

UK and Scottish Governments recommend vast Affric Highlands rewilding project for global UN flagship status

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Britain's largest rewilding initiative has been earmarked by the UK and Scottish Governments as a globally-prestigious showcase project to help nature, people and climate, as the United Nations (UN) Decade of Ecosystem Restoration steps up action to halt climate breakdown before 2030.

Led by Trees for Life, Affric Highlands is a community-focused 30-year plan to create a vast nature recovery area of over half a million acres stretching from Loch Ness to Scotland's west coast. It will restore woodland, peatland and riverside habitats to help save native species from extinction, boost biodiversity, and sustain new nature-based jobs and support re-peopling.

The UK Government and Scottish Governments have recommended Affric Highlands for UN World Restoration Flagship status – joining a prestigious roster of global projects, whose final shortlist of 10 will be announced later this month.

Steve Micklewright, Chief Executive of Trees for Life, said: "The huge environmental challenges of the coming decade need to be met with huge ambition. Affric Highlands is about scaling up ecological restoration, working collaboratively, and seeing nature as a key ally in tackling climate breakdown. We want to show how nature, local communities and livelihoods can help each other thrive.

"We're delighted that both the Scottish and UK Governments have given Affric Highlands their endorsement for flagship status. It's increasingly clear that rewilding offers hope for nature, climate and people."

Affric Highlands brings together a huge range of local partners to create a bold new vision for the area. Its ambition is to demonstrate how the return of nature and recovery of landscapes can strengthen existing livelihoods and create new opportunities.

Stephanie Kiel, Affric Highlands Team Leader, said: "We are working closely with a range of different landowners and land managers to develop and link-up nature restoration projects across the Affric Highlands area, which encompasses Glens Affric, Cannich, Moriston and Shiel. People are a central part of this vision, and more resilient ecosystems will support a greater diversity of job opportunities that can help sustain rural communities.

"We are providing the expertise to help restore native woodlands, including through natural regeneration, while returning much-needed trees to the banks of upland streams and rivers to provide vital shade, nutrients and shelter for Scotland's struggling Atlantic salmon."

Golden eagles, red squirrels, red grouse, short-eared owls, mountain hares, trout, ospreys and otters will benefit from the improved and better-connected wild habitats. The Affric Highlands emblem is the Scottish wildcat, and there will be efforts to help save this species from extinction.

Trees for Life is working with local schools, community groups, and health and youth services so that young people can develop their voices to help shape the direction of Affric Highlands. The introduction of a Green Leadership Award for young people and a wellbeing-focused nature photography project are currently underway. Such broad community engagement is one of the UN's key principles for nature recovery.

Competition for UN World Restoration Flagship status is extremely strong, with over 400 nominations expected from around the world. The successful 10 projects will make ecosystem restoration tangible for a broad audience and inspire a global movement to scale-up efforts to prevent, halt and reverse collapse of biodiversity worldwide.

Affric Highlands is a Trees for Life initiative being delivered in partnership with Rewilding Europe. It is part of Rewilding Europe's acclaimed European network of nine awe-inspiring rewilding landscapes, which also include Romania's Southern Carpathians, Croatia's Velebit Mountains, and the Oder Delta in Germany and Poland.

Trees for Life has been rewilding parts of the Affric Highlands landscape for the past three decades, supporting the expansion of native pinewoods in Glen Affric. At the charity's flagship Dundreggan

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Rewilding Estate in Glenmoriston near Loch Ness, it is restoring the Caledonian forest and growing tens of thousands of trees from locally-sourced seed each year.

In early 2023, Dundreggan will become home to the world's first Rewilding Centre – showcasing how large-scale nature recovery can give people amazing experiences, create jobs and benefit local communities.

For more details, see treesforlife.org.uk.

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