

**Campaign to save Loch Arklet View strengthens
Moorland habitat destroyed in Forestry blunder**

Local people in Inversnaid and Stronachlachar in the heart of the Trossachs, are both heartened and saddened by recent events in their battle to save iconic views around Loch Arklet, which are under threat of forestry planting: heartened by the response to their petition, but saddened by the scars on the hillsides which were mistakenly cultivated by Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) in readiness for planting.

The petition, launched when the communities were asked for evidence by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) to show that people who lived outside the area also objected to the planting, has been signed by over 1000 people from around the world in just 3 weeks. Links to the petition and more information are on the website www.locharkletview.org.uk.

The Loch Arklet area, and nearby Loch Katrine, are to be part of the much heralded Great Trossachs Forest project partly funded by BP and the Heritage Lottery Fund. Strathard Community Council and Loch Katrine Community Trust have agreed not to object to planting the slopes surrounding Loch Katrine but feel that to include Loch Arklet with its open views is just a step too far. At present, no planting consent has been issued for Loch Arklet while the dispute is ongoing.

So it was with utter disbelief that the local community observed diggers cultivating the hillsides at east Loch Arklet in an area excluded from planting consent, at the very start of that project. Despite clear planting boundary maps contained within documents issued publicly during lengthy and costly assessment and consultation exercises, involving many other national bodies (e.g. Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Water), FES got it wrong.

FCS has apologised for the mistake and agreed to immediately reinstate the ground, but the damage has been done. Moorlands, once disturbed, cannot fully recover and valuable carbon sequestration environmental benefits are lost. FCS (which in fact itself decides on planting consents) will now be making the decision on planting in the Loch Arklet area after all the errors in mapping and cultivation have been resolved.

Local people have been uneasy with the accuracy of FCS maps and statements regarding the planting plans for some time, and are now doubtful of Forestry's ability to follow their own well-publicised documents for this ambitious Great Trossachs Forest scheme.

The case has recently been brought to the attention of the Scottish Environment Minister Michael Russell, and locals are hoping to persuade The Scottish Government that national tree-planting targets can be met in other locations. Planting at Loch Arklet represents less than 2% of the Great Trossachs Forest. It doesn't seem right that the final decision rests with Forestry Commission Scotland and locals are hoping that this will be reviewed independently of FCS.

Notes:

1. Strathard Community Council covers a large area, from Aberfoyle along the B829 to Inversnaid and Stronachlachar.
2. Loch Katrine Community Trust represents the residents of Loch Katrine and Loch Arklet.
3. Full details of the campaign and supplementary information are available on the website www.locharkletview.org.uk
4. The e-petition link with 624 signatures to date is:
<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/save-the-loch-arklet-view.html>

Note that additional signatories are being collected on paper petitions locally throughout the Aberfoyle area, accounting for at least 385 signatures since 26 November.