

Eisg Brachaidh – Scoping Report

Introduction

Woodland Trust Scotland (WTS) submitted an application for an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) screening opinion for 250ha of afforestation on 30th August 2020. A letter for more information from Scottish Forestry (SF) was received on 17th September, 2020. This information was submitted on 19th March 2021 and SF issued an EIA determination on 26 April 2021 which stated that the project would require an EIA.

SF supplied a statement of reasons, included as appendix 1 to this report. A scoping meeting was held on 24 June 2021. The report that follows is the summary of that meeting, the issues raised, and ultimately WTS recommendations for the focus of the EIA.

Scoping Meeting

The scoping meeting took place online, via Zoom on 24 June 2021. A list of attendees and apologies is shown in table 1 below.

| Scopee | Organisation |
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| Attended | |
| [REDACTED] | Assynt Community Council |
| [REDACTED] | Assynt Foundation |
| [REDACTED] | Coigach Community Council |
| [REDACTED] | Eisg Brachaidh Estate |
| [REDACTED] | Inver & Kirkaig Fishings Estate |
| [REDACTED] | Inverpolly Estate & agricultural tenant for Eisg Brachaidh |
| [REDACTED] | Inverpolly Estate Woodland Advisor |
| [REDACTED] | NatureScot |
| [REDACTED] | NatureScot |
| [REDACTED] | NatureScot |
| [REDACTED] | RSPB Scotland |
| [REDACTED] | Scottish Environment Protection Agency |
| [REDACTED] | Scottish Forestry - Chair of EIA Scoping Meeting |
| [REDACTED] | Scottish Forestry |
| [REDACTED] | Scottish Forestry |
| [REDACTED] | Scottish Forestry |
| [REDACTED] | Scottish Wildlife Trust |
| [REDACTED] | Woodland Trust Scotland / CALLP |
| [REDACTED] | Woodland Trust Scotland |
| [REDACTED] | Woodland Trust Scotland |
| [REDACTED] | Woodland Trust Scotland |
| [REDACTED] | Woodland Trust Scotland |
| | |
| Apologies | |
| [REDACTED] | Scottish Wildlife Trust |
| [REDACTED] | Woodland Trust Scotland |

Table 1. List of attendees and apologies

Correspondence in absentia

The following scopees submitted correspondence in lieu of attending the meeting. See Appendices 2- 6 for copies of correspondence submitted.

| Scopee | Organisation | Issue | Appendix ref |
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| ██████ | Historic Environment Scotland | None | Appendix 2 |
| ██████ | Highland Council | Visual impact Deer vehicle collisions | Appendix 3 |
| ██████ | Mountaineering Scotland | Access and visual impact | Appendix 4 |
| ██████ | Canoe Scotland | Access | Appendix 5 |
| | | | |

Table 2: List of correspondence in absentia

Minutes

Table 3. below contains the minutes from the scoping meeting.

The final column shows a reference to the issues log (Appendix 8). There is a reference in this column if an issue is raised or if the information in the minute is relevant to the issue. As appropriate, multiple minutes covering the same points have been assigned to single issues.

Some of the issues arising from the scoping meeting were brought up in the EIA determination issued by SF on 26 April 2021. Some duplication occurs in the issues log, this is to ensure the concerns of all scopees can be captured as clearly as possible.

Issues are coded by topic as follows:

EIA – Arising from the EIA Screening Opinion letter (Appendix 1)

Arc – Issues concerning archaeology

Ac – Issues concerning access

Ag – issues around agricultural impacts

Bi – Issues concerning birds

Dm – Issues concerning deer management

FWPM – Issues concerning freshwater pearl mussel

Hi – Issues concerning habitat impact (from deer, of fencing works)

Ma – Issues concerning mammals (otter, badger & water vole)

Ps – Issues concerned with public safety

Vi – Issues concerning visual impact on landscape

Wa – Issues concerning water

Wc – Issues concerning woodland creation / natural regeneration

| Scopee / Heading | Minute | Issues Log ref (if added) |
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| Introduction | | |
| ██████ - SF | Welcome and introductions. Explanation of EIA and scoping process. WTS to write scoping report detailing issues raised including by those not attending today. | n/a |
| ██████ - EB | AW presented the reasons why this proposal is needed. ██████ has multi-generational commitment to conservation. Range of site designations (some in unfavourable decline); loss of wildlife; EB is important to Scotland's biodiversity. Deer browsing and trampling are primary causes of decline of woodland and more will be lost without effective protection. For decades we have tried a workable way to restore woodland. Fence is only viable option to uphold tenant grazing rights and access payment schemes, enable sustainable deer densities and habitat recovery. | n/a |
| ██████ - WTS | PL presented slides with more detail on what the proposal is and how the WTS intends to deliver it. | n/a |
| Points of Clarification | | |
| ██████ - SEPA | No significant issues but because it's a designated site we need to make sure NatureScot are happy with proposals. Will follow up on minor comments by email to Keir and WTS – see Appendix 6. | none |
| ██████ | Increased tracking along northern boundary fence will result in more excreta entering the River Kirkaig, not less – so there will not be nitrogen pollution benefits as suggested by PL; river water quality will not improve. Enquired on SEPA's perspective of this. █████ noted it and to get back to █████. | Wa1 |
| Correspondence in absentia | | |
| ██████ | See appendices for copies of the correspondence. | none |

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| | <p>Historic Environment Scotland – no heritage assets within their remit included in proposal.</p> <p>Highland Council – recognises woodland restoration benefit to the designated woodland; Highland Council’s Forestry and Woodland Strategy classifies the area having ‘potential with sensitivities’; Landscape lies entirely within NSA with prominent viewpoints from falls of Kirkaig and the top of Suilven. Advises to be aware of fencing at prominent view-points; Alignment of fence will need to minimise risk of deer vehicle collisions. Recognises Public access has been discussed with the local area access officer.</p> <p>Mountaineering Scotland – response submitted last Sept. Ensure sufficient access points along route of fence-line; could add signs to fence-line to let users know where nearest gates are; would like to see LVIA - keen to see what analysis of potential impact and special qualities of the NSA. He expressed the opinion that culling over deer range would have more cohesive impact than segregation of extensive sections of land by fences which illustrate a failure of management to control impacts of deer on vegetation. A Strava link was shared which showed that there was a concentration of activity on the road for cycling and routes through lochs Sionascaig and Veyatie for kayaking.</p> <p>West Sutherland DMG (late submission in writing 28/06) – There needs to be more info on deer movement and how it will be impacted by the fence. Particularly evaluation is needed of potential for deer to be pushed into bottlenecks, and deer welfare. The proposal aims to reduce deer numbers to 1/100ha over two years but there is not enough information to show how many deer will need to be culled to achieve this.</p> | <p>Vi1</p> <p>Ps1</p> <p>Vi2</p> <p>Ac1</p> <p>Dm1</p> <p>AC1</p> <p>Dm15</p> <p>Dm16</p> <p>Dm17</p> |
| Issues | | |
| <p>██████ - AF</p> | <p>AF fully supports whole project; bigger fence better than lots of little fences to recover biodiversity losses; restoration of woodland is paramount as 95% of the woods are gone and we’re already missing important species (red squirrel, blackcock, etc.); happy to have open dialogue with any landowners to make it a success.</p> | <p>none</p> |

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| <p>██████████ – Jones - ACC</p> | <p>No-one can speak out against natural regeneration of woodland, but question is how, what public funds would be used, is a fence of this nature really necessary? Some might suggest it's an obscene amount of public money.</p> <p>Had detailed concerns, some no longer relevant particularly about deer movement, although yet to bottom that out.</p> <p>Landscape assessment was flawed.</p> <p>Does not approve of enrichment planting.</p> <p>What is the 'original state' that the project is trying to restore the woodland to e.g. the 1900s, 5000 years ago? He added that in 1750, the area was populous, settled and under cultivation. He urged the need for clarity on history, what it means to restore or bring back to an 'original state', which is not defined in the proposal, and the fact that the area has changed over time where in the past it has been under agriculture, settlements and woodland, so what should it be now? Not saying it couldn't or shouldn't be woodland.</p> <p>Birchwoods die, they are dynamic – why are we trying to intervene in this natural process?</p> <p>At Leorchirkaig birch have died, revealing lazy beds indicating arable land some 200 years ago. Should they be restored?</p> <p>Need to better understand the cost / benefit.</p> <p>Will consider documents and respond fully in due course.</p> | <p>Dm2</p> <p>Wc1</p> <p>Arc1</p> <p>Wc2</p> |
| <p>██████████ - SWT</p> | <p>SWT supports the proposal and would like to see habitats move out of unfavourable condition. Would prefer if this could be achieved with no fencing but it would appear that a fence is necessary in this case.</p> <p>Would like to see a maintenance commitment beyond 20 years so that old fencing can be removed. Hard to plan long term, but Scottish countryside littered with dilapidated fences, a hazard to people and wildlife.</p> | <p>none</p> |

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| | Welcomed the point about what period to restore to but added we need to accept there is uncertainty when restoring habitats. | |
| | <p>Four points, all referenced in EIA determination letter.</p> <p>1. Deer management in this area is characterised by movement; this is a significant project; it needs a Deer Management Plan at the Coigach and South Assynt level (not at single estate level) to establish the impact of the fence on neighbours and this hasn't been done; need to include deer numbers in a plan, and neighbour obligations; if we get it wrong we will have deer welfare issues. A deer plan covering one property won't make much impact.</p> <p>2. Question whether a fence is needed at all. Majority of habitats are in recovering or favourable condition, except woodland. There are pockets of regeneration throughout Inverpolly and around Lochinver so focussed deer control could work. The 2011 EB fire was devastating for regeneration. But for that fire, woodland regeneration in the area would be better.</p> <p>To manage deer effectively with no fence...this is possible and preferable. There are some examples of how to do this [get birch regeneration] in the deer group to the North, along the coast.</p> <p>If there had been stronger representation on this in 2018, we would have tried to incorporate this in the 2018 deer plan. There was no strong focus on the woodlands at that time.</p> <p>Section 7 in place on Inverpolly for last 10 years generally held to be a success with the majority of habitats in unfavourable recovering or favourable condition, except for the woodlands and dry heath. Woodland hard to evaluate. Lots of fragments over large area. Some enclosed, some naturally regenerating now, some moribund, no question about that. If not for the 2011 fire, we'd be more optimistic about the woodlands than not.</p> <p>A lot of the Inverpolly woodland regen is linked to cattle grazing/trampling. Can't get away from the fact that deer are a problem. Secret will be to get more cattle trampling to encourage birch, especially on EB. We do need to focus on this area. Conservation history is good on Inverpolly Estate. Cattle grazing/trampling has encouraged birch</p> | <p>Dm3</p> <p>Dm4</p> <p>Wc3</p> <p>Dm5</p> <p>Hi1</p> <p>Wc3</p> |

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| | <p>seedling establishment in places. How will the young trees on more fertile areas marked for enrichment planting be protected from cattle? Conclusion on deer is a larger area deer plan is needed and is preferable. He had submitted alternative ideas in Nov 2020 but he believes there had been no real consideration of that. SF's letter confirms alternatives need to be looked at.</p> <p>3. There is a high % of fences close to lochs in Assynt. This is a threat to birds and the riparian environment. Deer will trample up against fence-lines impacting the riparian environment. Is bird strike an issue? We need to know what birds are there and the importance of riparian zones for them. I don't think it's possible to mitigate, but it needs a breeding bird survey first.</p> <p>Do fences have to be marked, in which case they become more visible and impact landscape?</p> <p>4. It's not a designation but it is part of Wild Land area #32 – Inverpolly and Glencanisp, which refers to the existing deer fences as diminishing the perceived naturalness of the area. More fences will be a greater threat. Can Scottish Forestry look at this? The beauty of the landscape is that you can walk through it unencumbered and unaware of manmade objects of any sort; a fence would destroy that and people wouldn't want to walk there.</p> | <p>Bi1</p> <p>Vi3</p> <p>Vi4</p> |
| <p>██████ - NS</p> | <p>There is a role for NS to assess any proposal that may affect a protected area; we know WTS and the Wayne family have done a lot of work to try and address protected areas and features; we'd like to see that all of that work feature in the EIA report; including impacts and benefits on the designated features and more commentary on monitoring and how it will be managed long term.</p> <p>The Visual Assessment goes a long way to suggest mitigations; NS has guidance for how applicants can assess proposals in Wild Land Areas published in 2020.</p> | <p>Hi2</p> <p>Vi5</p> |
| <p>██████ - IKF</p> | <p>Concerned that the fence-line will cause trampling close to the Kirkaig river and therefore erosion, silting and a high level of nitrites.</p> <p>There is already a high density of trees on either side of the river Kirkaig providing shade for Atlantic salmon which spawn on gravel beds that could be silted up if there was increased trampling and erosion.</p> | <p>Wa2</p> <p>Wa3</p> |

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| | <p>Indicated that more trees would not benefit Fresh Water Pearl Mussels or salmon.</p> <p>As Wild Land, we sell it as an unspoilt wilderness and an adventurous fishing experience. Having a fence-line running down it will detract from its appeal for our clients.</p> <p>This fence will put additional deer grazing pressure on the Kirkaig grazings and potentially more pressure on deer ingress into Lochinver, already a locally contentious issue.</p> | <p>FWPM1</p> <p>Vi6</p> <p>Dm6</p> |
| <p>██████████ - NS</p> | <p>NS interested in a nature-rich future. Acknowledges significant contribution of Wayne family to deal with designated site features and the significant potential positive impact on local biodiversity. NS is responding on natural habitat role but also taking account of deer legislation and balancing duties. Significant potential biodiversity gain needs to be balanced and the deer legislation is meant to be flexible.</p> <p>NS recognise there are potential significant habitat impacts within and out-with the fenced area which need to be evaluated; NS looking for a more accurate breakdown of deer control actions likely to be taken pre-, during and post-fencing, recognising potential significant habitat impacts within the fenced area and other distribution of habitats impacts outside the fenced area after fencing.</p> <p>Evaluate/consider deer vehicle collisions risk;</p> <p>Consider any agricultural damage;</p> <p>Consider potential changes to deer movement in and around residential areas and the deer management strategy needs to take this into account. The proposal needs flexibility and mitigations before, during and after fencing; if the DMG was willing to engage in planning that would help; may be that we can involve only those willing to be involved.</p> | <p>Hi3</p> <p>Hi4</p> <p>Ps2</p> <p>Ag1</p> <p>Dm7</p> |
| <p>██████████</p> | <p>Many concerns, all reflected in December email sent to ██████████ of Scottish Forestry</p> <p>1. Agricultural damage – we are tenants on EB and owners of Inverpolly so run the two as one unit. Our cattle are used to running over the hill. They will track the fence and start</p> | <p>Ag2</p> |

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| | to do damage if forced around lochs; risky for calves swimming with adults. We will need to spend time and money on rescuing cattle. | |
| | 2. Potential economic damage – stalking parties stay in the lodge and bring in £5,100 per week for 3 weeks of the year; our deer model (produced by VC) indicates we will lose 2 weeks letting with a fence, resulting in financial hardship; plus there's the knock-on impact of fewer guests spending money in the community. | Dm8 |
| | NS haven't told us we can't graze more sheep or cattle on EB; fearful that NS money for this project might mean limited grazing for us in future. Concern over the levels of post Brexit agri subsidies. | Ag3 |
| | 3. Visual damage – EB is heavily designated and unspoilt by human intervention – a fence will be a gross intrusion for walkers, fishermen and kayakers. It will no longer be a wild experience. The fence to Poll Loisan seems to have been forgotten, there's been no attempt to hide the line or take into account vehicle access routes across the landscape needed for fence construction. | Vi7 |
| | 4. Access damage – no paths doesn't mean no walkers. The coastal path is not defined on the ground so people take a variety of routes. How will they find out where gates are? A fence will spoil the adventure - will fisherman be able to walk around the lochs freely? Will the hundreds of walkers and kayakers be able to pass through? | Ac2 |
| | 5. Environmental damage – there will be increased impacts from deer and cattle; mitigation is never 100% effective and the burden will fall to neighbours. The fence will zig zag through existing woods – how much will be cut down for that? Could FWPM be affected by fencing treatments / chemical leaching? The fenceline is on average 15m from the loch – not wide enough to let deer pass around without damaging ground they are walking on. | Hi5 FWPM2 Hi6 |
| | 6. Deer – EB is the only low ground not heavily settled that is available to deer; there's enough conflict in village without pushing them closer; deer welfare will be a problem to the east along Loch Sionascaig where deer will be trapped between the loch and the fence – the gap will need to be wide enough to allow deer to travel through comfortably; seems ridiculous to pay for a fence and leave a giant hole in it [at Loch Buine Moire], it's a deer trap; will | Dm9 Dm10 Dm11 |

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| | <p>the cull be in season only or will you shoot stags out of season? The EB DMP alone is fairly meaningless - a revised DMP is the only way to predict what it means for other estates.</p> <p>7. Fire in 2011 is the reason for lack of regeneration on EB; prior to that EB had great regeneration, it will come again. Fencing will make it worse next time; it is a waste of public money. Various other options could be pursued; we have extensive woodland enclosures at Inverpolly.</p> <p>8. Birds - lack of up to date information from RSPB – need to know where waders nest and feed so fence-line doesn't get in between them; mergansers could be nesting on Loch a Ghillie and may fly low to Fionnloch and Loch Sionascaig causing issues of bird strike; the local golden eagle pair will no longer have gralloch without the deer (provided by the current stalker when doing his culls).</p> | <p>Dm12</p> <p>Dm13</p> <p>Bi2</p> <p>Bi3</p> |
| <p>██████████ - CCC</p> | <p>Concerns on displacement of deer and impact on motorists; loss of wild feeling; access for walkers and canoeists; visual impact. Glad to be part of this EIA discussion.</p> | <p>Dm14</p> <p>Ps3</p> <p>Ac3</p> <p>Vi8</p> |
| <p>██████████ - RSPB</p> | <p>We think the scheme, because of its scale, will have considerable benefits for climate and biodiversity. This includes widespread benefits for ground flora, woodland, invertebrates and a wide range of species. Woodland bird assemblages are smaller than they might be – this proposal will help increase numbers and diversity.</p> <p>Carbon capture will benefit significantly from a reduction in deer grazing; this is hugely welcome and some cattle grazing can have some benefits for the natural regeneration of woodland.</p> <p>Potentially some issues with the fence – but we can look to mitigate fence strike around lochs, on the open hill and through woods using micro-siting to benefit divers, mergansers and waders.</p> <p>There have been very few surveys in this area so don't have lot of data but we know there are mergansers, divers, waders, common sandpipers and green shank present.</p> <p>Suggest a bird survey, using specific vantage points to understand flight lines for divers and where waders are</p> | <p>Bi4</p> <p>Bi5</p> <p>Bi6</p> |

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| | <p>breeding, rather than a broad breeding bird survey across the entire area.</p> <p>Overall the long-term impacts are significantly positive for wildlife and ecosystem services, hydrology, water quality, soils and species.</p> | |
| <p>██████ - SF</p> | <p>Schedule 3 of the EIA Regulations stipulates the information that must be included in an EIA Report; we will provide further detail of this in our Scoping Opinion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Non-technical summary · Site description – relevant aspects of the current state of the environment · Description of the forestry project · Site selection and alternatives · Prediction of impacts – forecasting methods or evidence used to id/assess · Description of likely significant effects associated with the project · Mitigation · References <p>The main reasons for the project requiring consent were identified in our screening opinion of 26 April 2021. We considered the size and design of the project could have complex, long-term, or irreversible impacts on the environmental sensitivity of the area, with particular regard to its biodiversity and landscape.</p> <p>Landscape</p> <p>Although we appreciate the valuable contribution that the visual appraisal makes to our understanding of how the proposed deer fence may be seen in the landscape, we are of the opinion that because of the sensitivities of the Assynt-Coigach landscape, a more in-depth LVIA is required.</p> <p>Considering that Eisg Brachaidh estate is within a National Scenic Area and in part within and adjacent to a Wild Land Area, the potential effects of the deer fence proposals on the landscape should also be assessed. Specifically, such a landscape assessment should refer to the Special Qualities of the Assynt – Coigach NSA, the Landscape Character Type 334: Cnocan – Ross & Cromarty Key Characteristics and Description, and the Description of the Inverpolly – Glencanisp Wild Land Area.</p> | <p>EIA1</p> <p>EIA2</p> |

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| | These references would contribute towards the identification and assessment of the potential landscape effects from the deer fence proposals, especially the potential consequences of constructing a physical barrier which is intended over time to promote the recovery and regeneration of the vegetation pattern within the enclosure. In contrast, out with the fence the pressures on the vegetation could be potentially more considerable as a consequence of excluding deer from a considerable area of land. These differences could potentially have effects on the key characteristics of the wider landscape so should be considered. | EIA3 |
| | | EIA4 |
| | The LVIA should include an assessment of any infrastructure that may be required to both construct, maintain and – in future – dismantle and remove the enclosure, and any short-, medium- and long-term visual effects of those stages of construction and dismantling. | EIA5 |
| | Considering the potential landscape and visual effects on the Wild Land Area from the proposals, we would also request that the applicant carry out an assessment of the proposals to the NatureScot Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas – Technical Guidance September 2020 . | EIA6 |
| | Biodiversity | |
| | The EIA should quantify and evaluate the potential significant effects of the proposals on the SSSI and SAC features, both within and out with the proposed enclosure. Proposal maps provide a broad indication of where the anticipated 250ha of woodland regeneration is expected to occur, but it should be clear how each area has been assessed as being suitable for woodland creation and consider what impact the anticipated regeneration may have on non-woodland habitats. Consideration should also be given to areas of deep peat in relation to project design. | EIA7 |
| | | EIA8 |
| | Bird and Mammal surveys should be completed and any likely significant effects on the current environmental baseline discussed. | EIA9 |
| | Under the Habitats Regulations , before undertaking or giving any form of permission, consent or other authorisation to a plan or project, we must check whether the plan or project would be likely to have a significant effect on a European site. The EIA Report must provide such information as we may reasonably require for the purposes of the appraisal as our conclusions must be made on the basis of there being no reasonable scientific doubt as to the absence of adverse | |

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| | effects. There is a need to ascertain the proposal will not adversely affect site integrity of the SAC. | EIA10 |
| | <p>Deer</p> <p>There remains uncertainty over the likely impacts on deer welfare and behaviour over time and therefore the efficacy of the mitigation strategy in minimising impacts to an acceptable level, both within the enclosure and over the whole range.</p> <p>The capacity to disperse is an essential part of the lifecycle of wild deer, identifying the likely significant effects and subsequent mitigation on deer is reliant on a predictive approach that requires detailed knowledge of likely deer movement patterns.</p> | EIA11 |
| | <p>The scoping documents provide a desired density, however the EIA Report should be clear on how the number of deer to be culled can be achieved both safely and humanely. The EIA Report should also consider and discuss how deer within the proposed enclosure may react to captivity, or what if any welfare implications may arise on becoming a captive herd e.g. stress, wildfire or inbreeding depression. There can be no uncertainty around any likely effect on deer welfare.</p> | EIA12 |
| | <p>Appendix 9 of the scoping documents suggests “We can’t be certain how the deer will react to the fence, but with local knowledge we have tried to mitigate this to reduce any potential impact as much as possible.” The EIA Report should clearly describe the adverse impact each measure is intended to avoid, mitigate or compensate when implemented. It should also describe the effectiveness of such measures, their reliability and certainty, as well as the commitment to ensuring the practical implementation and monitoring of the results.</p> | |
| | <p>It may not be possible to mitigate all significant effects but the EIA Report must ensure that it identifies any residual impacts (those remaining after mitigation) and their significance.</p> | EIA13 |
| | <p>EIA Report should also discuss</p> <p>Public Access</p> <p>The EIA should fully understand the nature and extent of the current use of the site and assess the potential impacts that the proposals may have on this use.</p> | EIA14 |
| | The effectiveness of the proposal. | |

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| | <p>There remains uncertainty as to whether the project can successfully achieve its objective of woodland regeneration in the presence of livestock and wild deer. This should include clarification of current grazing cattle and sheep and how this will be impacted.</p> <p>Cumulative impacts Potential cumulative impacts with other existing, consented or planned (known) deer fencing that may be relevant to this proposal.</p> <p>Alternatives A description of the reasonable alternatives studied by the applicant, which are relevant to the proposed forestry project and its specific characteristics; and an indication of the main reasons for selecting the chosen option, including a comparison of the environmental effects.</p> <p>Other issues Maps should accurately reflect what is in the application for EIA consent and be at an appropriate scale to show a reasonable level of detail.</p> | <p>EIA15</p> <p>EIA16</p> <p>EIA17</p> |
| ██████████ | Assynt Foundation doesn't recognise the term 'Wild land', it is subjective as the land is not wild, it has been managed for hundreds of years. 'Restore' terminology not appropriate either, we are trying to 'expand' the woodland. | n/a |
| ██████ ██████████ | Regardless of terminology there needs to be an assessment of the impacts on wild land. | n/a |
| ██████████ | <p>Summary of meeting Main issues are impact of fence on designated features / on deer (need DMP to look at that and impact on Lochinver village); recreation access for walkers / fishing / canoeists; enrichment planting and economic impact. Benefits – carbon capture, woodland expansion and biodiversity.</p> <p>Next steps: Scoping report drawn up by applicant and circulated around everyone to ensure it is accurate; SF then has 35 days to assess and give its scoping opinion detailing what significant effects should be addressed in the EIA report.</p> <p>Applicant then writes and consults on the EIA report. Then the public will have an opportunity to comment.</p> | n/a |

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| ██████████ | Checks that it is ok for scopees to submit a 1-page report to SF (given wifi issues at today's meeting). Chair says yes | n/a |
| ██████████ | Asks if the general public will get a chance to respond to the proposal – ██████████ confirms the public will get a 30-day period to respond to the EIA report. Will previous public letters of response be included in the report? Chair advises yes. | |
| ██████████ | Thanks everyone for attending and presenting | |

Due to the problems with some of the internet connections we accepted a further written response from anybody who was affected. WTS received further clarification letters from ██████████, RSPB and SEPA. These were checked over and the only fresh issue that didn't appear in the meeting recording was a point from ██████████ which has been recorded as point Ac4 and added into the issues log table. WSDMG also submitted a written response as they couldn't attend the meeting – the issues raised have been added to the Issues Log.

Issues Log

Each point from the EIA determination letter has been included in the issues log. Issues raised in the minutes have been grouped, where appropriate, and added to the issues log which has been broken down into more detail.

WTS has proposed mitigation measures next to each issue and given an indication of significance following mitigation in the next column. Some issues are simply relevant information, requests for clarification, inclusion from the SF scoping letter or relevant to matters outside the scope of an EIA and so have not been given a rating.

Recommendations for the EIA Report

WTS' assessment of significance in the issues log show that deer management issues predominate as the most significant in terms of potential impact following mitigation measures. The remainder of the issues can be minimised through implementation of the planned mitigations or balanced against the many significant positive impacts acknowledged by attendees as noted in the minutes above, including AF, CALL, NS, RSPB, SWT and SF too.

The proposed project area is designated SSSI/SAC, within a national scenic area and forms part of wildland area number 32. It is important therefore that the positive and negative effects on designated habitats and species need to be considered. Further visual impact assessment has also been requested in addition to the studies which have already taken place.

We therefore recommend that the EIA should focus on deer management issues, the impact on designated habitats and species, and landscape. It should identify and develop further mitigation to reduce the significance of the likely impacts raised.

The EIA should describe and discuss the alternatives to fencing the entire estate and include a non-technical summary of why this is the preferred option.

It should clearly outline how deer monitoring in conjunction with deer management will safeguard the designated site woodland features and the sustainable management of wild deer together with associated welfare concerns.

It should outline the significant positive effects of the proposals on designated habitats and species and how mitigation can minimise any potential short term negative effects.

The Bird Survey will be focused and agreed with RSPB as the recognised expert body for this issue and an ongoing dialogue with RSPB will be maintained.

A full LVIA of the potential effects on the landscape will be included.

The EIA will include an updated issues log showing how each issue has been mitigated and where possible reduced to acceptable levels.

Appendices

Appendix 1. SF issued EIA determination letter

Appendix 2. HES letter confirming 'no records of interest in project area'

Appendix 3. Highland Council [REDACTED] response

Appendix 4. Mountaineering Scotland [REDACTED] response

Appendix 5. Canoe Scotland [REDACTED] response

Appendix 6. SEPA [REDACTED] response

Appendix 7. WSDMG [REDACTED] response 28/06/21

Appendix 8. Issues Log - separate document

Eisg Brachaidh Project Team

Woodland Trust Scotland

9th July, 2021

Appendix 1. FCS EIA determination and statement of reasons.



Scottish
Forestry
Coilltearachd
na h-Alba

Highland & Islands Conservancy
'Woodlands', Fodderty Way
Dingwall, Ross-Shire, IV15 9XB
Tel: 0300 067 6950
highland.cons@forestry.gov.scot
Conservator: John Risby

Woodland Manager
Coigach-Assynt Living Landscape Project

By email woodlandtrust.org.uk

Our Reference – 030902379

26 April 2021

Dear

The Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017

I refer to your application at Eisd Brachaidh Estate, by Ullapool for, 250 hectares of afforestation.

We are required to provide a Screening Opinion under the above Regulations as to whether the work you are proposing is an EIA project and will require EIA consent.

I can confirm that the work you propose **will** require EIA consent.

Description of Forestry Project and Location

Although the maps provide a broad indication of where natural-regeneration is anticipated, it is not clear from these or from the supporting information how each area relates to non-woodland protected habitats and how they have been assessed as being suitable for woodland creation.

The supporting information does not clearly demonstrate the requirement to enclose the entire Eisd Brachaidh Estate, non-woodland habitats have been assessed as being in favourable maintained or unfavourable recovering condition.

The role of the Section 7 agreement and Coigach – South Assynt sub area Deer Management Plan in delivering designated features into favourable condition is not discussed. Consequently it is not clear the extent to which these management agreements are being successful or failing to meet their objectives.

The description of relevant aspects of the current state of the environment are incomplete. The mammal survey is an 'interim report' largely based on earlier surveys and by its own declaration fieldwork is "by no means complete". A recent bird survey has not been undertaken, instead the supporting information includes a summary based on personal accounts that are not supported by data.

The screening request concludes "Fencing the estate will avoid any negative impact on surrounding owner's deer stalking activity", though the evidence to support this statement has not been provided. To set this proposal in context we would expect an assessment of how the proposal relates to the management objectives of all neighbouring landholdings.

Scottish Forestry is the Scottish Government agency responsible for forestry policy, support and regulation

S e Coilltearachd na h-Alba a' bhuidheann-ghnìomha aig Riaghaltas na h-Alba a tha an urra ri poileasaidh, taic agus riaghladh do choilltearachd



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

There remains uncertainty as to whether the project can successfully achieve its objective of woodland regeneration in the presence of livestock and wild deer, as no method to control their abundance or distribution in areas identified for natural regeneration is proposed.

The screening request does not consider the potential cumulative impacts with other existing, consented or planned deer fencing that may be relevant to this proposal.

Description and Mitigation of Likely Significant Effects

The supporting information does not provide the level of detail required to determine the significance of impacts on SSSI and SAC features, both within and out with the proposed enclosure. Appendix 2 provides brief notes of an expected outcome within the enclosure, though it is unclear what methodology was used to arrive at these conclusions.

There remains uncertainty over the likely impacts on deer welfare and behaviour over time and therefore the efficacy of the mitigation strategy in minimising impacts to an acceptable level, both within the enclosure and over the whole range. Appendix 3 confirms "Deer movements in the area are difficult to predict with any certainty. The area may be one of the through routes for deer into and through Inverpoll Estate." The capacity to disperse is an essential part of the lifecycle of wild deer, identifying the likely significant effects and subsequent mitigation on deer is reliant on a predictive approach that requires detailed knowledge of likely deer movement patterns.

The screening request concludes the proposal will not inhibit public access, but does not provide the rationale for this assumption. Favoured routes have not been identified on the access map and local and other relevant stakeholders views have yet to be invited on the location of access gates.

Although a competent piece of work, the visual appraisal does not include mention or assessment of any infrastructure that may be required to both construct, maintain and in future dismantle and remove the enclosure, and any short, medium and long term visual effects of those stages of construction and dismantling. Additionally, the potential visual effects created as a consequence of the vegetation within the enclosure having the grazing pressures removed has not been considered. From the more elevated and distant viewpoints, this differential vegetation pattern may become visible in the wider landscape, despite the actual enclosure being too far distant or screened from view.

Consultation

The outcome of discussions held with NatureScot, including comments and advice with regards to deer and protected sites are not captured within the screening request. Neither are the opinions and issues raised by those who do not support the proposal.

Changes to deer management on one landholding can have significant effects on others. The extent of these effects are unclear, as the views of the tenant farmer, Deer Management Group, all neighbouring properties and local community regarding this project are not fully captured within the screening request and supporting information.

Conclusion

In reaching our decision we have taken into account the information you have provided with the request for a screening opinion and other existing environmental information for the area.

We considered the size and design of the forestry project could have complex, long-term, or irreversible impacts on the environmental sensitivity of the area, with particular regard to its biodiversity and landscape. We have therefore concluded that expert and detailed analysis of those impacts would be relevant to whether or not the proposal should be allowed.

Although the visual appraisal makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of how the proposed deer fence may be seen in the landscape, as Eisd Brachaidh estate is within a National Scenic Area and in part within and adjacent to a Wild Land Area, we are of the opinion the potential effects of the deer fence proposals on the landscape should also be assessed and a more in-depth [Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment](#) is required.

Although a useful tool in managing wild deer, fencing is rarely appropriate as a long-term fix particularly on a landscape scale. We need to be certain that this project is an effective means of deer management that both safeguards the designated site woodland features and the sustainable management of wild deer. The screening request and supporting information does not clearly demonstrate this.

The screening request considered alternative solutions were shown to be unviable, but did not provide detail on alternate designs or explain why they were shown to be unworkable. The EIA process will provide further opportunity for an analysis of all reasonable alternatives taking into account the environmental effects.

Next Steps

It is recommended that you now contact us to request a Scoping Opinion, which will provide the information that is to be included in your EIA Report.

We must consult statutory consultees during the scoping process, so we recommend you arrange an online Scoping Meeting and invite Scottish Forestry and all of the necessary organisations and individuals that can contribute information or that may be affected by your EIA forestry project.

We advise this includes:

- NatureScot
- Highland Council
- Scottish Environment Protection Agency
- Historic Environment Scotland
- West Sutherland Deer Management Group
- Assynt Foundation
- Inver and Kirkaig Fishings estate
- Inverpolly estate
- Scottish Wildlife Trust
- Assynt Community Council
- Coigach Community Council
- Ramblers Scotland
- Mountaineering Scotland
- Scottish Canoe Association
- RSPB Scotland


If you do not hold a Scoping Meeting we will still require the following information to consult independently:

- A description of the location of your forestry project
- A map identifying the land
- A description of the nature and purpose of your forestry project and its likely effects on the environment
- Any other information that you wish to provide, e.g. any avoidance, off-setting or mitigation measures.

Guidance on EIA for forestry projects can be found at:

<https://forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/environmental-impact-assessment>

Yours sincerely


For Conservator

Appendix 2 - HES letter confirming 'no records of interest in project area'



HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND

ÀRAINNEACHD
EACHDRAIDHEIL
ALBA

By email to:

[\[REDACTED\]@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:[REDACTED]@woodlandtrust.org.uk)

Woodland Manager - Coigach & Assynt Living
Landscapes Partnership (CALLP)
Woodland Trust Scotland

Longmore House
Salisbury Place
Edinburgh
EH9 1SH

[\[REDACTED\]@hes.scot](mailto:[REDACTED]@hes.scot)

T: 0131 668 8575

Our case ID: 300051733

04 June 2021

Dear [REDACTED]

Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017
Eisg Brachaidh Estate - Woodland Restoration
EIA Scoping Meeting

Thank you for contacting us regarding the scope of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) to be undertaken for the proposed woodland restoration scheme on the Eisg Brachaidh Estate in the Scottish Highlands. We have reviewed the details in terms of our historic environment interests. This covers world heritage sites, scheduled monuments and their settings, category A-listed buildings and their settings, inventory gardens and designed landscapes, inventory battlefields and historic marine protected areas (HMPAs).

The Highland Council's archaeological and cultural heritage advisors will also be able to offer advice on the scope of the cultural heritage assessment. This may include heritage assets not covered by our interests, such as unscheduled archaeology, and category B- and C-listed buildings.

Proposed Development

We understand that it is proposed to fence the 2000 ha Eisg Brachaidh estate to enable the effective control of deer numbers within and to allow habitat restoration at a landscape scale including woodlands, heath and bog.

Scope of Assessment

We can confirm that there are no heritage assets within our remit located within the proposed woodland restoration scheme area or its vicinity. We are therefore content for heritage assets within our remit to be scoped-out of any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) undertaken for the scheme. Consequently, we confirm that we will not require to attend the proposed scoping meeting to be undertaken for the scheme.

Further information

A new Historic Environment Policy for Scotland (HEPS, 2019) was adopted on the 1st May 2019, which replaces the Historic Environment Scotland Policy Statement (HESPS,

Historic Environment Scotland – Longmore House, Salisbury Place, Edinburgh, EH9 1SH

Scottish Charity No. SC045925

VAT No. GB 221 8680 15

2016). The new Historic Environment Policy for Scotland is a strategic policy document for the whole of the historic environment and is underpinned by detailed policy and guidance. This includes our Managing Change in the Historic Environment Guidance Notes. All of these documents are available online at www.historicenvironment.scot/heps.

Practical guidance and information about the EIA process can also be found in the EIA Handbook (2018). This is available online at <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/archives-and-research/publications/publication/?publicationId=6ed33b65-9df1-4a2f-acbb-a8e800a592c0>

We hope this is helpful. Please contact us if you have any questions about this response. The officer managing this case is [REDACTED] and they can be contacted by phone on 0131 668 8575 or by email on [\[REDACTED\]@hes.scot](mailto:[REDACTED]@hes.scot).

Yours sincerely

Historic Environment Scotland

Appendix 3 – Highland Council [REDACTED] response

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@highland.gov.uk>
Sent on: [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@polandtrust.org.uk>
Subject: RE: Eisd Brachaidh Scoping Meeting Documents link

Dear [REDACTED]

Good to catch up earlier and thanks for explaining your proposals at Eisd Brachaidh in more detail.

I will not be able to attend the meeting next week and so briefly outline some of the key points that we discussed:

Highland Forest & Woodland Strategy

This area is classified as 'Potential with Sensitivities' which recognises that sensitive woodland creation or restoration may benefit many of the designated features found within the site (SPA, SAC & SSSI). NatureScot will be best placed to comment on this aspect, but there would appear to be core areas of ancient woodland remnants (AWI 1a & 2a) which would benefit from a reduction in deer pressure, along with other non-woodland habitats.

Landscape

The entire site lies within the wider Assynt-Coigach NSA. There are prominent viewpoints, particularly along the Core Path route to the Falls of Kirkaig and from the top of Suilven. I appreciate that you have certain constraints which dictate how far the perimeter fence can stray from the ownership boundary. I mentioned a couple of areas where I thought this may cause issues, such as along the shore of Fionn Loch, but I understand that the local topography provides the opportunity to minimise this visual impact.

Public Access

I understand that you have been in discussion with the Council's Access Officer about any requirements.

Roads

The alignment of new deer fences will need to minimise any risk of deer vehicle collisions. I understand that Galbraiths will be submitting a planning application for a deer grid to the south (in addition to the existing grid to the north).

I hope you have a productive meeting next week. I would be grateful if you could forward a copy of the scoping report, when available.

Regards

[REDACTED]
Forestry Officer (North Highland) | Infrastructure & Environment | Highland Council

All Highland Council planning staff are currently working from home and have limited access to non-digital / paper records. Please note that I do not work on Fridays.

Appendix 4 – Mountaineering Scotland [REDACTED] response

From [REDACTED]@mountaineering.scot>

Sent: 24 September 2020 11:08

[REDACTED]<[REDACTED]@coigach-assynti.org>

[REDACTED]<[REDACTED]@landtrust.org.uk>; donald.macleod@forestry.gov.scot

Hello [REDACTED]

Thank you for getting in touch about the deer fence at Eisd Brachaidh. Our interest in this proposal lies with the recreational access arrangements and the assessment of impact on landscape and visual amenity.

Online searches about the proposal led me to the conclusion that information is rather limited on the landscape and visual impact of this proposed deer fence in the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area and Wild Land Area 32, Inverpolly-Glenantisp. I had got in touch with the Woodland Officer at Scottish Forestry as I was interested in finding out more about this extensive deer fencing scheme, and expected that as regulatory body they would hold more data on this.

It turns out that they don't as it is not funded by a forestry grant and there was not the usual public consultation that goes along with the use of public funds, with the associated environmental documents.

For access I understand the that route to Sùilven from Inverkirkaig lies along the north bank of the river and should not be affected by this proposed fenceline. However it is an extensive barrier to recreational access generally and would like assurance that there will be sufficient crossing points for those wishing to pass through the fence. We would expect to see crossings at regular intervals so that people do not have to make unnecessary detours. This is important in the wet, lochan-speckled landscape here. In addition, the think that crossings should be clearly visible to the public, with arrows indicating the direction to the nearest crossing point to make it easier for people to find them if visibility is restricted.

On landscape and visual impact we would like to see what analysis was done for the potential impact on the special qualities of the NSA and if it would have an effect on the qualities of the Wild Land Area, especially as seen from visual receptors such as Casteal Liath on Sùilven and around the summits of Cul Mor and Stac Polly. This is not just the visibility of the physical fenceline, but the ongoing landscape changes over time through the effect of the fence on vegetation, inside and outside of the fence.

It is our opinion that in a landscape like this that culling over the deer range should have a more cohesive landscape impact than segregation of extensive sections of land by fences, which in many cases can illustrate a failure of management to control Red Deer impacts on vegetation.

I look forward to receiving your analysis.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]
Access & Conservation Officer

Mountaineering Scotland
The Granary, West Mill Street
Perth, PH1 5QP



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www.mountaineering.scot

Appendix 5 – Canoe Scotland [REDACTED] response:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| From: | [REDACTED] [REDACTED]@canoescotland.org> |
| Sent on: | Friday, August 28, 2020 8:08:01 PM |
| To: | [REDACTED] [REDACTED]@woodlandtrust.org.uk> |
| CC: | [REDACTED]@coigach-assynt.org>; Info <info@coigach-assynt.org> |
| Subject: | Re: Canoe Trail |
| Attachments: | Inverpolly Lochs Trail.jpg (2.79 MB) |
| | |

Microsoft Exchange Server;converted from html;

[REDACTED] thank you again for the assistance in forwarding my email.

[REDACTED] many thanks for your initial response and for searching out the trail on the Go Paddle website. There is however another section of trail which is included in the 'Scottish Canoe Classics' guidebook and is a popular loop, or traverse from Elphin to the West Coast. I attach a plan showing the two sections to the north and east of Loch Sionasgaig connecting through to Fionn Loch and Loch Veyatie. Hopefully these routes are also out with the area to be fenced, but if they do conflict, I'd appreciate being able to discuss potential access solutions.

Many thanks, and I hope you both have (had?) a good weekend.

[REDACTED].

[REDACTED] | SCA Access Committee

[REDACTED]
Scottish Canoe Association

Caledonia House, 1 Redheughs Rigg, South Gyle, Edinburgh, EH12 9DQ
t: 0131 317 7314

w: www.canoescotland.org

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Find us on Facebook www.facebook.com/ScottishCanoeAssociation

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On Fri, 28 Aug 2020 at 09:13, [REDACTED] <[HYPERLINK](#)

[REDACTED] [@woodlandtrust.org.uk](#)" [REDACTED] wrote:

Morning [REDACTED] nice to hear from you again, I left a phone message to say I had found the portage route on the GoPaddle website that runs from Loch Buine Mhor (who's boundary isn't to be fenced) across the narrow bit of ground to Boat Bay. This appears to be well outside the fenced enclosure but if you could send me your map that would be useful to just double check.

Regards

[REDACTED]

Access further resolved via phone calls to make two gates at the east end kayak friendly if the short cut to Fionnloch from Gull Bay is chosen. Awaiting spec for the 2 kayak friendly gates. Confirmed other route is outside the fence.

Appendix 6 – SEPA [REDACTED] response

Fw: 1702 – Eisg Brachaidh Scoping - SEPA Response



scotland@woodlandtrust.org.uk

[REDACTED]

If there are problems with how this message is displayed, click here to view it in a web browser.

Reply Reply All Forward

Thu, 24/06/2021 16:55

OFFICIAL – BUSINESS

Dear [REDACTED] Woodland Team

Thank you for your invite to the EIA scoping meeting – it was useful to attend and I apologise I was not able to stay for the whole event due to other commitments.

The information provided within the submission suggests that issues such as avoiding inappropriate planting on deep peat or wetlands are already being considered – and the proposals will improve wet woodland (which is itself a type of wetland habitat) and other peatland habitats will be improved due to other associated actions. We also note the confirmation provided at the meeting that there is no need for new tracks, or other similar infrastructure. As a result of above, and based on the other information currently supplied then SEPA has no specific significant issues to highlight for consideration in the EIA process. However as all of the area is a designated site it is important to ensure that NatureScot is content with the proposals.

Consideration may also need to be given to protecting any local private water supplies and we draw the applicants attention to the relatively new Cultivation of Upland Woodland Creation sites – Applicants Guide (which hopefully you have a link for Keir as I cannot find one). In addition if the trees are to be protected by tree guards then there should be a tree guard removal plan after the trees are established (leaving the plastic-based guards lying on the landscape would constitute improper waste disposal).

Should you wish to discuss any site specific issues further I can be contacted via planning.north@sepa.org.uk.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]
Senior Planning Officer
SEPA Planning Service

Appendix 7 – WSDMG response 28/06/21

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Eisd Brachaidh proposal. Given the time constraints please accept comments from WSDMG in bullet points below.

1. There is not enough information provided about the movement of deer and how this will be impacted by the fence
2. The fence alignment could lead to deer being pushed in to bottlenecks no evaluation of this.
3. The proposal aims to reduce deer numbers to 1/100ha over two years but there is not enough information to show how many deer will need to be culled to achieve this.
4. We are concerned that not enough work has been done to evaluate whether deer welfare is going to be adversely impacted by this proposal.

We look forward to receiving your response to the concerns raised.

[REDACTED]
Chair WSDMG East Sub Group/Vice Chair WSDMG

[REDACTED]
Estate Manager

Sallachy Estate

Lairg

IV27 4EF

/Web. www.sallachyestate.co.uk

Appendix 8 Issues Log – Please see separate attachment