

VOLUME 1: CHAPTER 12: FORESTRY

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12. FORESTRY

12.1 Executive Summary

- 12.1.1 This Chapter considers the potential for significant effects on the forest resource, forest management and access associated with the construction and operation of the Proposed Development with the Proposed Alignment. A review of the Proposed Development with the Alternative Alignment is reported in **Volume 5: Chapter 10: Forestry – Alternative Alignment**.
- 12.1.2 The Proposed Alignment is predicted to result in the loss of 5.75 ha of woodland due to the requirement to create an Operational Corridor (OC) for the construction and safe operation of the proposed OHL, including the creation of access tracks.
- 12.1.3 The woodlands within the study area are for the most part recently created native woodlands. One area of semi mature conifer plantation is also affected.
- 12.1.4 Mitigation through design is for minimal tree felling and utilising the current unplanted ground where possible. There are no areas of ancient woodland or ancient or veteran trees present.
- 12.1.5 No significant effects were identified from the direct loss of woodland. The effects of woodland removal, in forestry terms, were assessed as not significant, on the basis of the relatively low magnitude of change in the context of the regional resource, and the low to medium sensitivity of the types of woodland present in the study area.
- 12.1.6 Given that the Proposed Alignment would result in the permanent loss of woodland, the Applicant is committed to making arrangements to plant off-site the equivalent area of woodland as compensatory planting, meeting the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy (CoWRP) objective of no net loss of woodland. The development of compensatory planting scheme agreements will be progressed with landowners within the regional land boundary of the Local Authority, of where the Proposed Alignment is geographically located.
- 12.1.7 The area of woodland removal required for other consented and proposed development will be mitigated through Scottish Government's CoWRP objective of no net loss of woodland. In this way there is considered to be no cumulative effect on forestry.

12.2 Introduction

- 12.2.1 This Chapter assesses the potential effects of the construction and operation of the Proposed Development with the Proposed Alignment on forest and woodland areas to the west of Strath Halladale. A review of the Proposed Development with the Alternative Alignment is reported in **Volume 5: Chapter 10: Forestry – Alternative Alignment**.
- 12.2.2 The effects associated with the construction phase can be considered to be representative of worst-case decommissioning effects, and therefore no separate assessment of decommissioning has been undertaken.
- 12.2.3 The assessment has been prepared by Neil McKay MICFor, Director of Neil McKay Forestry Consultant Limited, a professional member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters (ICF) since 1994. A table presenting relevant qualifications and experience of key staff involved in the preparation of this Chapter is included in **Volume 4: Appendix V1-5.1: EIA Team Details**.

12.3 Scope of Assessment

- 12.3.1 This Chapter considers the likely impacts of the Proposed Alignment on forestry and woodland. This includes an assessment of the sensitivity of the forest areas located along the route of the Proposed Alignment and an

assessment of the likely impact that would arise from the Proposed Alignment, with particular emphasis on forest structure and management.

12.3.2 The assessment is based on the description of the Proposed Alignment that is provided in **Volume 1: Chapter 3: The Proposed Development**.

12.3.3 This assessment is based on the requirement to form an Operational Corridor (OC) along the route of the Proposed Alignment within forest and woodland areas, while recognising the potential impact over broader forest management areas as a result of the Proposed Alignment. This Chapter reports on the assessment of the effects associated with the creation of the OC only. Any felling undertaken outside of the OC would be solely under the control of the landowner and the Applicant would not have any influence or control over such.

12.3.4 As provided in terms of the Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2022 (ESQCR) and Schedule 4 of the Electricity Act 1989, the Applicant has the necessary statutory powers to remove woodland for the purposes of construction and on-going maintenance of new overhead lines (OHLs), and/or protection of electrical plant.

Study Area and Operational Corridor

12.3.5 The forestry study area includes all woodland standing, windblown, felled or regenerating within the Limits of Deviation (LoD) for both the proposed OHL alignment (50 m either side of the centreline of the OHL alignment) and the access tracks (25 m either side of the centreline of the access tracks), prior to identification of an OC (see **Volume 2: Figure V1-12.1: Forestry Study Area** and **Figure V1-12.2: Aerial Imagery of Baseline Forestry** of the EIA Report).

12.3.6 The OC is defined with reference to the distance at which a tree could fall and cause damage to the OHL, resulting in supply outage. As a result, the final OC width would be based on the safety distance required to allow a mature tree falling towards the OHL at the mid-point on an OHL span between two towers, taking account of topography and tree height at maturity.

12.3.7 Whilst the design of the Proposed Alignment has sought to minimise impacts on woodland and forestry where possible, some felling during construction to create an OC for the OHL and access tracks, is required. The width of the OC would be variable depending on the nature of the forest or woodland. Within areas of commercial forestry, the OC would require a distance of 42.5 m either side of the OHL for the L8c standard tower (i.e. Towers 29 to 64 inclusive) and 36 m either side of the OHL for the L7c standard tower (i.e. Towers 19 to 28 inclusive). Whilst in areas of native woodland the OC can be reduced (e.g. to 30 m either side of the OHL for both the L7c and L8c standard towers). For new tracks (temporary and permanent) a 25 m OC is required (12.5 m either side of the track plus running width).

12.3.8 The OHL OC and track OC is displayed on **Volume 2: Figure V1-12.3: Forestry Felling** of the EIA Report.

12.3.9 Wherever appropriate, this OC of woodland removal is reduced by occupying areas of existing open ground. Opportunities to utilise existing open ground (unplanted) areas within which to locate the OC will be taken into account, to reduce the extent of woodland removal.

12.4 Consultation

12.4.1 The scope of the assessment has been determined through a combination of professional judgement and consultation with stakeholders through a formal EIA scoping process and pre-application advice. **Table V1-12.1** sets out the comments received from consultees in relation to forestry and the actions taken to address them within this assessment.

Table V1-12.1: Consultee Scoping Responses

Organisation & Date	Summary of Consultation Response	EIA/Design Response to Consultee
The Highland Council (THC) 21 st May 2024	<p>THC acknowledged that comments from the Council's Forestry Officer were not received by the time of issue of the scoping response.</p> <p>THC noted that, as it stands, a specific chapter on Forestry would not be required, however, this may change if the layout alters going forward.</p> <p>Information in support of the application will be required and this should outline areas of woodland / forestry plantation which may be felled to accommodate new development. THC recommend that compensatory planting of new woodland is a clear expectation of any proposals for felling, and thereby such mitigation needs to be considered within any assessment. If trees are removed, then compliance with the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy (CoWRP) must be demonstrated.</p>	<p>This Forestry Chapter has been provided which describes the areas of woodland affected and refers to Compensatory Planting in compliance with the Scottish Government's CoWRP Policy.</p>
Scottish Forestry (SF) 22 nd April 2024	<p>SF raise a concern that the developer has not committed to assess the impacts on forestry and woodlands and has not committed to the control of woodland removal policies. SF advise the planning authority to address this concern with the developer and ensure the policies set out in SF's response are considered and within the scope of the EIA report.</p>	<p>This Forestry Chapter addresses SF's concerns about assessing the impacts on forestry and woodland and has committed to the control of woodland removal policies within paragraph 12.8.2. Paragraph 12.11.2 references the requirement for compensatory planting.</p>
	<p>Scottish Government's policy on control of woodland removal: implementation guidance February 2019 provides guidance on the level and detail of information SF will expect within the EIA Report, to help us reach an informed decision on the potential impact of the proposed development.</p>	<p>The Scottish Government's CoWRP and implementation guidance is referenced and followed in Section 12.8 (Embedded Mitigation Measures) of this Chapter.</p>
	<p>SF strongly advises the developer to include detailed information on the types and areas of forestry to be felled and restocked as a result of the proposed development</p>	<p>The forestry and woodland information is contained in Section 12.7 (Baseline Conditions) of this Chapter.</p>
	<p>Any additional felling which is not part of the application will require permission from Scottish Forestry under the Forestry and Land Management (Scotland) Act 2018 (the Act).</p>	<p>No additional felling is anticipated for the Proposed Alignment, other than what is outlined in this Chapter. The Proposed Development with the Alternative Alignment is considered in Volume 5: Chapter 10: Forestry – Alternative Alignment.</p>

Organisation & Date	Summary of Consultation Response	EIA/Design Response to Consultee
	The applicant should note that any compensatory planting required as a result of the proposed development, may also need to be considered under The Forestry (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017.	The applicant recognises the requirements of compensatory planting within Section 12.11 (Mitigation) of this Chapter.

12.5 Legislation, Policy and Guidance

12.5.1 The key legislation, policy and guidance listed below has been considered in the assessment:

- The Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal (2009)¹;
- Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal: implementation guidance (2019)²;
- National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) (2023)³ (see below);
- Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029⁴
- UK Forestry Standard 5th Edition (2023)⁵;
- The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017⁶;
- The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002⁷; and
- The Electricity Act 1989⁸

12.5.2 Policy 6: Trees, woodland and forestry of NPF4 notes that development proposals should not be supported where they would result in:

- any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition;
- adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerows and individual trees of high biodiversity value or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy⁴;
- fragmenting or severing woodland habitats, unless mitigation measures are identified and implemented; and
- conflict with Restocking Direction, Remedial Notice or Registered Notice to Comply issued by the Scottish Government Forestry Regulator, Scottish Forestry.

¹ The Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal 2009 available at <https://www.forestry.gov.scot/publications/285-the-scottish-government-s-policy-on-control-of-woodland-removal> [Accessed on 23/08/2024]

² Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal: Implementation Guidance available at <https://www.forestry.gov.scot/publications/349-scottish-government-s-policy-on-control-of-woodland-removal-implementation-guidance> accessed on 23/08/2024

³ National Planning Framework 4 available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4> accessed on 23/08/2024

⁴ Scotland's Forestry Strategy 2019–2029 available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-forestry-strategy-20192029/> accessed on 22/01/2025

⁵ The UK Forestry Standard: 5th Edition available at <https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/uk-forestry-standard/> accessed on 23/08/2024

⁶ The Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2017/101/contents> accessed 22/01/2025

⁷ The Electricity Safety, Quality and Continuity Regulations 2002 available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/2665/contents> accessed on 22/01/2025

⁸ The Electricity Act 1989 available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/29/contents> accessed on 22/01/2025

12.6 Methodology

Desk Study

12.6.1 Ancient Woodland Inventory (Scotland) (AWI)⁹ and the Native Woodland Survey of Scotland (NWSS)¹⁰ available through open data was reviewed for the study area. As no forest specific datasets have been used, the National Forest Inventory 2022¹¹ dataset is the main digital source. Scottish Forestry Map Viewer¹² was also viewed for the position of grant aided and other woodlands.

12.6.2 Web based imagery was also reviewed to ensure all forest and woodland cover was included within this assessment.

Field Survey

12.6.3 A forest walkover was undertaken on 23rd July 2024. During the site visit the forest crop condition was checked against the desk study information. The current tree crop condition was recorded as was the tree height. See **Volume 4: Appendix V1-12.1: Forestry Photographic Records**.

Assessment of Effects

12.6.4 There are currently no standard criteria for assessing the sensitivity / importance and magnitude for forest felling and restocking or determining the value of woodland loss. As such, the assessment is broadly based upon the methodology set out in **Volume 1: Chapter 5 - EIA Process and Methodology** and based on the requirements of the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 (EIA Regulations).

12.6.5 Sensitivity / importance is relatively clear in definition as set out in paragraph 12.6.7 below, whereas the criteria for magnitude is defined by area, as set out in paragraph 12.6.8. Assessing the impact of the Proposed Alignment on the forest structure relies heavily on the General Forestry Practice Guide set in UK Forestry Standard Fifth Edition⁵ (UKFS) and NPF4³ Policy 6 (see paragraph 12.5.2).

12.6.6 The significance of an impact depends upon the sensitivity / importance of the forest area, combined with the magnitude of the impact. The criteria for assessing these, together with the resultant levels of predicted significance, are described in the following paragraphs.

Criteria for Assessing Sensitivity/Importance of Receptors

12.6.7 Criteria for assessing the sensitivity / importance of a forest, is as follows:

- High: Ancient Woodland and ancient or veteran trees;
- Medium: Native woodlands and Plantation on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS),
- Low: Productive conifer plantation; and
- Negligible: Unplanted areas.

Criteria for Assessing Magnitude of Change

12.6.8 Criteria for assessing the magnitude of change to a forest or woodland, is as follows:

- High: a change of >40 ha to the forest or woodland;

⁹ Ancient Woodland Inventory (Scotland) available at <https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/c2f57ed9-5601-4864-af5f-a6e73e977f54/ancient-woodland-inventory-scotland> accessed on 23/08/2024

¹⁰ Native Woodland Inventory of Scotland available at <https://www.forestry.gov.scot/forests-environment/biodiversity/native-woodlands/native-woodland-survey-of-scotland-nwss> accessed on 23/08/24

¹¹ National Forest Inventory 2022 available at <https://www.data.gov.uk/dataset/2f24493b-0c4b-47bb-9e16-3a6e1740a01c/national-forest-inventory-scotland-2022> accessed on 23/08/2024

¹² Scottish Forestry Map Viewer available at <https://www.forestry.gov.scot/support-regulations/scottish-forestry-map-viewer> accessed on 23/08/2024

- Medium: a change of between >15-40 ha to the forest or woodland;
- Low: change of between >0.1-15 ha to the forest or woodland; and
- Negligible: a change of <0.1 ha to the forest or woodland.

Significance Criteria

12.6.9 The predicted significance of impact is determined by consideration of a site's importance / sensitivity in conjunction with the magnitude of change predicted on it. **Table V1-12.2** provides a framework for reaching a judgment as to the significance of an impact.

Table V1-12.2 Matrix for Determining the Significance of Direct Impact

		Sensitivity of Receptor / Receiving Environment to Change / Effect			
		High	Medium	Low	Negligible
Magnitude of Change/Effect	High	Major	Major	Moderate	Negligible
	Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	Negligible
	Low	Moderate	Minor	Minor	Negligible
	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible	Negligible

12.6.10 Major and Moderate effects are considered to be significant within the context of the EIA Regulations.

Limitations and Assumptions to the Assessment

12.6.11 No forestry or woodland information has been provided by any woodland owners or agents.

12.6.12 The open data forestry shapefiles have been used to identify the woodlands within the study area. There are minor differences between these, the Ordnance Survey mapping and aerial imagery.

12.6.13 The assessment assumes that no additional felling would be required for upgrade works to existing access tracks.

12.7 Baseline Conditions

12.7.1 Mapping of the various woodland components within the study area, as displayed on **Volume 2: Figure V1-12.1**, is based upon the forestry open data datasets, updated by the use of aerial imagery and fieldwork.

Woodland Designations

12.7.2 There are no Ancient Woodlands listed in the AWI within the study area. Achrugan Forest includes AWI Other (on Roy map) approximately 420 m north-west of the Proposed Alignment at OS Grid Reference NC 831627.

Desk and Field Study

12.7.3 A desk-based review identified the following forest and woodland areas within the study area, as displayed on **Volume 2: Figure V1-12.1**:

- The conifer plantation listed on the National Forestry Inventory (NFI) at OS Grid Reference NC 881617 is not shown in the open data as to when it was planted or the forestry scheme reference. However, field survey identified that the conifer plantation includes Sitka spruce with tree height in the range of between 8 m to 10 m.
- Areas of Rural Development Contract (RDC) native woodland creation are present at OS Grid Reference NC 882614, NC 883612, NC 885608, NC 887606 and NC881619. The native broadleaved trees are mainly birch and with tree height in the range of between 1 m to 3 m.

- An area of Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS) native woodland creation is present at OS Grid Reference NC 892602, approved for planting in 2006 and mainly comprises of birch with a tree height of approximately 3 m.
- Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) woodland creation, native broadleaves is shown on Map Viewer as agreed for planting in 2018 at NC 883614, NC 883611 and NC 886608.

12.8 Embedded Mitigation Measures

12.8.1 The embedded mitigation is a combination of decisions taken during the design process to avoid or minimise the potential for likely significant effects through routeing and alignment of the OHL and access tracks, and the implementation of standard practice mitigation measures that are well established and effective.

Design

12.8.2 The design of the OHL and access tracks have aimed to avoid the larger forest and woodland areas and have avoided the nearest small NWSS native woodland at OS Grid Reference NC 896604.

Good Practice

12.8.3 Good forest practice for removing the trees will be followed as detailed within the site-specific Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) that will be prepared by the successful Principal Contractor, and through the good practice guides within UKFS. Only the conifer plantation would provide marketable timber.

12.9 Assessment of Likely Significant Effects

12.9.1 The assessment of likely significant effects associated with the construction and operational phases of the Proposed Alignment is based on the activities described in **Volume 1: Chapter 3 - The Proposed Development**.

12.9.2 The assessment has been limited to the forestry and woodland removal required to create the proposed OC for the OHL and required access tracks.

Direct Effects – Forest Removal

12.9.3 Forest and woodland removal is required following the specifications for the safe construction and operation within the OC. The tree sizes are relatively small and do not require any further felling to a wind firm boundary to avoid any predictable windblow.

12.9.4 The direct loss of forest and woodland from construction and operation of the Proposed Alignment is set out in **Table V1-12.3** and illustrated on **Volume 2: Figure V1-12.3**. This includes the areas proposed to be occupied by the OHL and access tracks and provides detail of the current and planned future habitats:

Table V1-12.3 Woodland Condition of the Proposed Alignment OC

Felling Requirement	Current Woodland	Planned woodland (without Proposed Alignment)	Area (ha)
OHL OC	Conifer plantation	Conifer plantation	0.41
OHL OC	Planted native woodland	Native woodland	4.44
Access track OC	Planted native woodland	Native woodland	0.90
Total			5.75

12.9.5 The total direct loss of forestry and woodland for construction of the Proposed Alignment equates to 5.75 hectares (ha).

12.9.6 The loss of the small area of conifer plantation is Low sensitivity and Low magnitude and therefore **Negligible Adverse** and **Not Significant**.

12.9.7 The sensitivity of the planted native woodland within the study area is Medium. The direct loss of this woodland category is assessed as Low magnitude. This effect is assessed as **Minor Adverse** and **Not Significant**.

12.10 Cumulative Effects

12.10.1 The area of woodland removal required for the Proposed Alignment and other proposed grid connections that form part of the Connagill Cluster Grid Connections, will be mitigated through Scottish Government's CoWRP objective of no net loss of woodland with compensatory planting. This policy will be applicable to the woodland areas of those developments that are not yet consented. In this way there is considered to be no cumulative effect on forestry.

12.11 Mitigation

12.11.1 At the time of construction and operation the Applicant will, where possible, take the opportunity to reduce the width of the OC.

12.11.2 Given the Proposed Alignment would result in the permanent loss of 5.75 ha of woodland, the Applicant is committed to making arrangements off-site to plant the equivalent area of new woodland as compensatory planting to meet the Scottish Government's CoWRP objective of no net loss of woodland. Compensatory planting to be undertaken will comply with UKFS and associated guidelines which may apply, or any other such replacement standard applied by the planning (consenting) authority. Planting will be supported by an approved replanting plan and shall identify location, species and woodland design, timing, maintenance, monitoring, and reporting standards.

12.12 Residual Effects

12.12.1 The Proposed Alignment would result in the loss of 5.75 ha of planted conifer and native woodlands.

12.12.2 With the commitment to make arrangements to plant off-site the equivalent area of woodland lost due to construction and operation of an OC for the Proposed Alignment as compensatory planting, in terms of direct loss of woodland coverage, there are no residual effects.

12.13 Summary and Conclusions

12.13.1 This Chapter provides an assessment of the potential effects of the Proposed Development with the Proposed Alignment on forest and woodland areas.

12.13.2 The Proposed Alignment is predicted to result in the permanent direct loss of 5.75 ha of woodland due to the requirement to create an OC for the construction and safe operation of the OHL including the creation of access tracks. The woodlands consist of a small area of conifer plantation and areas of various planted native woodlands. There are no areas of AWI or NWSS affected by this woodland removal. No significant effects were predicted for the removal of this woodland.

12.13.3 The Applicant is committed to making arrangements to plant off-site the equivalent area of woodland as compensatory planting, meeting the Scottish Government's CoWRP objective of no net loss of woodland. The details and locations of the compensatory planting areas are yet to be confirmed.

12.13.4 Given the adherence to CoWRP by this Proposed Alignment, other consented developments and those not yet consented, woodland loss will be replaced with compensatory planting then there is assumed to be no cumulative effect.

12.14 References

Forestry Commission Scotland. (2009) The Scottish Government's Policy on Control of Woodland Removal, Forestry Commission.

UKFS (2023) General Forestry Practice Guide set in UK Forestry Standard Fifth Edition

The Scottish Government. (2023) National Planning Framework 4, Scottish Government