

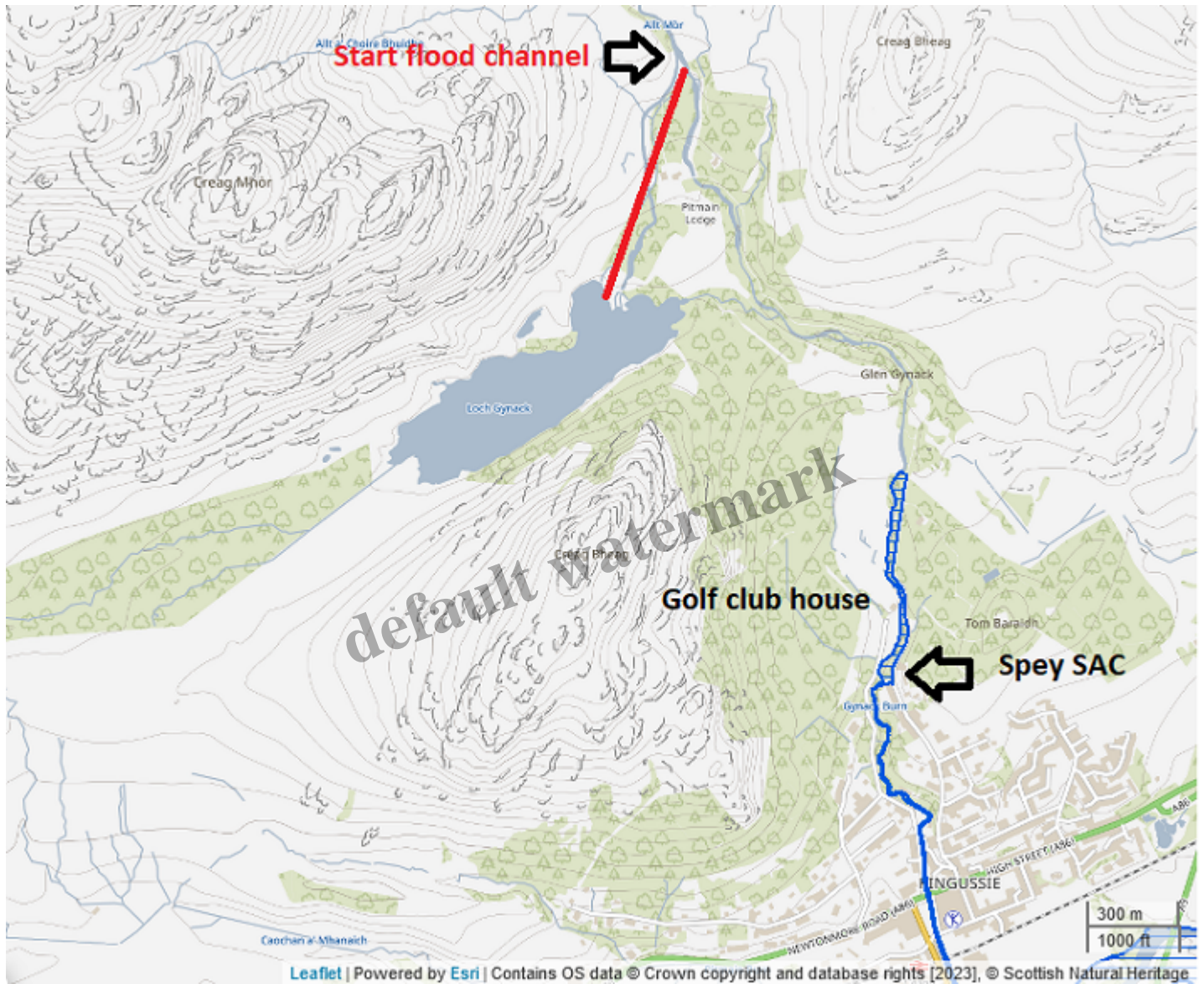
The Pitmain Estate flood channel repairs – the River Gynack awash with silt

Description



Looking upstream from the bridge by Kingussie golf course club house 12th May

On Friday silt was washing down the Allt Mhor/River Gynack into the River Spey Special Area of Conservation from the work to repair to the Pitmain Estate flood alleviation channel. I have been informed that this is not the first time this has happened recently.



On 28th April ([see here](#)) I commented on how much needed work to repair the Kingussie Flood Alleviation scheme had started but without planning permission, so it was unclear what work was being done to repair the channel or how likely this was to work. Now it appears the repair work may be breaching the Controlled Activities Regulations (CAR) ([see here](#)) and result in significant damage to the River Spey Special Area of Conservation protected for its otter, atlantic salmon, sea lamprey and freshwater pearl mussel. The photo shows how large quantities of silt have been washed down into the SAC from work upstream.



The blocked up intake 2022

That work is taking place at the intake to the flood alleviation channel (shown on map above). Why further river engineering is required within the Allt Mhor is unclear as all the obvious problems with the flood alleviation channel were below this intake. It may have looked a mess but it should have been possible to re-open it once the other repair works were complete without moving large quantities of silt into the river. If more extensive work is being undertaken, it begs the question whether this lies within the scope of the original plans and if not, why the Pitmain Estate has not been required to submit a further planning application? There is still no documentation on the planning portal to explain what is going on.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) conducted what is known as a Habitats Regulations Assessment on the Pitmain flood channel as part of the planning application in 2016 (Appendix 4 of the Committee Report ([see here](#))). This concluded that the original construction of the channel was unlikely to have any impact on the species protected by the SAC. This was in part because fresh water pearl mussel and sea lamprey, which are particularly vulnerable to silt, had not recently been recorded in the River Gynack – although they are found downstream in the Spey. And partly because of the measures described in the Construction and Environment Management document provided by the Pitmain estate to prevent silt entering the river system.

With new engineers and contractors undertaking the repairs to the channel, it is unclear how far they are abiding by the provisions set out by their predecessors. The Planning Conditions imposed by the CNPA did, however, require:

“A sediment management plan to minimise disruption to the channel habitat and landscape during regular sediment removal at the intake structure and along the length of the channel”.

The question therefore is why has the CNPA and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, which is responsible for the quality of water in our rivers, allowed this to happen? The problem, which I have referred to before, is that when landed estates and developers are given an inch, they take a mile, to the considerable detriment of the natural environment.

The inconsistency of our Public Authorities approach to the Glen Bancher-Pitmain estate when it comes to conservation is striking. On the one hand they have been allowed to release silt into the River Spey down the River Gynack. On the other NatureScot and the Woodland Trust have paid for riparian woodland restoration – “nature based solutions” – along the River Calder in Glen Bancher ([see here](#)) in no small part to reduce the amount of sediment washed down by floods and improve habitat for salmon!

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. landed estates
4. planning

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