£2 million for world's first rewilding centre near Loch Ness

Friday 7 February, 2020

Trees for Life is to establish the world's first rewilding centre near Loch Ness in the Highlands – thanks to more than £2 million of support from The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund led by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), The National Lottery Heritage Fund and other funding.

The groundbreaking centre will be at Dundreggan, the charity's 10,000-acre estate in Glenmoriston. It is expected to welcome over 50,000 visitors annually – allowing people to explore stunning wild landscapes, discover Gaelic culture, and learn about the region's unique wildlife including golden eagles, pine martens, red squirrels and wood ants.

The centre will boost the rural economy by providing a new attraction on the journey between Loch Ness and Skye, and benefit the local community through at least 15 new local jobs.

"Dundreggan Rewilding Centre will showcase how rewilding and nature can give people amazing experiences, create jobs and really benefit local communities. It will celebrate one of the Highlands' greatest assets – the wild landscapes and unique wildlife being returned through rewilding," said Steve Micklewright, Trees for Life's Chief Executive.

"Dundreggan has become a beacon of how to rewild a landscape. With this centre, it will become a beacon for rewilding people too."

An all-weather visitor centre, café and events space will act as the gateway to fully accessible trails, child-friendly forest experiences and more adventurous walks. These will enable families and people with specific needs to get out into wild landscapes and get involved in rewilding.

Announcing the award from The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund, SNH Chief Executive Francesca Osowska said: "A key priority for SNH is to help ensure tourism and other sectors benefit from, and invest in, Scotland's high-quality environment. Nature and culture are closely linked in the Highlands and Islands, and in many places they are central to the local economy, maintaining rural populations, jobs and skills."

The core of the centre will include displays and interpretation in English and Gaelic, a café, classrooms, Gaelic Resource Centre and events space. Outdoor facilities will include fully accessible trails, children's forest experience area and more challenging trails. The centre will provide events and experiences for visitors to the area, and groups with specific needs – such as those with physical or learning disabilities, families, schools and other groups.

The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund has granted £714,000, while The National Lottery Heritage Fund has given initial support for a grant of £783,000. £630,000 of other funding has been secured to enable the core of the centre to be constructed. Trees for Life is now seeking additional funding, including to power and heat the centre in a sustainable way.

The Rewilding Centre has been developed following extensive consultation with the local community. 10 per cent of local residents responded to requests for feedback, and all were overwhelmingly positive. Planning permission in principle was granted by Highland Council in April 2019, and Trees for Life will apply for full planning permission this year. Construction should begin in early 2021, with the centre opening in 2022.

At Dundreggan, Trees for Life is protecting and expanding globally important fragments of Scotland's ancient Caledonian Forest. The estate is home to over 4,000 plant and animal species – including several never recorded in the UK before or once feared extinct in Scotland.

Trees for Life is dedicated to rewilding the Scottish Highlands. Its volunteers have established nearly two million native trees at dozens of sites, encouraging wildlife to flourish and helping communities to thrive. See www.treesforlife.org.uk.

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Notes to Editors

Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund

? The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund – led by Scottish Natural Heritage and part-funded through the European Regional Development Fund – is backing the project with £714,000. This is part of a new £5 million Scottish programme of projects to invest in the Highlands and islands to provide more and better quality opportunities for visitors to enjoy the area's natural and cultural heritage.

? The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund encourages people to visit some of the more remote and rural areas and create and sustain jobs, businesses and services in local communities.

? Natural heritage includes natural habitats and wildlife, geology and landscapes. Cultural heritage includes history, language, architecture, ancient monuments, historical sites and cultural landscapes and the sectors of theatre, arts and literature. There is a close link between these two and interests often overlap. They are important locally, and on a national and international scale. They provide opportunities for the cultural and creative industries, environmental and tourism sectors.

? The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund is funded through the European Regional Development Fund with a £5 million investment in the Highlands and Islands. The Natural and Cultural Heritage Fund will invest in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland to provide more and better quality opportunities for visitors to enjoy natural and cultural heritage assets; encourage people to visit some of the more remote and rural areas; and create and sustain jobs, businesses and services in local communities. The Fund's purpose is to promote and develop the outstanding natural and cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands in a way that conserves and protects them.

? The Scottish Government is the Managing Authority for the European Structural Funds 2014-20 Programme. See www.gov.scot/policies/european-structural-funds; follow @scotgovESIF.

? Scottish Natural Heritage is the government's adviser on all aspects of nature and landscape across Scotland. See www.nature.scot; http://twitter.com/@nature_scot.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

? The National Lottery Heritage Fund has allocated £783,000 to the centre – with £81,000 upfront to develop the project and a further £702,000 earmarked for a later date.

? Thanks to National Lottery players, the National Lottery Heritage Fund invests money to help people across the UK explore, enjoy and protect the heritage they care about – from the archaeology under our feet to the historic parks and buildings we love, from precious memories and collections to rare wildlife. www.heritagefund.org.uk

Company Contact:

Trees for Life

T. 07753 488146
E. richardbunting@gmail.com
W. https://www.treesforlife.org.uk

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