

This paper comprises:

Community Land Scotland Response to the Consultation from The European Nature Trust on the creation of a `Highland Wilderness Reserve`.

Community Land Scotland Position Paper on `rewilding` more generally.

The European Nature Trust proposal for a Highland Wilderness reserve.

We acknowledge receipt of your recent message about the creation of a Highland Wilderness Reserve.

This proposal resembles that of Mr Paul Lister of some years ago which received little support in the Highlands or more widely. We note Mr Lister is involved with TENT.

We believe it would be very difficult to describe any area of the Highlands as `wilderness` for many, many centuries. To have a man-made and fenced-in 'wilderness' now created, as proposed, with the reintroduction of species, would be as artificial a creation as the current devastated and forlorn landscape which is much of the Highlands today. Further, however, such an artificial creation would be a denial of Highland history and heritage seeking, as it appears to do, to exclude humans from the landscape of which they have been an intrinsic part historically, other than as guided visitors. The approach suggested smacks of much that has been wrong with the Highlands over the past two centuries, with privileged elites seeking to live out their vision of the place, and heads in a direction that would repeat those tragic errors.

The proposal reads like the creation of a theme park. The suggested benefits of employment for local people appears as secondary to the desire to re-introduce species as a philosophical and cultural construct of how TENT think a small part of the Highlands should look and be managed. The suggestion that the TENT reserve would be able to educate local people about the benefits of the ecological preservation and restoration environment appears as patronising.

Our vision for the Highlands is of a place renewed environmentally, economically and in terms of population, where people and the landscape are as one, not separated by a fence. We want to see communities in the lead of their own development, not as ancillary to other people's developments. We believe areas of the Highlands far greater than the 50,000 acres envisaged in the proposal require renewal and this proposal offers very little toward that vision.

We note that in parts of the Highlands significant environmental renewal is taking place without the need for vast fences or excluding people from within particular large boundaries. In some cases it is local people driving the renewal.

The proposal as it stands would of course transgress one of Scotland's most cherished rights, that of having access to all of Scotland's land to 'roam' freely but responsibly.

If there is an availability of cash to pursue the renewal of the Highland environment, we would urge that is directed to local communities with an ambition to own and renew land, economy and community.

Overall we can see little merit in what is being proposed. We will share our view with the appropriate authorities and others with an interest in land in the Highlands.

We enclose for you a copy of a position statement on 'rewilding' more generally.

Community Land Scotland

Community Land Scotland – Position Paper on `rewilding`.

Community land owners see their function as bringing about the renewal of their place, its people, its built and natural heritage.

Renewal embraces the social and economic development of the place, and the enrichment of the life, environment and culture of that place.

This happens under the direction of the people of that place, through their participation and ownership of key decisions.

The yield from the investment in the land is opportunity, in perpetuity, for the common good of the people of that place and its environment.

Most community owners are principally motivated by the needs of people, in the face of economic, social and cultural challenge and decline; they want to see the re-population of their place, in part and if necessary, by the re-settlement of once inhabited localities, localities others may perceive as `wild`. Community owners do not see any contradiction between this and their local history, in achieving greater bio-diversity, and an enriched environment and more naturalness.

Particularly in the Highlands and Islands where many owners manage very large acreages of land, when community owners or potential community owners look out onto the land beyond the currently cultivated crofts, they don't see a wild landscape, they see a deserted place, a degraded place, a place far less productive than in times past, a place supporting far less bio-diversity and fewer people, a spoiled (not unspoiled) landscape.

Community owners see people and their interests as part of the natural order and landscape, every bit as much as a diverse range of plants and other species should be.

Community Land Scotland does not believe the term "re-wilding" is a helpful term in this context.

Community owners, on the other hand, understand that some people can perceive some parts of their locations as having characteristics of `wildness`, and some community owners market their area for the experience of `wildness`, solitude and renewal that many can derive from such landscapes. This is a means of attracting visitors and securing economic gain locally, and community owners not only have no desire to threaten those continuing opportunities for the community and for those who wish to experience that environment, they wish to enhance the opportunities and experience.

Many community land owners have an approach to and conduct land management practices and hold beliefs about the renewal and enrichment of their landscape, of which many in the `re-wilding` movement, so called, would approve.

Community owners take, and they support the taking of, human interventions to deliver their vision for their land. This can include renewables at a scale determined locally as acceptable.

As an approach to the long term management of parts of their land assets, a `rewilding` approach, so called, may commend itself to owners, provided it does not compromise their objectives toward people and their place, and the culture of that place.

On community owned land, any matters relating to the re-introduction of species, is a matter for the democratic will of the people locally, with a first priority toward the re-introduction of people.

The TENT Consultation Paper

Please reply to:

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Community Land Scotland

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Proposal for a Highland Wilderness Reserve – Consultation

The European Nature Trust (TENT) has developed a detailed vision for *a fenced wilderness reserve in the Scottish Highlands*. TENT has commissioned Conservation Capital, an impartial organisation with expertise in nature-based business development around the world, to carry out a stakeholder consultation.

We would like to meet with you to explain more about the vision and gather your important feedback. This will help TENT to understand the feasibility of the vision and determine a suitable location for the Highland Wilderness Reserve.

About the Highland Wilderness Reserve Proposal

Due to centuries of human pressure, the Scottish Highlands has lost most of its original native forest cover and several key native species have disappeared. Despite strong efforts by government, landowners and NGOs in recent decades, biodiversity remains low and ecosystem services are failing – a situation exacerbated by climate change.

The Highland Wilderness Reserve proposal seeks to restore a defined area of the Scottish Highlands to its former natural splendour, representing a model that is both ecologically and financially self-sustainable and which might serve as a pilot initiative.

Key aspects of the Highland Wilderness Reserve would include:

- ✦ Significant tree planting and peatland restoration to aid the recovery of natural processes and ecosystems.

- ✦ Controlled release of missing native species into a fenced reserve.

- ✦ Development of a complementary mix of nature-based businesses, including:
 - Nature and wildlife tourism: wildlife watching, adventure activity and photography/arts
 - Accommodation: luxury, medium-range and camping options
 - Nature-friendly consumer products: reserve-branded merchandise and local products

Initial business planning for a 50,000 acre reserve suggests that significant economic returns could be generated for the local area:

- ✦ Over £6,000,000 in annual revenues by Year 10 depending upon the scale of initial investment (plus indirect revenue opportunities for the wider economy).

- ✦ Significant job creation: an estimated 37 full time and 26 seasonal job opportunities (plus many indirect job opportunities in the wider economy).

- ✦ Through a school experiences programme, general communication and community involvement, the Highland Wilderness Reserve will be able to educate and inform local communities and visitors about the importance of ecological preservation and restoration.

Your Views

TENT understands the vital importance of hearing from all relevant stakeholders. We are presently consulting government representatives, local community organisations, nature conservation organisations, landowner organisations, outdoor access organisations and other opinion leaders. Moving forward, TENT is keen to potentially explore partnerships with private landowners, local

communities, national organisations and the public sector in order to fulfil the vision for a Highland Wilderness Reserve.

Would you or, alternatively a colleague, be available to schedule a telephone call with Conservation Capital to discuss the proposal? We envisage this call would last no longer than 45 minutes.

We would be grateful if you could provide your response to this request to g.jeffries@conservation-capital.com. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me through the same email address.

Yours sincerely,

Glen Jeffries

Conservation Capital – on behalf of The European Nature Trust

About TENT

TENT was founded to support and fund initiatives designed to preserve and restore Europe's wild places and the rich biodiversity that exists within them. TENT maintains a Europe-wide view, acting to support diverse projects in the areas that need it most. For further information about TENT's work, please visit: <https://theeuropenaturetrust.com/our-work/>.

About Conservation Capital

Conservation Capital is a specialist practitioner in the field of conservation enterprise. For over a decade we have been working to support organisations unlock the potential of business as a tool for conserving critical conservation landscapes, primarily in Europe and Africa. We have operating hubs in St Andrews, London and Nairobi. Conservation Capital is leading the consultation on an independent and impartial basis. Please visit: <http://www.conservation-capital.com>.