

The destruction of trees at Loch an Eilein, Rothiemurchus

Description



View over An Camus Mor, the site that Rothiemurchus estate wishes to develop into a 1500 place new
Credit Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group

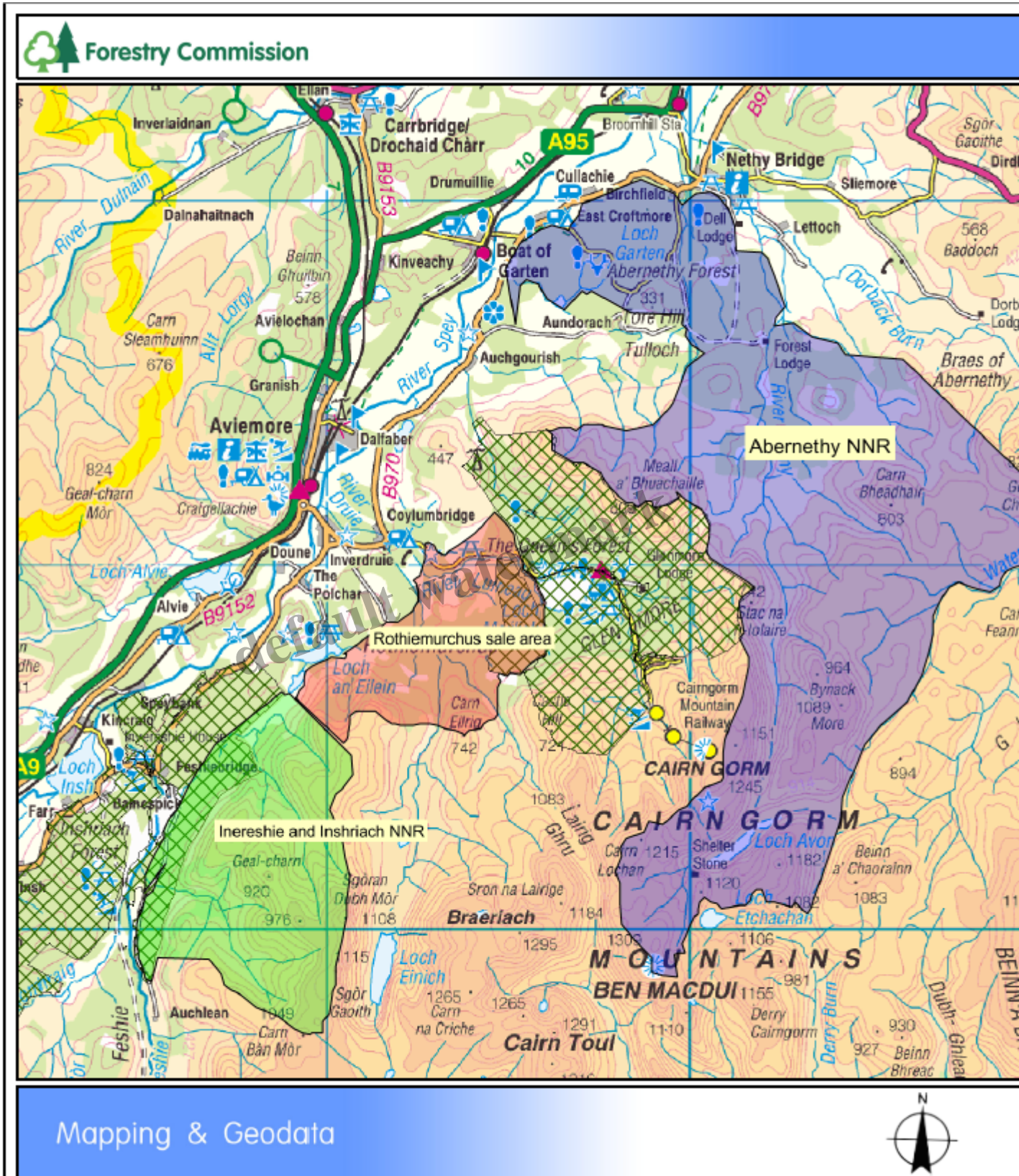
Chris Townsend's post on Friday on the destruction of trees at Loch an Eilein is well worth a read ([see here](#)). Chris highlights the hypocrisy of some of the people responsible for managing our natural environments, who on the one hand lecture visitors about the damage they do (which is tiny in the scheme of things), but then blithely ignore the extensive damage caused by land owners and

managers. The Rothiemurchus estate sign featured in his post is a classic: after the swathe of destruction created by “foresters” chopping down trees, and destroying the ground cover, the visitor is asked to stay on maintained paths to care for the area (contrary to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code) while the sign also claims, *“If this area is not disturbed or trampled, heather and blaeberry will grow back and wildlife will move into this area”*. The clear message is visitors are a problem for wildlife but forest operations aren’t.

Rothiemurchus Estate, whose staff tried to stir up hatred against campers because of a fire which burned one granny pine ([see here](#)), is now lopping down pine trees that have regenerated naturally. One could also add that its the same Rothiemurchus Estate which is behind the An Camus Mor development (photo above) and is trying to circumvent the planning permission which recently lapsed (post coming soon). The same double-think of course pervades the approach of the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park which judges any impact associated with camping as unacceptable (and the reason why it needs to be banned) but ignores the far greater problems that pervade the National Park. The Cairngorms National Park Authority by contrast appears to have had no say in what is happening at Loch an Eilein and indeed the estate refused to participate in the Glenmore Plan, leaving a gaping hole in that strategy.

So, why is the tree felling being allowed to happen at Loch an Eileen?

In April 2014 the Forestry Commission bought a great swathe of the Rothiemurchus Estate from John Grant joining up the publically owned land at Invereshie and Inshriach with the Glenmore Forest Park.

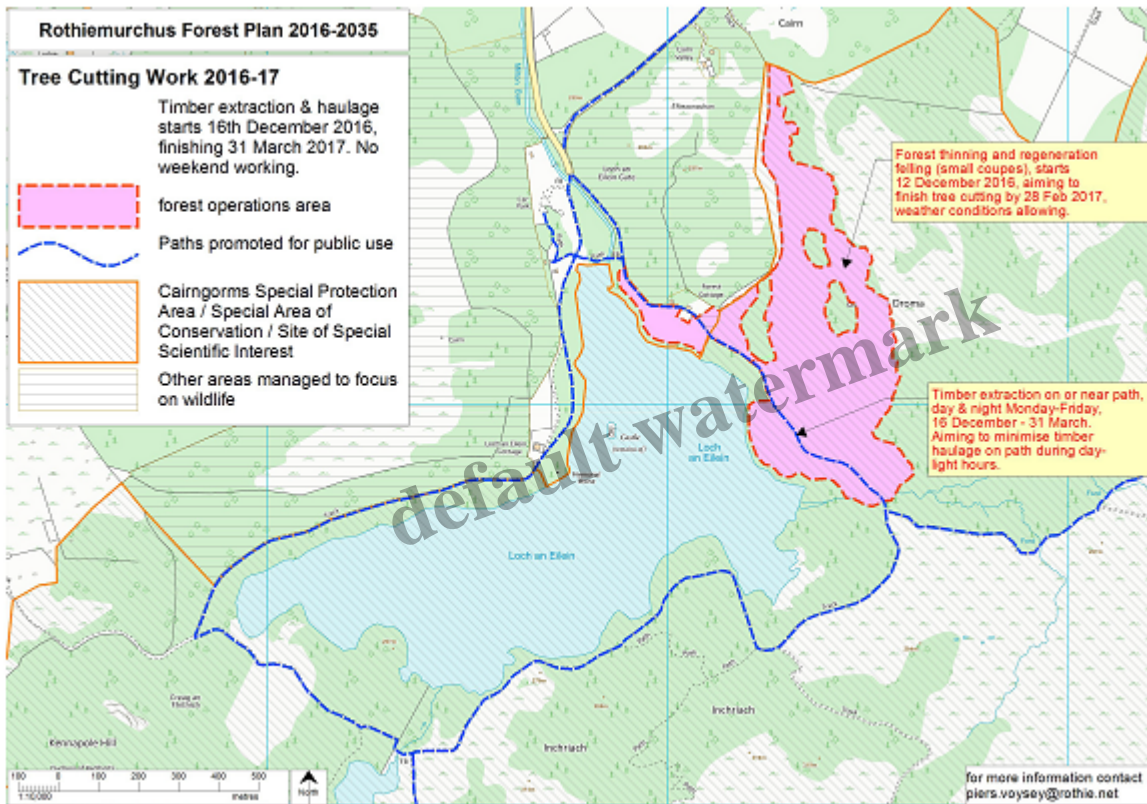


Map from FCS Rothiemurchus sale papers obtained by Rob Edwards by FOI

This was done without consultation and cost £7.4m, the largest single investment that Government has ever been made in our National Parks, although the main benefit appears to have been to the private

landowner rather than to conservation or public enjoyment of the Park. The shores around Loch an Eileen and where the tree felling has been taking place were however excluded from the sale.

Rothiemurchus receives ongoing public subsidy for managing the Rothiemurchus Estate so, after the sale of upper Rothiemurchus to FCS, a new Forest Plan was required to cover the remaining parts of the estate. It was produced in 2016 ([see here](#)) and provides the framework under which woodland is managed on the estate. It is this plan which has been used as the justification for the tree felling around Loch an Eilein



This work will remove areas of trees to enable the forest to regenerate naturally, thin out the remainder to give them room to grow as well as removing some of the non-native species. (<https://rothiemurchus.net/wp-content/uploads/Tree-cutting-at-Loch-an-Eilein.pdf>) .

Comment The trees here, as Chris pointed out in his post, had regenerated naturally – in fact the Forest Plan states that this natural regeneration took place after a large fire in the 1920s. After the ground was burned, pine trees reseeded but then shaded out further new saplings – that has resulted in the even age of the pine trees, which result in pole forests of tall straight stemmed trees. So, the foresters want to remove trees that have regenerated naturally to allow trees to..... regenerate naturally and give the remaining Scots Pine “room to grow” – or in other words to assume the look we would like them to have.

What this highlights is just how reluctant our public authorities are to allow natural processes to

determine what happens in an area – natural processes might result in something that doesn't fit with our ideas of what is natural.

<p>Woodland condition & deadwood component</p>	<p>Fragmentation of habitats due to pr woodland habitat</p>
	<p>Changing function forest stands as t evolve and develo</p>
<p>Pinewood extent</p>	<p>Total extent of pin much less than historically</p>
<p>Pinewood age structure</p>	<p>Prevalence of ver and very old age</p>

Extract from Rothiemurchus Forest Plan – note the commitment to structural diversity and a “more e

In the case of the Caledonian Forest, the latest orthodoxy appears to be that naturally the Caledonian pine forest would have had diverse age structures – beautiful granny pines (and they are beautiful) surrounded by trees of varying ages. The evidence at Rothiemurchus suggests otherwise but lets not allow that stop the “managers of the natural”, who intervene in order to create something which appears more natural. In doing so they are blind to the destruction described by Chris Townsend.

Now I am not against woodland management in general – and indeed believe our National Parks

should be demonstrating how to manage woodlands more sustainably. Nor am I totally against the idea that because of its limited extent the Caledonian Forest, and species within it, are potentially vulnerable. However, all but a small part of the Loch an Eileen forest felling is taking place within the Cairngorms Site of Special Scientific Interest and Special Area of Conservation (the other side of the Loch, on the north west shore is not so protected). The SAC is supposed to be the designation offering greatest protection to the Caledonian Forest. The public interest question is whether our most protected areas should be managed areas, where humans intervene and cut short natural processes in order to secure certain defined objectives, or whether we should allow nature to take its own course – what I would regard as re-wilding?

An alternative means to ensure we have trees of varying ages is NOT to chop down existing ones but to expand the extent of the forest at its fringes through natural regeneration – but that would mean tackling intensive moorland management by private landowners, including Rothiemurchus, which elsewhere on the estate undertakes muirburn which of course prevents the Caledonian Forest expanding through natural regeneration.

The recreational perspective

Its time that the people responsible for managing “conservation” in our National Parks started to take far more account of the recreational perspective. I believe Chris Townsend’s gut reaction, informed by knowledge of what is natural, was right – the destruction of natural woodland at Loch an Eilein within a protected area should not be allowed. Instead of trying to improve what is there, why not celebrate it as an area where natural processes have predominated for almost a 100 years even if this has resulted in the “wrong-shaped” trees?

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. Camping bye laws
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Author

nickkempe