

Community Land Scotland Response to the Consultation from The European Nature Trust on the creation of 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