

Bid to make Glen Affric Scotland's next beaver release site

Wednesday 27 July, 2022

A community consultation that will help decide whether beavers are reintroduced to Glen Affric has been launched in the Scottish Highlands, led by Trees for Life.

The rewilding charity is carrying out the consultation on behalf of four private landowners and Forestry and Land Scotland, who all manage land that has habitat capable of supporting a beaver population.

If the proposal is successful, it would be the first official release of beavers to the north-west Highlands since the species was driven to extinction some 400 years ago.

Trees for Life has long campaigned to protect beavers in Scotland, advocating for relocation to suitable habitat over culling when beavers have unwanted impacts on agricultural land. Beavers are a protected native species which were first reintroduced to Scotland in 2009.

The results of the six-week consultation, which runs from Monday 25 July, will be submitted to the Scottish Government's nature agency NatureScot in September as part of the beaver licence application.

"Studies show that beavers can bring extensive environmental and economic benefits. At the same time, understanding the views of the local community – from other landowners to angling clubs – is a key step in deciding whether to go ahead with any proposed beaver release. Like us, the landowners making this proposal really want to hear what people think," said Alan McDonnell from Trees for Life.

"Proposals such as this can excite a lot of opinion – supportive, opposed, or somewhere in-between – so it's important that as broad a range of stakeholders as possible get in touch with Trees for Life to take part in the conversation and make their views known," said Joan Cumming, North Region Environment Advisor at Forestry and Land Scotland.

If NatureScot approves the licence, up to three pairs of beavers could be relocated to Glen Affric from lower Tayside before the end of the year. The releases would be spread out over two to three years, with the Beaver Trust carrying out the translocations, and would take place around Loch Affric and Loch Beinn a'Mheadhain.

Alex Grigg, one of the landowners involved in the application, said: "I'd welcome the return of this keystone species to our area. They have a unique ability to re-engineer our depleted ecosystem. Trials in other parts of Scotland, the UK, Europe and the USA have shown beaver dams improving water quality and reducing destructive spate flooding – a particular problem for us, causing destructive erosion and loss of habitat, including for farmers.

"Beavers could help create a more stable and sustainable habitat for salmon – as they did for millennia before their extermination. Their pools can create important refuges for fish during drought, with the area beneath lodges providing the highest level of safety from predators such as herons. Unlike human dams they are porous, allowing salmon to pass. I think their return to the glens would be strongly beneficial. But of course it's vital that there's an informed debate and all voices are heard."

Following its change in approach to beaver management last year, the Scottish Government now actively supports relocations to suitable locations across Scotland, and the publication of Scotland's first National Beaver Strategy is imminent. NatureScot now also operates a Beaver Mitigation Scheme, which provides advice and funding to landowners and farmers to manage beaver impacts.

Full details on the Affric beaver release proposal can be found on the Trees for Life website. Anyone who would like to share their views on the proposal, or ask questions, should visit

treesforlife.org.uk/beaverproposal or email beaverproposal@treesforlife.org.uk.

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