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### **Glen Affric Land Management Plan consultation**

Mountaineering Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the plan for the future development of forestry in Glen Affric. This is an important area for its wild qualities, and the way that the forest is managed will have a strong influence on the practice and enjoyment of walking and mountaineering activities.

Mountaineering Scotland is a membership organisation with over 13,000 members and is the only recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers, mountaineers and ski-tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains, and acts to represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering. Mountaineering Scotland also acts on behalf of the 80,000 members of the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) on matters related to landscape and access in Scotland, and provides training and information to mountain users to promote safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of our mountain environment.

Our comments follow the order of topics presented in the scoping brief.

#### **Vision:**

We welcome the vision of a near-natural forest with a variety of tree ages and types, a much-needed change from even-aged monoculture forestry that characterises so much of the Scottish upland landscapes.

The recognition of the social importance of the forest landscape along the Glen and on the slopes of the mountains, and the wild qualities of the land, is a welcome aspect of multi-use forestry and will benefit the people using the forest for quiet informal recreation.

The scenic landscape aspects of the results of management are important and it is good to see that recognised, along with managing browsing animals for the impact that they make. The establishment of natural treelines through regeneration of trees and shrubs is an important part of mountain ecology that is missing in most of Scotland. The forests in Glen Affric can become a demonstration of how a natural landscape can look, with the wildlife benefits that come along with it, for biodiversity in itself and for the enjoyment it brings to our activities in glen, hillside and mountain top.

We support this rewilding initiative with the inclusion of natural treelines and re-wetting peatland. These aims support climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, we think that the Plan would

be more attuned to a 300-year vision if the climate unpredictability and how that will affect management responses was more explicitly stated or explained in the document.

**Land Management:** we welcome the intention to allow natural processes in Glen Affric – a rewilding of the landscape. The encouragement of the wild qualities of the landscape is welcome, with much of the land under consideration in the plan lying adjacent to Wild Land Area 24, possibly initially excluded because of the plantation nature of the forest at the time of mapping. We support the expansion of wild land qualities along the glen where they can be allowed to develop. This is a positive contribution to wild land as so often it is incrementally damaged around the peripheries. We suggest that visitors may be more likely to perceive naturalness and wild qualities of the land rather than have a wilderness experience given the nearness of roads, parking spots and path and track network.

**Deer Management:** we are pleased to see the intention to reduce the impact of wild deer to such a level as to allow for natural regeneration of the pine woodland trees and shrubs, and strongly support this policy if it is carried out with minimum use of deer fencing. The description of WLA 24 states: “Within some locations, the sense of naturalness of woodland is diminished by deer fences which indicate human intervention in grazing regimes, as well as appearing as a human artefact. Where there is a number of enclosures, there may also be cumulative effects.” The removal of fences would be a positive action.

**Management Objectives:** we will make general comment on management objectives regarding access and landscape rather than for each individual compartment.

For our members the forests are the gateway to the mountains beyond, to walk through on going up and again on descent back to lower ground. We expect that quiet informal access on foot will be maintained throughout the forest estate.

This requires the careful consideration of forest infrastructure: car parking, allowing overnight parking for wild camping trips; provision of routes to tops and ridges, not necessarily of forest road standard but clear ways to pass through forest on both ascent and descent; deer fencing removal when redundant, and very limited new enclosures.

We understand the economies of scale of large softwood felling coupes, but there are opportunities in Glen Affric to demonstrate alternative harvesting and restocking techniques. Developing local markets for products is a direction of management that we would support for landscape reasons and also for social and community reasons.

Diversity of colour and texture in the forests will be a benefit to recreational users, giving the feel of a less managed landscape than in other parts of Scotland, as befits a National Scenic Area. Visibility is an important topic as although many of our members want to see more natural woodland on the mountain slopes, there are members who are concerned that more woodland will reduce the pleasure of the long views from hillsides. The key points here may be stem density and stand diversity in plantations, with natural regeneration likely to result in a more open and varied structure than planting schemes. We would support this open, expansive woodland allowing natural processes to occur.

In the productive forest we would appreciate a more diffuse edge to plantations.

One of the concerns of many of Mountaineering Scotland’s members is the proliferation of hilltracks or made roads in the uplands that are poorly constructed or maintained, and are of a specification in excess of their actual use. We would welcome a policy of limiting tracks to being essential to their purpose and reduced in width or removed and restored when they are no longer needed.

Yours sincerely

*D. Black*

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