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Dear John

Ossian Long Term Forest Plan (LTFP) Renewal 2017 – Response to Scoping

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the scoping process for a long term forest plan (LTFP) for an area of the Corrour Estate. Ossian Forest is owned and managed by Corrour Estate, and as such, is situated in a popular area of the Central Highlands for hillwalking. The plan is to renew the LTFP to cover felling, replanting and management approval for the next 10 years, and to provide outline detail for a further 10 years.

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).

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 the previous LTFP was amended slightly to improve biodiversity within the forest by increasing the area of native broadleaf restocking. Similarly, the current scoping proposal highlights that standing deadwood and native trees will be retained for biodiversity, with a strong emphasis on restocking with native woodland species.

There is an intention to reduce deer numbers within the forest and on the surrounding hills with a view to allowing native woodlands to establish without the need for fencing. However, this intention has not yet been realised, and so fencing will be required in the meantime. Gates and appropriate crossing points of fences should therefore be maintained on main access routes to ensure minimal inconvenience to public access.

The current scoping proposal is supportive with respect to managing public access, and it is stated that public access will be managed in accordance with the SOAC. This is very important because, as highlighted in the scoping proposal, the area is well used by walkers, climbers and cyclists in a variety of contexts, from accessing long distance paths to climbing on the numerous Munros and Corbetts in the area.

Therefore, while supportive of the principles of managing public access, it is also important that appropriate measures are in place during 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. 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 completed.

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

Finally, we note that the area covered by forestry will be almost identical to what it is now in place albeit with marginal expansion. With the emphasis on conservation, it is to be welcomed that the plans should see a visual improvement with time through the introduction of native species, thinning and diversity.

We hope that these comments will be useful.

Kind regards,

David Gibson
CEO