

Management Plan for East Schiehallion

Last updated in 2024



Area: 871 hectares

National Grid Reference: NN 71386 54761 (Schiehallion summit)

For further information on our work at East Schiehallion:

<https://www.johnmuirtrust.org/about-us/where-we-work/east-schiehallion>

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1 Introduction

This is a living document that outlines our management aspirations for East Schiehallion over a long-term period. Whilst we understand the urgency of taking action to address the climate and biodiversity crises, we also recognise that environmental restoration will take time, so we will review this plan on a regular basis and update it as required, in consultation with stakeholders and the local community as necessary.

2 East Schiehallion

East Schiehallion lies within the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon National Scenic Area in Perthshire. It is an area of exceptional scenery and Schiehallion is one of the most prominent mountains in Scotland. The summit rises to 1,083 metres and is a Munro, attracting over 20,000 visitors per year. Schiehallion is anglicised from the Gaelic, Sith Chailleann, meaning 'Fairy Hill of the Caledonians'. It's home to ptarmigan, black grouse, mountain hare and rare mountain willows.

East Schiehallion covers an area of 871 hectares (2,152 acres). It stretches from the summit of Schiehallion to the north, south and east of the mountain, bounded by the Schiehallion road to the north, the hill of Dun Coilich to the east and the Allt Mor to the south.

East Schiehallion includes areas that are protected through specific designations. Alongside the Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon National Scenic Area (NSA), it is also part of the Schiehallion to Strath Fionan Geological Conservation Review site (GCR) and the Schiehallion Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its geology and limestone influenced habitats. Due to these designations, any changes we wish to make to the site may be subject to statutory approvals and should not negatively impact on the designated features.

For further information see appendix A for a detailed property description.

3 Our Ambitions

3.1 Our Vision

The purpose of the John Muir Trust is to conserve, protect and restore wild places for the benefit of all. Our vision is a world where wild places are valued for present and future generations. One of the ways we work towards this is by taking on stewardship of wild places and working with the community to protect and repair them.

The John Muir Trust took on stewardship of East Schiehallion in 1999. During our first two decades of looking after the site we have:

- Built and maintained 4 km of footpath up to the ridge of Schiehallion to accommodate the 20,000 visitors per year, repairing the scarring on the landscape of the previous path
- Built and maintained the 1 km Foss Loop all abilities access path
- Planted 12,000 native trees
- Enabled 40Ha Natural Regeneration
- Set up the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership in 2017
- Collected and grown seeds with local providence to be planted out
- Hosted 25 tree planting work parties
- Hosted the Connect Outdoors programme to engage 11 asylum seekers with wild places

Looking ahead, John Muir Trust's vision for protecting, repairing and enhancing the wild places at East Schiehallion is focused on helping nature, people and communities. To help us achieve our vision, our exemplary management approach is based on the current priorities outlined in the sections below.

At East Schiehallion we are re-establishing a mountain woodland habitat, which is now almost completely absent from Scotland. This provides opportunities for the local community to engage with our work through tree planting, seed collection and joining work parties.

3.2 Freedom for nature to repair itself

Our objective is to restore a mosaic of habitats which supports a diverse range of species, working alongside our neighbours and the local community to create a sustainable and functional ecosystem.

East Schiehallion is dominated by bare quartzite boulders across the summit ridge, with small patches of montane heaths and mires. Lower down the hill, heaths and grassland are widespread. There is only limited presence of montane woodland, as trees are heavily grazed by herbivores. Large patches of willow scrub at lower levels are expanding due to deer exclosures, and there are some remnant montane willows on the northern part of the site. The site is home to a range of native wildlife including breeding upland birds, woodland birds and mammals such as pine marten, mountain hare and water vole.

The site sits within the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership area, where we have been working collaboratively with neighbours at a landscape-scale since 2017.

3.2.1 Woodlands

Objective WS: To restore native mountain woodland habitat at East Schiehallion as an example of an almost completely lost habitat in Scotland.

Over the next 25 years we hope to see the return of native pine and oak woodlands on lower slopes and as this woodland reaches up the sides of the mountain it will be interspersed with a variety of native species including: rowan, aspen, birch, and willow. It will be a low-density woodland where the views beyond can still be seen. As the woodland reaches the montane zone it will become even more sparse, giving way to dwarf birch, juniper and montane willows on the higher slopes and the establishment of montane scrub on the highest slopes. This will create a unique experience for visitors as they ascend the mountain.

In January 2022 the Trust undertook a public consultation on its plans to restore mountain woodland. The woodland plan and consultation feedback report can be seen in appendix B.

Activity	Timeline
Gain statutory permission for large scale woodland restoration	2023-2024
Manage existing woodland	Ongoing
Maintain plantation at Strath Fionan	2024
Thin the native woodland at Braes of Foss	2024-2026

3.2.2 Peatlands

Objective BS: To ensure intact peatlands remain so, and where degradation and erosion has occurred that restoration enables the peatland to fulfil its potential capacity to capture and retain carbon, and to support biodiversity.

To date, there has been no thorough survey or restoration of the peatland on Schiehallion. We know there are significant areas of erosion and areas of deep peat (some of which is within the SSSI). We have earmarked an area of around 200 ha for investigation to better understand the distribution of peat, its condition, possible restoration techniques and indicative costs.

To ensure any proposed restoration works are successful, it is vital that grazing pressure from sheep and deer is reduced on site as this can have a significant impact on fragile peatland habitats (see section 3.2.4 Grazing management).

Activity	Timeline
Monitor and manage grazing pressure from sheep and deer	Ongoing
Peatland restoration scoping and feasibility study	2024

3.2.3 Calcareous grassland, flushes and heath

Objective HS: To ensure the SSSI remains in favourable condition

The Schiehallion SSSI is in favourable condition, which means the habitats and features are in a healthy state and are being conserved by appropriate management. As we work to reduce grazing pressure across the site, we will undertake an ongoing programme of habitat monitoring to ensure sensitive habitats remain in favourable condition. The monitoring schedule has been devised with significant input by NatureScot (see section 3.2.5 Monitoring nature’s recovery).

Activity	Timeline
Reduce grazing pressure from sheep and deer	Ongoing

3.2.4 Grazing management

Objective GS: Reduction of grazing pressure to a level that allows nature to repair itself

Our monitoring data indicates that grazing pressure is too high at East Schiehallion to achieve natural regeneration of plant species. Future grazing management will be determined from ongoing habitat monitoring.

Deer

At East Schiehallion red and roe deer are both present. The Trust recognises that deer have a vital part to play in a functioning ecosystem, however grazing pressure at East Schiehallion by deer and sheep is at a level which does not permit nature to repair itself. Therefore the Trust will carry out an annual deer cull at a level that aligns with our objectives on repairing habitats and restoring functioning ecosystems, primarily through natural regeneration. Further information can be seen in our deer management plan (appendix C).

We are working closely with our neighbours in the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership who share the deer range. The Breadalbane Deer Management Group is kept informed of the Trust’s cull requirement to aid in wider deer management planning.

Sheep

At East Schiehallion we also have a high number of encroaching sheep from a neighbouring landholding. We need to address this issue to prevent incursions and in 2022 NatureScot granted permission to reduce grazing on the SSSI area of the site.

Activity	Timeline
Undertake an annual deer cull which is aligned to habitat recovery	Annual
Liaise with neighbours to identify and implement a solution for livestock incursions	2024
Assess fencing options for the site	2022-2024

3.2.5 Monitoring nature’s recovery

Objective MS: Our sites show habitat regeneration in response to our management approach

The Trust takes an evidence-based approach to land management, so it is vital to monitor the impact of any interventions we make on the land, as well as how the land is changing due to external factors. We are currently assessing the follow impacts at East Schiehallion:

Impacts	Objective	Timeline
To assess changes in the level of grazing including browsing damage, to inform deer management plans	Dwarf shrub heath monitoring every second year	2024
	150 marked tree seedlings monitoring every year since 2018	Annual
	17 tree regeneration plots every four years	2026
	Monitor the condition of the SSSI features	Annual
	Re-survey calcareous flushes monitoring plots	2025

To assess changes due to woodland expansion	Black grouse lek count 2 Breeding bird survey transects	Annual Annual
To understand the effects of climate change on species present	5 mountain ringlet transects, each 100-200 m long	Annual
To monitor the condition of the freshwater environment by assessing a key biodiversity indicator species and the fastest declining native British mammal	Water vole survey, last done in 2019	2024
To prevent local extinctions caused by invasive species	Mink Sitka Spruce	Annual Annual

There is history of volunteers helping with habitat and species monitoring and we will continue to support this and provide learning opportunities for rural skills trainees to be involved in site monitoring where possible.

The Schiehallion Monitoring Plan details the existing monitoring plan along with analysis, results and recommendations (see appendix D).

Activity	Timeline
To produce robust site monitoring plans	2024-2025

3.3 An individual's freedom to enjoy the benefit of wild places

We believe people should have access to wild places and the knowledge and awareness of how to best connect with the natural environment and the actions they can take to protect it. This connection builds value and those who value wild places are more likely to care for and take action to protect them.

The John Muir Trust wants to inspire people and communities to experience and feel empowered to advocate for the benefits of wild places, to be able to influence government and land managers to protect wild places. To do this, we maintain an access network across East Schiehallion, and keep the sites safe and tidy by regularly removing waste and litter left by people. We support our neighbours by working together on visitor management, including directing traffic and dealing with car parking and carrying out a visitor survey to understand the needs of people coming to the area. We also write and install interpretation and make information available via our website to allow people self-service access.

3.3.1 Access

Objective AS: To support public access by maintaining the East Schiehallion mountain path and Foss Loop path

There are two maintained paths on East Schiehallion. The mountain path reaches ~800 m elevation and data shows it is used by an average of 20,000 people per year. The all-abilities Foss Loop path is used by an average of 2,600 people per year. Simple maintenance of both is undertaken by volunteers along with Trust staff.

The all-abilities Foss Loop path was built in 2019 and links East Schiehallion, Dùn Coillich (Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust) and Braes of Foss (Forestry and Land Scotland). The John Muir Trust has agreed with Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust and Forestry and Land Scotland to undertake any necessary maintenance on the path until 2028.

The mountain path underwent significant resurfacing and line definition work in 2020-21, which involved helicopter lifts to bring in path materials. Several parts of the path were upgraded at this time to increase steps, improve drainage and encourage walkers to stay on the path to reduce erosion hotspots. There had been several eroded lines forming away from the area where walkers join the boulder field, in areas of shallow peat.

In 2022, several extreme weather events caused minor erosion to small areas of the path, where drainage will need to be improved. A path survey will identify problem areas and help us to prevent further damage in future.

We have installed people counters on the Foss Loop and Mountain Path to help us understand the amount of footfall and erosion we might expect over time, so we can adjust our management and maintenance schedule accordingly.

Activity	Timeline
Redefine the path below the boulder field where it has been widened through erosion and several lines are forming	2024
Foss Loop maintenance	2024
Regular maintenance works including clearing vegetation along path edges and ensuring drainage ditches are clear on the Foss Loop	Annual
Clearing drainage ditches on mountain path	Annual

3.3.2 Visitor infrastructure

Objective IS: To provide facilities and information to help people enjoy and explore wild places responsibly.

Two paths to access East Schiehallion start from the Braes of Foss car park, which is on the south side of a minor road between the B846 and Kinloch Rannoch. The car park contains a toilet block, and the infrastructure is owned and operated by Forestry and Land Scotland, who charge a fee for its use.

During Covid lockdowns and restrictions, this site became very popular and car parking became dangerous, with cars left along both sides of the minor road, blocking access for emergency vehicles. To accommodate the additional vehicles, Forestry and Land Scotland created an overflow car park on the opposite side of the road, which now accommodates the extra vehicles during busy times.

In 2021, questions were raised about the Trust taking on the management of the Braes of Foss car park. An initial [scoping study](#) was undertaken in 2021 (appendix E), which recommended that a full feasibility study was completed. The Trust appointed the architects Simpson and Brown to look at options for relocating the current car park, expanding its size and possibly including a structure that could accommodate visitors. The review of visitor facilities is ongoing and will be reviewed along with our neighbours. There will be a community consultation on these plans before any recommendations are made.

There is interpretation including a map and information at the entrance to the car park to help people visiting the site.

Activity	Timeline
Review and consult on options for improving car parking and possible provision of other facilities	2023
Review how to make our interpretation more inclusive and engaging for a wider range of visitors	2025

3.4 The community's freedom to thrive in wild places

Thriving communities are core to the Trust's ethos and we work in partnership to enable communities to protect the wild places important to them. We understand that people and communities are not something distinct from nature but that they are interdependent, and we aim to enable communities to get the best from their wild places and thrive alongside the nature that lives there. We can only realise this with the help of communities who can care for wild places.

3.4.1 Partnerships

Objective PS: To work alongside our neighbours and other interested parties to make a positive impact for wild places at the landscape-scale, aligned with our ethos of the three freedoms.

The Trust set up the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership, which celebrated its fifth anniversary in 2022. The Partnership connects six areas of land to create a linked woodland corridor stretching across more than 3,000 hectares, from the Keltneyburn Special Area of Conservation to Loch Tummel.

The following partner organisations make up the Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership: Dalchosnie and Kynachan Estate, Forestry and Land Scotland, Garth Wood Wilding Project, Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust (Dùn Coilich), John Muir Trust, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust Scotland and affiliate partners Grenich and National Trust for Scotland Ben Lawers.

The shared vision is for a restored, vibrant landscape that provides opportunities for wildlife to thrive, for local employment and enterprise, and for people to enjoy, access and learn.

Activity	Timeline
Support plans for a collaborative deer control group to reduce the need for internal fencing across the landscape	Ongoing
The Trust organises and chairs quarterly Partnership meetings	Ongoing

3.4.2 Volunteering

Objective VS: To help us deliver our Property Management Plan and support people to feel connected to the site.

Volunteer opportunities have been offered on an ad-hoc basis, making use of existing volunteer groups or advertising work parties through the Trust’s website. Work parties can focus on activities such as seed collection, tree planting, path maintenance, tree tube removal, removal of self-seeded Sitka spruce regeneration, and habitat or species monitoring. We facilitate group requests to volunteer on site where staff time allows.

There are a regular group of local volunteers who work at Schiehallion and the surrounding Heart of Scotland Forest Partnership sites. These are generally retired people who regularly attend a weekly work party organised by our neighbours Highland Perthshire Communities Land Trust. There is currently a gap in engagement between school leaver age and retirees. Weekend work parties which were organised in 2021-22 saw good engagement with adults of working age and will be key to engage more fully with these age groups.

Activity	Timeline
Provide opportunities for volunteers that link with the aims of the Property Management Plans	Ongoing
Support work parties coordinated by SWT – 4 days a year	Annual
Support monthly work parties coordinated by HPCLT – 12 days per year	Annual
Support the promotion of volunteering opportunities with HoSFP	Ongoing
Support volunteering opportunities with Wilderness Scotland – 2 days a year	Annual

3.4.3 Outdoor learning

Objective LS: To provide inspiring outdoor learning opportunities for people to connect with wild places and learn about our work to conserve, protect and repair wild places.

Perth and Kinross has a low population density of year-round residents (approx. [150,000](#) people). The area is well set up for tourism and receives approximately [5 million](#) visitors per year, predominantly between April and August. Near Schiehallion, there are several hotels and caravan parks, so the population grows both with visitors and workers due to the availability of seasonal work. The community of interest comprises a range of villages and towns including Kinloch Rannoch (with a population of around 250), Aberfeldy (with a population of around 1,900) and Pitlochry (with a population of around 2,600).

The mountain path sees around 20,000 visitors each year, the Foss Loop easy access path sees around 15% of these visitors – anecdotally local people seem to use the Foss Loop the most, and many hill walkers return to the car park using the loop.

Activity	Timeline
Support HPCLT’s rural skills course	Annual
Hosting SWT’s trainee rangers – 2 days a year	Annual
Support George Watson College – 1 day a year	Annual
Support the delivery of the Junior Rangers program	2025
Deliver Seed to Tree workshops with local primary schools	2024
Support with the delivery of Connect Outdoors - 2 days per year	2024

3.4.4 Public events

Objective ES: To allow people access to wild places and share our work with the wider community

There are a small number of public events hosted on at Schiehallion, including visits from the Glasgow Children’s Hospital Charity. We’d like to explore attending the Rannoch Gathering in future.

Activity	Timeline
Support the hosting of public events	Annual
Hold an event to mark the 25th anniversary of JMT taking on Schiehallion	2024
Offer guided walks – 2 days a year	2024
Support with workshops linked to East Schiehallion – 2 days a year	Ongoing

3.4.5 Consultation

Objective CS: To work with the community of interested individuals and groups and incorporate their thoughts and ideas

Consultation is a key part of land management and the decision-making process. This management plan lays out the vision and broadly details our objectives for the estate. The Trust will engage with and undertake consultation with the local community and stakeholders on specific aspects of land management as they develop.

Activity	Timeline
To consult on our activities as we develop our plans	Ongoing

4 Appendices

A: East Schiehallion Description

B: Mountain Woodland Consultation

C: Deer Management Plan

D: Habitat Monitoring Plan

E: Sustainable Schiehallion Scoping Study