



The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

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Your ref: 030/518/281

Dear Sir

Forest Enterprise Design Plan Amendment Inverness, Ross & Skye Forest District- Upper Beaully

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendment; we highlight below our concerns with matters relating to the impact on access should the proposals as presented be implemented.

The proposed amendment is for 56.8Ha of new woodland within a 96.5Ha enclosure. The MCofS has no objection either to the principle of such planting in this location nor to the proposed species composition.

The assessment of the proposal appears to be wholly concerned with ecological, landscape and visual matters. We have no issues to raise with the assessment, insofar as it goes. However, it makes no mention of impact on access.

The proposed enclosure will abut the existing small enclosure. The latter constrains access to the suspension bridge south of Alltbeithe Youth Hostel, but its small size, limited lateral extent (1km), setting back of the fencing from the river except for one choke point, and the shape of the northwest fence mean that its practical impact is almost negligible.

The same cannot be said of the proposed larger enclosure. The enclosure will be an arc around 3km in length. The bridge will be about 2km from the south end of the arc and about 1km from the east end. Any approach from the south by An Caorann Mor will either (a) pass through the woodland (with stiles provided?) on the existing mapped path line to the river bank and then have a constrained route between the river and the deer fence, (b) follow a constrained and sinuous route to the west of the new woodland sandwiched between river and deer fence, (c) contour the steep hillside above the deer fence to the east end of the woodland and then return west along the riverbank to the bridge, (d) avoid the area altogether by crossing Allt a'Chomhlain and wading Allt Cam-ban, which is not always feasible.

Walkers descending from Mullach Fraoch-choire will have to head round the east of the existing plantation, with the more direct option west of the existing enclosure being closed off by the new enclosure.

Some may choose to still follow the direct option by climbing the deer fencing, though as ungrazed ground vegetation grows taller it is likely that this will become a less appealing option.

The MCofS has two suggestions to reconcile recreational interests with ecological interests:

- 1) A different alignment for the northern fence. From just south of where the mapped track reaches the river bank (around NH073194), take the fence in a broadly straight line roughly north-east. This would pull it back from the riverbank and avoid walkers experiencing a corridor effect.
- 2) Leave a gap between the current enclosure and the new one. A gap of, say, 100m could be achieved in combination with the previous suggestion with a slight decrease in new fence length and only minimal loss of proposed planting area. It is acknowledged that this would require the retention of the existing enclosure's western fence and thus a small overall increase in fence length requiring ongoing maintenance. There would, however, be less potential for damage to fences by walkers seeking to follow a direct route from the hill slopes to the river.

The MCofS is supportive of the intention behind the woodland proposal, but believes it requires modification to mitigate potential recreational impacts. Walkers are not antagonistic to the wider development of native woodlands – quite the opposite – but they would wish to see it done in a way that is not insensitive to their interests.

I hope that you will find these comments of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

David Gibson
Chief Officer