Cromarty Tree Planting Project 2015

Summary

As part of the MFTI's ongoing restoration work the project secured funding from the Nineveh Charitable Trust and Patagonia World Trout Initiative to fund the planting of 7000 native deciduous trees along rivers in the Cromarty firth catchment. Forestry Commission Scotland provided the trees and protective tubes which were planted by the Cromarty Firth Fishery Board and local Trust for Conservation Volunteers.

Measurable results

1. 6500 native deciduous trees were supplied by FCS (Forestry Commission Scotland)
2. 6500 native deciduous trees (Aspen, Willow & Birch) were planted by Cromarty Firth DSFB (CFDSFB) and TCV (Trust for Conservation Volunteers) in protective tubes.
3. 500 local willow cuttings were collected and planted by CFDSFB & TCV.
4. The site and trees will be monitored to measure the long term success of the project

TCV volunteers planting in the snow at Strath Rusdale and at Strath Rannoch on a better day.

Background

Across North Highland Forest District, including in the Cromarty area, Frostery Commission Scotland has been adopting commercial forestry plantation buffers of 30 metres from each bank for most watercourses. This not only exceeds the current Forest and Water Guidelines, but also offers the best chance of restoring a significant riparian woodland resource across the North Highlands. This buffer strip helps reduce the effects of the commercial forestry on the water course; acidification, sedimentation, enrichment, loss of biodiversity and tunnelling. However to help these rivers regain their true ecological potential the riparian zone needs to be restored to a more natural state with a mix of native deciduous trees along the banks of the river. This will improve biodiversity, increase nutrient input to the river through leaf litter leading to increased productivity and result in more invertebrates with benefits for fish and other predators. The trees and their roots improve cover for fish and also help to stabilise river banks reducing erosion and sources of sediment. This project

is also trialling the effectiveness of different genetic strains of aspen which have a very high conservation value. Climatic warming is also a threat to many upland populations of trout that are particularly vulnerable to warmer water temperatures. Planting trees to provide long term shade is a great way of keeping water temperatures down and climate proofing our upland rivers for the future. The wider benefits that trees can in also controlling water quality and quantity are summarised in a Review by Forest Research. [1.]

What we did

Habitat surveys conducted by the Cromarty Fisheries Trust and District Salmon Fishery Board (DSFB) have identified lengths of river bank that are lacking native deciduous tree cover in the Cromarty Firth Area. Working with the FCS the two main areas were chosen for planting this year; Strath Rannoch and Strath Rusdale. The Forestry Commission for Scotland (FCS) supplied 6500 native deciduous trees (Aspen, Willow & Birch) that the Cromarty DSFB and Trust for Conservation Volunteers (TCV) planted during April and March 2015. Different genetic strains of Aspen were planted in specifically identified locations where they will be monitored and the results used to influence future riverside Aspen planting. The trees were planted in protective tubes along the banks and riparian zones. Work on the ground was supervised and led by the Comarty DSFB bailiffs with local communities volunteers recruited and managed through TCV providing the bulk of the labour. The planting rtook 100 person days of work; 52 person days of planting were delivered by TCV volunteers and the remaining 48 by the Comarty DSFB bailiffs. The Moray Firth Trout Initiative was responsible for sourcing funding and managing the overall project.

TCV Volunteers planting native deciduous trees along the Strath Rannoch banks in the foreground with the commercial forestry plantation in the background.

[1.] Nisbet, T., Silgram, M., Shah, N., Morrow, K., and Broadmeadow, S. (2011) Woodland for Water: Woodland measures for meeting Water Framework Directive objectives. Forest Research Monograph, 4, Forest Research, Surrey, 156pp.