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Dear Mr Phillips,

**Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS): Inverlair LTFP Renewal  
Case reference: 15FGS00513**

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Inverlair Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP) Renewal Scheme.

Mountaineering Scotland 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 British Mountaineering Council 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.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 enshrined a right of responsible access on users and the associated Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC) details how land and water should be managed responsibly for access. Access rights should be respected when managing land or water by "taking access rights into account when planning and implementing any major land use change or development" (SOAC, 2005).

The scheme relates to proposed felling and replanting during the next 10 years (2017-2026), building on felling and replanting carried out over the last 10 years under the previous LTFP. The key aims of the scheme, as stated, are to:

- Continue to re-design the geometric shapes within and on the edges of the forest so that the woodland better reflects the surrounding landform;
- Improve the visual linkage between the forest and the surrounding landscape; and
- Increase the visual diversity of the forest.

The area to which the proposal relates is situated in Glen Spean approximately 6 miles east of Roybridge. The area is popular with hillwalkers, particularly those seeking to access the Munros of Stob a' Choire Mheadhoin (1105m) and Stob Coire Easain (1115m) situated to the west of Loch Treig.

These hills are typically accessed *via* the minor road connecting the A86 with Fersit. This road is used to access the forest and will be used by forestry vehicles associated with felling and replanting.

The main public access within the forest itself is along the East Highland Way (EHW) long distance path. As such, the proposal may conceivably impact on those exercising their statutory right of responsible access throughout the year and so the right of responsible access should be maintained during forestry operations. The plan seeks to minimise disruption to public access using a variety of means such as information signs, maintenance of waymarkers on the EHW, and the use of gates and stiles.

Mountaineering Scotland wholly supports the principle of woodland regeneration and in particular the development of native woodlands and the replacement or removal of non-native species. It is noted favourably that a range of tree species are proposed with the long term aim of greatly increasing the proportion of native woodland. There is an intention to reduce deer numbers within the forest through a combination of culling and improved deer fencing with a view to allowing soft conifers and native broadleaves to establish. The intention that gates are to be maintained on main access routes to ensure minimal inconvenience to public access is noted.

Great emphasis is placed on “softening” edges of plantations and providing visual linkage with the surrounding landscape. While commendable, it is noted that visual impacts are assessed generally in terms of the view from the A86, and not from nearby hills.

The plan is generally supportive with respect to managing public access. However, it is particularly important that appropriate measures are in place during and following periods of forestry operations. For example, clear signage and the need for people to be directed to use a particular or alternative route will need to be provided at car parks or other access points. Staff undertaking forestry operations should also be fully briefed regarding any diversions that may need to be put in place. It is assumed that all measures put in place will adhere to industry-approved good practice guidelines with respect to managing work sites where people are exercising their access rights, in particular the “Managing woodland access and forest operations in Scotland” leaflet. This should include removal of warning signs when works are suspended or completed, as we have experienced issues with non-removal of signs which have effectively and unnecessarily prohibited access.

Mountaineering Scotland is happy to publicise revised access arrangements, assuming the alternatives fulfil all relevant guidelines and comply with the SOAC.

I hope that you will take the comments above into account, and please do contact me if any of the above requires clarification.

Yours sincerely

David Gibson  
CEO  
Mountaineering Scotland