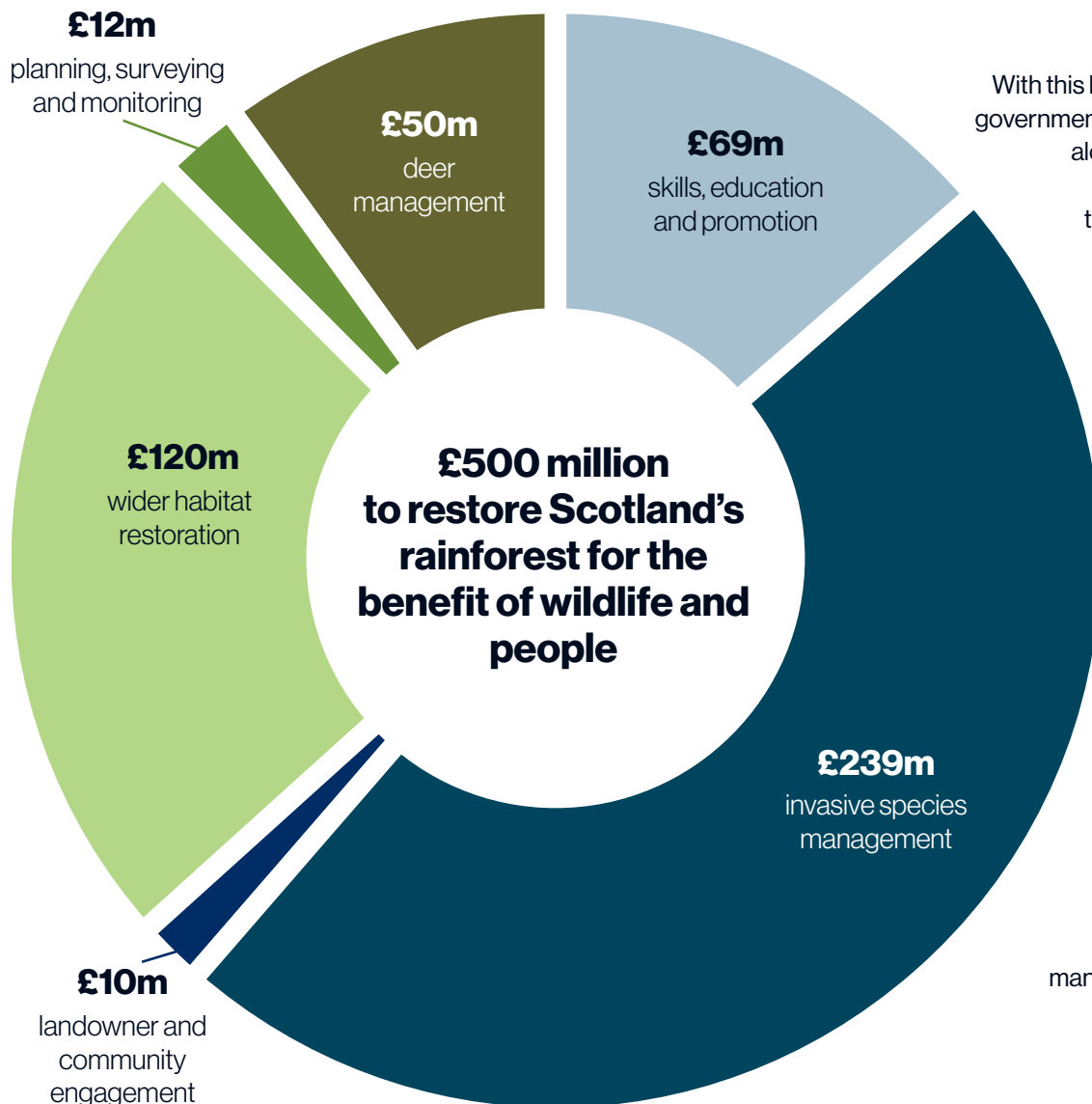
This innovative project has been created by the local community development trust. It aims to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits for the people of Appin, an area with significant rainforest remnants.

LOCH LOMOND

The temperate rainforest found in the National Park is some of the most accessible in Scotland. This exciting project aims to deliver both habitat restoration and an education programme for locals and visitors.

ACHIEVING THE RAINFOREST VISION

We estimate the long-term investment required to truly restore and expand the rainforest is £500 million



With this level of funding from both government and private investment, alongside increased public policy support, we could tackle the challenges that Scotland's rainforest is facing. It would support a targeted programme of community-focused, long-term, landscape-scale restoration initiatives, while also locking up carbon, providing jobs and saving this internationally important habitat.

The breakdown of funding reflected here is only part of the story. This investment is driving change, and helping to bring together communities and land managers across the west of Scotland.



A RAINFOREST FOR OUR FUTURE

“““

Being part of ASR has been really beneficial for our project, particularly the opportunities to share learning experiences. It has given us a sense that what we are doing locally is connected to nature restoration on a much wider scale.

– Rory Stewart, Manager, Nevis Landscape Partnership

“““

Two major challenges we face are deer pressure and invasive species. It is great that we have community-level projects on both of these which have the potential for greater impact compared to each landowner working independently.

– Anthony Glover and Amanda Matthews, Glacierska Cottage Woodland

“““

I've been filled with hope by the number of different people coming together with the aim of saving the rainforest. Our rainforest really could be saved if we continue the momentum!

– Henry Dobson, Land Manager, Ardtornish



Scotland's temperate rainforest is internationally important, but only 30,000 hectares remain

Rainforest thrives in the west of Scotland where rainfall is high and the air is clean

Scotland's rainforest is home to a huge range of wildlife, including rare mosses, lichens and liverworts

This habitat is under threat from overgrazing by deer, invasive non-native species, and fragmentation

Many people are working tirelessly to restore and protect Scotland's rainforest for the benefit of all who will come after us

TAKING ACTION TO SAVE THE RAINFOREST

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 savingscotlandsrainforest.org.uk

Find us on social media



Saving Scotland's Rainforest is a programme led by ASR with support from Plantlife Scotland and Woodland Trust Scotland.

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