

Forestry and Land Scotland's vacuous consultation on Glen Prosen

Description



The trashed landscape of Glen Prosen 2016; overgrazed, burned, plantations, clearfell, tracks. Photo: [unclear]. The large plantation has now been felled.

At the start of October, almost a year after they bought the Glen Prosen Estate for £17,555,000, , Forest and Land Scotland (FLS) launched an initial consultation of what to do with the land and buildings under the banner of developing an Angus Glens Land Management Plan ([see here](#)).

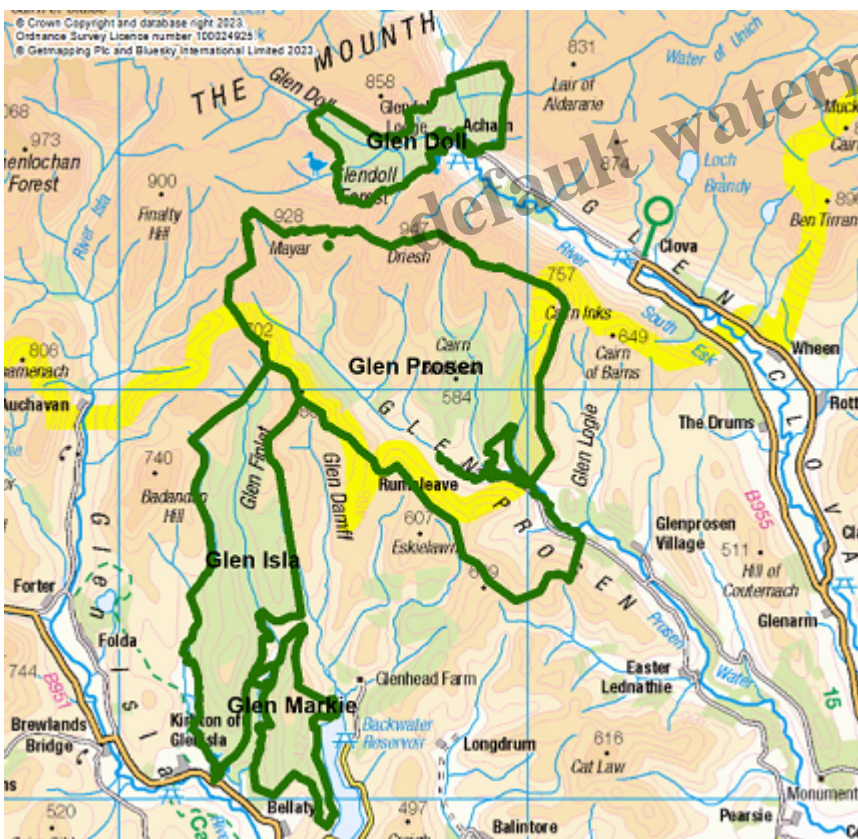
When I last wrote about Glen Prosen in January ([see here](#)) I thought it might take FLS to 12 months to develop a land-management plan. FLS are now saying they expect to take another 12-18 months to

do so. What climate and nature emergency? Two weeks ago SEPA's river level gauge at Prosen Bridge recorded the highest water during Storm Babet and some of the people waiting to hear the answer from FLS are living downstream in Brechin ([see here](#)).

The online survey, which is open until 12th November, comprises just four short questions, albeit substantive ones: what's special about the landscape; opportunities; could the land be managed differently; and opportunities for involving people? The open-ended questions are welcome – it encourages thought and I would urge readers to respond – but why has it taken FLS so long to write four sentences?

The scope of the consultation

While prompted by the purchase of Glen Prosen, the consultation is about developing a single land management plan which covers both the new acquisition AND Glen Doll. FLS's proposal is that once the plan for Glen Prosen and Glen Doll is complete, it will be combined with those for the plantations in "Glen Isla" (its actually Glen Finlet) and Glen Markie, to form one Angus Glens plan.



The consultation states that the plan for "Glen Isla" and Glen Markie was consulted on earlier this year but says nothing else about it and provides no links ([see here](#) – the plan is still awaiting final approval)

Glen Doll, which was planted by the Forestry Commission in the 1950s, has a Forest Design Plan in place dating back to 2009 ([see here](#)). There is no reference to this in the consultation or the fact that some of the Glen Doll documentation has been updated recently ([see here](#)).

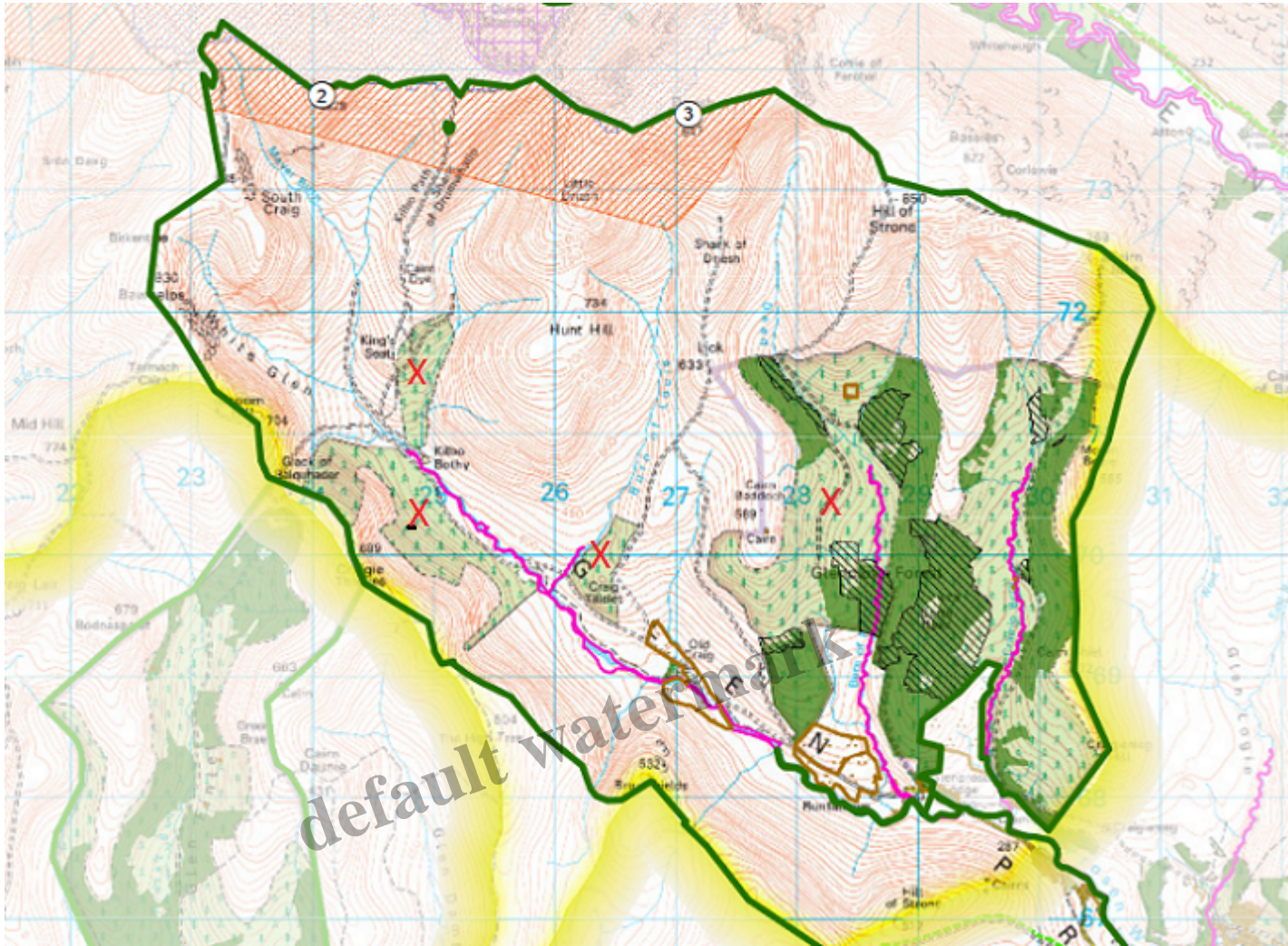
It is unclear what the benefits of combining all these plans together might be, except possibly deer control. The landholdings lie in four different glens, two different catchments and none of the “Glen Isla” plantations are in the National Park. While geographically close, by road its a different matter..

The Glen Isla plantations are managed solely for commercial timber production. The draft land management plan explained significant parts of the forest have been damaged by windthrow and is threatened by plant disease. FLS’ response to these consequences of industrial forestry practices is to carry on doing the same, except to bring the area planted with broadleaves up to the minimum UK Forestry Standards. The real risk is that combined under one management, the culture of commercial forestry in “Glen Isla” and Glen Markie will also be applied to the landholdings in the National Park.

A consultation in an information vacuum

There is very little background information provided on the consultation webpage to inform comments, not a reference to the stacks of information about the history of forest management in Glen Doll or what is to be learned from that.

There is nothing on deer numbers (despite all the research on this by Strathcauldih), sheep grazing, the history or extent of muirburn, hill tracks, the hydro scheme or flooding. The only information provided is an Angus Glens Features map which, while useful is hopelessly out of date:



Extract from the features map showing Glen Prosen from an old OS Map. Purple line = part of River South Esk Special Area of Conservation; yellow = National Park boundary; hatched green = windthrow; brown = heritage features (exactly what is not explained).

All the light green conifer plantations appear to have been clearfelled though this is not explained in the map key (I have photos for those marked X):



Former plantation at Craig Tillelet (third X from left) 2019.

Much of the remaining plantation has been windthrown (the hashed sections of the dark green). What thoughts FLS has about why the windthrow happened and how to avoid this happening in future is not explained. Nor are the options for what to do with it or how to restore the felled areas. All are fundamental questions for any future “forestry” or re-wilding here so why the silence in the consultation?

If FLS has changed the way the land in Glen Prosen is managed since it bought it, you wouldn't know. A year ago I highlighted a number of things that could be done immediately ([see here](#)): an immediate end to muirburn; the removal of all traps (for photos and commentary [see here](#)); a reduction in deer numbers through culling. These are simple things to do. FLS may well have done them but if so, you wouldn't know from the consultation.

FLS' plans for Glen Prosen

Easy to miss at the end of the consultation webpage, the section “Learn more about the Angus Glens”

does include some information about the properties FLS bought but is really about their intentions.



Has FLS removed the welcome to the moor signs that tell people to keep to the path?

The Angus Glens FAQs reveals some of FLS intentions in respect of how the land will be managed:

- It suggests that the focus will be on re-wilding according to what it calls the Scottish Government's definition of that term, but not how this will be done e.g whether fences will be used or what it will do with the plantations that are still standing;
- It says it will reduce deer numbers but only in consultation with neighbouring estates when we know that deer have to be reduced to 2 per square km for natural regeneration to take off;
- It indicates that it may try and used carbon credits to finance the project.

Which brings us to the elephant in the room, money. FLS has failed to say what budget, if any, is available to finance the management of Glen Prosen.

The other tab under "Learn More about the Angus Glens", headed "Glen Prosen: exciting opportunities for communities and business" is very revealing in this respect.

Potential opportunities

We have several properties ideal for ventures such as:

- > community venues
- > eco-tourism
- > field centres for education
- > walkers' bothies
- > forestry, conservation, or agricultural use
- > office accommodation

We also have areas perfect for holiday pods or chalets available for commercial lease or third-party development.

What is not said is how many properties FLS believes it needs itself for managing the land or for staff (e.g deer larder and accommodation) but in the absence of information to say otherwise it appears FLS is trying to lease much of it out commercially. For example, there are descriptions of three "holiday cottages" which "are available for commercial lease or development. They can be leased together or individually depending on expressed interest and availability." In other words FLS needs to generate money to finance the "project" – it is still not clear if FLS bought the hydro scheme as part of the sale and if so how much income that might generate.

One of these "holiday houses" is described as the "head keeper's house" which suggests that FLS has no plans to employ resident deer stalkers or foresters. If so, it appears FLS is going to apply the same disastrous model to Glen Prosen as its done elsewhere, where its land is "managed" by staff in far away offices, work is undertaken by contractors coming in from outside and other assets are leased out to private organisations to make profits ([see here](#)).

If Glen Prosen is going to be a regenerative project that includes people, following the Scottish Government's definition of re-wilding, then the consultation should have started with an explanation of the number of people who had been employed by the previous owners, set out how many jobs FLS proposed to create in the glen and then asked what else they could do to support job creation. It hasn't, but instead is continuing with the market free for all that has stripped remote glens of their population.

People should not be fooled by the five local consultation events which were scheduled as part of the consultation which on the face of it provided lots of opportunity for the 120 people resident in Glen Prosen and Glen Clova to become involved. With FLS having completely ignored the Aviemore and Glenmore Community Trust on the future of the Glenmore campsite, why would they respect the views of people living in the Angus Glens?

What needs to happen

I hope people will consider responding to FLS' consultation ([see here](#) – open till 12th) and make the point FLS needs to change.

Ten months after I set out “What the Scottish Government should ask FLS to do NOW at Glen Prosen” ([see here](#)), FLS haven't even got started!

To assist anyone thinking about responding, I think its worth repeating in full the points I made in January:

“Formulating plans may take time, but it also requires transparency, and with the climate and nature emergencies our public authorities need to be taking immediate action where possible. FLS could deliver the following within the next month if they had the will:

- *Issue information publicly about what has been bought (e.g. the number of properties included in the land sale), any conditions which could impact on future land-management (e.g there appears to be what is a sporting enclave with rights of access) and the main liabilities (e.g. the damage caused by previous track construction) – all questions which I drew attention to in my post in October ([see here](#)).*
- *Clarify how many staff lost their jobs/houses as a result of the sale and what actions have been taken to redress this (the parliamentary exchange suggests one former member of staff has been offered part-time employment by FLS).*
- *Remove ALL wildlife traps from the estate ([see here](#)), if this has not been done already.*
- *Stop all muirburn with immediate effect*
- *End all sheep grazing outside fenced enclosures and commit to challenging neighbouring landowners who allow sheep to wander onto their land*
- *Commit to reducing deer numbers to a maximum of 2 per square kilometre, which we know is the level which allows natural regeneration to take off, within three years and create stalking jobs to deliver this.*
- *Commit to working publicly with the Cairngorms National Park Authority to ensure future management of the Glen Prosen estate delivers National Park objectives and is used to put pressure on neighbouring landowners to change how they manage their land.*

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. conservation
3. Deer
4. flooding
5. FLS
6. forestry
7. Local communities
8. Scottish Government

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