

David Blair  
Tree Nursery Manager - Cairngorms Connect  
RSPB Abernethy,  
Forest Lodge,  
Nethy Bridge  
PH25 3EF

11<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear David,

**Salix lapponum, Loch A'an basin planting proposal**

Thank you very much for including Mountaineering Scotland in your consultation exercise. The views of communities of interest are as valuable as those of communities of place, and depending on the nature and location of proposals may be more affected by some proposals than local communities.

Mountaineering Scotland is supportive of this initiative as the natural tree and scrub line in Scotland is sadly depleted, and has been for some time. From the planting proposal paper, you appear to have been thorough in the ecological selection of the planting areas, following the Montane Woodland Action Group guidelines.

Having said that, there are a couple of matters that we would like to bring to your attention.

Our starting point is that this is a Wild Land Area and we would wish to see the wild qualities of the landscape maintained, and enhanced if possible. One point on which your paper isn't entirely clear to us is on protection of the planted willow stock, and specifically if you intend to fence off the planting areas, or if the planted stock takes their chances naturally without exclusion fencing?

You do mention extensive beating up and a fairly severe attrition rate expected, possibly through browsing. This would lead one to infer that the plants are left to develop naturally in the environment without artificial protection, but it is not stated if this is the case. We would have significant concerns if fencing was proposed in this particular landscape.

A second point also relates to the wild qualities of the landscape, and how you intend to transport thousands of shrubs to the planting sites. We are making the assumption that some form of all-terrain vehicle would be used to transport material and personnel, and we would be very concerned if new access tracks were to be proposed. There is an existing network of informal routes to and within the area which may be used. However, the soils in that area are thin and fragile and erosion could potentially be exacerbated. An access plan for this project would be welcome, with the potential for remediation works if erosion does occur, as is the norm in the Scottish planning system for works in sensitive areas.

Your email suggests that damage to plants by human activity could potentially be a problem if walkers and climbers are going 'off-path'. It is our experience that the majority of people will follow existing

routes on the ground to their chosen destinations as the going is easier on the legs, but that it is possible that a small number of people will walk across land.

You suggest that this may be addressed by educating and informing where possible those engaged in outdoor recreational activities in the locality. We would again have concerns about the placement of any formal interpretive features in a landscape that is wild in aspect, with no similar existing features in place.

We suggest that interpretation would be better sited at access 'gateways' to the hill paths, further down the hillside, where such structures may already be a feature in the landscape. An additional way of informing the climbing community may be through the UK Climbing website, with information posted on the logbooks of any particular crags affected.

For your information, the main, popular climbing destinations are:

Area 1 – Stag Rocks; Hell's Lum, Shelterstone Crag; Shelterstone Boulders; Garbh Uisge Crag; Waterfall Wall

Area 2 – none

Area 3 – Saddle Slabs

We suggest checking those and any other appropriate locations in the SMC Climbing Guide - The Cairngorms: <https://www.smc.org.uk/publications/climbing/cairngorms>

Route descriptions are given in detail, including approaches. Climbers use 'topos' to describe locations, rather than grid references. These detailed routes drawings on the crags show where climbers usually go, in summer and in winter, as climbing locations and routes may differ on bare rock and on ice.

It is unlikely that there will be much climbing outwith these locations, as the lengthy tradition of Cairngorm climbing is likely to have identified all the climbable routes on the rock. This may assist with micro-siting of your planting areas to avoid approach routes to any crags adjacent to the planting areas.

We hope that these comments will be useful to you as you take this project forward, and if you have any questions on the above then please don't hesitate to get in touch to discuss and we will help where we can.

Yours sincerely



D. Black

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