

Trees for Life

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[redacted]

Regional Manager - North
Forestry and Land Scotland
Via email

Dear [red]

Glen Affric/Strathglass Beaver Translocations

Following our face-to-face meeting last week where you informed us of your intention to change course in the process we have agreed regarding the possible translocation of beaver to Glen Affric, I felt it was important to write to you formally and in some detail to politely question and ask you to reconsider the approach you now intend to take. That is, is to undertake another round of public consultation/engagement, led by FLS.

Original Consultation

In June 2022, shortly before you became the Northern Regional Manager, a consortium of landowners, including FLS, asked Trees for Life to lead on a consultation process about the possibility of releasing beavers into Glen Affric/Strathglass. Following concerns raised by some in the community, we extended the consultation period into October 2022 to ensure that people had enough time to respond. As part of that process, we organised a number of drop-in events for the community which were well attended and views, both for and against, carefully listened to.

As I think you are aware, NatureScot has strongly endorsed the approach Trees for Life has taken with regard to consultation and that it has been adapted, with lessons learned, by the Cairngorms National Park Authority for their beaver work focused on Strathspey.

Landowners' Response to Consultation

Following the consultation, Trees for Life produced a report recommending that, for now, beavers are only released in Glen Affric. This was because of concerns raised about the possible impacts of beavers in Strathglass, although expert opinion is that there are unlikely to be significant negative

[redacted] Glen Affric is that they are very unlikely to reach Strathglass any [redacted] the entrance to the Glen will act as a barrier to dispersal [redacted] the other landowners agreed not to pursue releases on their land

We met with you and [redacted] online in January 2023 to discuss the proposal and it was at that meeting that [red] indicated that Forestry and Land Scotland intended to focus on the translocation of beavers within range. While we made it clear that this is contrary to the government directive to public agencies to focus on the translocation of beavers out of range, we welcomed your commitment to proceeding with the approach recommended in our consultation report. We then agreed a clear ongoing community engagement process and timeline with you, aiming for the

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[REDACTED] a licence application that could result in the release of beavers to Glen Affric this autumn.

We agreed that Trees for Life would remain the lead organisation for the engagement and communication with the community, staying in contact with key FLS team members such as [redacted]
[REDACTED] The process included work with the community on the monitoring of beaver activity, that has just been completed and is being written up.

[REDACTED] FLS has been prominently featured in the public communication about the process from its outset and its staff have attended many of the consultation and monitoring events and have been visible throughout. There can be no doubt in the minds of those with concerns that FLS are, and remain, heavily involved.

Nationally, we recently learned that FLS were going to submit a licence application covering three sites – one near Loch Rannoch, in Knapdale and Glen Affric – and that an expert had been commissioned to undertake this work. Of these, Glen Affric is the only site that is outside the current range and so supports the government's strategic aim to actively expand the beaver range in Scotland. I am sure you can appreciate our complete surprise when you told us at the meeting last week that you had withdrawn Affric from this process and that you wanted FLS to play a more active role in communicating and engaging with the community, including a further consultation/engagement process, the purpose of which I felt was very vaguely defined.

Objections and Concerns

Relationships with local people are of course also of major importance to ourselves and we have taken the objections and concerns about the return of beavers to Glen Affric and Strathglass very seriously. As part of the process, Trees for Life has diligently sought to involve people with concerns and we have had a number of site meetings with people with deep concerns and worries. While some members of the community will never agree with the plans to release beavers, it is our sense that concerns are dissipating as we explore the practicalities with them, due at least in part to the approach we have taken with regard to listening to objections, adapting our plans and making a strong commitment to on-going monitoring and active support in the unlikely event that beavers cause any negative impacts. In our contact with the community, discussions are already starting to

[REDACTED] bring and management will work in practice. It is far from clear [REDACTED] about the principles of the proposal will benefit anyone involved [REDACTED] rested in practicalities.

[REDACTED] successfully fundraised for a Beaver Officer post that would work with [REDACTED] monitor the beaver population and their impacts, while also building better relationships with those members of the community who continue to have concerns. This was partly done by [REDACTED] and not have the budget to fund its own member of staff.

Conclusions

While we understand and empathise with your feeling that FLS is more exposed on this now they are the only applicant and we are also aware that you are receiving a significant amount of pressure from the relevant constituency MSP, on reflection, we consider that:

[REDACTED] original consultation process was entirely in line with the National Beaver Strategy and guidance issued by NatureScot

- Significant changes have been made to reduce the scope of the proposal, in direct response to concerns raised [REDACTED]
- The process to develop a programme for the monitoring of the beavers has continued to [REDACTED] involve and engage the community and people's attitudes to the proposal have softened significantly
- Our commitment to employ a Beaver Officer, in the absence of a role within FLS, provides the resource needed on the ground to address community concerns, both now and in the future
- Having shared the plans we agreed back in January with the community, and having kept those plans on track, with FLS participation, there is a serious risk that further engagement ahead of submitting a licence application, however well we design it together, will lead to confusion, doubt and a loss of credibility amongst stakeholders

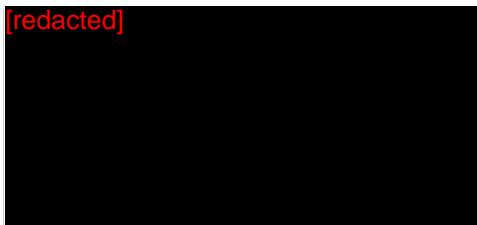
While we completely acknowledge that, as the landowner applying for a licence, you can go about this process however you choose and that you feel FLS is exposed to undue criticism if it does not take this additional step, we also consider that the process we agreed with you in January and have undertaken in good faith, with the active participation of FLS staff, more than deals with the concerns you raised at our meeting.

We know that the decision to go forward with an application lies with you as Regional Manager, although national staff have formally commissioned the Beaver Trust to include Affric as part of an umbrella application. The withdrawal of Affric at this stage means that FLS is now planning to release within the current beaver range only. This limited ambition is contrary to government policy and directives to public bodies.

With all of this taken into account, we would urge you to reconsider whether the potential value of extending this process is in fact outweighed by the inevitably associated costs and risks.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]



CEO

