

Flood damage in the Cairngorms and Scotland – whose responsibility?

Description

Following Storm Barbet ([see here](#)) Brechin and other settlements located by rivers which flow south and east out of the Cairngorms have TV once again been affected by flooding. People from Brechin whose property has been wrecked have been moved into hotels and describe what they have been through in the last three months as “living hell” ([see here](#)).

The message contained in flood warnings

Meantime the flood warnings issued by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) provides an insight into why government in Scotland has failed to address the issues and paid only a paltry £1500 to people whose homes have been wrecked:

“Areas affected: Brechin

Started at: 04:33 GMT on Thu 28 December

Flooding is expected – immediate action required

A FLOOD WARNING has been issued for Brechin

An updated FLOOD WARNING has been issued for Brechin.

The River South Esk has peaked in this area. River levels remain high and are expected to fall slowly throughout Thursday.

Further updates will be issued if appropriate.

Remain vigilant and remember, it is your responsibility to take actions which help protect yourself and your property. Advice and information is available through Floodline on 0345 9881188. This FLOOD WARNING UPDATE is now in force until further notice.....

Issued at: 04:33 GMT on Thu 28 December

Issued by: [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#)“

Similar flood warnings issued by the Environmental Protection Agency in England say nothing about it being the responsibility of the individual to “protect themselves and their property”. An example, copied at the same time as the flood warning for Brechin:

“Areas affected: Groundwater flooding in villages surrounding Andover

ACTIVE

Started at: 10:24 GMT on Wed 27 December

Flooding is possible – be prepared

Groundwater levels in villages surrounding Andover are high and continue to slowly rise. Groundwater is affecting cellars in Appleshaw and Hatherden, the sewer network in Penton Mewsey, and the main road in Penton Grafton. The spring at Biddesden could begin to flow from Thursday (28/12/2023). From today (27/12/2023) until Sunday (31/12/2023), the weather is forecast to be unsettled with up to 35mm across these five days. We expect groundwater levels to peak around the time of New Year. From the beginning of January 2024, cellar flooding in Penton Grafton and Kimpton, groundwater emergence into Deacon and Down Road, Kimpton, and surface water flooding in Thrupton could be possible, and is also likely after further heavy rain affects the area. We continue to monitor the forecast. Please remove valuables from cellars and ensure pumps used to reduce water levels can operate. This Flood Alert will be updated by 17:00 on Wednesday 03/01/2024.

Issued at: 10:24 GMT on Wed 27 December

Issued by: [The Environment Agency](#)”.

The idea that it is the individual’s responsibility to protect themselves from environmental disasters is a neo-liberal one. It follows from the Thatcherite view that there is no such thing of society and is part of a worldview that assigns responsibility to the individual whatever happens to them: unemployment, ill health, homelessness etc. God help anyone in Brechin whose house is made uninhabitable by flooding.

Under the neo-liberal world view those in power, whose decisions and actions cause people to become unemployed, ill (think of how particulate pollution causes respiratory disease) or homeless, are never deemed responsible for the misery they cause. The flooding in Brechin is a case in point. When did you last hear Sepa or the Scottish Government say anything about the responsibilities of the (mostly) very rich grouse moor owners who burn large areas of the Cairngorms and in so doing have increased the rate that water runs off the hill flooding the low ground below?

The Scottish Government and its agencies may sound more caring than those in England, but the truth is ultimately their approach to climate change and environmental disasters is as much in hock to the neo-liberal world view as government down south. And in some cases, as in Sepa’s flood warnings, this is more explicit than it is in England. We should not be surprised, its the same civil service that briefs politicians and the Scottish Government and its agencies are lobbied and influenced by all the same vested interests in England.

An opportunity for change?

The Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill potentially provides an opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to rectify this. It could switch attention from blaming victims to the grouse moor owners up the hill, who more than anyone else are in a position to do something to reduce flood damage. In particular the Scottish Parliament could examine the role that muirburn plays in flooding.

The challenge of doing this should not be under-estimated. The non-governmental organisations that have been campaigning to control muirburn have been mainly concerned about its impact on deep peat. Much of the latest issue of the Scottish Wildlife Trust magazine, for example, was devoted to muirburn, describing it as a “hot topic” and “burning issue” but said nothing about flooding. This focus on peat has left the door open for sporting interests to argue that muirburn should be allowed to continue on other ground, which includes much of the Angus Glens above places like Brechin .

For the last six months certain sporting interests have been using the large fire that took place near Cannich in May to promote the claim that the best way to fight fire is with fire, with Kate Forbes MSP acting as their leading political mouthpiece ([see here](#)). I will consider those claims and what happened at Cannich in more detail in the New Year. The important point here is that at the first reading of the Wildlife Management and Muirburn Bill earlier in December, the “fight fire with fire” argument dominated the debate and no MSP appeared to have been well enough informed to challenge this.

Flooding was not even mentioned. It should have been as its the weak point of those who are arguing muirburn is necessary to stop worse fires. Kate Forbes needs to be challenged to show as much care for those inhabiting the “living hell” of places like Brechin as she has for gamekeepers and to support new laws that would enable landowners to be held responsible for the way they manage their land and the impact this has on the rest of the population.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. flooding
3. grouse moors
4. landed estates
5. muirburn
6. Scottish Government
7. SEPA

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