

PE1812/HHH: Protect Scotland's remaining ancient, native and semi-native woodlands and woodland floors

Petitioner submission, 30 March 2024

Is it time to stop caring? The harder we strive to protect our local woods, the faster they are destroyed.

Any remnants of trust in local government were felled this year along with [78 trees with Tree Preservation Orders](#) (TPOs) in a publicly owned wood our council sold to a developer.

Community efforts to end native woodland deforestation, strengthen resilience (against flooding, pollution, INNS, peat and soil degradation) and mitigate the worsening impacts of global warming and nature loss are blocked by an impenetrable web of deceit and greed that facilitates and funds abusers at every single stage of the lucrative deforestation of Scotland industry. As ordinary citizens we have no recourse to justice for the erasing of our local nature. The trees we fought for are dead. Caring is a dead end.

In 2018 we learned a Council-owned wood, land, and dilapidated former Council offices were to be sold and so the community council secured TPOs for the many mature native and exotic trees on site. Expensive, extensive local authority officer time was dedicated to the long and involved process of delivering those TPOs. Soon afterwards the Council sold the wood, and we were relieved the trees were 'protected'. How stupid of us. Our Council granted the developer permission to clear fell and now most of the wood has been erased, including seven of the nine approximately 200-year-old Giant Redwoods that towered above the native trees. No single tree in the world sequesters more carbon than a Giant Redwood¹. Had our Council not conned us into thinking the trees were safe, we would have fought like Ukrainians for our wood and the 'protected' Red List wildlife that lived among those trees.

But our reserves-rich Council is cash crazy – pocketing the money from selling our land, demanding we pay more for their betrayals by adding 10% on our council tax, billing residents just days after their budget meeting, and then tossing us the cost of U-turning following their spat with the Scottish Government. Unlike priceless native woods that are hundreds of years old, when our Council betrays us by destroying our trees, there can be no U-turn.

¹ <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2421922-giant-sequoia-trees-are-growing-surprisingly-quickly-in-the-uk/>

The Council subsequently stated that as the wood was allocated for housing in the 2015 Local Development Plan, TPOs there are essentially useless. Clearly putting TPOs on the wood in 2018 was just a Council charade.

- **Why** did National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) not apply?
- **Why** was a felling licence from Scottish Forestry not required?
- **Why** did the Council not inform the local community council in 2018 that TPOs were a waste of everyone's care?

This outcome is an unforgivable breach of trust. We urgently need to be protected from our Council and we need help to save what remains of the wood. Evidence provided to the Petitions Committee suggests that councils' TPO regulatory powers are yet another weak link letting Scotland sink further into ecological poverty.

Council-owned land and woods are also dying from neglect, often overrun with invasive species. To have a chance of saving them, responsibility for all public woods could be transferred to another organisation (a new National Nature Service?) that has a remit to work in partnership with local communities and landowners to bring them back to ecological health. Nature is rapidly in retreat and [our local community is 100% powerless to help](#).

In addition to losing our wood, our community is bearing witness to our beloved hill above the felled wood being fenced off and dug up for yet another 'green concrete' conifer plantation extension to an existing vast disease-ridden monoculture block. Our hill's colours, contours and identity are being permanently erased, wildlife and pollinators poisoned and evicted again and again, [archaeological sites dug over](#), livestock gone, wild flowers and biodiversity eradicated over most of the 500 acre scheme. The vast amounts of the logging industry's chemicals and plastics now being added to the peaty soils with the associated toxins sure to leach into our burns and loch. The increase in high rainfall incidents this year alone is resulting in greater volumes of water clashing with the vast local land use change, deforestation, development and new drainage channels diverting the water, silt, and other debris into blocked and overflowing natural watercourses and flooding our pavements and roads.

While there will be no direct community benefit from the afforestation, hundreds of lumber trucks will travel through our narrow village streets, the tiny fragments of ancient woodland left face an even greater threat of INNS conifer infestation and all the while our hill has become nothing more than a gambling chip to be tossed between investment companies² around the world.

Many human-made cancers are spreading unchecked across Scotland's historic natural identity and the dire, declining condition of our mature native woodland is arguably the most obvious symptom. Small rural communities like those on Craignish Peninsula, [assessed by the Alliance for Scotland's Rainforest as](#)

² <https://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/markets/article-12307917/UK-fund-manager-Gresham-House-falls-hands-buyout-barons-Searchlight-Capital-470m-deal.html>

[defendable](#), are forced to form alliances with conservation charities to battle to protect them from the INNS cancer.

But most of Scotland is completely undefended from rampant, all-consuming, unchecked spread of INNS (Rhododendron Ponticum, commercial conifers, Laurel, Bamboo and many others) and the catastrophic diseases ([pluvaris](#) and [ramorum](#)) and pests they are spreading, leading Ireland to restrict imports of timber from Scotland³.

The logging industry has known for 30 years their favoured conifers are highly invasive. On Sky News in December 2021⁴, CONFOR Chief Executive, Stuart Goodall, said: "*If there are trees which are being blown in, by actively managing them we take them out and we would absolutely support that, we want to see our ancient woodland protected.*" We urge the Petitions Committee to demand CONFOR explains when and how the forestry industry will pay to remove its pollution, in accordance with its responsibilities to the UKFS and in line with Scottish Forestry's own guidance, instead of shunting the hard, spirit crushing work of removing self-seeded conifers on to people and volunteers in charities and communities who actually care about Scotland.

[The Royal Society of Edinburgh's 2024 Inquiry into public financial support for tree planting](#) has reached many of the same conclusions we have been presenting to the Committee. With the INNS conifers now being planted right down our hill, and housing development decimating mature semi-natural woodland up the hill to meet the plantation, there is no possibility of an NPF4 Nature Network to reconnect our community's fragments of ancient and native riparian woodland.

³ <https://www.farmersjournal.ie/more/forestry/new-restrictions-announced-for-timber-imports-from-scotland-804155>

⁴ <https://news.sky.com/story/scotlands-ancient-forests-facing-a-biodiversity-crisis-from-non-native-tree-planting-12502002>