Famous glen managed by Scotland's forestry agency joins UK's largest rewilding landscape in 'huge step forwards for nature'

Thursday 20 November, 2025

The world-famous Glen Affric National Nature Reserve managed by Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) has joined Affric Highlands, the UK's largest rewilding landscape – becoming the 20th landholding to sign up to the ambitious community-focused initiative.

Affric Highlands aims to restore nature across more than 200,000 hectares of the central Highlands, through a linked network of landholdings stretching from Loch Ness to Kintail, including Glens Affric, Cannich, Moriston, Shiel and Urquhart.

Coordinated by charity Rewilding Affric Highlands, the landscape brings together a wide coalition of landowners, local people, charities, businesses and others to boost biodiversity, tackle climate change, and create extensive social and economic opportunities for people.

FLS, the Scottish government's forestry agency, and Rewilding Affric Highlands have signed an agreement this month bringing the Glen Affric National Nature Reserve and other FLS landholdings in the glen – in total amounting to 17,604 hectares – into the partnership.

Glen Affric is also a Caledonian Forest Reserve, Site of Special Scientific Interest, National Scenic Area, and holds several European conservation designations.

"This is a huge step forwards for the entire area to become richer in nature, with new opportunities for people, including jobs, re-peopling and health. Glen Affric is at the heart of Affric Highlands, and FLS's work in this special place is hugely important," said Stephanie Kiel, Rewilding Affric Highlands executive director.

Alex Macleod, FLS North Region manager, who signed the agreement on behalf of the agency, said: "We're delighted to join this important coalition to allow nature to connect up and thrive across such a vast area of the Highlands. As stewards of Glen Affric on behalf of the nation, we hope our involvement will play a key part in further ensuring the extensive, long-term health of nature, communities, and livelihoods."

Often described as the most beautiful glen in Scotland, Glen Affric contains one of the best, and third largest, examples of the globally unique Caledonian forest that once covered much of the Highlands, but which is now reduced to less than 2% of its original extent.

FLS has undertaken important public forestry conservation work in the glen for 75 years, and for decades has worked in partnership with landowners, rewilding charity Trees for Life, and others on restoring the Caledonian forest there.

FLS estimates this work has protected and restored hundreds of hectares of Caledonian pinewoods through planting and allowing natural regeneration of Scots Pine and native broadleaves, including through deer management to protect young trees. It has also restored wetlands, peatlands, and other open land habitats.

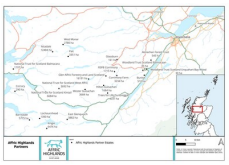
This month has also seen the 5,800-hectare Barrisdale Estate join Affric Highlands – bringing the landscape's growing partnership to 21 landowners, covering a combined total of more than 81,000 hectares.

These separate landholdings have all signed a memorandum of understanding and are making their own decisions on what nature recovery interventions are right for them, with the Rewilding Affric Highlands team offering advice and support.

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.

This habitat restoration is boosting biodiversity, and benefitting wildlife including golden eagles, red squirrels, black grouse, mountain hares, salmon, trout, ospreys and otters.

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Work is underway with local landowners to strengthen land-based rural livelihoods and nature-based economic opportunities, with the aim of making the region a hub for sustainable timber, fishing, farming, venison and wildlife tourism.

The Affric Highlands landscape, which aims to cover over 700 square miles, is mostly owned by 56 large estates, and Rewilding Affric Highlands is encouraging more landowners to join up.

Affric Highlands is a member of Rewilding Europe's family of major European-wide flagship rewilding landscapes, which range from Sweden's Nordic Taiga to Italy's Central Apennines.

In April this year, Rewilding Affric Highlands launched as an independent charity, having previously worked since 2021 as a joint venture led by Trees for Life, with support from Rewilding Europe. This followed the initiative's first three years as Trees for Life's East-West Wild project, when there was extensive preparation and local consultation.

For more details, see affrichighlands.org.

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