

# Far Ralia Estate Hill Track Upgrade New Bridge Crossing Supporting Information

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## **Introduction**

This application for permitted development is to upgrade and repair existing tracks leading to a woodland creation proposal currently going through the Forestry EIA and Forestry Grant Scheme procedures. The proposal of woodland creation is for 950ha of new native woodland. This application is also for a new bridge crossing to safeguard the Drochaid Balbh Bhardain Bridge which is B listed.

This application is made under the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Amendment (No. 2) Order 2014 (SSI 2014 No. 300). The Order amends the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 ('the GPDO') to require that, prior to the formation, or alteration, of agricultural or forestry private ways the developer or landowner must apply to the relevant planning authority (PA) for a decision on whether the prior approval of the PA is needed before development begins. This process is known as 'prior notification'.

The application must be accompanied by a description (see below) of the proposed development. The PA will then consider whether their prior approval is required.

## **Woodland Creation (Forestry) Project**

The Estate extends to approximately 1475ha. Approval is currently being sought from Scottish Forestry under the Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 to gain approval to plant 950ha of native woodland. This woodland will comprise around 530ha of native Scots Pine woodland, 260ha of native Birch woodland, and 65ha of native low density scrub woodland at high elevation. The remainder of the area, will be associated designed open ground for various species of flora and fauna.

## **Roads**

There will be 2 separate categories of roads to be constructed.

Firstly, the biggest roading operation will be the upgrading of the track from the entrance at Millton of Nuide to the ford at Allt Ghiubhais, totalling around 4050m. This upgrade will be to create access to the site that has multiple benefits. The main benefit will be to give upgraded access capable of running heavier vehicles than a 4x4. This is to give access during the operational phase of the project and to allow access to firefighting equipment, should wildfire ever be an issue. The improved running surface will also be beneficial from a health and safety perspective, in relation to employees and contractors being on site.

The running surface of the access track is presently depressed from its original formation, and is made up of two narrow running tracks with a central vegetation strip, due to years of vehicles running on the track, with little maintenance. The existing road structure, is approx. 2.4 m wide. Useable hard materials from the centre and sides of the road will be used to fill in established running tracks and allow water run off. This will ensure the stone fits the location and is fit for purpose. This will be done by re-profiling the surface to create a gently cambered running track with shallow drainage ditches on either side. Target width of 3.5 m for the overall track is forecast (track with ditches). Vegetation will be reinstated on verges as required.

As this track is already constructed and has been in place for over 100 years, there is little that can be done with regard to its location. The upgrading of the track will conform to Scottish Natural Heritages, 'Constructed tracks in the Scottish Uplands' guidance document, especially section 6.1 'Track enhancement and restoration'. This will be done by re-profiling the surface to create a gently cambered running track with shallow drainage ditches on either side. The upgrading of the track will also conform to the UK Forestry Standard.

The second upgrade will be from the ford at Allt Ghiubhais to the slopes of Garbh Meal Mor, totalling around 2570m. This upgrade will be to fill in potholes and maintain culverts. This section of the track will be for small vehicle access only.

All-terrain vehicles (ATV) tracks will be used for plant layout, to aid in the initial works to establish the woodland, deer control and site maintenance. The ATV tracks will avoid steep gradients and use in wetter months will be minimal to avoid discharge of water run-off via surface water into the water

environment. These ATV tracks will not require any vegetation removal or include material being imported onto site. The ATV track will be approximately 2.5m to 3.5m in width, with the stocking density of trees to be planted at an average of 1600 stems per ha, the ATV track will be incorporated into the variable density planting proposed for the site. As these ATV Tracks will be surrounded by the woodland creation, they will have no negative landscape effect. The Scottish Natural Heritage, 'Constructed tracks in the Scottish Uplands' guidance document makes no comment on best practise for these types of tracks. These ATV tracks are mentioned for information only and are NOT part of the Permitted Development application.

### **Bridge/ River Crossing**

To avoid damaging the Wades Bridge (Drochaid Balbh Bhordain Bridge) a new crossing will be installed across the Millton Burn. This bridge will be a clear-span bridge. This is to maintain the integrity of the river channel, allow the free passage of fish, otter, and water vole, and protect the watercourse from increases in silt loading downstream.

A clear-span bridge will be used as SEPA have a presumption against the use of culverts. Crossing watercourses (including culverting) is a controlled activity under The Water Environment (Controlled Activities)(Scotland) Regulations 201128 and requires authorisation from SEPA. This authorisation will be sought prior to any operations being undertaken.

The Millton Burn is part of the River Spey SAC, to protect this, as per UKFS Forest and Water guidelines legal requirement 1 - *Prior authorisation must be obtained from the water regulatory authority or lead local flood authority for building, engineering and other activities in or adjacent to watercourses that affect river hydromorphology; this includes water abstraction, impoundments, constructing culverts and extracting river gravel. Authorisation for gravel extraction may also be required from the conservation agency if the river is designated as, or flows through, a Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area or Site of Special Scientific Interest (Area of Special Scientific Interest in Northern Ireland).* All other relevant UKFS legal requirements and guidance will also be followed, as will SEPAs general binding rules.

### **Public Access**

Anecdotal evidence indicates General Wade's Military Road is regularly used by the public for walking and cycling; the estate track on Far Ralia is also used but appears to be less so, and gives access to the summit of Garbh-mheall Mor. Creag nam Bodach and Sron na Gaoithe are accessible from outside the estate.

Signs will be erected during the roading upgrade and repair to warn access takers of the works. No alternative routes are available within the area.

### **Designations**

The site has only one designation which directly affects it, and a number of designations outside the site but which are of significance:

- Cairngorms Wild Land Area (not a statutory designation) lies over a small area of the south-west corner of the site.
- River Spey SAC/SSSI and Insh Marshes NNR/SPA/SAC/Ramsar/SSSI.  
Watercourses on the site flow into these designated watercourses and features.

Due to the Millton Burn being classified as a part of the River Spey SAC, up to Loch an Dabhaich, all water courses which lead into the Millton Burn will be afforded the same mitigation. This mitigation will be to adhere to Forest and Water Guidelines for all operations.

A new bridge will be required to avoid using the Drochaid Balbh Bhordain Bridge, a CAR licence be sought from SEPA prior to works commencing.

### **Archaeology**

Archaeology is limited to three areas of interest along the northern margin of the proposal area and comprises of Lynmore Township, a farmstead and two buildings. The features are recorded on the Highland Historic Environment Record (HER) but all are non-scheduled. Drochaid Balbh Bhordain bridge (B listed) will not be used and any damage will be mitigated through a new crossing to be constructed downstream from the scheduled bridge.

**UK Forestry Standard**

All aspects of the UK Forestry Standard will be adhered to during the planning, operational and maintenance phases of the Far Ralia project. Due to the size of the project, the sections of the UK Forestry Standard which apply to this project are too numerous to list.

**Maps and other information**

See the Supporting Documents uploaded onto Eplanning for further information