Britain’s largest rewilding landscape launches as new charity

Friday 9 May, 2025

The UK’s largest rewilding landscape, Affric Highlands, has launched as an independent charity with the aim of restoring nature across more than 200,000 hectares of the central Highlands over the next 30 years, to benefit nature, climate and people.

The community-focused initiative brings together a broad partnership of landowners, local people and others to restore native woodland, peatland and riverside habitats, and boost wildlife across a linked network of landholdings stretching from Loch Ness to the west coast.

It will rewild the landscape and allow nature to connect and thrive across large areas – creating social and economic benefits for communities, supporting re-peopling, and tackling the climate and nature emergencies.

Affric Highlands will work with local landowners to strengthen land-based rural livelihoods and nature-based economic opportunities, making the region a hub for sustainable timber, fishing, farming, venison and wildlife tourism. This will include the creation of a network of businesses benefitting from rewilding.

“Affric Highlands is a community focused vision of hope. It’s hugely inspiring to be setting out as a new charity on this ambitious 30-year journey to take large-scale nature recovery to a new level,” said Affric Highlands executive director Stephanie Kiel.

“We want to create new opportunities and real benefits for local landowners, communities and rural economies, so nature, people and livelihoods can all thrive together.”

Restoring habitats will boost biodiversity and benefit wildlife including golden eagles, red squirrels, black grouse, mountain hares, salmon, trout, ospreys and otters.

The initiative will potentially cover over 700 square miles stretching from Loch Ness to Kintail in the west, and encompassing Glens Cannich, Urquhart, Affric, Moriston and Shiel.

The region is stunningly beautiful but largely ecologically damaged, with much land degraded following centuries of deforestation and overgrazing. The globally unique Caledonian forest has been reduced to isolated fragments. Damage to peatlands means they are emitting rather than absorbing carbon. Lochs and rivers are depleted of salmon.

This damage to the natural world means the region now supports fewer people than it could – limiting people’s opportunities for sustainable land-based jobs, and undermining sustainable agriculture which depends on functioning natural processes.

Affric Highlands began work in September 2021, when it also became the ninth member of Rewilding Europe’s network of large, iconic rewilding landscapes across Europe. This followed the initiative’s first three years of work as Trees for Life’s East-West Wild project, during which the charity carried out extensive preparation and local consultation.

Affric Highlands has since operated as a joint venture led by Trees for Life with support and advice from Rewilding Europe. The initiative has grown so successfully that it has now been launched as an independent charity, to take forward and upscale its pioneering work.

Affric Highlands’ growing partnership already consists of a broad coalition of 19 landowners, covering an area of over 58,000 hectares within the vast landscape.

These separate landholdings – which have all signed a memorandum of understanding – are making their own decisions on what nature recovery interventions are right for them, with the Affric Highlands team providing guidance and also support for seeking funding.

Native woodlands and peatlands are being restored to boost biodiversity and absorb carbon. Riverwoods are being created by returning woodland to the banks of upland streams and rivers to provide vital shade, nutrients and shelter for Scotland’s struggling Atlantic salmon.

Media:



Related Sectors:

Environment & Nature :: Farming & Animals :: Travel & Tourism ::

Related Keywords:

Highlands :: Wildlife :: Nature :: Rewilding :: Scotland :: Conservation :: Environment :: Farming :: Tourism ::

Scan Me:

The landscape is centred on Glen Affric, where native woodland restoration has been pioneered by Trees for Life since the 1990s. Thirty years on, these original areas are now alive with Scots pine and other trees, and wildlife is thriving.

Trees for Life's own 10,000-acre estate at Dundreggan in Glenmoriston – regarded as an exemplar of rewilding in the Highlands, and home to the world's first Rewilding Centre – is one of over 45 different estates that own most of the land in the Affric Highlands landscape.

Steve Micklewright, Trees for Life's chief executive, said: "Affric Highlands' success so far – coupled with the opportunities for people offered by its bold vision of landscape-scale nature recovery – has brought us to the point where it can now begin a new era as an independent charity. This is fantastic news for breathing new life into the Highlands through rewilding."

Rewilding Europe's family of major European-wide flagship rewilding landscapes range from Affric Highlands to Swedish Lapland to Italy's Central Apennines.

Frans Schepers, executive director of Rewilding Europe, said: "By recovering a tapestry of habitats, bringing together landowners and communities, and creating tangible benefits for people, Affric Highlands will enrich the social fabric and wildlife of these glens and hills, while inspiring the growth of landscape-scale rewilding across Europe too."

The Affric Highlands emblem is the Scottish wildcat. It is hoped that habitat restoration will support efforts to help this much-loved species thrive again.

For more details, visit www.affrichighlands.org.

Ends

Company Contact:

Affric Highlands

T. 0775348816
E. richardbuntingpr@gmail.com
W. https://affrichighlands.org

View Online

Additional Assets:

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.affrichighlands.pressat.co.uk