Consultation on planned peatland restoration work at Glensaugh Farm and Glen Dye estate

INTRODUCTION

Peatlands in good health are valuable carbon stores and important habitats with many benefits for people and nature: offering a clear nature-based solution to both the climate crisis and biodiversity loss. As such, peatland restoration is a key element of the Scottish Government's updated Climate Change Plan.

The James Hutton Institute's Glensaugh Research Farm (home of the institute's Climate-Positive Farming Initiative) and neighbouring Glen Dye estate are proposing to undertake a joint peatland restoration project on an area of degraded peatland that spans part of the boundary between them, to the east of Cairn O'Mount summit of the B974, Aberdeenshire.

Applications for funding for the restoration are being developed for submission to NatureScot's Peatland ACTION. Peatland ACTION is a programme of works helping to restore damaged peatlands across Scotland, funded by the Scottish Government. If the funding applications are successful, it is hoped that the restorations works could be carried out later in 2022.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENT

Both the James Hutton Institute and Glen Dye estate intend to register the peatland restoration work on their respective land areas with the IUCN's Peatland Code. The Peatland Code is a voluntary certification standard for UK peatland projects that validates and quantifies the climate benefits of peatland restoration and provides assurances that any climate benefits being claimed or traded are real, quantifiable, additional and permanent.

A part of the Peatland Code's validation process, is a requirement that project owners identify, notify and consult relevant stakeholders with regard to the proposed restoration project and take action to mitigate any identified negative impacts of the project on stakeholders where feasible and/or relevant.

To that end, we welcome you to review this consultation document which provides details of the proposed project.

We do not anticipate that the proposed restoration project would have significant negative impact on any stakeholders. However, if you have any concerns regarding this proposed project, or simply wish to know more, please contact us at Climate.Glensaugh@hutton.ac.uk

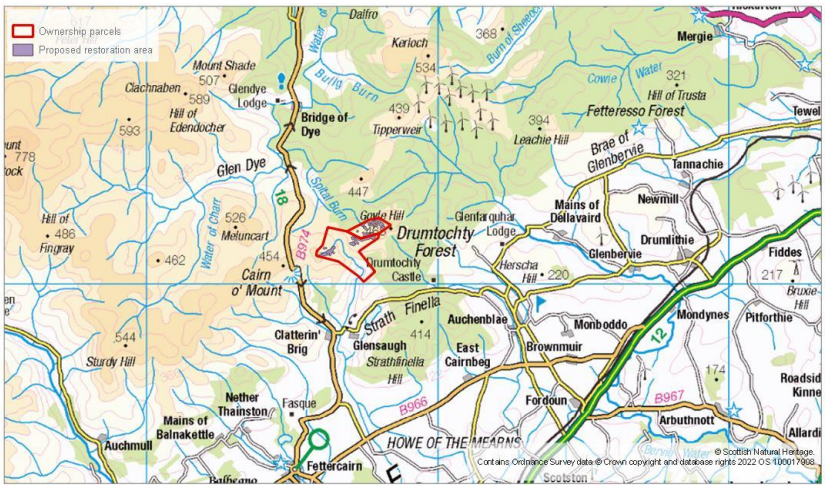
If the project is successful in proceeding, then further information on its progress and outcomes will be made available on the Glensaugh Climate-Positive Farming Initiative website.

PROJECT LOCATION

The restoration site lies approximately 1.0 to 3.0 km east of the Cairn o' Mount viewpoint, Aberdeenshire (Map1), with an elevation range from 370 to 460 m.

The project area covers approximately 74 ha, and has a central OS grid ref. of NO671815. Further spatial information is provided below under 'Proposed works' and 'Access'.

Map 1 - Location of proposed restoration project

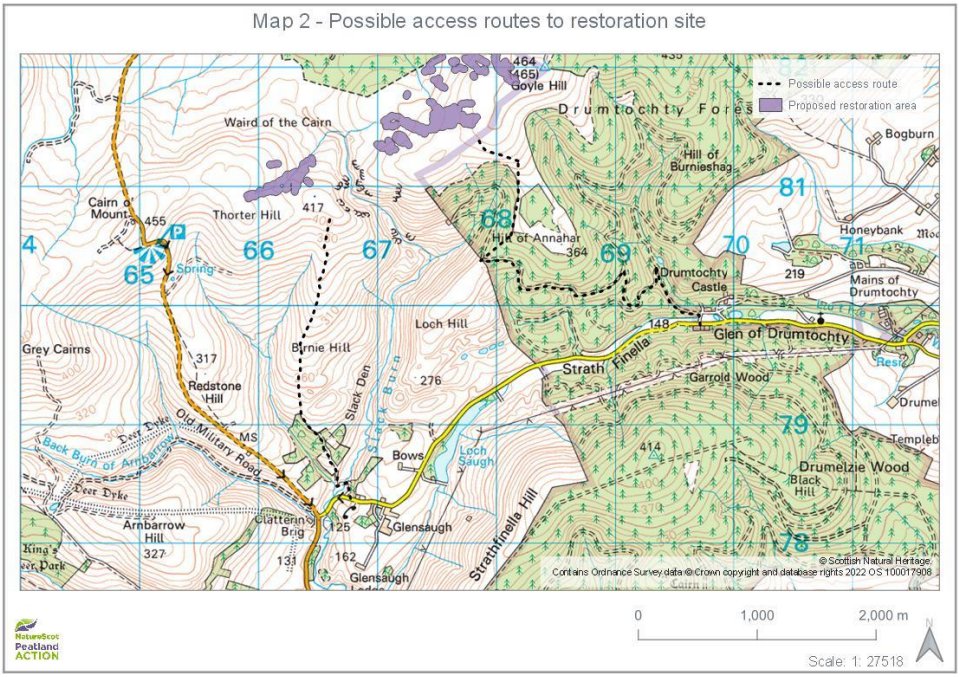


ACCESS

Access to the western edge of the restoration site would largely use an existing farm hill track that runs up Birnie Hill, with a further final 370 m over the open hill (Map 2).

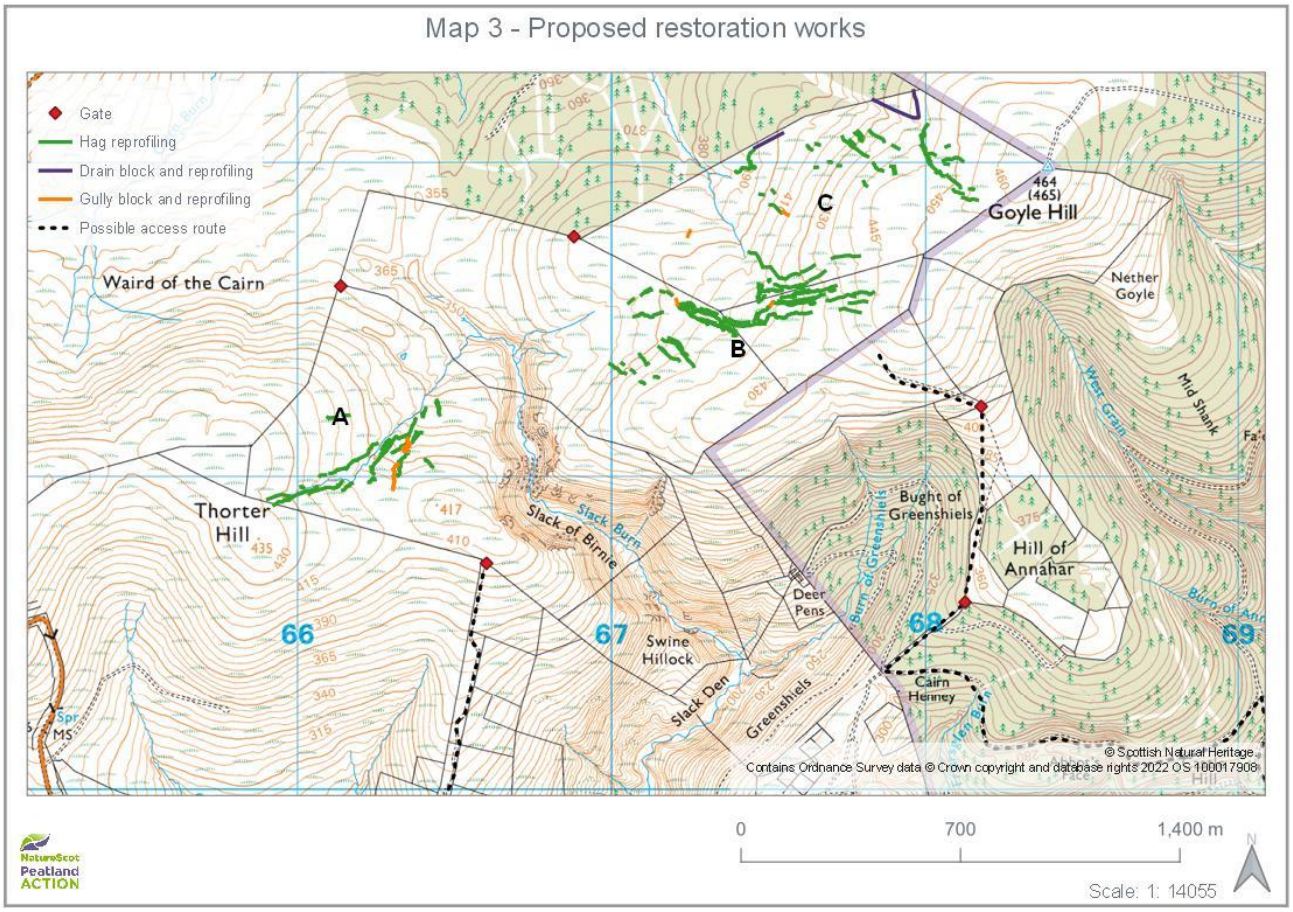
The eastern area of the project site may be accessed by a forest track originating in Drumtochty Glen, at NO6972 7983 (4.9 km of forest track), then 650 m through a grass field and a final 650 m on rough hill track.

Map 2 - Possible access routes to restoration site



On the hill there is a fence between the Glensaugh land and the Glen Dye parcel (Area C in Map3 below) to the north, with a 3 m wide gate at NO6688 8176 that may need to be widened. There is a historic boundary stone adjacent to this gate on the Glensaugh side. The local council archaeologist has been consulted and it has been confirmed the gate can be used provided contractors are made aware and ensure they avoid the stone.

PROPOSED WORKS:



The majority of the restoration will focus on reprofiling and turfing exposed hags and gully peat faces. Gullies are generally vegetated, with only one unvegetated side, so peat baffles along the eroding side are proposed in these areas. On the few narrower gullies that are present, small peat bunds are proposed at appropriate pinch points. It is proposed that reprofiled hags should also have occasional peat deflector bunds created at the toe, to reduce/prevent flow of water and subsequent erosion. Hags and gully sides are generally in the range of 1 to 2 m in height.

Bare peat faces will be re-turfed using locally won turves from local borrow pits. The borrow pits will be restored and covered over by stretching existing vegetation from around the edges and tamping down to leave only shallow depressions.

A Peatland Action video showing reprofiling work is available here.

On the Glen Dye land, in addition to the reprofiling work, there are two small drains, which are targeted for standard peat-damming, with the edges of the drains reprofiled.

A Peatland Action video showing drain-blocking work is available here.

Restoration works would be carried out by experienced contractors and the works overseen by an experienced Peatland ACTION Project Officer as well as representatives from James Hutton Institute and Glen Dye.

On the Glen Dye parcel, spruce regen. from the adjacent plantation to the north would be likely to progress further across the peatland if left untreated, so these will be removed. The removal of the desiccating effect of the regen. will also improve the chances of the area moving to a wetter more sphagnum rich habitat which will be less suited to the spread of conifers. Scottish Forestry have been contacted and it has been established that a felling licence is not required for this work.

POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS

Water: The peatland restoration site is partly within the River Dee catchment, which is a Drinking Water Protected Area, and it is therefore essential to protect water quality and comply with Scottish Water requirements. The River Dee is also designated as a Special Area of Conservation for freshwater pearl mussel, otter and salmon, which again emphasises the need for protection of water quality.

Some watercourses mapped on the OS 1:50k maps are present near hags, and where the hags are within 5m of the watercourse, these hags have been removed from the job spec. for contractors and mapping will be provided to assist in identifying hags to be avoided. Fabric silt traps will also be employed during the works phase as appropriate.

The Peatland Action project officer involved has liaised with both SEPA and Scottish Water to ensure compliance of proposed works.

Tracking damage: Any vehicles to be used off of existing tracks will be low ground pressure (LGP) vehicles with wide tracks to avoid damage to soil/vegetation and minimise the impacts of machinery tracking over the site, with machines tracked over drier ground where possible and avoiding very wet areas.

Wildlife: Peregrine falcon have been recorded in the area as well as a number of ground-nesting bird species. Works will not commence until after the end of their breeding season.

There is no evidence of other protected species such as otter or water vole in the restoration area.

PROJECT TIMESCALES

The target is for works to commence after mid-August 2022 and be completed by 31st October 2022. This avoids the bird breeding season and maximises the chance of work being carried out in drier conditions. Within this time window, it is anticipated that on-site works should take around three to four weeks.