Licence granted for historic return of beavers to waters around Loch Ness – 500 years after last sighting at world-famous loch

Friday 30 October, 2026

A licence for the historic reintroduction of beavers to the Loch Ness area has today (30 October) been granted to charities Trees for Life and Beaver Trust by Scottish government agency NatureScot – in the 500th year since beavers were last recorded at the world-famous loch.

The Ness Beaver Project will reintroduce at least 15 beaver family groups around Loch Ness over the next three years, with the first reintroductions potentially happening as early as next month.

Establishing a healthy population in the catchment through licensed releases will secure the species' reintroduction to the Highlands and benefit communities, wildlife and biodiversity, say the two charities.

Beavers create dams and canals which can restore and reconnect rivers, wetlands and floodplains – improving freshwater ecosystems, supporting a wide range of wildlife, and helping manage climate change impacts such as droughts, wildfires and flooding.

Following extensive community discussions, which revealed strong public support, Trees for Life applied to NatureScot for a licence to release beavers around Loch Ness, at a network of sites carefully chosen to establish a thriving and connected beaver population.

Alan McDonnell, Trees for Life's head of nature restoration, said: "Beavers are key allies in tackling the interconnected climate and biodiversity crises facing us all, so this successful result brings real hope for the future. Our thanks go to everyone locally who has taken part in the discussions.

"There has been huge interest from communities and local businesses. Our engagement has been locally focused, with the team meeting people on the ground to listen to their views firsthand."

Dr Roisin Campbell-Palmer, head of restoration at Beaver Trust, said: "We're delighted by NatureScot's decision, and grateful for the invaluable engagement from people who live and work locally. Bringing beavers back to this beautiful place will be great progress for Scotland's Beaver Strategy, bringing benefits for nature, climate and people."

Beavers were hunted to extinction in Scotland several hundred years ago, before being officially reintroduced in 2009.

The last widely cited historical record of Scotland's beavers, dating from 1526-27, places them around Loch Ness. Hector Boece's History and Chronicles of Scotland, translated into Scots by John Bellenden, says: "Beside Lochnes… ar mony wild hors; and, amang thame, ar mony martrikis, bevers, quhitredis, and toddis." This translates as: "Beside Loch Ness… are many wild horses; and among them are many martens, beavers, weasels, and foxes."

Half a millennium to the year on, Trees for Life and Beaver Trust will now reintroduce beavers at key sites in lochs, lochans and rivers around Loch Ness. Specific sites will be announced once the beavers have been safely released, so the animals can settle into their new homes without disturbance.

The River Ness catchment was identified by NatureScot in 2022 as one of Scotland's most suitable for beavers. The area has a network of good habitat, with hundreds of kilometres of river and loch banks, extensive woodland, and low risk of affecting other land uses.

Beavers can also bring economic benefits to communities through eco-tourism. Important tourism revenue in the Loch Ness area is largely based on natural and cultural heritage, and the sector has been strongly supportive of the Ness Beaver Project.

Trees for Life's locally based beaver management officer and Beaver Trust staff will be on hand to engage with the community, so that people can benefit from the beavers' return. Activities will include citizen science monitoring, research opportunities, support for land managers, and educational events. A monitoring and mitigation group will be established.

The beavers will be relocated to the reintroduction sites from elsewhere in Scotland.

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The project is funded by Trees for Life's supporters and Missing Species Appeal, Fred Foundation, Forest Peace Foundation, and Rewilding Britain's Rewilding Innovation Fund.

See treesforlife.org.uk/ness-beaver-project.

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