

Unacceptable telecommunications masts (4) – the full potential impact of the SRN scheme

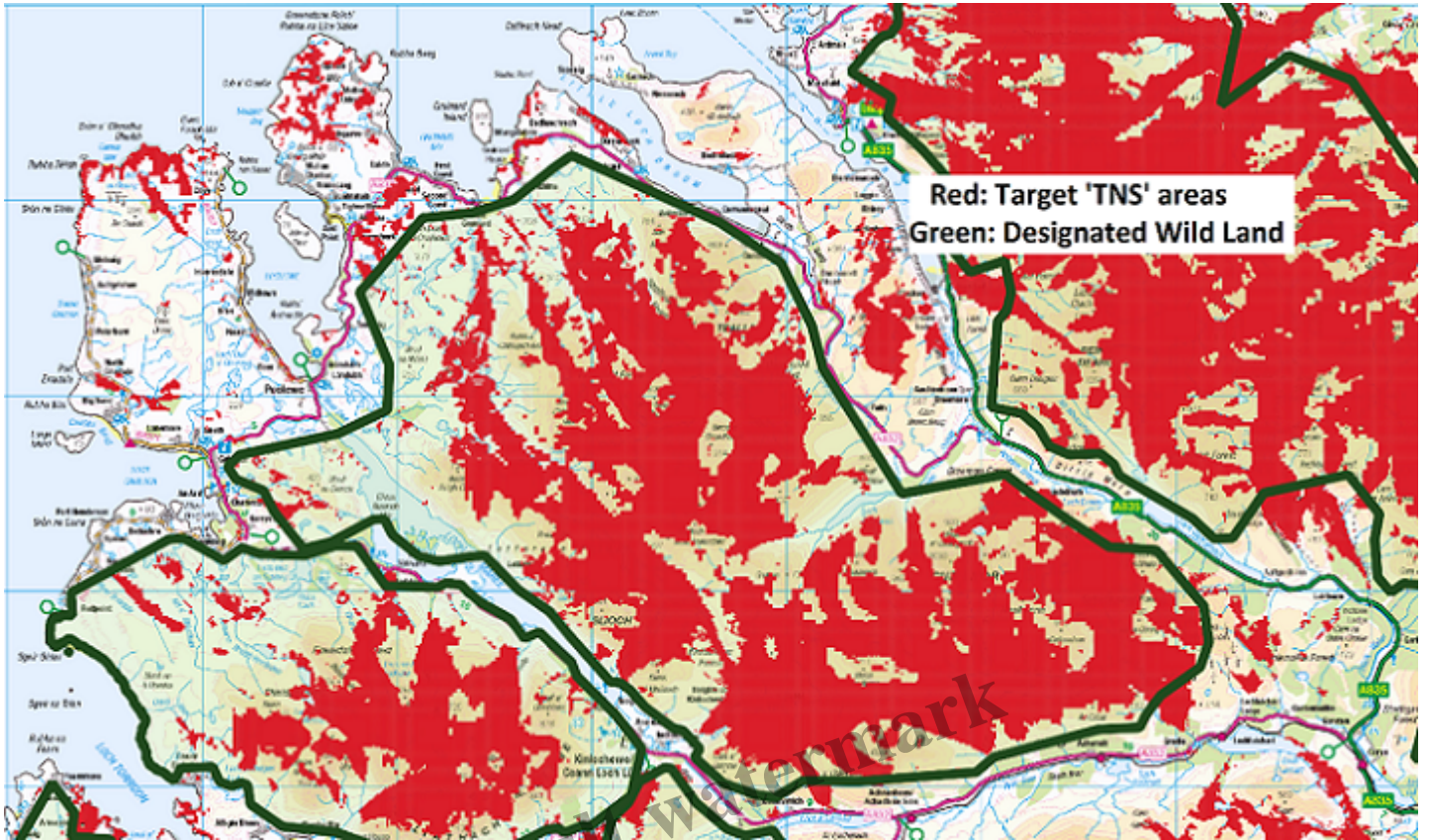
Description

Parkswatch has already featured the Shared Rural Networks (SRN) scheme, and some instances of its potential impact ([see here](#)), ([here](#)) and ([here](#)). Some digging (mostly by others) reveals that the potential impact of the SRN scheme is much bigger and much worse than many people previously thought.

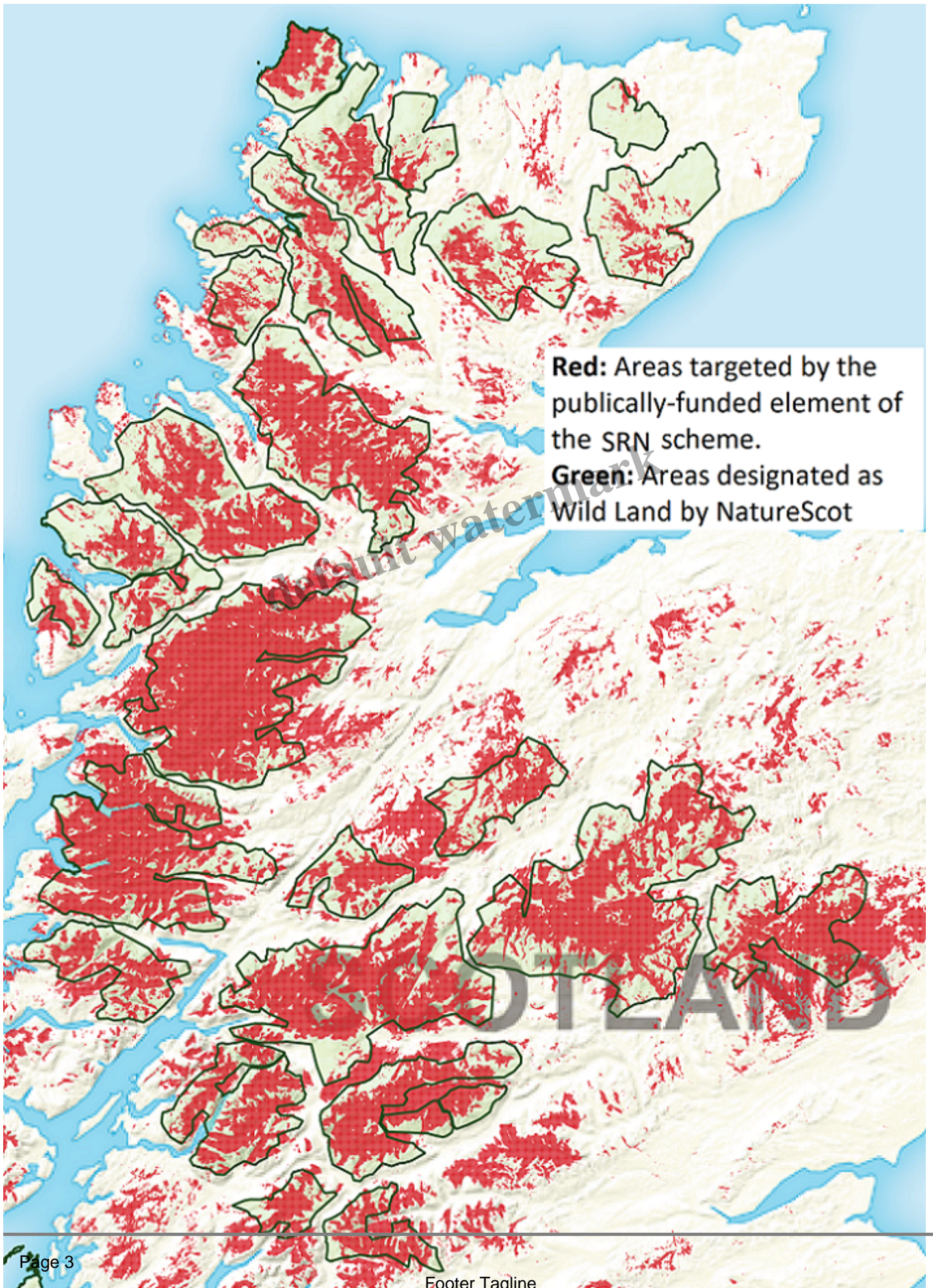
To recap, the Shared Rural Networks (SRN) scheme is an initiative to provide better mobile telephone service to rural communities and businesses. This is essentially a GOOD THING. However, the scheme has set itself a goal of providing coverage to 95% of the UK land area. There's a lot of money involved – £460 million from the current network providers, and £500 million from the UK Government. [Source: SRN website.] That's a lot of money, so even if each mast costs £1M, that's a lot of masts. The problem with the target is the 95% land area – not 95% of population.

The network providers are funding masts where there are people, leaving the empty areas to be funded by central government. Publicly-funded masts can *only* be sited in TotalNotSpot (TNS) areas, as defined by Ofcom in 2020.

The maps below show the impact on wild land. Green is the boundary of the Wild Land Areas recognised by the Scottish Government. Red shows the areas targeted for publicly-funded coverage. First, the Fisherfield area:



Second the whole of Scotland:



The conflict is obvious.

I have an email from the SRN authority, which I quote:

“The new masts proposed under the Shared Rural Network are to provide geographic coverage for these areas. Although there may be few or no premises in these locations, the masts will provide coverage for those who live and work in rural areas whilst away from a fixed address; as well as those visiting the area.

Even in areas where there are no premises, it is still essential to provide improved connectivity. *Having the ability to access vital information and services is critical, as is the reassurance of being connected if there is an incident in these harder to reach places.”*

I’ve underlined the important phrase. Mobile phones are essentially line-of-sight; wild land is where there is no significant visible human infrastructure. So, to paraphrase only slightly, the aim is that there should be no wild land anywhere in Scotland – and there is £940 million to back that up. You maybe need to read that sentence twice for it fully to sink in.

Now, I don’t think the SRN planners had an *intention* to destroy wild land. They’re based in London, and probably had no concept of wild land when they set up the 95% target.

But it is happening now – planning applications for masts are in, overwhelming NatureScot and local authority planners– and the whole new network is supposed to be in place by 2025.

As far as I can make out, the relevant Westminster Minister, is Julia Lopez, MP, (Minister for Data and Digital Infrastructure). Its not clear who the Scottish minister for protecting Wild Land is: it could be Joe FitzPatrick MSP, Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning, or Mairi Gougeon, MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and the Islands or possibly Lorna Slater MSP, Minister for Green Skills, Circular Economy and Biodiversity.

What is needed is a change of target to say 99% of inhabited areas, not 95% of land as a whole or just a blanket “not in Wild Land”.

Get writing! Either directly to the Ministers, or through your MP and MSP. Remember as well that if you are a taxpayer, it’s your money!

Category

1. Cairngorms
2. Loch Lomond and Trossachs
3. Other parts Scotland

Tags

1. conservation
2. landscape
3. planning
4. wild land

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Author
robert-craig

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