

Forest and Land Scotland's planning application at Cairn Gorm – the implications

Description

TVForest and Land Scotland (FLS) have recently submitted a prior notification to Highland Council that they intend to restore an area of peatbog at Cairn Gorm below and west of the Coire Cas car park ([see here](#)). Most of the area is on land FLS own but two hectares are on the Cairn Gorm estate owned by Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) and managed through their subsidiary Cairngorm Mountain Scotland Ltd (CMSL).

The proposal is the first in a long while that is about proactively trying to restore damaged ground at Cairn Gorm. Although outside the ski area, if the restored peat holds back some water it could help mitigate a small part of the increased flood risks that have been created by HIE's extensive groundworks and new hill roads at Cairn Gorm.

The planning papers record that HIE "has agreed in principle that FLS undertakes at the same time the peat hags re-profiling on their land" confirming that the initiative is all that of FLS. This is significant. HIE has never shown any interest in conservation management at Cairn Gorm and lacks the expertise to do so. The application therefore provides not just a practical example of the need for a joined up approach to land management between Glen More and Cairn Gorm but support for the argument that Scottish Ministers should transfer the land back to FLS, reversing the disastrous transfer to HIDB, HIE's predecessor, almost 50 years ago.

Whether this Peatland Restoration project provides value for money is, however, a moot question. With the Scottish Government well behind on its Peatland Restoration targets I suspect FLS has been asked to identify more projects. The proposed area is just above the Caledonian Forest in Glen More and while the papers reveal both that no trees will need to be removed, suggesting it may be too wet for most trees to seed by naturally, they also reveal that there is no grazing pressure from mammals. That suggests that the erosion of this area of peat may have been through natural processes. Unfortunately there is nothing in the Prior Notification that explains why FLS believes this area of peat has eroded but in my view there is a difference between restoring peat damaged by the way humans have managed bog and repairing bogs that have eroded naturally.

Normally I might go and have a look for myself but this was written on the overnight train to the Pyrenees and on my phone, hence no photos (there are some in the application for those who want to look). To give them credit, FLS propose to use peat to block up drainage channels. That is unlike the RSPB who just over the hill on Bynack Mor helicoptered stone in to do the same job (something I have been meaning to write about for some time).

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA

2. conservation
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