

Concerned about the impact of hydro schemes? Help the Munro Society survey.

Description



Hydro construction track in Glen Affric, a National Scenic Area and Special Area of Conservation between Caledonian pine forest. No designation at present can stop a hydro scheme and in the Lomond and National Park not a single area has been designated as important enough for there to be a presumption against hydro developments.

While the impact of windfarms on landscape make front page news – the latest being the predictable decision by the Courts to uphold the Scottish Government’s decision to give the go-ahead to the Creag Riabhach scheme in Sutherland ([see here](#)) – hydro schemes rarely receive any coverage at all. For a long time, most people who care about the landscape, appear to have been blinded to their impacts.

Hydro sounds such a good thing it must be. More and more people I meet and talk to however are now beginning to believe the evidence of their eyes, particularly the blighting of the landscape with new tracks.



Looking south from Aonach Shasuinn, May 2017

Parkswatch has been highlighting the destructive impact that hydro schemes have been having in our National Parks and, after my post on Ledcharrie <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2017/08/31/whats-gone-wrong-ledcharrie-hydro-scheme/> it seems an appropriate time to inform readers how they can help monitor and document what is going on. This is important because our politicians and decision makers will I am afraid put the wishes of landowners and developers first unless they are confronted with evidence they cannot ignore (and remember most decision makers hardly visit the hills and have probably never walked round a hydro scheme).

Following my walk with Members of the Munro Society to look at the Ledcharrie scheme ([see here](#)) I have been working with them to develop a hydro scheme reporting form. The idea is to assemble information about hydro schemes, the good, the poor and the unacceptable, which can then be analysed and used by the Mountaineering Council and others. Munro Society Members have now visited three hydro schemes in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park which I had not seen and sent me their report forms.

The Inverlochlarig hydro scheme

To give an example of how the form can help, [here](#) is an example for Inverlochlarig, in the heart of Rob Roy country. Its well worth reading and I found it incredibly informative. When working on the form we had not thought of inserting photos into it – reporters don't need to do this – but Derek Sime had the good idea and in my view they illustrate his report brilliantly.

While no two people are likely to have the same response to a hydro scheme, whether they see it on the ground or recorded in a form, its good to be able to give publicity to what I think is a good hydro scheme in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park (there are others). The intake is discrete, the pipeline hard to detect and because an existing track was used for most of the construction, without any widening, there has been little further landscape impact, even from the tops of the hills. The hydro scheme is not perfect though and the report form records some oversteep banks which are not revegetating, a short section of new track which is too broad and some abandoned pipes, still there three years after the scheme was completed. I hope the LLTNPA will address these outstanding issues and have agreed with the Munro Society to send the form to the them but overall I agree with Derek, this appears an exemplary scheme.

I will cover other reports of hydro schemes from the Munro Society in due course. Meantime.....

If you want to get involved.....

The Munro Society is looking for more volunteers to report on hydro schemes across Scotland. They have a list of schemes they have prioritised for reports and if you would like to help with these, you can contact them [through their website](#) – just put in the subject line Hydro Scheme survey. There is nothing though to stop people reporting on schemes they come across in the hills and if want to do so there is a blank report form [Hydro scheme survey v3](#). You can return this to the Munro Society or if the scheme is in a National Park you can send it to nickkempe@parkswatchscotland.co.uk (we have agreed to share information about schemes in our National Parks). Don't worry if you cannot fill in all the form, or only fill in part of it – even partial information will help the Munro Society prioritise sites for full surveys. And photographs are as important, if not more important than words.....

The form that we have created came about because of the walk I did with members of the Munro Society to look at the Ledcharrie scheme. We realised we needed to do something to capture

information on the impact of hydro scheme and I am sure this will evolve over time. Learning what to look out for though is greatly helped by walking round schemes with other people. I am hoping to arrange another such walk, probably in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park in the next month or two. If you would be interested in this, please contact me at the parkswatch email with your contact details and indicating which day/s of the week are most suitable for you.

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs

Tags

1. CNPA
2. landscape
3. LLTNPA
4. planning
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