



SWMID

SOUTH WEST MULL &
IONA DEVELOPMENT

Welcome!

We're thrilled to be bringing back our newsletter to bring you stories from our growing projects. Lots of transitions at SWMID this year, bidding heartfelt farewells to some incredible staff members who have contributed immensely to our mission, we are also excited to welcome fresh faces bringing new energy and ideas to our work.

We hope you find our newsletter both exciting and inspiring, packed with updates on our latest projects.

The Season Begins A-New at Aird Fada, by Leigh Eisler

October and November mark the start of the seaweed farming year, with kelps seeded in late autumn. Unlike traditional farming, seaweed requires no freshwater or fertilisers and thrives in the cold winter ocean. Harvesting is dictated by rising ocean temperatures, not the maturity of the seaweed. As winter turns to spring, deep-sea nutrients surface, boosting kelp growth. However, warming waters in April attract plankton, including species that settle on seaweeds, prompting the harvest. In this fourth year of farming, we have sown three species—sugar kelp, winged kelp, and furbelows. We are planning multiple uses for the upcoming crop: some is being sent off for bioplastic research, we will be trialling a seaweed/biochar fertiliser and continuing product development of a kiln-dried seaweed.



Seeded line before deployment



Growing Together: Community Forestry in Action

Autumn is always a busy and exciting time in Forestry and this year has been no exception. In August we welcomed two new staff members to the Forestry Team: Keziah and Andy. Since starting the job, together with Matt, they've been busy getting to know the forest, milling timber, building and fixing fences, making charcoal, keeping an eye on the deer and making exciting plans for the future of the Sawmill and the Forest.



Felling and Harvesting

Harvesting on the valley's northeast bank finished in August, marking the last felling at Tiroran until 2029. This gradual process replaces the single-species Sitka spruce plantation with a diverse mixed forest managed under Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) principles, avoiding clear-felling.

Restocking

Planting is underway in the forest's northwest corner near the sawmill. It's exciting to replant this unique area with a mix of native and non-native conifers and broadleaves, chosen for habitat benefits, terrain suitability, and timber quality.

All the sawmil activity

Recent challenges at the mill, including oversized logs and trailer issues, have paused milling temporarily. We're exploring a larger trailer to resume work. Fresh Inverinan larch logs were a welcome change from the older Tiroran stock, and new larch from the island's North end will provide 4.8m timber soon.



Lots of fun for everyone

This year, we've hosted some fantastic family events, including the exciting launch of our Nature Trail! Developed with ideas, facts, and illustrations from Bunessan Primary School pupils and our ranger Emily, the trail is now open for all. Start your adventure at Fingal's Giant Chair, and don't miss the hidden fairy village behind the adventure playground!



We have a variety of exciting projects upcoming! If you are interested in volunteering at all, please scan this QR code using your WhatsApp camera to join the forest volunteer group chat





Your Community Garden

This year, the community garden hosted a busy season of events, school visits, and challenging weather. Our Annual Swapping events have become a highlight for Ross of Mull gardeners. We began with a lively seed swap and tattie day, followed by a spring plant swap featuring donated vegetables, herbs, and flowers—a great opportunity for local gardeners to exchange advice and tips.

A Sunny Harvest Celebration

In late September, we enjoyed perfect weather for our food swap and harvest celebration. We had a great turnout from the community sharing homegrown, homemade, and foraged produce.

Growing for The Future

This growing season, we've enjoyed regular visits from Bunessan Primary School, where children tackled tasks like sowing, planting, harvesting, and winter prep. A highlight was their harvesting and cooking day, creating soup and pesto to share with parents and garden users. The pupils are a joy—polite, hardworking, and enthusiastic team players.

We've also hosted skill-sharing events like plant workshops and needle felting days. Emily Wilkins continues her Nature Club, and we're thrilled to now host the Little Earthlings playgroup.

Winter Gardening Tip

Protect your soil over winter to prevent erosion. Mulch with seaweed for nutrients, use homemade compost or manure, or cover beds with plain cardboard (no plastic or heavy print) as an effective alternative.

Community Garden Volunteers
WhatsApp group



There's always plenty to do in the garden! If you're interested in volunteering, scan the QR code with your WhatsApp camera to join our volunteer group chat.

Garden Dates for your diary

Christmas Wreath Workshop
Monday 9th December, 11am - 1pm

Wintering Well days with Lorraine and Emily
January 8th, 15th, 22nd & 29th

In February, join us to help build a new honesty box shelter at the garden entrance—details coming soon!

A Round up from Bendoran Water Activities Club 2024, by Jon Lloyd

Skiffing

The 2024 summer season saw a wider range of activities despite August's dismal weather. The skiff section flourished, thanks to Ben Wilde and Hana Werner training new coxes and building a dedicated group of regulars. They also hosted a successful Skiff Open Day with an impressive turnout.

Sailing

Sailing activities flourished this year, in June we hosted a successful assistant instructor course with the additional help from a senior instructor from Oban. This allowed us to then host a very popular Sailing Open Day, giving the new instructors a chance to apply their skills and introduce sailing to a wide range of participants. Ed Howarth kindly provided safety cover with his RIB, while Bunessan Primary School PTA delighted everyone with a BBQ.



Kayaking

Kayaking sessions were held on Saturdays when the weather allowed and instructors were available. We managed to embark on a few trips beyond the bay, including one from Carsaig towards Franck Lockwood Island and another out to Market Bay.

AGM

With several members taking on management roles, BWAC is becoming more organised. An AGM will be held in December to elect new officers and discuss future plans. Stay tuned for details on the date and time!

Plans for 2025

Looking ahead, we plan to offer sailing sessions to Bunessan Primary in the summer term. Additionally, a new outboard motor, partly funded by The Waterfall Fund, will enable powerboat tuition for safety boat drivers, enhancing club activities and maritime safety.



South West Mull Makers

South West Mull Makers have enjoyed another successful year at their shop in the Columba Centre, offering a variety of locally produced arts and crafts. Their Christmas Emporium is now open Thursday to Sunday 2p-5pm until Sunday December 15th. Stop by to discover their lovely products.



The Columba Centre



Community Gym

This year, SWMID has taken over the management of the community gym. We're thrilled to see an increase in users and hope membership continues to grow, as regular use is essential for the gym's sustainability.

If you're interested in a membership, please contact our team at gym@swmid.co.uk.

Flexible Room for Hire: Perfect for a Variety of Services

At the Columba Centre we are offering a flexible room for hire, available for both long-term and one-off bookings. It's perfect for therapy, hairdressing, massages, nail treatments, meetings, and more. We are open to all suggestions. For details on availability and rates, please get in touch - admin@swmid.co.uk

Save The Date for our AGM!

Almost that time again! This year our AGM will be held on Saturday 25th January! Further details will be sent out soon.



Finally a message from our CEO

I am constantly inspired by the incredible team of staff, volunteers, and board members who make everything we do possible. Their dedication and passion drive the success of our initiatives, supporting and empowering our communities in so many ways. Together, we are creating a vibrant future for SWMID, full of opportunities across all our projects and programs.

We are especially excited about new initiatives planned for 2025, including an exciting programme of events and community feasts, and look forward to working closely with our members and the wider community to bring these ideas to life. This sits alongside new research partnerships to looking at the impact of community owned land and partnerships to explore the potential of seaweed in novel applications.

If you'd like to discuss SWMID or connect with me directly, please email Saskia at admin@swmid.co.uk

