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Dear Dr Currie

North Argyll Forests Strategic Plan Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft strategic plan on your consultations webpage.

1. Our interests lie with access through the Forest blocks to the open high ground, and the landscape implications of restocking and other management on the National Scenic Area and Wild land Area.
2. 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.
3. We support your intention to "maintain walking and biking trails, for everyone to enjoy and gain health and other benefits". Access through forest blocks can often be confusing as forest roads and tracks can bend and turn away from preferred walking destinations beyond the forest.
4. Your LMP Priorities states "maintain and where necessary/possible, improve access to long distance routes, including routes to access Munros...". We agree that maintaining clear paths to the popular hilltops and crags will be of benefit to hillwalkers and climbers.
5. In this part of the country, the key area is the Ballachulish Horseshoe routes. We think it is important to maintain routes up and down, for both summer and winter seasons. We think it also is important to hillwalkers for Forestry and Land Scotland to take account of routes to Munro tops, Corbetts and Grahams within and adjacent to the Forest Estate as many walkers like to take in a variety of tops, for the different experience and challenge of them.
6. Forestry staff for the area will no doubt be aware of these informal routes up and down through the Forest, and for ease of recognition the

Munros are Sgorr Dhearg and Sgorr Dhonuill, and the access through Glenachulish, but also the nearby tops of Sgorr Bhan and an easy route over Beinn Bhan to the main road.

7. Access to the Corbetts Fraochaidh and Meal Lighiche would benefit from recognition in the Strategic Plan Priorities. Informal access from the north may be well known, but some attention to informal access routes through the Forest from Glen Creran would be welcome.
8. Another topic of importance to hillwalkers and climbers within the Strategic Plan is the intention for “extending woodland cover to the natural tree line by natural colonisation and expanding commercially productive woodland, where feasible”, coupled with “control deer grazing and browsing pressure, to improve open habitats and protect restocking”.
9. Many of our members welcome more tree cover on the hills, but there is also a significant percentage who appreciate the open views from hillsides and are concerned that woodland plantation would obstruct these wide and long views. Encouraging more natural regeneration, especially within the National Scenic Area, would allow trees to grow naturally where they can, and may result in a more open, scattered appearance rather than the straight rows and blocks of plantation. This would allow woodland cover to reach a natural treeline and preserve views through the trees.
10. This of course depends very much on the impact of herbivores like sheep and deer and the means to control their impact. We are of the opinion that the landscape and biodiversity would benefit from limiting the number of deer per square kilometre to allow for natural tree and shrub regeneration. This also has climate mitigation benefits through carbon storage and sequestration in the landscape. Our preference would be to manage this through deer culling rather than the use of lengths of deer fencing.
11. Where deer fences are deemed essential, we would expect pass gates to be installed at key points of informal access to the more open hill.
12. How felling and restocking is managed in the National Scenic Area is important visually. NSAs are the top landscape designation in Scotland and the visual appearance of forestry management is a major component of the NSA. We suggest that FLS give greater emphasis to continuous cover forestry in the NSA rather than high impact clear-fell coupes.

We hope that these comments on the Strategic Plan are helpful, and we will be pleased to assist Forestry and Land Scotland with any of these points above if we can.

Yours sincerely



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