

CASE STUDY

Location: Carrick Farm near Lochgoilhead, Cowal

Size: 1525ha

Aim: Establish a productive forest with significant areas of native planting

Main challenge: The presence of Golden Eagles

Environmental requirement: Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)

Background

Carrick Farm was purchased by a UPM Tilhill client in 2011 with the aim of establishing a productive forest. The investment appraisal was predicated on planting about two thirds of the farm, leaving the upper ground and ridges open to accommodate Golden Eagles which were known to be present in the area.

Challenges

Following the purchase, a pair of Golden Eagles was recorded nesting on the site – the first known breeding attempt on the farm for over 40 years.

Impact

The planting plan needed radical alterations to find options that would satisfy the concerns of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) in relation to the legally protected status of Golden Eagles whilst keeping the client's objectives at the forefront to be able to deliver a commercially viable forest.

Next steps

Extensive research was carried out by the UPM Tilhill teams of ecologists, Investment managers and forest managers.

Critical to the planting plan redesign was to gain an understanding of the eagle's use of the ground at Carrick Farm.

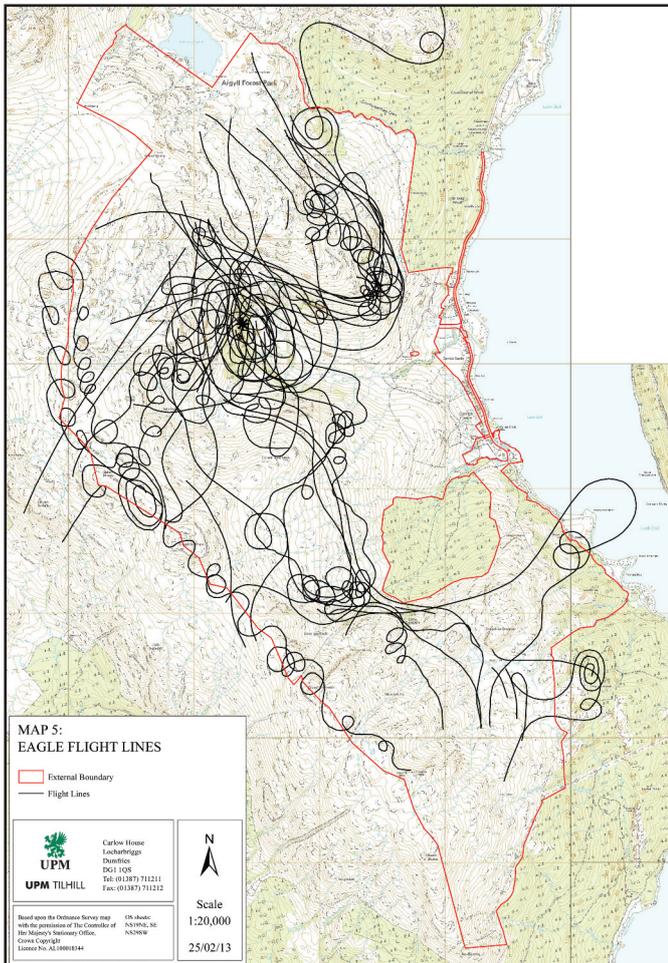
Over 200 hours of vantage point surveys of eagle flights, computer-generated modelling to identify key topographical features used by hunting eagles, data from

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nest cameras and satellite transmitters, habitat surveys, live prey surveys and site-specific advice from the UK's leading eagle experts contributed to the revised planting plan designed to satisfy the Environmental Statement, which would then underpin the grant aid application.

Results from the ground surveys suggested a lack of live prey such as grouse and hares on the property, the consequence of decades of ecological overgrazing by sheep. Consequently, although the eagle pair successfully produced single chicks in 2011, 2012, and 2013 only one has survived into maturity. Starvation is likely to have been a factor.

Respond

In response to this, UPM Tilhill incorporated into the new plan, low-density native woodland planting on upper forest edges to contribute towards an increase in biodiversity and habitat suitable for eagle prey. Added to this were areas of retained open ground which will undergo recovery from long-term grazing impacts to allow the development of habitat structure and the chance for live prey to improve the longer-term productivity of the eagles. The ability for eagles to find live prey as opposed to carrion is important to their breeding success.

Result

The new planting plan allows for large open areas and a diverse forest edge for the eagles to hunt over as well as retaining important topographical features such as crags and ridges used by soaring and hunting birds. Planting will consist mainly of productive Sitka spruce with areas of Norway Spruce and Scots pine. In addition, areas of riparian and other natives woodland are being developed (many focused on developing existing native woodland remnants).

Approval

These significant alterations, following detailed discussions with SNH, allowed Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS), the competent authority for administering the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) (Scotland) Regulations 1999, to give consent for 563 hectares of new mainly productive woodland planting at Carrick Farm. Completion for planting will be in 2015.

The Future

A long-term monitoring programme is planned with FCS and SNH to assess the way eagles use the ground at Carrick Farm as a new woodland structure develops including the monitoring of prey abundance and eagle breeding success.

This will provide an important case study into how eagles respond to an environment with increasing levels of both productive and broad-leaved forest cover. The productive conifer element will help financially support the project.



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