



Scottish
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na h-Alba

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Chief Executive Jo O'Hara MICFor

Nick Kempe
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Our ref: SF585

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Dear Mr Kempe

Many thanks for your email of 25 October regarding the landslip damage on FLS land in Strathard and Loch Katrine.

The Scottish Government recognises that sustainable management of wild deer populations and the protection of trees from herbivore browsing are important aspects of sustainable forest management. High numbers of deer can challenge successful woodland establishment and can therefore impact on Scotland's ability to adapt to climatic changes. [Scotland's Forestry Strategy](#) acknowledges this and will support the implementation of the [Wild Deer National Approach](#).

I have been in contact with Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) about the issues in your email. In line with the Scottish Government position, FLS is fully committed to proactive deer management. FLS carries out one third of the annual cull in Scotland whilst only managing 9% of Scotland's land. The [FLS deer management strategy](#) is published online and will be updated in 2021 following the publication of the report to government of the independent [Deer Working Group](#).

FLS also recognises the contribution that woodland makes to slope stability. FLS is about to undertake work with Transport Scotland above the trunk road at the Rest and be Thankful. This will focus on native woodland planting and will be developing techniques to reduce the incidence of landslips that can be applied elsewhere on FLS land.

You raised specific concerns about the landslip at Strathard and Loch Katrine. There have of course been intense rainfall events in the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park (and at some other sites) in recent years and FLS is taking this issue very seriously. We recognise the impact of landslips such as this, but do not agree that this warrants the establishment of an inquiry. Of course it is important to be aware of the context to the management of the land in question, some of which I set out below.

Prior to coming into FLS's management, Loch Katrine was a hill sheep farm that maintained an open treeless sward. With FLS's change in management approach, they report that there are now significant areas of new regeneration outside the fenced enclosure as well as within it. These impermanent deer fences will be removed once the main part of the native woodland is no longer

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at risk from browsing damage, thus allowing the same grazing regime across the whole area. FLS does want a level of grazing to maintain habitats, but at a sustainable level.

FLS have been culling significant numbers of deer in this catchment and will continue to do so. However, a consequence is that deer from surrounding (privately-owned) properties move across the ownership boundary to occupy the land made available by the culling. Most of these properties are members of the Balquidder Deer Management Group (as is FLS), and many also rely on income generated by deer to support their land management activities. Over a number of years, FLS has been collaborating with the group, setting cull levels in Katrine at a level which reduces the local deer population but still leaves a population of sufficient size to satisfy other landowners. In return, FLS has expected, and encouraged, these landowners to cull significant numbers of deer on their land as part of a landscape-scale approach.

As yet, the cull levels required for the sustainable development of native woodland across the catchment have not been achieved. As a consequence, FLS now intends to implement further significant increases to the cull on the land that it manages in Katrine. These increases will be implemented starting this year, with the cull level being set using data on the population from helicopter counts. You will appreciate that this is a sensitive issue and one that FLS wants to continue to take forward in co-operation with its neighbours.

Across the country, Scottish Forestry supports the use of fences to protect new planting and natural regeneration recruitment, and encourages active deer management through grant support. The Cairngorms Connect project is a good example of a collaborative landscape scale approach to deer management and one we would like to see repeated elsewhere.

As mentioned above, there is currently an independent review of deer management in Scotland underway which is due to report before the end of the year setting out a series of recommendations on deer management in Scotland. Scottish Forestry and FLS have been actively participating in this review process and will work with other SG colleagues to consider any recommendations that come out of this review.

Thank you for taking the time to contact me, I have also passed on your comments to the team in FLS.

Yours sincerely

Jo O'Hara
Chief Executive