

WILD LAND NEWS 67

Autumn 2006



COMMENT

Article

The next eight months are a crucial time for wild land issues.... as in May 2007 there are elections for the Scottish Parliament and local Councils. MSPs have already seen the importance of renewable energy / landscape issues in constituencies such as the Western Isles, where large wind farms on Lewis are controversial projects.

The Wild Land Group has maintained its resolute position of not accepting large onshore windfarms north of the Highland boundary fault. We also defend rivers and lochs against intrusive hydro schemes. We urge all Scottish members to ask their prospective MSPs and Councillors about protection for wild land, the conservation of high quality landscapes and locational guidance for renewable energy schemes.

Perthshire and the Ochils in particular have seen some intense lobbying over the issues of wind farms as well as the impact of the possible enlargement of the Beaully - Denny power line.

We thought we were making progress on the issue of landscape, with a Landscape Forum being convened by the Scottish Executive. Unfortunately not all organisations and civil servants seem to be treating the matter seriously, with poor responses so far from business, tourist and landowning interests.

We must ensure that current and future politicians can join up the dots between quality Scottish landscapes, strong tourist draws, good wild areas of escape and high recreational spend. Lobbying politicians in a sustained and co-ordinated way helped produce the Land Reform (Scotland) Act which included good access provisions. Let's do the same for landscape, wild land and the location of renewable energy projects.

AGM Report - Creag Meagaidh / Newtonmore - June 2006

Article

Alistair Cant

The AGM was held on Saturday 17 June and a small but dedicated band of members were entertained and informed by Peter Duncan of SNH at Aberarder Farm, Creag Meagaidh. He gave a fascinating talk about the methods used by SNH on their National Nature Reserve to encourage growth of native trees, wild flowers and other flora. They have become very inventive in controlling large fauna, particularly red deer, and have spent a considerable time liaising with neighbouring estates and the local Deer Management Group. Many thanks to Peter and his team for the briefing.

The results were impressive as SWLG members walked up the glen, some ascending the corrie rim. Clearly this is active human management to slowly re-wild the locality, whilst also ensuring excellent access for walkers, climbers, etc.

The formal AGM took place in the Balavil Hotel in Newtonmore, where the Co-ordinator gave a presentation of the past year's activities and looked forward to the future. The Treasurer presented the annual accounts, which showed a small planned deficit, to bring the reserves

to just over £5000. The steering team members were re-elected and the meeting would up, for the socialising to continue thereafter.

Copies of the annual accounts and annual reports are available from the Co-ordinator.

Hope for Control of Upland Tracks?

Article

*An Executive Review offers an opportunity to press for more regulation over the construction of these eyesores. **Hamish Johnston** reports.*



The ugly scar of the newly bulldozed track on Carn na Saobhaidhe - *photo:Hamish Johnston*

The last few weeks have seen a flurry of publicity that could lead to tighter controls on the number and quality of upland tracks...and SWLG members can help bring this about if they act now.

On 25 August the *Inverness Courier* carried a big feature on a particular track in the Monadhliath Mountains south of Inverness. They interviewed Sigrid Rausing, owner of the Coignafearn Estate, who is very concerned about the construction by the neighbouring Dunmaglass estate of a wide track that runs from the glen right to the summit of Carn na Saobhaidhe (811metres) with a spur to Carn Mhic Iamhair (781 metres). It also connects to an existing wind turbine at 672 metres on the southern end of Beinn Dubhcharaidh.

Dunmaglass have said that the track was made between 2002 and 2003 to support their farming and sporting activities, which exempted them from planning permission. But another player was mentioned in the article - Renewable Energy Systems (RES) which apparently will

be submitting a revised application to the Scottish Executive for a windfarm - on Dunmaglass. RES deny any involvement in the Dunmaglass track.

I was unaware of this controversy when in June, as part of my round of the Corbetts, I climbed Carn na Saobhaidhe from the south and encountered this track as I approached the summit. The despoliation of the hill is amongst the worst that I have encountered in over 30 years of hill walking. I was moved to write to Highland Council's Director of Planning & Development (DPD) and sent site photographs. The upshot of my correspondence with the DPD was that:

1. The estate did not require planning permission because they had built the track to support their farming and sporting departments. The track is a "Permitted Development" under Part 6 Class 18 (1) of the Town and Country (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 as amended.
2. The Planning Authority has no control over a development once it has Permitted Development status.

There may or may not be an issue over whether this particular track was built for the permitted purposes or whether these were a cover for some other objective - only time will tell. But there is definitely an issue over the size of the track and the crudeness of its construction. In October 2004 measurements were taken - it was found to be 10 -12 metres wide including ditches and banks. The track itself is approximately 8 metres wide with ditches on either side each 1.0 - 1.5 metres wide. The track and ditches have been cut into the ground so that the road surface lies approximately 3 metres below the level of the surrounding land (see photograph). What sporting activities demand a track of such dimensions, one asks. Elephant hunting?

So what now? It is clear that the rules as they stand provide no protection for the landscape from the creation of crude bulldozed tracks, and are open to abuse at worst or bad taste at best.

The good news is that the Scottish Executive is currently reviewing the General Permitted Development Order. I would like to see a revised Order with more stringent criteria for approval of upland tracks. It should require that they be built appropriate to their approved purpose (which will limit the size) and to proper standards (such as the good practice guidance recently published by Scottish Natural Heritage). There should also be the sanction of required re-instatement of terrain where approval conditions are not met.

So help! SWLG members can easily influence this review. Why not write now to the Scottish Executive Development Department, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ ? And to your MSP.

Common Land Issues

Article

Issues over land ownership, land reform and communal ownership are restricted solely to rural and wild areas. The leading expert, Andy Wightman has produced a report showing that in many urban areas, 'common good' has been wrongly expropriated, often by local authorities. Common good land is owned historically by the taxpayers and often managed by local authorities. Over time some authorities have acted as if the land is theirs to deal with as they see fit.

One common thread is the lack of clear, open information on land ownership hinders the best use of land for the good of the community.

Developments in Renewable Energy since March 2006

Article

Fiona Anderson reports

It is 2 years since I last undertook a review of press articles on RE concerns, mostly though not entirely from Scottish Environment News and Planning magazine. I have noticed not a great, but a significant reduction in column length of reporting on windfarm applications since the frenetic days of 2004, possibly with planning authorities organising themselves better with strategic advice. SNH has found that most developers are now avoiding locations that would cause a significant impact on wild land and wildlife, and possibly also the smaller local developments are becoming more accepted. The Government and Scottish Executive are both more committed to taking effective action on climate change and energy review. The whole scene has changed for the better

Climate Change Review

At the end of March the Environment Secretary, Margaret Beckett admitted that the target of cutting the UK's carbon emissions by 20% below 1990 levels by 2010 would be missed.. Much of the blame was laid on stronger than expected economic growth and escalating gas prices forcing power companies to switch back to coal use. Friends of the Earth were scathing over the obsession with economic growth. Another Planning Policy Statement was announced instead, which, 6 months later has reached draft stage for England & Wales (PPG22)

Beauly to Denny National Grid line

In April Highland Council were set to oppose the 400kv line, raising the prospect of a public inquiry despite supporting in principle the need for strengthening the transmission network. This was because of significant adverse amenity effects along 4 specific lengths, Beauly to Eskdale, Cannich to Guisachan, the River Speyside to Feargour Wood and west of the A889 to East of the A9. By June the Inquiry was expected to start in early 2007 and last 9 months, costing the objectors (Highland, Stirling, Falkirk and Perth & Kinross Councils plus SNH and Cairngorms NPA up to £450,000. By July however, Jimmy Macdonald, a Highland Councillor, was saying that the inquiry would be a waste of public money as 95% of the scheme was acceptable and the outcome had already been decided. The Director of Planning said he was confident the costs would be shared between the relevant local authorities and public agencies. He thought they would see an upgraded line but they are fighting to ensure the route is correct in four specific cases and that the line is put underground in a couple of small sections.

Energy Review "Our Energy Challenge"

In April the Government announced a review of future energy needs and supplies and which was published in July. It says that without further action and greater long term certainty for investors, the recent growth in renewables to 1.25% of total UK supply with a further 11,000MW (9%) of wind energy in the planning system, may slow between 2010 and 2020. This is blamed on scarcity of sites for hydro schemes and planning delays on wind farms. Barriers will be removed to small scale household RE applications, and the Renewables Obligation will be strengthened and modified to support 20% of electricity generation. The Government proposes to streamline energy planning by setting out national statements of need for energy sources, dealing with such issues as health and safety, and restricting public enquiries to local concerns. Little mention is made of biomass, energy from waste or combined heat and power. A consultation on nuclear policy will feed into a White Paper towards the end of the year. Blair emphasised that revival of nuclear power is only part of the answer to energy supply.

Micropower Bill

The Climate Change and Sustainable Energy Bill, the primary legislation in England & Wales required to allow widespread small scale electricity generation, received Royal Assent in June. The Scottish equivalent proposed by Sarah Boyack was formally lodged in June. It requires all new buildings to include micro-generation as permitted development.

Shetland Islands Council

Shetland Islands Council was reported in April to be promoting a £1bn community owned windfarm in partnership with Scottish & Southern Energy. It would be Europe's most productive windfarm as it would generate electricity at close to maximum capacity for around half of the time. An environmental impact study is being prepared and there has been close consultation with conservation organisations. There has been no noticeable local opposition.

Whitelee

Scottish Power's 322MW windfarm on Eaglesham Moor, Europe's largest, was approved in May by Ministers. 140 turbines will be built by 2009. This represents 5% of the capacity required for the Scottish Executive to meet its target of 40% of energy from renewables by 2020. Meanwhile the windfarm at Barvas Moor on Lewis will be reduced by 10 turbines to 190 to meet the objections about bird life.

Highland's RE Strategy

Scotland's first detailed RE strategy was adopted in May. It has 3 preferred areas for major wind farms in the Monadhliaths, south of Inverness, East Sutherland and Easter Ross. The Director of Planning said they developed their own strategy as they already had 2,000MW in projects with approval or awaiting it and they could not keep waiting for the Executive to prepare a national strategy. It would be subject to constant review.

Sub-sea cables study

HIE announced in May a feasibility study into options for cable connections between Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles to the mainland. In June the Scottish Executive announced funding. The creation of a cable between Shetland and Norway is also being considered. Potential connection points on the mainland include Melvich in Sutherland, Peterhead, Inverkip, Hunterston and Liverpool. In response to claims that this would reduce the need for the Beaulieu to Denny transmission line, Scottish & Southern Energy said it needs to be upgraded now.

Marine Energy

The Scottish Executive launched a consultation in May on the best way to increase energy generation from wave and tidal sources in Scotland. It acknowledged that these technologies are not receiving sufficient support from the Renewables Obligation (Scotland) System (ROS). The proposal is for a "banded" Obligation so that part of it must be met by electricity from wave or tidal devices. The new system should be in place by April 2007 and responses were due by August 3rd.

Sutherland Hydro Scheme

In May the Chairman of Assynt Community Council, a trustee of the John Muir Trust said that the hydro-electric scheme under consideration for several years for the Reay Forest Estate near Scourie in Sutherland could have a disastrous effect on wild land and tourism. It would involve damming existing lochs, flooding neighbouring land and constructing tunnels and roads. Npower Renewables is currently carrying out an environmental assessment.

Scottish draft SPP6

The Scottish draft SPP6 was published in July. It requires new developments to generate at least 10% of their energy on-site from renewable sources and for local authorities to designate areas suitable for wind farm applications and those that are not. Greater account should be taken of natural heritage and the cumulative effects of wind farm applications. Local community involvement is encouraged through community ownership of RE projects, small scale local windfarms, use of community trust funds or funds from developers. The Executive is also considering classing RE technologies as "permitted development." But commentators have said the planning system alone cannot ensure the delivery of sustainable energy - a tough strategy and ambitious targets for cutting waste are urgently needed. And most applications for windfarms over 50MW do not go through the usual planning process but are determined by Scottish Ministers. Although there is no indication that such proposals will be governed in future by the new SPP, there is a hint in the Energy Review that the current overhaul of the planning system may bring some of these proposals into the Planning domain. The consultation period ends October 6th

Ochils Windfarms

In July Ramblers Association Scotland called on shareholders at the Scottish power AGM to reverse company plans to build a large windfarm at Green Knowes in the Ochil Hills. Seven windfarms are planned by different developers in the Perth & Kinross and Clackmannanshire Council areas. This would be completely out of scale with the landscape of this compact range of hills and would adversely affect recreation and tourism. RAS claims that the Renewables Obligation Certificate system is to blame for this huge emphasis on land-based turbines and proposes it be amended by the measures proposed by the Scottish Executive in May. They are also campaigning to get tighter height restrictions built into planning guidance.

North Uist-Harris link

In September consultants for Western Isles Council reported that a 5km "green" causeway, linking North Uist and Harris, could be built to complete the spinal route between Eriskay and the Butt of Lewis. It would include tidal generators and be flanked by wind turbines. Part of it could be raised to allow vessels to sail through the Sound of Harris.

Orkney wave power project

Following a visit to an Edinburgh based wave power project in Portugal, Nicol Stephen, the Enterprise Minister, announced in early September that he wants to see similar devices operating in Scottish waters by next summer. A share of £8million funding for marine energy projects will be invested in a Pelamis project at the European Marine Energy Centre on Orkney.

On Diurnal Variations in the Remoteness and Tranquillity of the Highlands

Article

David Jarman

A' Chràlaig is not at all remote - a cup of the Cluanie Inn's coffee-tasting coffee, and you can be on top in a couple of hours (less if you're our mad hillrunner, or have a second cup). Still, 1120 metres up is a grand place to be, especially when you manage to get there just before the first big shower on one of those days of cold blustery northwesterly winds that kept May lively this year. Wanting to daunder the summit ridge, to appreciate rather than assault it, I retreat to the lee side. So why do we say 'the cloud blotted out the view' when it is whitening and purifying it, not ink-spattering it? It's from Icelandic *blettr* - a stain, apparently, in yet another

curious inversion of meaning. Such are the random musings of a half-hour on a tramped-snow stance, as each hint-of-sun optimistic return to the cairn is repulsed.

The stance is well-chosen, completely out of the wind. As the passage of time slows, the sounds of the mountains reassert their immemoriality. Near on the left are the urgent tumblings of the burns in the vast corrie. Close overhead is the spasmodic spatter of hail and sleet on my sunhat (well it is May). And from away on my right, over the bare south shoulder, comes a constant noising that once tuned into magnifies into a distant roar. It must be the river far down in An Caorann Mor; or no, it must be the traffic on the A87; but surely that can't be so continual, this is not bank-holiday on Ben Lomond, although in a fleeting clearance the road is visible and the sound intensifies; but the air direction is wrong for that, and there are no motorbike bursts. On stepping out briefly, the roaring simply seems to be an overlay of wind on water.

These are the sounds of remoteness. We don't come to the wilds for literal peace and quiet, although when utter silence does descend, once or twice in a lifetime, it is deafening. We come for natural noise, the ambient sound of tranquillity, incited today by the reverse-thrust of a raven's wings as it crosses the ridge to find itself too close above me, and by the unearthly yelp of a deer calf down below demanding its mother (thanks to Keith Miller for telling me what that was last year).

As these sounds impinge and fall into place, something is missing. It's not the boys in light blue, who are giving us a day off even though it's midweek; although a pair of ptarmigan do a damn-good impersonation, blasting low across the shoulder from behind me and down into Coire na Cràlaig, rendering my stance acutely vertiginous. And since it is now afternoon, the three couples doing the ridge today have had their lunches by the cairn and moved on.

Missing the flights

Now, the recommended direct route up A' Chràlaig from Cluanie is straight up the SW flank, a monstrous 600m of dull toil which has long deterred me from a proper visit (having taken the Munro in on a circuit from Affric years ago). But a bit of reluctant map-sleuthing reveals an infinitely better line, almost as direct, worth your SWLG annual sub alone: it's just round on the west up a side stream and then by a curious grassy rake onto the shoulder behind the 800m promontory. And it gets you away from the intrusion of the A87 almost immediately, aided by the cascading waters. Except that today, we are directly under the flight path of the transatlantic jets, and every few minutes another jumbo with its vital cargo bound for Orlando or Las Vegas sears across the firmament, its noise overpowering that of the burn, and persisting for minutes almost till the next follows in its groove.

So this is what is missing during the prolonged shower - there is a diurnal variation in the long-haul airline schedules, and they are giving me respite and tranquillity up here on A' Chràlaig.

Two years ago (in an anonymous Comment) I sounded off about non-natural noise intruding ever more into the wilds. The sources railed against then were road traffic, especially howling motorbikes, and light aircraft, which mercifully are still uncommon away from the Central Belt fringes. Transatlantic jets rated only a sentence, as an upcoming issue, and prompted by many days up in the Arrochars and Cowal, which I suspected were particularly in the line of fire of air traffic routed over beacons at Glasgow/Prestwick. Now they have become even more inescapable than the low-flying RAF, who at least only inflict themselves two or three times on a bad day.

Earlier in May, before all the endless unsettled spells, www.mwis.org.uk alerts me to an impending fine spell, and logistics actually allow me to get over to Dornie and bike up Glen Elchaig as the Highlands turn African. Hours of factor 30 skies expose the traces paralleling

out towards Greenland (do they ever come back? - inbound trails are so rare they must be like ships of old clockwising the ocean currents); as the gales subside, their sound intrudes ever longer.

Beating the rushes

Your scribe is one of the great festerers, and the effort of will to rise well before the sun on the third day may have disturbed the tranquillity of the Killilan hand-reared stag populace. This is the day astonishingly foretold by mwis when the haze would clear, making the long push out to An Riabhachan ideal for viewing the ancient landscapes of the mysterious Monar basin. The early start would also get the initial ascent done before the sith-trolls had got their furnaces stoked in the corries. And, I realise up on the fat landslip-wrinkled snout of An Socach, it has won me a couple of hours of aeronautical peace before the first departures from the continental hubs were larger-than-life silver symbols scything the cerulean 30,000 feet above [I'm just paying out the rope - Ed.].

A Guardian travel feature tells us that a thousand flights a day now leave Europe for North America, with two main pulses early morning and afternoon. I have done it once, on a perfect day, seeing everything from Ben Rinnes to Cape Wrath, including right down the Great Glen, with Sula Sgeir as an incredible coda. Assuming our collective addiction to lines of white will never be assuaged, and that neither fuel prices nor government action on global warning are likely to reverse the trend, then apart from praying for really quiet engines, the only way for us wild land lovers, our offspring, and our foreign visitors to experience the fabled tranquillity of the Highlands is to track those diurnal variations. How reassuring that human behaviour peaks as predictably as the rush-hour, from the B&B-to-evening meal span of tourism to low-flying sortie schedules to hillgoers lunching on top. Maybe mwis could include transatlantic flight path predictions, as they shift to optimise weather patterns?

It is late on in the afternoon when the roof-ridge of An Riabhachan affords a mile of high living, out and back, unencumbered by poles, pack or outer layers, in light airs, with sunny breaks still, and in silence apart from distant waters and the occasional faithful ptarmigan. One helicopter has gone its business through to the west and back, but now there are no mechanical distractions from gazing to Kintail and Torridon and Wyvis, or from delighting in tennis-court webs of dense gossamer revealed as the snowbeds have shrunk back - whatever can overwinter up there in such quantity to spin them, and to feed the spinners?

Monar remote and tamed, wild and tranquil by turns

In four days, I meet just one other gangrel, off-track. He is bound for An Cruachan, a rounded hump out in the midst of Monar, not even a Corbett. There must be some reason - and it is: this is supposed to be the most remote hill in Scotland. I wish him well, forbearing to mention the Bendronaig stalkers path 2 km opposite, long upgraded to an ATV track, or the boats up to Pait Lodge 5 km away at its foot. Let alone the public transport procession 3 km above.

Back out in civilisation, just in tourist-time for supper at Lochcarron Inn, the clan is gathering for the annual trans-Scotland hike. The weather has broken comprehensively, and they will be too wind-and-wet battered to hear or care about any unnatural disturbances to their remoteness crossing Monar.

New Era Of Cairngorm Ownership

Article

Anne Macintyre

We have been invited to respond to a consultation document to seek and confirm views on the proposed transfer of Cairngorm Estate from the regional development agency, Highland and Islands Enterprise, to Forestry Commission Scotland, and on the proposed future structures for management.

Cairngorm Estate lies within both Cairngorm National Park and a National Scenic Area and covers 1418 hectares of moorland and mountain including Cairngorm summit and the ski area. Nearly half of the estate lies within Natura 2000 sites and the western half of the estate lies within the Northern Corries SSSI which starts off on the lower slopes in Glenmore Forest and rises to the summit of Cairn Lochan.

The Estate was purchased by the Forestry Commission in 1923 as part of Glenmore Estate but when skiing facilities and the access road were developed in the 1960's the area was then transferred to HIE's predecessor, Highlands and Islands Development Board in 1971.

SWLG has over many years and through numerous consultations and publications expressed our concerns for the future of Cairngorm. It is here, more than any other area of Scotland, that the powerful commercial interests, driven by HIE, have been in conflict with our duty to protect such a magnificent but fragile environment.

In our own publication 'Cairngorms at the Crossroads' in 1987 we called for wiser management of this special area and articulated the need to cherish and value wild landscape for its own sake in the face of a formidable assembly of threats. During the era of HIE's ownership the area was constantly under threat from Lurcher's Gully through to the long running battle over the funicular railway which SWLG constantly opposed.

HIE's ownership of this area was wholly inappropriate so we fully support transfer to another agency that will take a more balanced approach to management of the area. A number of agencies have been considered in the options appraisal including SNH, Cairngorm National Park, Cairngorm Mountain Trust and Cairngorm Mountain Ltd which manages the ski area.

However the preferred option is clearly to return this area to Forestry Commission Scotland offering a more holistic management of the area from Glenmore up to the higher slopes. Forestry Commission Scotland is already involved in land management within Cairngorm National Park, is the largest manager of recreational land in Scotland and already manages areas of sensitive mountain environment including close working with the ski area at Aonach Mor.

SWLG therefore supports this proposal and the proposed management structures including an Advisory Forum involving the legitimate interests of the local community, other public bodies and recreation and conservation representatives.

We are also please to see that HIE will retain financial responsibility for the removal of the funicular railway and any repayment of ERDF funding in the event of these obligations being triggered.

For further information about this consultation and for details on how to respond (deadline is 15 November) go to the Forestry commission website <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/consultations> or send for a Response Form to Cairngorm Consultation, Forestry Commission Scotland, Inverness District Office, Tower Road, Smithton, Inverness IV12 7NL

Following David Jarman's forestry articles in WLN 65 & 66, he and John Digney have been invited by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to attend consultation meetings on re-structuring some key plantations. So far David has attended a meeting at Cluanie and John has been to one at Crianlarich. Further ones are scheduled for Aberfoyle and Ballachulish.

As the trees are harvested, the plantations are re-designed to take greater account of their visual impact and the access problems they pose. In general a much greater proportion of native species is to be included with a reduction in the quantity of sitka spruce. The treeline will be lowered in places and more open space created within the plantations. There are, of course, some places where we would like to see the total removal of exotic conifers and an end to large-scale commercial forestry, but nothing quite so radical seems likely at present and the timescale of the new plans runs well into the middle of this century.

Cluanie

David sat round a table with FCS staff and representatives of the neighbouring sporting estates, but nobody else from the local community or other interest groups. Far from debating wholesale conversion of the grossly insensitive and intrusive Glen Shiel forest, the FCS people and the stalkers were only there to discuss details of deer control fencing and walkers' access to the ridges. Remarkably, the chair of the local Deer Management Group stole our thunder by coming straight out and saying the forest should never have been planted. He turns out to be Duncan Poore, a former head of the Nature Conservancy and professor of forestry - so we are not alone. It came as a considerable surprise to learn that Glen Shiel was excluded from the Kintail-Affric National Scenic Area - perhaps, the foresters quipped, because its scenic value had already been compromised by coniferisation.

Crianlarich

SNH and Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park staff and one local person were also present at this meeting, and a dozen others had been invited. FCS were receptive to suggestions from all parties and some modifications to the design plans will be taken on board, although the hope we had expressed that commercial forestry might cease entirely in Coire Chaorach (north-east of Ben More) cut little ice with FCS. Hill access is a particular concern in this area, notably for Ben More and the Cruach Ardrain horseshoe where forestry has severely limited the route options and greatly diminished their aesthetic appeal. FCS had in advance specifically asked us for ideas here and for the forthcoming Glenachulish meeting, and we are to be involved in further consultations involving a wider range of interest groups before any decisions are taken.

Abercairny windfarm proposal turned down

John Digney reports

The Scottish Executive has withheld consent for a proposal to by Catamount Energy Ltd. to build a 24-turbine windfarm at Abercairny, north-east of Crieff in Perthshire. The turbines would have stood 104 metres high from base to blade-tip, and would have generated 66MW in total.

A public inquiry was convened and concluded that:

- the proposal would not serve to preserve the natural beauty of the area.

- some sites which, although not designated, have some historic and architectural interests which may not be protected.

In upholding the findings of the inquiry, Deputy Minister for Enterprise, Allan Wilson, said: "Our aim remains to ensure that we take advantage of Scotland's extensive renewables potential whilst safeguarding our natural heritage. In short, the circumstances must be right for all new renewable energy developments."

One significant aspect of this decision is that the area in question, although on a popular tourist route on the very edge of the Highlands, is not covered by any special landscape designation. The references to "natural beauty" and "natural heritage" are encouraging, and the decision indicates awareness on the part of ministers and inquiry reporters of the overall value of Scotland's landscapes. We hope this will extend to more remote areas and that developers will get the message that intrusive schemes are not welcome.

Update on Beaully - Denny Power Line

Article

Anne Macintyre reports

In the last edition of WLN we reported that the Scottish Executive had received over 17,000 objections to the Beaully to Denny powerline proposals. It is therefore no surprise to hear that it has now been announced that a public local inquiry will be held and a series of pre-inquiry meetings are to be held as follows:

- 3 October - Aviemore Centre at 2pm
- 25 October - Drumossie Hotel, Inverness at 2pm
- 27 October - Perth Concert Hall at 2pm
- 31 October - Albert Halls, Stirling at 2pm

The purpose of these meetings is to identify the parties who wish to take part in the inquiry and will discuss (amongst other things) the different forms of participation, the scope of evidence, the opportunity for parties to group together, the order of appearances, the likely duration, start dates and venues.

Anyone wishing to take part is asked to contact Scott Mackenzie at the Scottish Executive, Inquiry Reporters Unit, 4 The Courtyard, Callendar Business Park, Callendar Road, Falkirk FK1 1XR. Tel: 01324 696 462 or email scott.mackenzie@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Letters to the Editor

Article

Dear Sir,

We receive Wild Land News where I work and I enjoyed David Jarman's article on Gaia's Revenge. Whether through climate change or the end of cheap oil, our modern society faces major upheaval and I think it is paramount that we all realise this, but also that we don't give up campaigning for the alternatives. There are many community groups now working locally to reduce their carbon emissions and their energy demand - this is the way of the future.

Communities need to localise essentials like food production and energy supply wherever possible. If electricity (and other energy sources) were generated close to the point of use, there would be no need to cover the wild places with wind turbines or energy crops as that's not where the demand is. We do need wind power but as one component of micro-renewables. These small-scale renewable devices include solar, wind and ground-source heating and are vital for addressing demand in urban areas. I also think some larger-scale

renewables will be required to meet the heavy demand of conurbations until demand reduction really kicks in - probably once oil reaches \$100/barrel! But I would prefer marine devices and off-shore wind close to the point of demand - not huge windfarms miles away.

It's important to remember that there is no single answer to the energy crisis which looms. We all need to consider how best to utilise local resources sustainably. For example, while woodfuel heating may be ideal for Highland communities with access to sustainably managed natural forests, it's no answer for keeping all the residents of the Central Belt warm.

Unlike some of your contributors, I am totally against nuclear power - my main reason being that it epitomises the outdated centralised electricity distribution system we currently seem to favour. All forms of energy generation have a carbon cost, which is why the key to addressing climate change is energy demand reduction. And let's not forget that transport is a huge source of CO₂, which nuclear goes no way to addressing. And there's also the fact that uranium is not an indigenous material, nor is it renewable - it too will run out. To go down the nuclear route is to avoid changing the way we do things. I expect that from politicians, but not from environmentalists!

Decentralised energy systems do work, with a bit of enlightened leadership. Woking Borough Council is a well-quoted example, having reduced its CO₂ emissions by 77% since 1991 by investing in energy efficiency, district heating and renewables. Schemes such as these in urban areas will keep the wilds wild. But nuclear power will simply stop us from daring to realise an alternative future.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Mandy Meikle (Green Energy Campaigner)
Reforestation Scotland,
42 Woolfords, West Calder

Dear readers,

I am perturbed to read the latest issue of WLN and find three favourable references about the benefits of nuclear energy. I appreciate that these are individuals' opinions, but I find the increasing sympathy for a nuclear resurrection amongst some "worthy" individuals quite insidious, and akin to the anonymous, glossy anti-turbine "campaign" we have seen here recently.

Let us be very careful; we still have patches of unidentified, irradiated bogland from the Chernobyl fallout in the Highlands - protecting wild land should not just be about aesthetics. We have difficult choices and decisions to make; let us give them the careful consideration they require.

Yours sincerely,
Michelle Di-Duca
Fort Augustus, Inverness-shire

Dear Editor,

I was most dismayed to read your article in WLN about possible hydro-electric development in the Loch Glendhu area. I had hoped, perhaps naively, that potential developers had got the message from the Shieldaig decision that our precious mountain country was not there to be plundered for small scale hydro schemes.

I have known and loved the Kylescu, Loch Glendhu, Loch Glencoul, Stack of Glencoul area for over 40 years and have walked, explored and camped there on numerous occasions. It is very little known, wild by any definition and unspoilt.

I was puzzled to read about the Maldie Burn/Loch an Leathaid Bhuain plans because, as you will know, there is already a small hydro plant there with a power station below the track and pipes running down from the loch. The pipes run down beside the considerable waterfall which becomes magnificent in wet weather and is seen prominently from the A94 descending from Quinag to Kylescu.

Damming and despoliation of Loch Srath nan Aisinnin cannot be allowed and I hope all the organisations that opposed Shieldaig have been alerted.

Richard Gilbert,
Crayke, York