

The state of the western Cairngorms (7) – BrewDog's Lost Forest (2)

Description



Looking west from the Burma Rd across to Cnoc Fraing and muirburn on the Alvie Estate

If BrewDog's description of Kinrara as a "Lost Forest" is appropriate for the Strathspey part of the estate ([see here](#)), it feels even more apt as you descend the Burma Rd past scattered pine trees towards the River Dulnain.



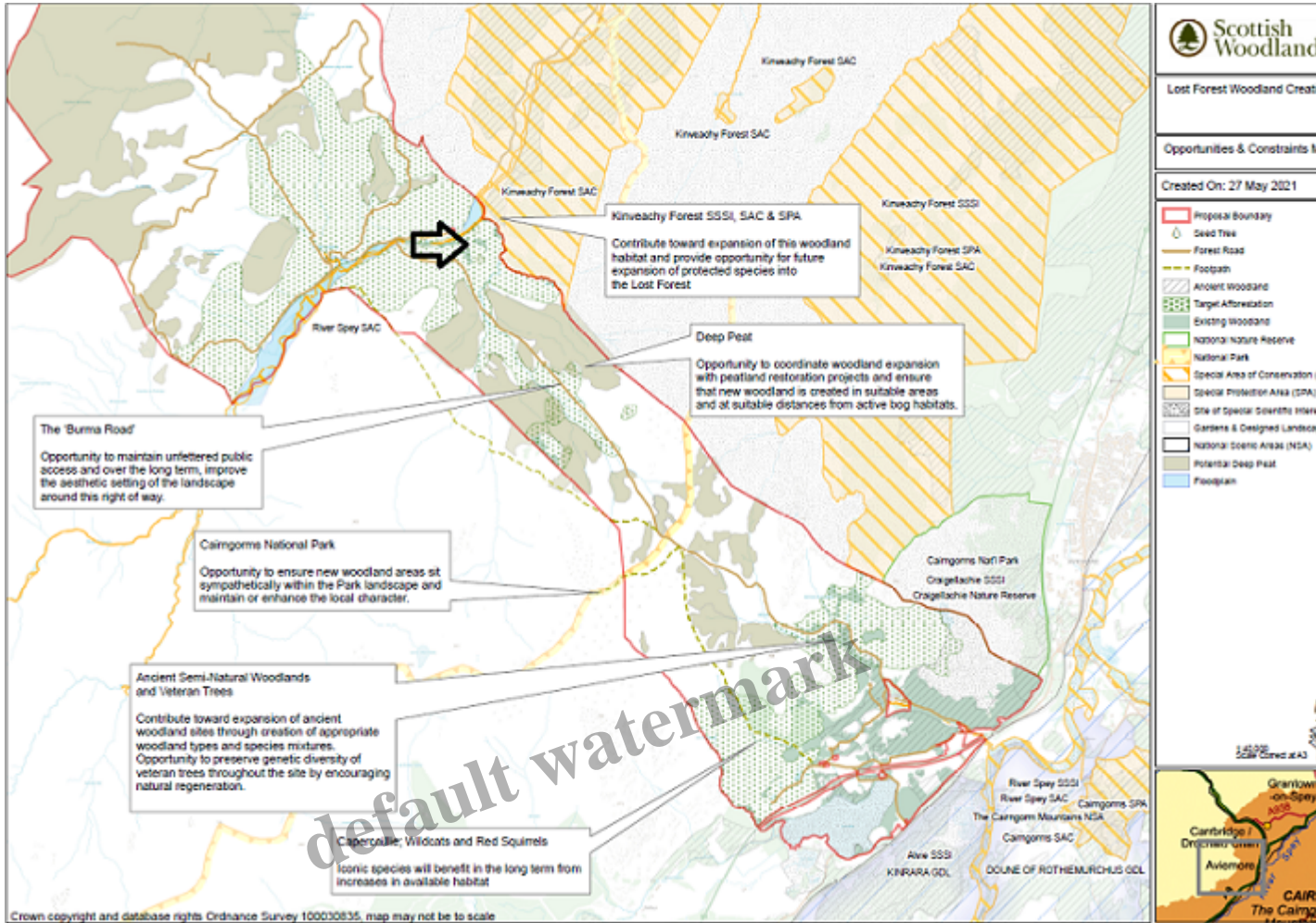
Looking back to scattered Scots Pine beneath the north ridge of Geal Charn Mor. The boundary between the Kinrara and Alvie estate runs across the hillside just beyond the trees.

But then, after you cross the Allt nam Muireach, you realise the pines are not so lost after all:



The pines in the foreground on the Kinrara estate but trees behind are part of the Kinveachy Forest Special Area of Conservation on the Seafield Estate.

The “Opportunities and Constraint” map from the Scottish Woodlands consultation on creating a new forest [\(see here\)](#) shows the relationship quite well:



The black arrow points to the pine trees in the photo above

The pine trees are right next door to the Kinveachy Special Area of Conservation, created to protect and regenerate the large fragment of Caledonian Pine Forest along the River Dulnain above Carrbridge. It seems strange that the Kinrara pines were never included in the SAC, but then the Dulnain part of the Kinveachy SAC was originally included within the proposed Cairngorms National Park boundary. Conservation boundaries owe as much to politics as to science!



The same trees in the photo above – above and right of the dense block of forest – viewed from the side and the Special Area of Conservation

The view from the Kinveachy side shows how in ecological terms this should be treated as a single forest. The good news is, after extensive efforts to reduce deer numbers, the Kinveachy Caledonian pine forest is now regenerating up the Dulnain to the boundary with Kinrara.

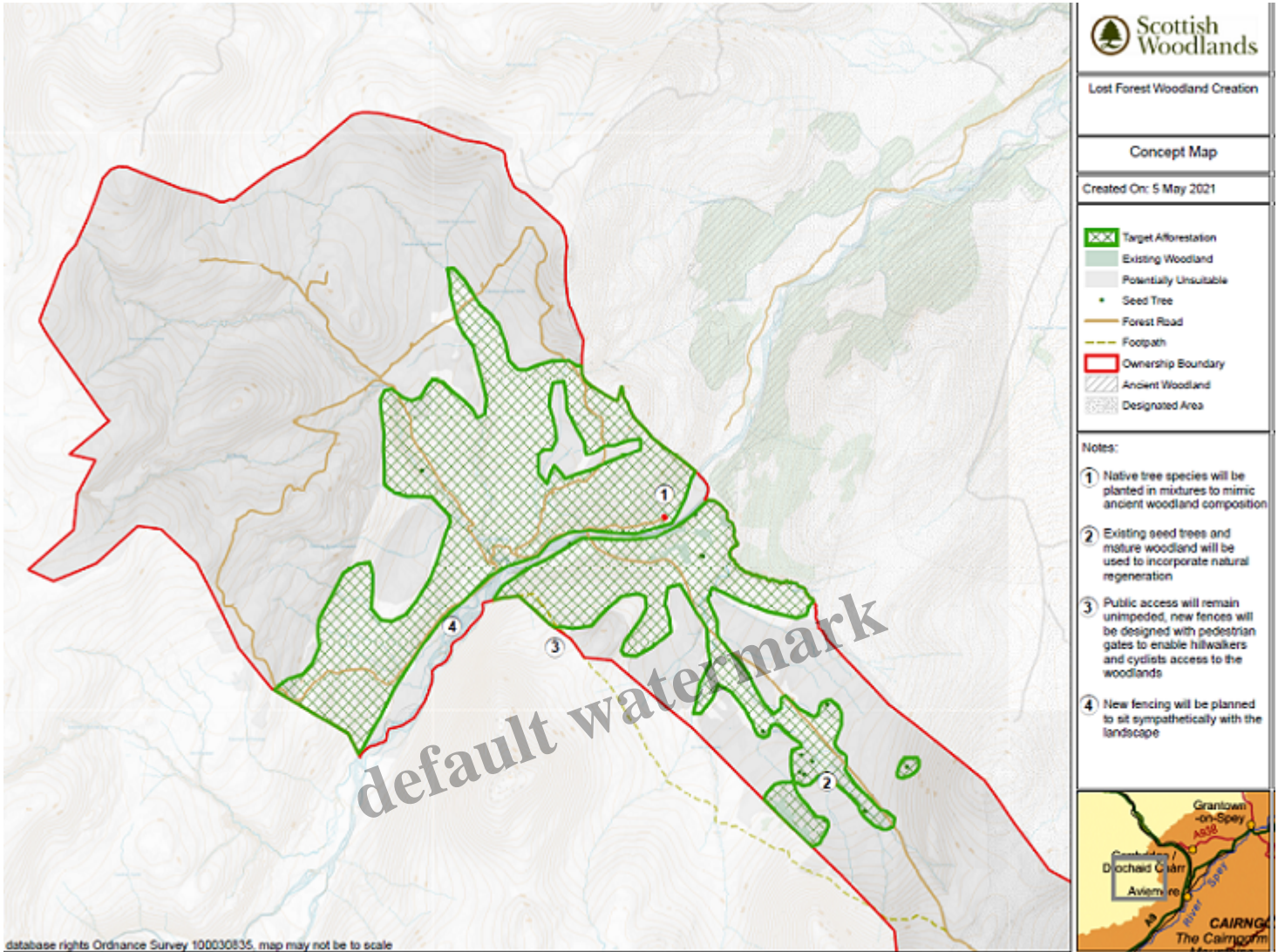


The boundary between Kinveachy and Kinrara runs approximately down the near left horizon to about 400m beyond the cottage

But at the Kinveachy boundary, unprotected and facing owners whose main concern appears to have been how they could increase their bag of grouse, the regenerating forest has up until now been met with a wall of fire. That has acted as a block to the Caledonian Forest expanding to regain something of its former extent and in doing so incorporate the isolated pines.

Scottish Woodlands' proposals for planting and fencing

Following BrewDog's purchase, with the burning stopped, Scottish Woodlands is now proposing to plant most of the lower lying land and protect the new trees with deer fencing:



The new planting is completely unnecessary because, as on the Strathspey side of the estate, almost anywhere you care to look outside of peaty areas, there are trees and shrubs just awaiting their chance:



Birch and willow by the Burma Rd, within the proposed fenced planting area on the south bank of the Dulnain. The bridge over the Dulnain visible on the right.

While at first sight the slopes above the north bank of the Dulnain appear burnt to bits and almost treeless, tucked away and along the burns its a different matter:



Trees on the lower part of the Allt an Tudair, a tributary of the Dulnain



Extensive juniper scrub on the middle section of the Allt an Tudair, just below the prominent crossroads on the Scottish Woodlands plan. The juniper extends higher up the burn, beyond the proposed fencing and “woodland creation area”.

The position on the Dulnain side of Kinrara is exactly the same as on the Strathspey side, with muirburn ended, the lost forest is waiting there to regenerate naturally. This means there is no need to plant. Moreover the Dulnain side of Kinrara is also in the Monadhliath Wild Land Area – a fact that Scottish Woodlands fails to mention – which makes fencing even more inappropriate. What BrewDog needs to do therefore to make the Lost Forest a reality is to reduce deer numbers as Wildland Ltd has done in Glen Feshie.

The challenge is actually trickier than in Glen Feshie because of the shape of the Kinrara Estate and its place in the Dulnain catchment. Data from the Monadhliath Deer Management Group ([see here](#)) shows that over the summer months deer are mainly found above 600m but then in the winter move onto the lower ground and down the Dulnain. That means there are relatively few deer on Kinrara during the summer months and into the stag stalking season, whereas after that season ends grazing pressures increase. A very good illustration of why BrewDog should press the Scottish Government to abolish the closed season for stag stalking, as recommended by the Deer Working Group, and as I suggested in

my last post.

Without a reduction in numbers, the creation of fenced exclosures will deprive the deer of winter foraging and force them further down the Dulnain, where they end up in bad weather at present, increasing the grazing pressure on the Kinveachy Caledonian Pine wood. As the current proposal stands, for every new tree Scottish Woodlands plants, a naturally regenerated sapling could be lost lower down. Is this what BrewDog really want? Conversely, if BrewDog joined forces with the Seafield Estate and focussed on reducing the numbers of red deer, for every sapling that regenerated on Kinrara, another might regenerate at Kinveachy.

Other issues with Scottish Woodlands' proposals for the Dulnain catchment



Looking down the Burma Rd towards the Dulnain.

While once the land on either side of the Burma Rd may have been forest, now a significant proportion of it appears to be peat and there are questions of how far trees will grow in these areas. Scottish Woodlands states that planted areas will avoid deep peat, defined as peat over 50cm in depth, but the

opportunities and constraints map (above) shows areas where planting and peat overlap. Instead of asking consultants to work out what areas might be better left as peat bog and what areas should be planted, BrewDog would be better leaving it to nature.



How much peat has been destroyed and carbon released into the atmosphere as a result of the construction of the road beneath Sguman Mor?

Scottish Woodlands plan says nothing about where peatland restoration might take place, though BrewDog announced they were hoping to do this after they purchased Kinrara. While much of the peat bog I saw was in fairly good condition, the road under Sguman Mor was a shocker: another reason why BrewDog should be producing an overall estate conservation plan and not just a tree planting plan.



Birch sapling on the bulldozed area outside the grouse shooters hut beneath Sguman Mor at c550m above the proposed woodland creation area

And just like on the Strathspey side, Scottish Woodlands' plan says nothing about montane scrub. Its half a woodland creation plan, only dealing with the lower to middle ground. Fencing that will do nothing to help montane scrub develop. Another reason why BrewDog need to focus on reducing deer numbers to enable natural regeneration rather than planting trees behind fences.

The choice facing BrewDog

Ask people what they think the most important things we should be doing to address the climate and environmental crises and most will probably include planting trees high on their list. Its practical and something everyone can do. That was clearly BrewDog's intention when they purchased Kinrara.

What most people don't realise, however, despite all the evidence from Glen Feshie, is that if you reduce the number of grazing animals sufficiently, over much of Scotland trees would come back without any other human intervention. Kinrara, as I hope I have shown in these two posts. is one of those places. It's also very special because of its lost Caledonian Pine forest. Scottish Woodlands

planting proposal threatens not just that, but the regeneration that is taking place at Kinveachy downstream.

The challenge for BrewDog – and any other landowner facing this choice – is that this is not just a matter about choosing what is best for the land. The choice currently has serious financial implications. Unfortunately, the current forestry subsidy system directs money towards planting trees and fencing. Though neither are particularly effective – a significant proportion of deciduous trees that are planted fail to survive while fencing rarely does its job for more than a few years – there is no equivalent support for reducing deer numbers. Only the richest and most committed landowners can make the right choice.

As a completely new type of landowner with a high public profile, BrewDog has the opportunity to persuade the Scottish Government to change all that. In doing so they could do far more for tackling climate change in Scotland than they ever would by planting trees on their own land.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

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Author

nickkempe