



The Granary
West Mill Street
Perth PH1 5QP
Tel: 01738 493 942

By email to

ianthomasforester@gmail.com & cowaltrossachs@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Ian Thomas
Chartered Forester
DCP

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Dear Mr Thomas

Rest & Be Thankful Woodland Creation Land Management Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the LMP. Our response focuses on two areas of interest to our members, landscape and access.

Landscape

We appreciate the constraint that FES is operating under in order to stabilise the slopes in this area. There is little detail and consequently great flexibility in the proposed planting. The mention of mixed native woodland we take to mean even the “fast establishment” areas are included. This, together with the proposed natural regeneration, is something Mountaineering Scotland supports.

However, this natural regeneration area reaches to the top of the Corbett Beinn Luibhean and as this area is on open hillside we would like to understand how and whether it would be any different from the rest of the hillside without the use of deer fencing. The plan highlights such fencing around the overall site but none within. Should this be a consideration we would have serious concerns with fencing around the summit of a Corbett.

Whilst we appreciate the need for site access we have some concerns that any new hill tracks should be proportionate and in line with all current best practice, and again we note there is a lack of detail about these tracks.

Access

In terms of more general comments, The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 provides for 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).

While it is helpful to acknowledge the potential impact on public access, we ask forest managers to consider the following points:

- Visitors to the forest have a statutory right of access so long as they are acting responsibly and in compliance with the SOAC, and this right of access is not restricted to built roads and paths.
- The intention to maintain existing public access routes open should be stated in final proposals.
- Where deer and other fencing is included in proposals, consideration should be given to appropriate siting of gates and stiles to enable access. In this case that includes to the popular Corbett Beinn Luibhean.
- During forestry operations, clear signage should be used, including at access points where there is the need for people to be directed to use a particular or alternative route. Signage should be removed promptly after the conclusion of operations.
- Staff undertaking forestry operations should be 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.

We also wish to encourage consideration of potential new access routes through provision of green walkways and the feasibility of re-establishing legacy paths where appropriate. It is noted that some mention of this is included in the document.

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

If you are able to provide further information in due course concerning deer fencing that would be appreciated. My thanks again for the opportunity to comment and I hope that you will take the above points into account.

Yours sincerely

David Gibson
CEO, Mountaineering Scotland