

CLIMATE SOLUTION:

Rewilding Europe to invigorate local economies



Type of action

Community mobilization for purchasing and rewilding land for the benefit of the local economy.

Groups and organizations involved

Movement Reforesting Scotland (local crofter fisherman, local tenants)

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Location

8400-hectare North Assynt Estate on the North-West coast of Scotland

COLLECTIVE PURCHASE BY LOCAL RESIDENTS OF AN 8400-hectare estate where 800 hectares of woodland has now been restored. Previously, this area was used for sheep grazing, and as shooting areas, and although this use of the land benefited a few people (namely the private landowners), it did not provide the environmental and social benefits which are now evident.

The woodland, which has been able to grow since the sheep were removed, now provides more jobs than sheep farming. The woodlands continue to provide income from deer hunting which was already present in the area. But further income is generated from tourism, from walkers following the “North Coast 500” road, and seasonal sightseers. Tree orchards, tourist paths and fuelwood projects are underway. Furthermore, the growth of this native woodland composed of birches, rowans,

pine and willows is a haven for wildlife and creates a rich ecosystem which was previously absent, not to mention acting as a new carbon sink.

Crofters were initially provided with grants from the Scottish Government to plant trees, and provided with income to compensate for not keeping sheep on the land. However, income is now such that the benefits of woodland over sheep grazing are clear.

The purchase of this land is setting a precedent for land reform in Scotland, much of which has historically been under the private ownership of large estates. More communities across Scotland are now starting to purchase land as they recognise the benefits of reforestation for the environment and society.



Impacts of this action on...

Carbon capture (mitigation)

The restoration of the land that was continually grazed allows for increased carbon capture in the soil and trees.

Social and economic factors

Forests provide more jobs than grouse moors or sheep farms, whether in vistas for tourists or hazel for fish traps, refuges for deer and cattle, or inspiration for artists.

Biodiversity and ecosystem resilience

Allowing bare hillsides to rewild by removing sheep has contributed to creating a more biodiverse landscape.

This action is transformational because...

It is looking through social and environmental lenses, as well as economic ones. It is aiming for win-win outcomes instead of balancing trade-offs and making compromises. There is little “spare” land on the planet today, and around two-thirds of current and former forest lands are claimed under customary or traditional land ownership - much of this not recognized by governments. The prospect of dedicating large areas of land to absorbing atmospheric CO₂ raises fears of taking land away from communities. So, to succeed, this project works with and complements local customary land needs and rights. The aim, aside from carbon sequestration, is to rewild forest areas, and also to “rehumanise” the land by restoring people’s connection to it. Done correctly, it can be pro-poor and a force for democracy and a fairer future. Done correctly, it can increase the sustainability of many uses of forests, including harvesting for construction materials, firewood and food supplies. Done correctly, it can also reinforce the existing roles of forests as anchors of ecosystems and the services that they in turn bring.

This action could be scaled up through...

Increased knowledge of economic opportunities (hunting, eco-tourism, non-timber products, etc.) at a local level; local and regional initiatives that prioritize the cultural value of protecting the land.