

By email to : [joachim.boehm@forestryandland.gov.scot](mailto:joachim.boehm@forestryandland.gov.scot)

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Dear Sir

### **Strathspey Woodlands Land Management Plan consultation**

Mountaineering Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the plan for the future development of forestry in Strathspey. This is an important area for walking, climbing and ski touring, and the way that the forest is managed will have a strong influence on the practice and enjoyment of these activities.

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.

Our comments follow the order of topics presented in the scoping brief.

#### **Vision:**

We welcome the vision of a forest with a variety of tree ages and types, a much-needed change from even-aged monoculture forestry that characterises so much of the Scottish upland landscapes. The recognition of the social importance of the forest landscape on the slopes of the mountains and the wild land characteristics of parts of it are a necessary aspect of multi-use forestry and is of benefit to the people using the forests for quiet informal recreation.

#### **Strategic Objectives:**

**Productive:** Continuously forested landscape in visually prominent areas and avoiding large-scale clear-fell are important aspects of the Plan from the perspective of informal recreation in the area.

**Treasured:** We would appreciate more detail on what is meant by easily accessible. Is it as a walking destination reached by public transport or active travel, or enabling access through woodland to tops and ridges, with footpaths? The scenic landscape aspects of the results of management are important and it is good to see that recognised, along with managing browsing animals. The establishment of natural treelines through regeneration of trees and shrubs is an important part of mountain ecology that is missing in most of Scotland – this is something that a National Park should rightly be leading on. The forests in Speyside can become a demonstration of how a natural landscape can look, with the wildlife benefits that come along with it, for biodiversity in itself and for the enjoyment it brings to our activities on the slopes.

**Access:** As an access asset we would like more understanding on what is meant by the term. For our members the forests are the gateway to the mountains beyond, to walk through on going up and again on descent back to lower ground. This requires the careful consideration of forest infrastructure: car parking, allowing overnight parking for wild camping trips; provision of routes to tops and ridges, not necessarily of forest road standard but clear ways to pass through forest on both ascent and descent; deer fencing removal when redundant, and very limited new enclosures. A level of detail beyond the scope of this paper, but we believe it is helpful to acknowledge this.

## **Key Features**

**Recreation:** we welcome the recognition that recreation is a high priority in the forests on the western slopes of the Cairngorms. We appreciate the concern given to encourage biodiversity through zonation of the forests. It is sensible to direct high-impact activities to more robust areas, and we expect that quiet informal access on foot will be maintained throughout the forest estate.

**Landscape:** a diversity of colour and texture in the forests will be a benefit to recreational users, giving the feel of a less managed landscape than in other parts of Scotland, as befits a National Park. Visibility is an important topic as although many of our members want to see more natural woodland on the mountain slopes, there are members who are concerned that more woodland will reduce the pleasure of the long views from hillsides. The key points here may be stem density and stand diversity, and natural regeneration is likely to result in a more open and varied structure than planting schemes. We would support this.

**Timber production:** Large felling coupes really have no place in a National Park as they have a very obvious adverse physical impact. We understand the economies of scale of large softwood felling coupes, but the opportunity that a National Park gives to demonstrating alternative harvesting and restocking techniques and developing local markets for products is a direction of management that we support for landscape reasons and also for social and community reasons.

**Biodiversity:** The wildlife of the Cairngorm forests is well known and enjoyed by many engaged in informal recreation. We support the intentions to manage the habitats to allow conditions for biodiversity to develop in as natural a way as possible. The Plan states that habitat protection is considered mainly for Designated Sites but we think that there is a further dimension that needs to be taken into account – climate change. The unpredictability of weather patterns and temperature will create uncertainties on how plants and animals and fungi will develop together. A focus on currently designated sites is a risky policy as there is no guarantee that the designated features will be able to survive in an unpredictable climate. An emphasis on habitat connectivity, and reduction in fragmentation and isolation of habitats, along with a lighter touch in land management techniques is climate-proofing, or rewilding if you like. We think that the Plan would be more attuned to a 200-year vision if the climate unpredictability and management response was more explicitly explained in the document.

**Water:** water is an essential component of the landscape. Water quality and planting regimes adjacent to watercourses is well covered in the Plan and we support the aims.

Yours sincerely

*D. Black*

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