

# East Schiehallion Mountain Woodland Consultation Summary Report



<b>Report Prepared by</b>	East Schiehallion Property Manager and Conservation Officer
<b>Edited by</b>	Regional Delivery Manager

## Background

The Trust aims to restore mountain woodland at East Schiehallion. This has been part of our publicly-available Woodland Plan approved by Scottish Forestry in 2016 and shared with immediate neighbours and the Breadalbane Deer Management Group at that time.

Following a Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership visit to Norway in 2019, we have been exploring this objective for Schiehallion and partner sites. The Trust undertook a feasibility study with partners which was completed in March 2020. We have regularly updated Heart of Scotland Forest partners and other stakeholders with the project as plans have developed.

In 2020, we identified three options for taking this project forward:

1. No fencing, deer control, removal of sheep through purchase or active shepherding
2. Smaller fenced exclosures to create a seed source
3. Boundary fencing, using deer control and active shepherding to deal with incursions

Following further investigation the Trust is of the opinion that option three is the most appropriate way forward for the site as it is the option which provides the best chance of success to reduce grazing from both deer and sheep which is the biggest threat to the success of the project.

This document sets out the engagement and consultation activities that have taken place since the Trust began taking forward plans for mountain woodland at East Schiehallion.

**Table 1: Timeline for engagement and consultation**

Method	Date	Trust staff involved (see key)	Activity	Results
Documents submitted to Scottish Forestry and shared with neighbours and BDMG	March 2016	ESPM	Aspiration for establishing montane woodland on Schiehallion included in Woodland Plan.	Woodland Plan approved by Scottish Forestry.
Information on public register for 4 weeks	October 2017	ESPM	EIA Screening opinion request for woodland creation and regeneration.	No EIA required, Woodland creation and replanting grants awarded.
Site visits and discussions	May 2019	ESPM ESCO	Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership visit to Norway to see examples of intact mountain woodland.	A greater understanding of a habitat which has been lost across much of its range in Scotland
Mountain Woodland Action Group meetings	2020 onwards	ESCO	The Trust have been members of the Mountain Woodland Action Group since 2019. Updates given at twice-yearly meetings and a handful of informal site visits with partners.	No concerns raised in meetings partners supportive of the project and its aims to raise the profile of mountain woodland potential in Scotland.
In person meeting	February 2020	ESPM ESCO HPLM	Meeting with Scottish Forestry and NatureScot to discuss project and permissions required.	
Documents shared with NatureScot and HOSFP	March 2020	ESCO	Feasibility study for mountain woodland at Schiehallion was completed, identifying three possible management options.  HOSFP mountain woodland feasibility study funded by NatureScot was completed and initial project plans discussed with MWAG and HOSFP partners.	

Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership meetings	March 2020 onwards	ESPM ESCO	Partners have been collectively updated on plans as they evolved from 2020 onwards at four meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scottish Wildlife Trust</li> <li>• Forestry &amp; Land Scotland</li> <li>• Kynachan &amp; Dalchosnie Estate</li> <li>• Woodland Trust Scotland</li> <li>• Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust</li> <li>• Garth Wood Wilding Project</li> <li>• National Trust for Scotland (Ben Lawers)</li> <li>• Grenich Estate</li> </ul>	No specific concerns were raised during partnership meetings.
In person meetings with immediate neighbours	June 2020	CEO	Site visit with owner of Dalchosnie & Kynachan Estate.	
In person meetings with immediate neighbours	August 2020	CEO	Met owners and farm manager of Crossmount.	
	Sep 2020		Letter received from owner of North Chesthill Estate) about the project.	Various concerns raised and shared with BDMG, NatureScot and Scottish Forestry.
Phone call with immediate neighbour	October 2020	CEO	CEO call with Garth.	Update on project plans.
Zoom meeting	October 2020	CEO ESPM	CEO gave presentation at Breadalbane Deer Management Group meeting.	Information on project noted in BDMG minutes.

In person (site visit)	October 2020	ESPM ESCO	Met NTS Ben Lawers and Crossmount Farm Manager.	Site visit to look at potential fenceline routes and to discuss the project.
In person (site visit)	Dec 2020, Sep 2021	ESPM ESCO	Woodland Trust Scotland visited on two occasions to discuss the mountain woodland project.	WTS supportive of the project, acting as advisory partner for the planning of the woodland restoration.
In person (site visit)	February 2021	ESPM ESCO	NTS visit to look at snow lie and potential fencelines.	Update on project plans.
In person (site visit)	March 2021	ESCO	Tree nursery owner visit to the site to look at opportunities for seed collection and building raised beds on the site.	Advice on tree seed collection and planting.
In person (site visit) with immediate neighbours	June 2021	RDM	Met Dalchosnie and Kynachan Estate on site.	Update on project plans.
Teams call with immediate neighbours	June 2021	RDM	Virtual call with Garth Estate.	Update on project plans.
Stakeholder engagement	Aug/Sep 2021	ESPM	One-to-one discussions on Teams and phone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RSPB</li> <li>• Mountaineering Scotland</li> <li>• Scottish Raptor Study Group</li> </ul>	RSPB: undertake lek search surveys before fencing to ensure that black grouse leks are not impacted.  Mountaineering Scotland: incorporate regular crossing points, supportive of open fence design to minimise impacts on access.  Scottish Raptor Study Group: ensure construction takes place outside raptor breeding period (i.e. after August).
In person (site visit)	Sep 2021	ESPM	NatureScot site visit to discuss project and site condition monitoring.	New monitoring plan developed, included in project plan.

Phone call with immediate neighbours	Sep 2021	RDM	Phone call with Crossmount Farm Manager	Update on Project plans and discuss sheep incursions.
Phone call with immediate neighbours	Oct 2021	RDM	Phone call with Glen Lyon Estate	Update on project plans.
Documents submitted to NatureScot	December 2021	ESPM ESCO	Permission requested from NatureScot for fencing and reduction in grazing of SSSI	Application approved by NatureScot in January 2022
<b>January – February 2022</b>		<b>Two-week public consultation</b>		
Social media	3, 4 Feb 2022	Two John Muir Trust Twitter posts asking for local feedback on public consultation.  34.3k followers		Gained 20 retweets and 44 likes on one Tweet.
John Muir Trust E news	31 Jan 2022	Mention about consultation process with a link to share feedback.		272 click throughs from E news.
Press release	31 Jan 2022	Sent to Press and Journal and the Perthshire Advertiser.		Press release not picked up by newspapers.
Public consultation on JMT website	24 Jan – 6 Feb (some responses came in late)	An open public consultation with a summary document available on the Trust's website.  The webpage had 789 views during the consultation period.		15 email responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 former JMT Trustee</li> <li>• Breadalbane DMG</li> <li>• 5 neighbours</li> <li>• 5 MWAG partners</li> <li>• 2 members of the public</li> <li>• Mountaineering Scotland and RSPB Scotland</li> </ul>

#### Trust staff key:

Abbreviation	Name	Role
ESPM	Liz Auty	East Schiehallion Property Manager
ESCO	Izzy Filor	East Schiehallion Conservation Officer
HPLM	Mike Daniels	Head of Policy and Land Management
RDM	Kevin Cumming	Regional Delivery Manager
CEO	David Balharry	Chief Executive

## **NatureScot and Scottish Forestry**

We have engaged with Scottish Forestry and NatureScot (formerly SNH) from project concept in early 2020. We met with representatives from both agencies along with Woodland Trust Scotland in-person in February 2020.

We met virtually in 2020 with NatureScot staff to look at mitigation measures to progress the project. It was recommended that adequate habitat monitoring would need to be put in place before approval could be granted and NatureScot staff agreed to visit the site to assess the SSSI's current condition and grazing pressures.

A site visit took place in July 2020 to look at the three habitats that form the designated features of the SSSI. We received advice on site condition monitoring of these features.

In August 2021 we had a Teams call with the Woodland Officer at Scottish Forestry to update them on our project.

NatureScot visited the site again in October 2021 to discuss our new monitoring plan (included in the consultation documents). In December 2021 we submitted an application for consent to reduce grazing in the SSSI (including the use of fencing) to NatureScot and permission was granted in January 2022.

## **Consultation responses**

The following are summaries of the responses to the two-week consultation, similar comments have been collated, and feedback has been divided into themes.

### ***Principle of establishing mountain woodland***

The following comments are quoted directly from responses:

- “It was great to see your proposal and I really look forward to following your progress in the coming years”
- “Good luck with the project”
- “The East Schiehallion Mountain woodland plans look great, 100% support them”
- “The principle of the plan is excellent”
- “Excellent document, well presented”
- [We] “support JMT’s desire to see restoration of mountain woodland on a landscape scale across our respective sites”

- “It looks a very interesting project indeed”.
- “We welcome the intention to extend woodland cover across the hillside where it is possible. Our preference would be for this to be achieved without fencing, by managing deer and sheep in the local range, but we understand the challenge of achieving this, which is clearly explained in your Consultation Document”
- “We have no difficulty in regenerating areas and am supportive of the proposed strategy to reduce grazing and encourage habitat improvement”
- “I support the Trust's worthy ambition to re-establish Montane Woodland on Schiehallion, but disagree with the method”
- “We would contend that in order to achieve this, that a number of large woodland creation schemes could be placed around the lower to mid slopes of the mountain, and this will provide the necessary foundations on which higher regeneration can take place at a later date. BDMG members would have no objection to this, and it would deal with a number of the more problematic aspects of the proposal”
- “It is my opinion that your proposed ‘offset electric fencing’ will be unlikely to solve the grazing problem, especially in the longer term after you have removed the fence. JMT should instead follow the well demonstrated practice at Creag Meagaidh and Mar Lodge by aggressively culling the deer (and being very insistent that the sheep be removed)”
- “The idea is a good one, and montane woodland is welcome where it exists, but the price at Schiehallion is much too high”
- “Schiehallion is absolutely the wrong site for these proposals”

### ***Visual impacts of fencing / vegetation change***

Key points and quotes from respondents:

- Visual impact on Glen Lyon and Loch Rannoch National Scenic Area
- Visual impact in a ‘wild place’ [Glen Mor]
- Impact of vegetation changes when viewed in the landscape
- “The woodland will enhance the landscape greatly at lower altitude over time. At higher altitude it will be far less obvious from neighbouring hills and the vegetation change will only be remarkable to those walking through it”
- “The existing electric fencing is very unsightly”

Our reply:

East Schiehallion sits on the edge of the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon NSA, so the impact on this designation is important to consider. It is our view that increasing woodland cover through this project, right up to the treeline zone has additional aesthetic benefits. There will be additional

benefits to biodiversity within the NSA, linking several nearby areas of young and ancient woodland and providing a seed source for the future.

To mitigate the visual impacts of fencing, the chosen fence design is only slightly higher than a stock-height fence and we anticipate fencing will be removed once woodland has been established and grazing levels can be controlled at a low level on the estate. Existing fencelines will be used where practicable, to minimise the negative visual impacts of new fencing.

It should be noted that the proposed project is for one new fence line on the south side of the mountain in Glen Mor and to upgrade and extend an existing fence on the north side of the mountain. We contest the 'wild' nature of Glen Mor as noted by some respondents, as there are numerous signs of human impacts in the form of grazing and infrastructure in the landscape. Infrastructure includes: an existing metal boundary fence on the south side of the Allt Mor, a boundary stock fence between Garth and Glenlyon estates, a deer fence around Dun Coillich, a hydro scheme, two landrover tracks, grouse butts, shielings and two bothies.

The nature of the proposed fence is strategic, this type of fence will not exclude all grazers, there will still need to be sustained deer stalking effort and regular gathering of sheep that enter the area, which is included in our planning.

### ***Schiehallion SSSI montane assemblage habitats influenced by limestone***

Key points:

- How will designated features in the SSSI be maintained in favourable condition with a reduction in grazing?

Our reply:

NatureScot have given permission for increased fencing and a reduction in grazing in the SSSI. Site Condition Monitoring plots are being set up as directed by NatureScot to monitor the condition of calcareous grassland, alkaline mire and species rich dry heath. These plots will be monitored every three years so that mitigations such as targeted grazing could be put in place if the habitats were showing signs of moving towards unfavourable condition. The strategic fencing in the proposed plan will not exclude herbivores completely and grazers are likely to preferentially graze these habitats.

### ***Herbivores***

Key points and quotes from respondents:

- The fence could create a “deer trap”
- Possible issues around deer welfare by excluding them from sheltered ground on lower slopes which they use in bad weather
- We can’t distinguish impacts of deer from impacts of sheep in our monitoring data
- All options to remove sheep e.g. purchase and sale from owner haven’t been explored
- Deer can be controlled by culling, why are we spending so much on fencing out approx. 200 sheep?
- The fence won’t be effective in keeping grazing animals out
- Developing habitats might draw in deer from a wider area due to lack of a full enclosure
- “We agree that the first objective in removing sheep is essential”

#### Our reply:

Deer movements will be affected by fencing on the site, however there is no evidence to suggest that there will be a negative impact on deer welfare. Offset electric fencing has been successfully used by National Trust for Scotland at Ben Lawers and Mar Lodge (which is also a strategic or shield fence and not an enclosure), where neither estate has reported the fence design impacting deer welfare. A similar fence has been used since 2018 at lower altitudes at East Schiehallion, with no incidences of deer welfare issues.

Concern was noted by several respondents that the fence could create a ‘deer trap’. The offset fence design specifically allows any deer inside the fence to jump out of the fenced area and we will also install several deer leaps to aid this. After fencing, an initial reduction cull to reduce grazing pressure by deer on the site will be required to remove any deer ‘hefted’ on the site. At present, there is very little woodland habitat for deer at East Schiehallion, so any welfare impact in removing deer access to the site will be small. In the long-term once fencing can be removed, the mountain woodland habitat created will vastly increase good habitat for deer in the area.

Ongoing deer control will be necessary throughout the fence’s lifetime as deer may come into the area by moving around the top of the fence and if there is heavy snow or fence damage. The success and level of our culling activity will be determined by the habitat response from our ongoing monitoring plan.

Two respondents noted inconsistencies in the habitat data given, suggesting that grazing levels were reducing on the site. We have been part of foot and helicopter deer counts through the Breadalbane Deer Management Group from 2011 to 2021, the data from which is publicly available. Counts provide a snapshot of deer movements on a given day, therefore grazing impacts are monitored on the site more accurately through vegetation surveys. The Trust have monitored grazing impacts since 2008, through marked seedling and dwarf shrub heath monitoring. Marked seedling growth has not changed over this period, apart from in one plot which was fenced in 2018. The heath data shows growth over the same period from an average

height of 25cm in 2008 to 32cm in 2019. Despite growth in heath height, this data shows that browsing levels on East Schiehallion are too high to allow young trees to establish. We appreciate that sheep contribute to this overgrazing, with around 200 sheep on the site and deer are also having a significant impact on tree and vegetation growth.

### ***Black Grouse***

Key points and quotes from respondents:

- The Forest Research guidance does highlight the requirement to mark stock fencing <https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/documents/7050/FCTN019.pdf> if required.
- The areas of new fencing are slightly further away from the core black grouse area and you could perhaps make a case for not marking the purple fence line but given the new woodland habitat will be highly suitable for black grouse foraging over time, this might need further thought.

Our reply:

We plan to carry out lek search surveys this spring and to monitor how black grouse use the woodland habitat as it develops so that fence marking can be implemented if required.

### ***Tree planting***

Key points and quotes from respondents:

- Ensure adequate biosecurity measures are followed
- Planting of certain species may not be required due to natural regeneration
- “The excellent work on soils is good to see, the marginal success of trees in these areas can be mitigated a great deal by matching species to soil types. Exposure, snow lie, aspect and wetness are also important factors, but this attention to site suitability will lend itself to the success of the project. I also support the approach of minimal ground disturbance while planting”
- “I would not like to see any mounding on East Schiehallion and I hope that JMT will be very aware of the existing flora when it carries out its montane planting”.

Our reply:

Planted trees will be sourced from several local tree nurseries using seed of as local a provenance as possible. The biosecurity measures taken by nurseries will be an important part of agreeing a contract for growing trees. We are discussing options with a grower to create raised beds on site at Schiehallion, where young trees can be hardened-off and stored for a year or longer if necessary. This would also allow visitors to see part of the growing process.

In line with Scottish Forestry guidance, to reduce the likelihood of spreading *Phytophthora austrocedri* in planted juniper, the creation of raised beds on site would allow us to keep nursery stock for a growing season to minimise the risk of planting out infected plants. Sites for planting juniper will focus on areas that drain well and away from areas of high footfall to reduce knock-on impacts if plants do become infected. We will incorporate monitoring of planted juniper into our future monitoring plans for the site.

No mounding will be carried out for any of the planting, hand screening will be used where required. Detailed vegetation surveys and botanical mapping will be taken into account in tree planting plans to avoid botanically sensitive sites.

## **Access**

Key points:

- New fencing would restrict access of walkers

Our reply:

Fencing can have an unavoidable impact on visitors exploring areas of the site not on paths or tracks. We want to minimise impacts on walkers and cyclists using the area, which is why we have discussed appropriate measures with Mountaineering Scotland to mitigate these which are included in the plans.

The proposed fencing is purposely strategic and will not be a full enclosure. Walkers using the main path up Schiehallion will not have to navigate any new gates / stiles to walk up the mountain. Crossing points will be constructed at regular intervals along fencing, with signage in between to point visitors towards the direction of the nearest crossing point. Strava heatmaps has been used as a basis for identifying informal routes on the mountain to ensure crossing points intersect with these and all formal paths will have a crossing point. The proposal includes one new fence and one upgraded and extended fence.

## **Climate change / carbon**

The following comments are quoted directly from responses:

- “The proposals suggest ‘significant’ carbon sequestration can be achieved have there been any calculations done?”
- “The timing looks slow given the urgency of climate change, how can this be speeded up?”

Our reply:

We have not carried out any specific carbon calculations at Schiehallion yet, but calculating the carbon capture potential of the land we manage is part of a wider Trust project being led by the Trust's Carbon Officer. We are happy to share data on this when it is available.

Planting areas will avoid soils with a substantial peat layer and will be restricted to mineral soils. Initial soil ground truthing in 2021 identified small areas of deep peat on the site and consequently, a thorough peat survey of these areas is planned during summer 2022. All planting will be done by hand to further reduce soil disturbance and associated carbon loss through soil respiration. The long term, small scale nature of the planting is suited to volunteers alongside contractors.

It is our view that low density planting of species unlikely to regenerate at East Schiehallion naturally is the right balance for this project. Natural regeneration will be monitored after grazing has been reduced and will inform future planting. We are proposing to plant at low density of 500 stems per hectare or less over the whole area.

### ***Consultation process***

Key points:

- Inadequate consultation, comments haven't been incorporated into final plans
- Full EIA requested

Our reply:

This document sets out the engagement the Trust has undertaken on this project over several years. The comments received for this report are a result of a public consultation on our proposed plans. It is not uncommon that during consultations respondents that broadly support plans feel that engagement has been sufficient and those that are not supportive feel it has not. The Trust is comfortable with the level of engagement with stakeholders for this project.

We are grateful for all constructive feedback that has been provided from our engagement and we have attempted to incorporate this into our proposal to improve the plan where possible. This can be seen through our new monitoring plan for the site (including the SSSI) and our approach to public access of the site. We will consider the comments from this consultation carefully and include those that could improve the project.

The next stage of this process is to request an EIA screening opinion from Scottish Forestry.

We will continue to make ourselves available to all stakeholders and they are welcome to contact the Trust to discuss the project at any time.

## Summary Conclusions

The majority of respondents supported plans to reduce grazing and establish mountain woodland at East Schiehallion. Comments in support of the project from respondents related to the quality of the documents produced, especially the detailed work undertaken on soils, the plans to involve the local community and the consideration and engagement undertaken regarding public access with any proposed new fencing.

The main area of concern raised by some respondents was the use of a strategic boundary fence as part of the solution to aid in reducing grazing on site. It is important to consider the boundary fence working alongside increased deer control and reduced grazing by sheep through actively gathering them. It is also important to consider that the boundary fence is indeed only new to south of the property. The East is already fenced to the proposed specification and to the North it is an upgrade and extension to an existing stock fence line.

A second area of concern is that the fence will not allow grazing animals that enter the area to exit again. The proposed fencing is purposefully not a full height deer fence. We know from the proposed design that deer inside the fenced area can jump from inside to out as has happened in the area already fenced with this design at East Schiehallion. We are proposing as part of the design to install a number of deer leaps to aid deer movement if they enter the fenced area. The intention is for this design to work alongside a deer control program and not in place of it. With regards to sheep the principal of the fence is to aid in reducing encroachment and will work alongside a program of actively and regularly gathering sheep as needed.