Appendix 1

This document includes full comments from those respondents that gave permission to share their text.

1. You mention trees being sourced from a trusted nursery. I'd recommend doing a full biosecurity assessment of the planting, particularly looking at species-specific pathogens that may inadvertently be transferred (e.g. Dothistroma, Phytophthora austrocedri etc.) This risk can normally be managed (like any other risk) through assessment and control measures (Phytophthora screening tests, moving plants at certain times of year etc.) – but I suggest looking at specific hosts and pathogens, and not just the general trustworthiness of the source nursery (though that is also important).
2. At RSPB Abernethy, we have generally found that Scots pine, eared willow, rowan and juniper are naturally regenerating in some areas where deer are controlled. Other species are not (in our opinion due to lack of nearby seed source) and are therefore being planted. Each site will be different due to existing seed source, topography, prevailing wind, deer movement etc., and you will know your own site best. I think it would be useful to monitor the fenced area, and gradually drop species from the planting mix if you find that they are regenerating without need for planting. The justification you give for planting (i.e. that it will allow the fence to be removed sooner) is a strong one from a landscape perspective. I think this justifies starting with a fairly broad planting mix and monitoring what happens over time.
3. When it comes to species/ provenance, there is plenty of existing guidance such as the Forestry Commission provenance zones, recording seed collections as +/- 300m asl (FRM regs), Caledonian Pinewood Inventory, and the MWAG BPGs. There are also some upland/ montane forms of common species (downy birch, goat willow) which you should be aware of. My view is that the most appropriate seed is usually from parent trees that are growing in similar conditions to your proposed planting site, even if these aren't technically the nearest.
4. You mention silver birch having been planted previously. Are you keeping this in the planting mix? At Abernethy we find it grows well wherever it has self-seeded, but view it as probably a recent incomer brought in by hikers, vehicles or blown from planted trees. Andy Amphlett's recent paper has some good tips for distinguishing downy/ silver birch and hybrids, based on the shape of the bracts. I think this has been circulated previously but I can share some further correspondence with him when you get to that stage.

Hope that's of use. Good luck with the project.

As members of the ES local advisory group or committee in the early days of JMT ownership. Early 2000s though I've not checked exactly when.

There were two main problems at that time that prevented natural regeneration of the montane flora. Encroachment by sheep from the neighbouring land to the west, and excessive numbers of deer. Both the sheep and the deer were hefted to ES.
A very expensive fence was erected along the western boundary of the JMT land but this did not deter the sheep. They gained access around the top of the fence and continued to graze, as your monitoring since 2008 has shown. You say there has been "consistently intense grazing". The ongoing reluctance to cull sufficient deer has also been a continuing detrimental influence.

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.) Only by 'dehefting' the grazers and continuing long term with culling to sensible levels will you achieve the montane regeneration you feel is necessary. Your plantings will continue to be impacted in the longer term by too many grazers. Reduce their numbers.

It is frankly a disgrace that it has taken JMT so long to establish that that they have made very little progress since purchasing the property.

I would comment further that the existing electric fencing is very unsightly as are the tube plantings. Where fencing results in channelling of mountain users, even over a short period of years, it is extremely regrettable and not at all in keeping with the open access tradition and law.

As for the planting on neighbouring Dun Coillich, I would comment that the mounding, that was done prior to the planting there, rendered the ground more or less impossible to access. Planting was carried out in or close to areas of considerable botanical interest and this should have been taken into account.

I would not like to see any mounding on ES and I hope that JMT will be very aware of the existing flora when it carries out its montane planting.

I am happy to be contacted about my comments.

Thank you for including me in the circulation of your strategy paper for the “Schiehallion Mountain Woodland Consultation”. I have had an in depth look at the proposals. We would like to make the following comments as part of the consultation.

Firstly we would like it noted that there has not been any consultation with your adjoining landowners or the Deer Management Group with regard to your proposals. The paper you have provided is a strategy for a woodland creation scheme on a significant scale, on land immediately adjacent to our Estates. Your paper is headed “a consultation process” but in fact none of your neighbours views have been included.

Secondly the proposals will have a big impact in the surrounding area and as it is of significant size and as it includes an SSSI and is in a NSA, we request an “EIA Determination”. Please could FLS advise whether a full EIA is required.

Carbon Sequestration - The proposals suggests that “significant” carbon sequestration rates can be achieved. Have there been any calculations done with regard to carbon sequestration?

Climate change – you have intimated that snow melt is a significant reason for erosion of Schiehallion and the existing condition of the habitat. Have you got data which demonstrates this? We all know that there is far less snowfall and therefore snow melt during the past 20 years than was experienced earlier this century. We agree that wetter summers and winter storms are still a significant factor but we are not sure if these have actually increased or not. Can you comment.

Visual impact – We have no difficulty in regenerating areas and am supportive of the proposed strategy to reduce grazing and encourage habitat improvement. We would not necessarily agree that the harsh boundary is of significant hindrance as the Highlands have looked very much the same for thousands of years. We would argue however that erecting a double fence up the bare face of the north and south sides of this mountain will have a detrimental impact visually.

Sheep numbers – We agree that the first objective in removing sheep is essential as they browse just as efficiently as deer but continually throughout the year unlike the red deer.

Deer numbers – Deer welfare is a priority and achieving a satisfactory deer density is important for everybody including neighbours. Has an evaluation been undertaken on the current deer population and the impact of your proposals? Your statement said that there are “significant densities of deer” on your ground. Can you provide the data please. The deer will generally only use the lower Schiehallion slopes you are proposing to fence off, during the harsher winter months and early spring for shelter and food. If you do fence out deer in this area there could be a welfare issue and consideration of this impact must be included in the paper.

It was great to see your proposal and I really look forward to following your progress in the coming years. Here are a few notes that I took while reading:

* It will be interesting to follow the impact of the new fencing – I'm assuming one reason why you couldn't do a full exclosure was the difficulty of installing a complete fence over the summit ridge? Your proposed fence could be a really useful compromise and be better for hillwalker access too.
* Monitoring progress will be really important, both for the planted trees and marked seedlings within the fenced area, but also associated vegetation change. I'm happy to help advise on this.
  o It would be great if you could include additional data on % cover of species within the plots, or % cover of functional plant groups
  o You could always re-sample plots 1-10 at some point to see if heather height and frequency increases in response to the fenced exclosure?
  o Good idea to include some more plots in unfenced heathland areas as a comparison.
  o My research is finding height is a good proxy for other growth measurements in planted montane willow scrub; so if you can only measure one variable then measure shrub height!
* It was great to see the soil survey – I hope we can get something of this detail at our proposed montane scrub restoration areas.
* For supplementing your whortle-leaved willow populations, you could look into taking cuttings (or seed if there is any) from nearby populations at Carn Gorm, Farragon Hill and Ben Vrackie, and maybe even Drumochter too.
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I hope this was helpful, and all the best for the next phase of your project.

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My views on how I perceived the best way to proceed with this project in terms of fencing changed over the course of the two visits, it is not a straight forward site and there is no right or wrong way of doing it. I suspect there will be a learning curve steeper than the mountain itself whichever way the project evolves.

There is much to be said for an incremental approach with the medium term set up of seed source exclosures. The timescales for creating a seed source pretty much matches that of a fence life, so this would seem to be a good option and target to start with. It would lower the considerable input to herding and stalking of deer for many years while seed source plantings establish with confidence and mature. However, establishing scrub on the mid and higher slopes with exclosures would require more fencing at high altitude than in your proposal, in ground where the possibility of fencing is already marginal, and require a larger budget for fencing to protect a smaller area of ground. The effect of the strategic fence proposed in this consultation is unknown and will likely change over a few years as beasts become accustomed to it or not. It takes the fence into an area where conventional fencing will be impossible, underbuilding fencelines becomes a major part of the construction, and access for construction, maintenance and equipment are very difficult. The possibility of finding a contractor who will take on that work competently should be established at least in principle before the project progresses much further.

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.

The SSSI habitats will change with planting of montane willows and spread of tall herbs through reduction of grazing. This was of major concern to some in the early days of the Ben Lawers projects but the results have largely enhanced the biodiversity and species richness of the sites with the removal of grazing. Should this need to be demonstrated, there are studies into the vegetation change which has taken place at Ben Lawers which would be of direct relevance to your project.

It is encouraging to see that funding for tree planting projects is not through standard grant schemes. This will give greater flexibility, longer possible timescales for establishment and again likely lead to greater success.

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. This can also be demonstrated at Ben Lawers.

The public involvement in the project in terms of volunteer input is similar to the Ben Lawers projects. I feel it is a very valuable way to promote and raise awareness of the work. I hope the necessary long term commitment to staffing is also accounted for.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your woodland creation plans for East Schiehallion, and for the early stakeholder engagement on what issues may affect hillwalkers visiting the site for recreation.

Mountaineering Scotland supports activities that lead towards creating a richer and wilder environment which address both the climate crisis and biodiversity crisis, and for the benefit of people. This includes native woodland management and expansion, and especially the regeneration of native woodlands and scrub where the land can naturally support them.

Our interests lie generally with the effect of proposals on mountain landscapes, especially National Scenic Areas and Wild Land Areas, and along routes to mountain summits and climbing crags. We advocate that infrastructure used for land management in the uplands, specifically fencing and tracks, be avoided where possible and be kept to a minimum where it is demonstrated to be necessary.

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 support your intention to not construct a full exclosure fence, and to keep the ends hidden as far as possible form the high points around the summit.

The Scottish Outdoor Access Code advises that putting up a high fence over long stretches of open country without providing gates, gaps or other access points might be considered unreasonable (section 4.9, bullet point 4). We therefore support your plans to install suitable crossing points on the fence, along with signage to point walkers towards the nearest gate or stile. The use of Strava heatmaps will help indicate routes that walkers currently take and provide suitable locations for crossing points in the fence.

We note your intention to involve community volunteer tree planting in this woodland creation project, and ask that you keep Mountaineering Scotland in mind when seeking volunteer assistance with tree planting, especially on the higher altitudes. This could be an opportunity for Mountaineering Scotland staff and Directors to contribute toward mitigating greenhouse gases emitted during business travel by planting trees to store carbon and aid biodiversity, and also for members to contribute to mitigating their travel emissions for recreational mountaineering.

I hope you find these comments useful in your development of plans for East Schiehallion.

Your comments or feedback on the John Muir Trust's plan to establish mountain woodland at East Schiehallion.

The principle of the plan is excellent.
I am unclear of what the area involved in this is – my guess from the maps is c 900Ha – can you confirm?
The timing looks slow given the urgency of climate change – how can this be speeded up?
A key objective should be as a demonstrator project – so similar projects can be done all over Scotland.
You have provided detailed information in you plans for planting density.
There is no detailed information on what the ambitions are for grazing density improvements – what are these?

I was appalled (and I'm not often appalled!) to read of the plans for montane woodland on Schiehallion. The idea is a good one, and montane woodland is welcome where it exists. But the price at Schiehallion is much too high. Glen Mhor is a beautiful unspoiled place, in the heart of the wild country. The new fence east of Schiehallion is pretty conspicuous but I saw that as being worth it, in a less sensitive part of the property where there are already fences (albeit smaller ones). Glen Mhor is a different kettle of fish - and when Trustees visited it a few years ago there was unanimous opposition to allowing the dam to be moved upstream, because of the effect it would have on the first of the series of gorges on the river.

Are you sure this is the right thing to do? Might it not be better on a smaller scale, on S side of Dun Coillach - a much less sensitive landscape, because of the pipe track, pylons etc? Is there scope for debate eg at the AGM? Very happy to meet onsite if you want.

Thanks for including us in this consultation.

As we've discussed previously over the phone, we don't agree with some of the assertions behind the proposals and we don't think this is the right site for the proposals. I've put our points down as bullets to keep them concise.

- The proposed fencing will ruin the scenery in Glen Mhor.
- We don't believe it will be effective in keeping grazing animals out.
- The paper does not yield any clear evidence of there having been tree cover on Schiehallion which we believe has spent the vast majority of its life with minimal tree cover on it. Given the time period involved, it is inevitable that occasional trees will have grown (despite grazing and climate constraints) and died to contribute to the pollen record, and to provide some evidence of there having been some trees on the land over the millenia.
- Despite the lack of evidence, the paper uses the word "restore" and holds farm and sporting management interests responsible for the lack of tree cover, despite the lack of evidence that there has been any real tree cover since the ice age.
- We wholeheartedly reject the view that a moorland represents a 'wet desert'.
- The cost/benefit case for replacing one valuable habitat with another has not been made. The 'Why' chapter has only 5 paragraphs:
    - One about engagement with people, which is a worthy aim but not a justification for this particular project and its costs.
    - One about landscape and aesthetics without recognising the visual impact of the fencing.
    - One about carbon sequestration but admits that this will be low and slow, and the Friggens, et al 2020 research paper casts doubt over the advantages of planting over heather.
    - One concerns erosion, but I have doubts about the extent to which grazing is responsible for it in this area - as opposed to the combination of shallow soils/altitude and wind exposure. Erosion does not seem to be a major factor supporting this proposal.
    - The other is about connectivity with other nearby woodlands, which is also a worthy reason except that only the lower ground at the foot of the mountain will connect habitats.
- The fact that the species have persisted despite the centuries of grazing suggests that they are not under threat. Heath height has been increasing recently according to the paper. We're not aware of any increase in grazing pressure on Schiehallion over the past century of stewardship of this land - is there a point in the land's botanical history that the Trust is trying to replicate, and does it know how the land was grazed then?
- Without sporting interests, there would not be any deer control on the hill except at the expense of the public purse. Something has to pay the stalker's wages - we are already finding the stalker is regularly coming back empty handed from a trip up the hill after seeing little or no deer to shoot. Clients don't pay to come back for another day of seeing nothing.
- It is possible that the regeneration of plants together with the lack of a full enclosure may draw deer in from across a very large deer range. This would affect the objectives, or otherwise the consistent culling at what may become a deer feeding area may make deer management in other parts of the deer group uneconomic. This could have unintended consequences, including job losses/depopulation of rural communities and less capacity to undertake deer management activities - in turn leading to later population growth. The widely reported statistics over the past years about the increase in deer numbers is attributable not to hill deer but to low ground/woodland populations where they are harder to control and there are no longer the numbers of gamekeepers and farmers who used to control them.
- Would JMT be maintaining an annual sinking fund to pay for future fence maintenance and/or removal in the event that it doesn't work?

In summary: our view is that the benefits of this project do not come close to justifying the short- and long-term costs involved. It would be an irresponsible use of the Trust's funds, and/or a poor use of taxpayer's money in both its capital and management costs.

I love walking through a wooded mountainside as much as anyone, and I have the utmost respect for the intentions of everyone involved in promoting this project. However, Schiehallion is absolutely the wrong site for these proposals and I am concerned that the project is being pursued to justify the efforts already spent doing so and riding the current wave of enthusiasm for (sometimes inappropriate) tree planting. If the Trust has the resources to plough into this sort of project, we suggest it purchase an area of moorland which can be more effectively fenced off.