

Dereliction of duty by Forestry and Land Scotland at Glenmore in the Cairngorms

Description

In a recent letter to the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald (29 June, see below) I suggested ways that the management of the land around Loch Morlich and nearby areas in Glenmore Forest Park could be improved to meet public concern over environmental degradation. Such improvement is likely to be far more important than the potential use of byelaws in the Cairngorms to control irresponsible camp fires

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and associated litter problems

'Forestry bosses making mess of Glenmore asset'

RECENT proposals for by-laws to restrict camping in the Loch Morlich and Glenmore area are misguided and will do little to solve current problems.

Those problems will simply migrate to other locations in the national park or elsewhere.

Furthermore there is no need for any legislative action - it is already a criminal offence to light a camp fire 'so as to endanger any other person, or to give reasonable cause for alarm or annoyance, or so as to endanger any property' (Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 (section 56), and 'it is an offence to leave litter in any public open space' (Environmental Protection Act 1990 (section 87).

The fundamental problem is the lack of enforcement of existing legislation.

Campaigning for camping by-laws would be a long and tortuous process with no guarantee of success.

Outdoor recreation interests are likely to strongly oppose such measures, given recent experience in the Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park but also because everyone knows what the problems in Glenmore are - exceptionally poor planning, management and operational performance by the land owners, Forestry

and Land Scotland.

It is incredible that this land has been in public ownership for over 100 years, either under the control of the Forestry Commission, or their successors, FLS, but for most of the last 20 years the senior management have demonstrated that they are quite incapable of meeting their obligations in Glenmore.

Anyone familiar with the management of state owned forest land elsewhere, such as in North America and the Scandinavian countries, will realise that the management of Glenmore falls way below the most basic standards expected in an area of such high amenity and recreational value.

Last week's Cairngorms National Park Authority board meeting revealed that FLS do not appear to even have an effective Fire Control Plan for Glenmore, or even staff employed to actually put out fires, while the nearest senior FLS officer responsible for Glenmore's management seems to be located north of Inverness.

No wonder Glenmore Forest Park is in a complete shambles.

The top priority should be to get political pressure

applied to the FLS senior management so that they finally meet their long standing but neglected obligations. Immediate requirements include a properly resourced FLS ranger service, with staff present on a 24 hour basis when necessary, along with adequate toilet and litter collection services.

In parallel to this FLS needs to work out a plan, under the supervision of the CNPA, to provide a lot more formal and informal camping facilities, covering both tenting and campervan provision in the Loch Morlich area.

There is also a need for the Scottish Government to re-visit FLS' extraordinary decision last year to refuse a Community Asset Transfer of their main camping site in Glenmore.

It beggars belief that FLS preferred a private sector company, based in Glasgow, with no experience of running any camp site anywhere, to a local community bid backed by the financial resources of Anders Povlsen and his Wildland company.

No wonder people are avoiding this camping site with its extortionate fees (£48 for a tent for two adults plus two children plus

vehicle for one day on a bank holiday) and seek alternative locations ne to pitch their tent.

Furthermore why sh the profit from this cam operation, on state own land, disappear in the direction of Glasgow?

FLS knew that the alternative was commu trust management, wit profit to be devoted to projects and initiatives

Some of that profit s be in use today, paying for the new facilities a staffing urgently need around Loch Morlich. Dealing with private greed plus public bod incompetence in Glen should be a much high priority than thinking camping by-laws.

Dave
Newton

Farewell, Win

ALTHOUGH greatly saddened at the passing the incomparable Win Ewing and in conveying heartfelt condolences her family, Scotland celebrates a great life lived.

During her time in parliamentary could with her personality actions and achieve Madame Ecosse gal the movement for S independence.

To her lasting me and legacy unity of must now be Scotla aim, as we remember rallying call, 'stop t Scotland wants to

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Existing legislation is already sufficient to deal with such problems, ([see here](#)) and ([here](#)), and is set

out in Annex 1 of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code ([see here](#)). The only changes worth considering would be to increase the fines for offences under this existing legislation.

Account must also be taken of the Scottish Government's National Litter and Flytipping Strategy, launched in June by the Circular Economy Minister, the Greens MSP Lorna Slater. As she is also responsible for Scotland's national parks it would appear that Glenmore might be the perfect location for her to test out some of the ideas in this Strategy. If appropriate infrastructure developments and behavioural changes can be achieved in Glenmore there will be useful lessons learnt for wider application.

Most of the land at Glenmore is under the ownership of Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS). At the last Board meeting of the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) the Chief Executive, Grant Moir, when referring to FLS management of this area, said:

"there is a need to have an on-site manager for Glenmore. I have said that before and I will say it again. For the amount of people who go into Glenmore, it needs on-site management".

Highland Councillor Bill Lobban reinforced this message, saying:

"the rangers are doing the best job they possibly can. They are not there 24 hours per day....maybe we need to start thinking outside of the box such as providing facilities where visitors can have a barbeque without using charcoal".

These comments all point to a woeful lack of effective action by FLS and their predecessors, the Forestry Commission, over several decades. Their performance can be contrasted with the National Trust for Scotland on the other side of the Cairngorms massif. There an on-site senior manager and other NTS staff ensure that effective, 24hr coverage, is present on the Mar Lodge Estate to deal with fire, litter and any other problems. It is time for Scottish ministers to give clear instructions to FLS to ensure that the standards of management in Glenmore are at least as good as those being achieved by NTS elsewhere in these mountains.

The immediate future requires a 24hr presence by FLS whenever weather conditions and visitor numbers require this. FLS already accept that Glenmore is the "most pressured site in the country. There's nowhere else that has to deal with the issues arising from that challenging combination of high visitor numbers and a concentration of environmental sensitivities". But they also admit "but obviously we are not on site 24/7 and some of those issues happen very late at night and our staff are there during the day when it's busiest" ([see here](#) for interview with Paul Hibberd, Regional Visitor Services Manager FLS, Inverness Courier 30 June 2023). FLS have "obviously" got their visitor management priorities all wrong if this is the best they can do in a location which is like no other place in Scotland.

FLS need to be reminded that they are supposed to work in Glenmore under the framework of the National Park Partnership Plan which guides the work of all public bodies within the national park and is approved by Scottish ministers. So why do they appear to be repeatedly ignoring the recommendations of the CNPA's chief executive that this area needs an on-site manager, as was present in previous decades, and the comments of Board members at their last meeting that 24 hr management presence is required at critical times? Perhaps Mr Hibberd should spend a night in a tent on Loch Morlich beach to find out what everyone else thinks FLS should be doing in Glenmore.

Discussions also need to start on asset transfer possibilities in the wider Loch Morlich area covering the whole of the loch and its immediate surrounding land. The recent fiasco surrounding the FLS tendering process for the camp site ([see here](#)) suggests that FLS need to be relieved of their responsibilities over quite a wide area of land at Glenmore. Much of this land would be far better managed if primary responsibility was transferred to the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust, backed up by CNPA oversight and supported by the experience and financial resources of Wildland Limited. That is what was planned for the camp site until FLS took leave of their senses. FLS should retain responsibility for fire control measures and associated forestry management activities over the more remote parts of Glenmore, away from Loch Morlich.

In an article in the Strathspey and Badenoch Herald (29 June) the Highland and Islands Greens MSP, Ariane Burgess, described a recent visit to see the damage caused by the large fire at Corriemoney nature reserve to the west of Inverness where new planting, ground vegetation and some timber were destroyed. But she also notes “how resilient nature can be. There was a clear line where the fire stopped when it reached the mature trees, which had thicker bark and more moisture”, adding that when new woodland is being created the trees need to be “given time to grow and establish themselves”.

This provides a clear lesson for Glenmore where there is far too much plantation forestry, carried out long ago by the Forestry Commission. This has degraded one of Scotland’s finest ancient Caledonian Forests whose historic remnants were established and replenished by natural regeneration over thousands of years, all the way back to the last Ice Age. These plantations need to be felled asap along with the more recent planting by FLS at the west end of Loch Morlich. FLS need to be told that restoration of this forest should be entirely by natural regeneration, to meet both biodiversity and climate change requirements, as well as the need to provide a future forest structure that is far more resilient to wildfire damage than the current forest.

Meanwhile the CNPA needs to take a much closer look at fire risk more generally in the northern Cairngorms and ask, for example, why Rothiemurchus estate continues to carry out muirburn in Glen Einich ([see here](#)), for grouse, on land adjacent to the Glenmore Caledonian Forest. Surely the risk of this regular burning getting out of control is much greater than a fire spreading from a barbecue in the middle of a sandy beach by Loch Morlich?

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. access rights
2. CNPA
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