Scottish Forestry
Coilltearachd na h-Alba

Environmental Impact Assessment
Screening Opinion Request Form

Please complete this form to find out if you need consent from Scottish Forestry, under the **Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017**, to carry out your proposed forestry project. Please refer to Schedule 2 Selection Criteria for Screening Forestry Projects under Applying for an opinion. If you are not sure about what information to include on this form please contact your local Conservancy office.

Proposed Work

Please put a cross in the box to indicate the type of work you are proposing to carry out. Give the area in hectares and where appropriate the percentage of conifers and broadleaves

Proposed Work	select	Area in hectares	% Conifer	% Broad-leaves	Proposed work	select	Area in hectares
Afforestation	☐				Forest roads	☐	
Deforestation	☒	11.9 ha	100%		Forest quarry	☐	
Location of work		Ski Trails , Clashindarroch LMP					

Description of Forestry Project and Location

Provide details of the forestry project (size, design, use of natural resources such as soil, and the cumulative effect if relevant).
Please attach map(s) showing the boundary of the proposed work and other known details.

EIA screening is sought for the peatland restoration of Ski Trails, Clashindarroch (see attached maps). This will involve the deforestation of 11.9 ha. Deforestation is to support the restoration of 10b [Upland Sphagnum Bog] and 8c [Juncus effusus Bog]. The purpose of the restoration of 10b (Upland Sphagnum Bog), Blanket Bog habitat (UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat) is to protect carbon storage potential, improve the quality of the water in the Burn of Little Blackmiddens, a tributary of Kirkney Water, within the River Deveron catchment, and improve the biodiversity within the restoration area.

The crop to be felled is poorly performing Sitka Spruce on deep peat which has:
- Variable tree sizes.
- Deficiencies evidenced by yellowing and absence needles beyond two years growth.
- Negative growth ratio of leader to lateral suggesting poor increment.

Restoration
We wish to carry out 11.9 ha of forest-to-bog restoration. Felling and re-wetting of the proposed restoration areas will be undertaken using low ground pressure machines and standard forest-to-bog techniques. The area is currently retaining water despite forestry drainage with key bog indicator vegetation present across the site. Rewetting will allow the hydrology, and eventually the vegetation, to be restored to Blanket Bog habitat (UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Habitat) which corresponds to National Vegetation Classification M19/M20. There is sufficient existing seed source for Sphagnum and other bog species on site to make this successful.

Given that the 10b soils at Ski Trails are hydrologically connected to the 8c soils, the area to be restored will be treated as presumption to restore.

A combination of standard restoration methods will be used (as per the Peatland Action Technical Compendium):

- Block all drains and, where necessary, plough furrows using peat dams or composite dams to disperse water across the peatland.
- Undertake stump flipping and ground smoothing across the previously afforested area to un-modify the pattern of ploughed ridges and furrows. If left in situ, the plough/furrow pattern will suppress the water table and development of peatland vegetation, and will promote regeneration of negative indicators especially non-native tree species.
- Where there is suspected peat cracking, we will install backfill trenches to retain water on site. Backfill trenches counteract the excessive lateral flow of water within the peat, which can result from the ploughing and draining carried out during afforestation, and the subsequent drying and suppressing effect of the mature trees on the peat and water table.
- Remove any non-native tree regeneration as this is a negative indicator and an undesirable vegetation type on a peatland.

FLS is a Peatland Action delivery partner on behalf of Scottish Ministers to reduce greenhouse gases across Scotland's National Forests and Land. Restoration of Blanket Bog is a key action from the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, the habitat is recorded on the Scottish Biodiversity List. Beyond its value as a carbon store, peatlands contain a huge diversity of organisms.

The delivery of re-wetting operations will be undertaken as soon as practically possible in line with UKFS and UKWAS. Monitoring of the site will take place at year 5 following re-wetting.

Provide details on the existing land use and the environmental sensitivity of the area that is likely to be affected by the forestry project.

The current crop of Sitka Spruce on 10b (Scenario A peat type) and 8c (Scenario B peat type) is performing poorly with limited timber value. Slow growth, low stocking density, variable tree size and yellowing are all due to the peat soils. The degraded peat bog will be emitting more carbon than being stored due to the poorly performing crop.

The restoration is presumption to restore as defined in Deciding Future Management Options for Afforested Deep Peatland. On these sites restocking should not take place, but restoration started as soon as possible.

The proposed peatland restoration is adjacent to exisiting Blanket Bog (Priority Habitat), also on 10b soils. The peatland restoration will provide habitat connectivity with the Hill of Towanreef SAC and SSSI in additon to other peatland restoration on approved open ground held by FLS.

The proposed works will restore the deep peat areas to a functioning peatland system which will act as a long term carbon store and increase its value for biodiversity and water quality.

Description of Likely Significant Effects

Provide details on any likely significant effects that the project will have on the environment (resulting from the project itself or the use of natural resources) and the extent of the information available to assist you with this assessment.
Population and human health: some impact There are no water supply infrastructure present within the restoration area. The Nordic Ski Trail, Tom's Lair begins at NJ 4265 2688 and runs through the centre of the proposed peatland restoration for approximately 300m, before crossing the Burn of Little Blackmiddens. Biodiversity (habitats, species): positive impact Restoration of a degraded peatland will restore a priority open habitat, benefitting both habitat and its associated species. Land: no impact. The restoration is not adjacent to any other land holding. Soil – and geology, geomorphology: positive impact Re-wetting the site will benefit the peat soils as forestry modifications will be reversed to stop oxidisation and further degradation and erosion of the peat. The Peatland Condition Category of the proposed area is 'Modified; Previously forested'. The drainage modifications to the soils here will continue to have a negative impact unless intervention to restore a more natural peatland hydrology occurs. Using criteria set out in 'Deciding future management options for afforested deep peatland' it is evident that the most appropriate future option for this site is to restore it to an open ground peatland habitat. Water: positive impact Re-wetting techniques have shown to have no significant adverse effect on water quality. Ultimately, the water quality of the local area will be improved by reducing run-off from the exposed peat and degraded peatland. Air: no impact. Climate: no impact Afforested peatlands have the potential to emit more GHG emissions than can be absorbed by a growing woodland. Restoration of afforested peatlands, especially will prevent the significant net release of greenhouse gases, ultimately benefitting the local climate. FLS is a Peatland Action delivery partner on behalf of Scottish Ministers to reduce greenhouse gases across Scotland National Forests and Land. A Scottish Government objective is to have all afforested peatland restored by 2035. Afforested peatlands are a sensitive environmental topic receiving even more scrutiny since the Climate Emergency was announced by the First Minster in April 2019 and COP26. Cultural Heritage: no impact There are no scheduled monuments or archaeology with the restoration area.

Landscape: no impact.
Peatland restoration will create more open space within the LMP forest blocks and their local area. This will add more diversity to the forest structure by creating open and associated native woodland habitats.

Include details of any consultees or stakeholders that you have contacted in order to make this assessment. Please include any relevant correspondence you have received from them.

Mitigation of Likely Significant Effects

If you believe there are likely significant effects that the project will have on the environment, provide information on the opportunities you have taken to mitigate these effects.

Population and human health:
If the Tom's Lair ski trail is damaged during harvesting, restoration or restock, it will be reinstated to ensure access post-restoration works. Water will still be able to pass underneath the trail, meaning both sides of the trail will be hydrologically connected.

Biodiversity (habitats, species):
Pre-operational surveys will identify any protected or breeding species to ensure suitable mitigation is in place to avoid any disturbance.

Soil:
All forestry operations will be managed as per UK Forestry Standard, Managing Forest Operations to Protect the Water Environment, Know the Rules 2nd Ed. Silt management will be carefully controlled through installation of sediment traps and leaky dams to protect watercourses.

Water:
All forestry operations will be managed as per UK Forestry Standard, Managing Forest Operations to Protect the Water Environment, Know the Rules 2nd Ed.

Forest Research has demonstrated that phased felling and low impact harvesting can effectively control negative impacts of forest clearance for peatland restoration www.forestresearch.gov.uk/publications/forest-clearance-for-peatland-restoration/. 10 m exclusion buffers will be maintained along all water courses as per PeatlandACTION guidelines.

Cultural Heritage:
Pre-operational surveys will identify any hidden cultural heritage features to ensure suitable mitigation is in place to avoid any disturbance as per UK Forestry Standard. If heritage features are identified within the proposed peatland restoration will be protected as per UK Forestry Standard and ALGOA Scotland, Guidance for Peatland Restoration and the Historic Environment in Scotland, 2022.

Sensitive Areas	
Please indicate if any of the proposed forestry project is within a sensitive area. Choose the sensitive area from the drop down below and give the area of the proposal within it.	
Sensitive Area	Area
Deep peat soil	11.9 ha
Select...	
Select...	
Select...	
Select...	

Property Details			
Property Name:	Ski Trails , Clashindarroch LMP		
Business Reference Number:		Main Location Code:	
Grid Reference: (e.g. NH 234 567)	NJ 4272 2709	Nearest town or locality:	Rhynie
Local Authority:		Aberdeenshire	

Owner's Details			
Title:		Forename:	
Surname:			
Organisation:	FLS, East Rregion	Position:	
Primary Contact Number:		Alternative Contact Number:	
Email:			
Address:	Portsoy Road, Huntly, Aberdeenshire.		
Postcode:	AB54 4SJ	Country:	
Is this the correspondence address?		No	

Agent's Details			
Title:	Ms	Forename:	Meriem
Surname:	Kayoueche-Reeve		
Organisation:	FLS	Position:	Forest Planner
Primary Contact Number:	0300 067 6200	Alternative Contact Number:	
Email:	enquiries.east@forestryandland.gov.scot		
Address:	Portsoy Road, Huntly, Aberdeenshire.		
Postcode:	AB54 4SJ	Country:	Scotland
Is this the correspondence address?		Yes	

Office Use Only	
GLS Ref number:	