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Affric Highlands Initiative



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What is the Affric Highlands Initiative?



An ambition, over 30 years, to work with with people who live and work in the landscape

- To scale up nature restoration for the future of the land and the people who live here.
- Enabling nature, communities and businesses to support each other and thrive.

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The Three Pillars



Nature and Ecosystems



People and Communities



Livelihoods and Economy

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We believe

- A surge of nature, at scale, will create new economic opportunities.
- That communities can benefit as well as landowners.
- That land-based jobs will increase and there will be more scope for entrepreneurship





Early Stages

- Meeting landowners to learn about their objectives
- Offering free surveys to establish what priority habitats or species they have
- Presenting findings along with potential for projects (no obligation to take them forward)
- Developing finance models that make it possible to deliver projects
- Figuring out how to support young local people





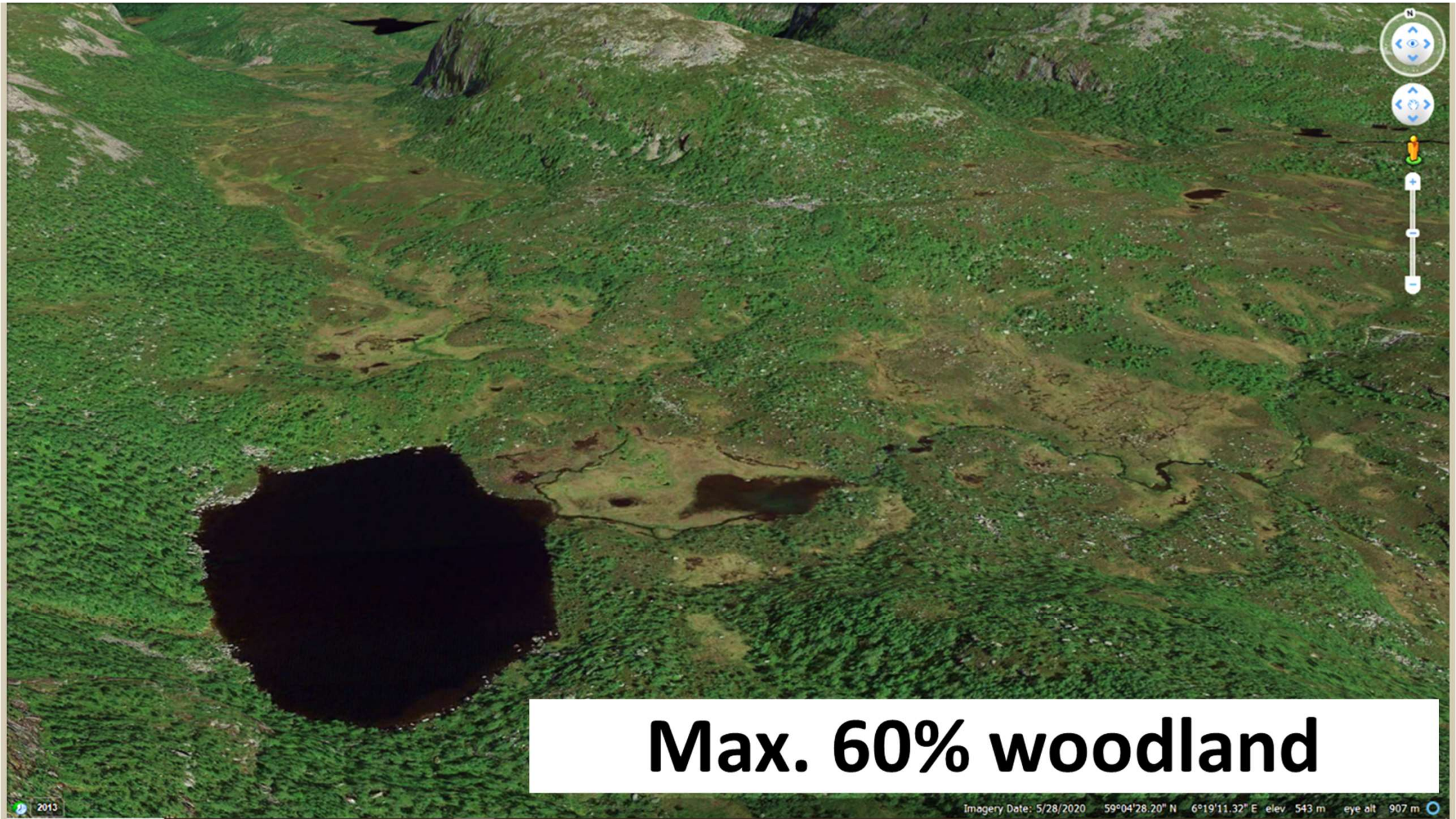
What can Affric Highlands offer land owners/managers

- Affric Highlands is an initiative to enhance, restore and maintain healthy functioning ecosystems at landscape scale across the Scottish Highlands, for the benefit of nature and people - helping to mitigate and combat biodiversity loss, climate crisis and our ability to continue to live off the land sustainably.
- Through ecological surveys, identify strategic priorities for ecosystem restoration across woodland, peatland, montane and river systems, and provide scientific recommendations for their management.
- To feed into any current or future land management plans - working with current land agents.
- To propose areas of habitat restoration at landscape scale in collaboration with neighbours.
- To assess herbivore impacts across habitats and understand current deer management objectives on the land.
- Working, in conjunction with estate objectives, through a long-term partnership - helping landowners tackle future challenges.



Historical context for Wild Tree survey

- **22000 years ago:** Last Glacial Maximum, assumed no trees in Scotland ❄️ ❄️
- **15000 years ago:** got warm, some trees returned from southern refuges ☀️ 🌲 🌳
- **12900 years ago:** got cold again, trees retreated into 'microrefugia' ❄️ 🌲
- **11500 years ago:** got warm, trees returned from microrefugia and southern refuges ☀️ 🌲 🌳 🌲 🌳
- **6000 years ago:** tree cover at maximum ~60% ☀️ 🌲 🌲 🌳 🌲 🌳 🌳 🌲 🌳 🌲 🌳 🌲 🌳
- **1000:** burning, grazing & felling cause tree cover decline to ~20% 🧑🔪 🔥 🐑 🌲 🔥 🌲 🌳
- **1600s:** tree cover decline intensifies, industrial charcoal production commences 🧑🔪 🔥 🔪 🐑 🌲 🌳 🌳
- **1700s:** Highland Clearances begin, people and cattle replaced by sheep, some planting 🐑 🐑 🔥 🔪 🌲 🌳
- **1800s:** Clearances continue to ~1860, start of sport shooting, tree cover declines from 9 to 6%, planted trees now outnumber wild trees 🐑 🐑 🐑 🐑 🌳
- **1900s:** sport shooting dominant and deer population rockets, start of state forestry, Pacific conifers planted widely, much Ancient Woodland and bog converted to plantation, tree cover increases to 18% yet wild tree decline continues 🐑 🐑 🐑 🐑 🌲 🌲 🌳 🌲



Max. 60% woodland



1st OS Map (1843 - 1882)

Sròn Lice na Feàrna



Historical refuges

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Topographic refuges

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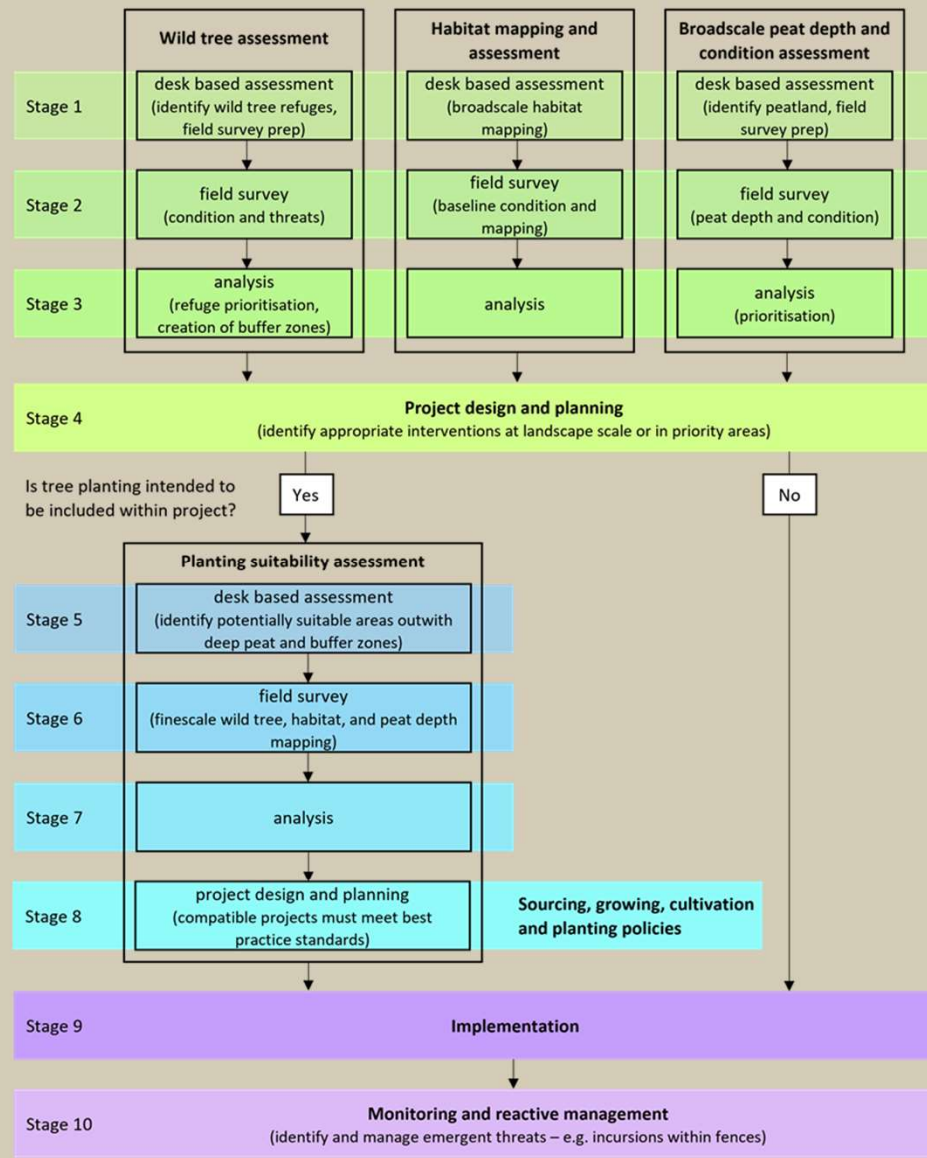
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Refugial species: more than just trees!



Framework for prioritising wild trees and wider ecosystem restoration





Current conservation model prioritises 'woodland creation' and planting

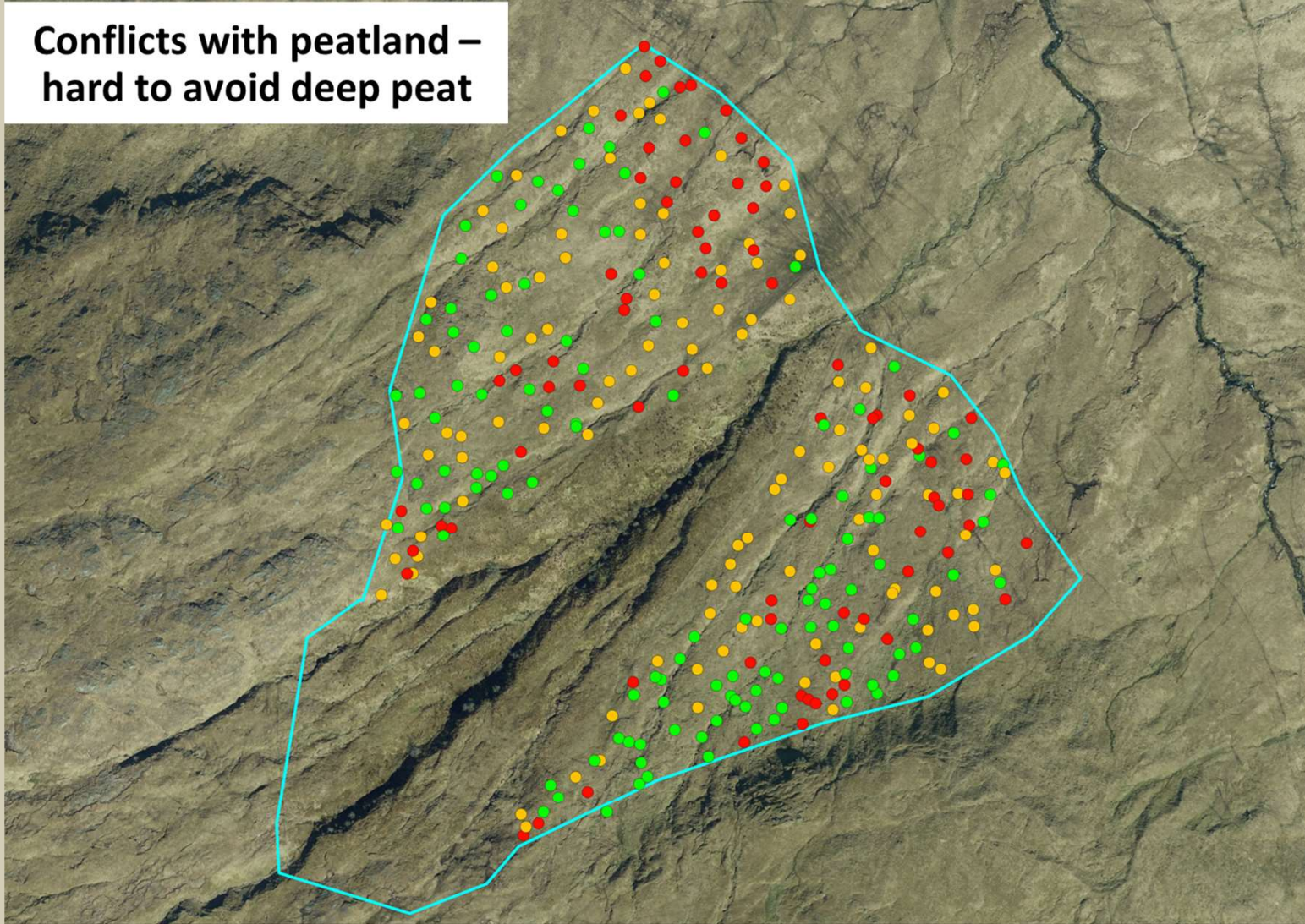
- Identify suitable area for planting
- Deer fence, source and grow trees, cultivate, plant
- Maintain fence until trees 'get away'



**Cultivation often damaging,
planting structurally homogenous**

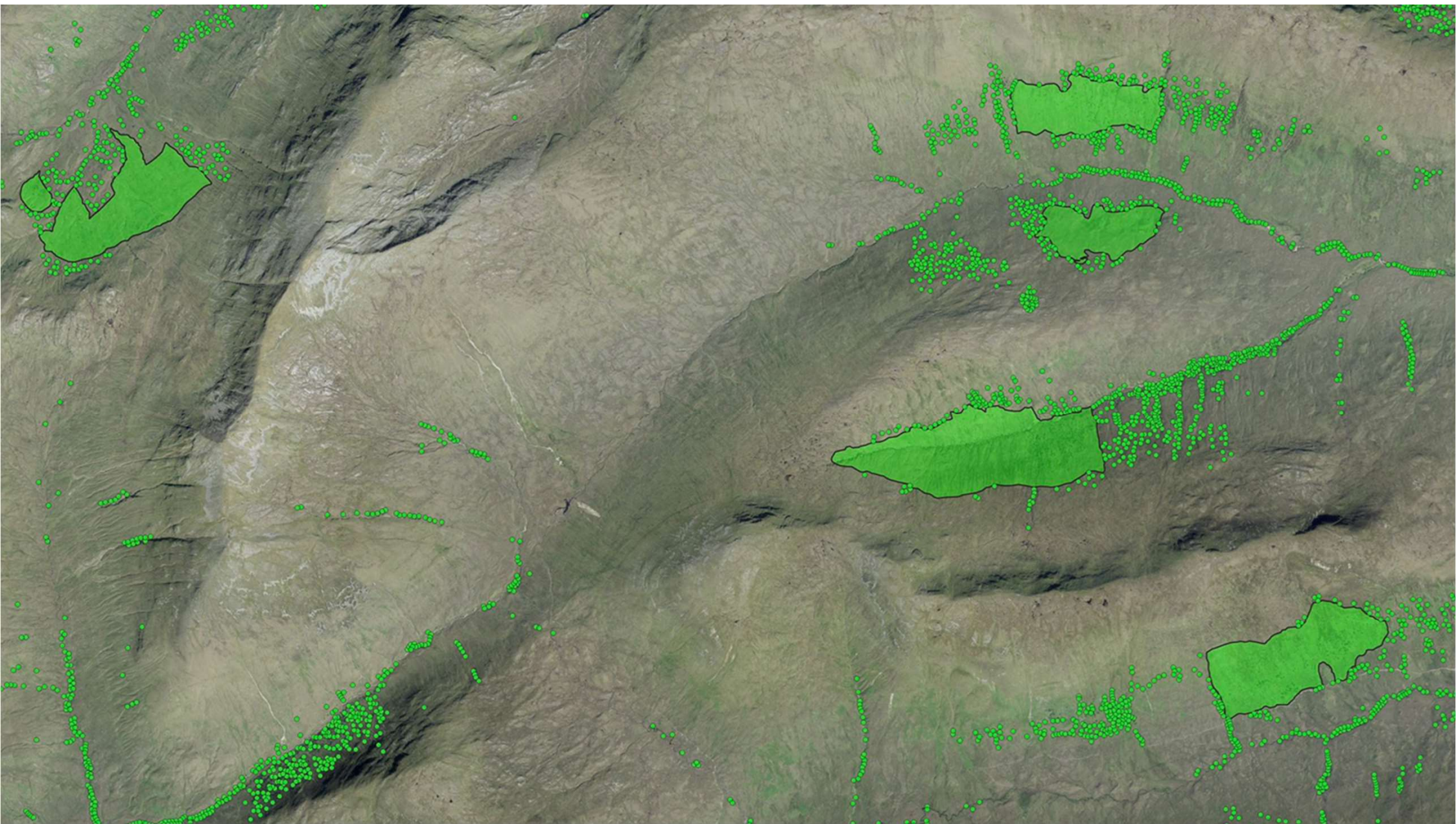


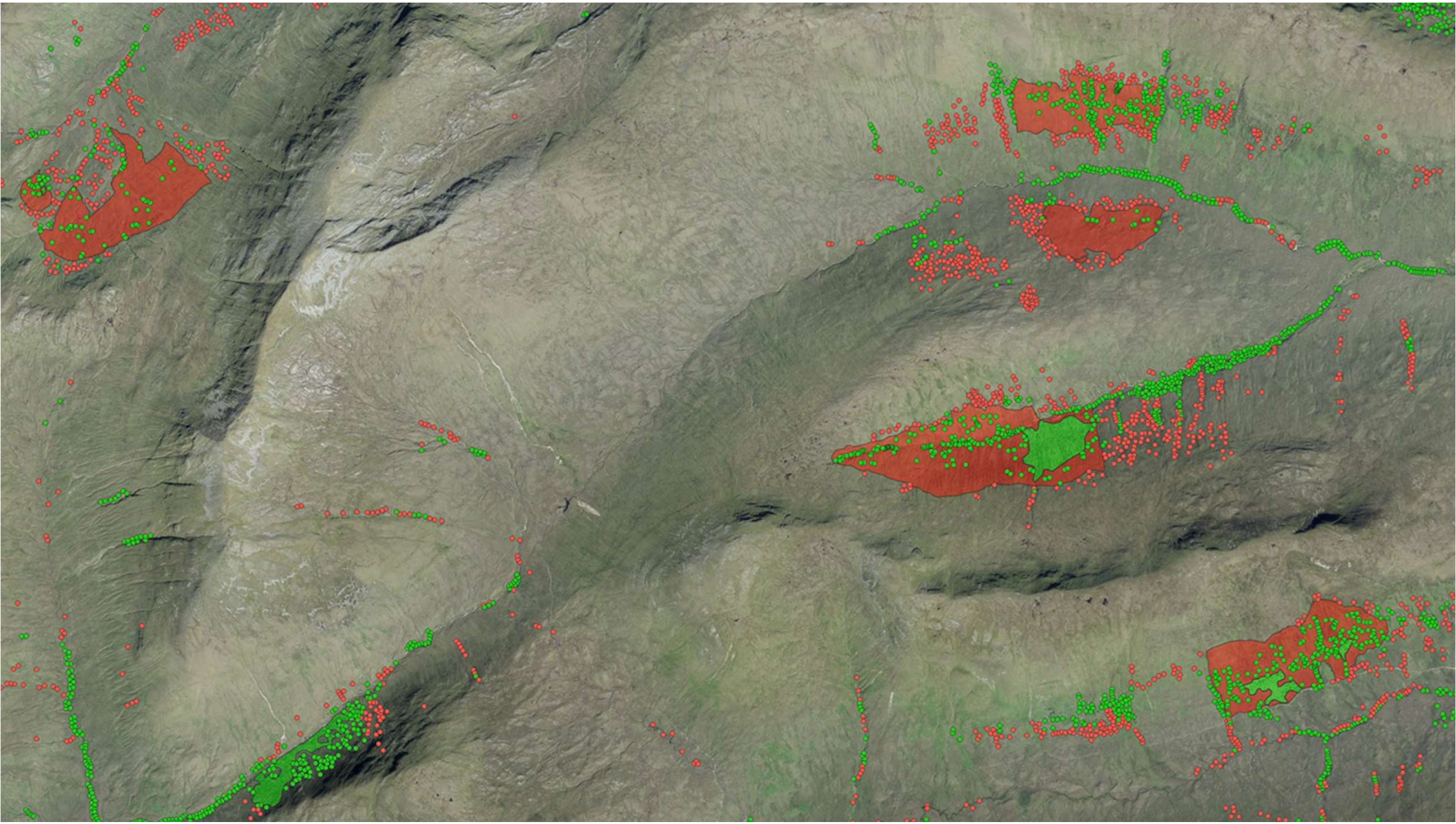
**Conflicts with peatland –
hard to avoid deep peat**



Much diversity lost when high herbivore impacts resume

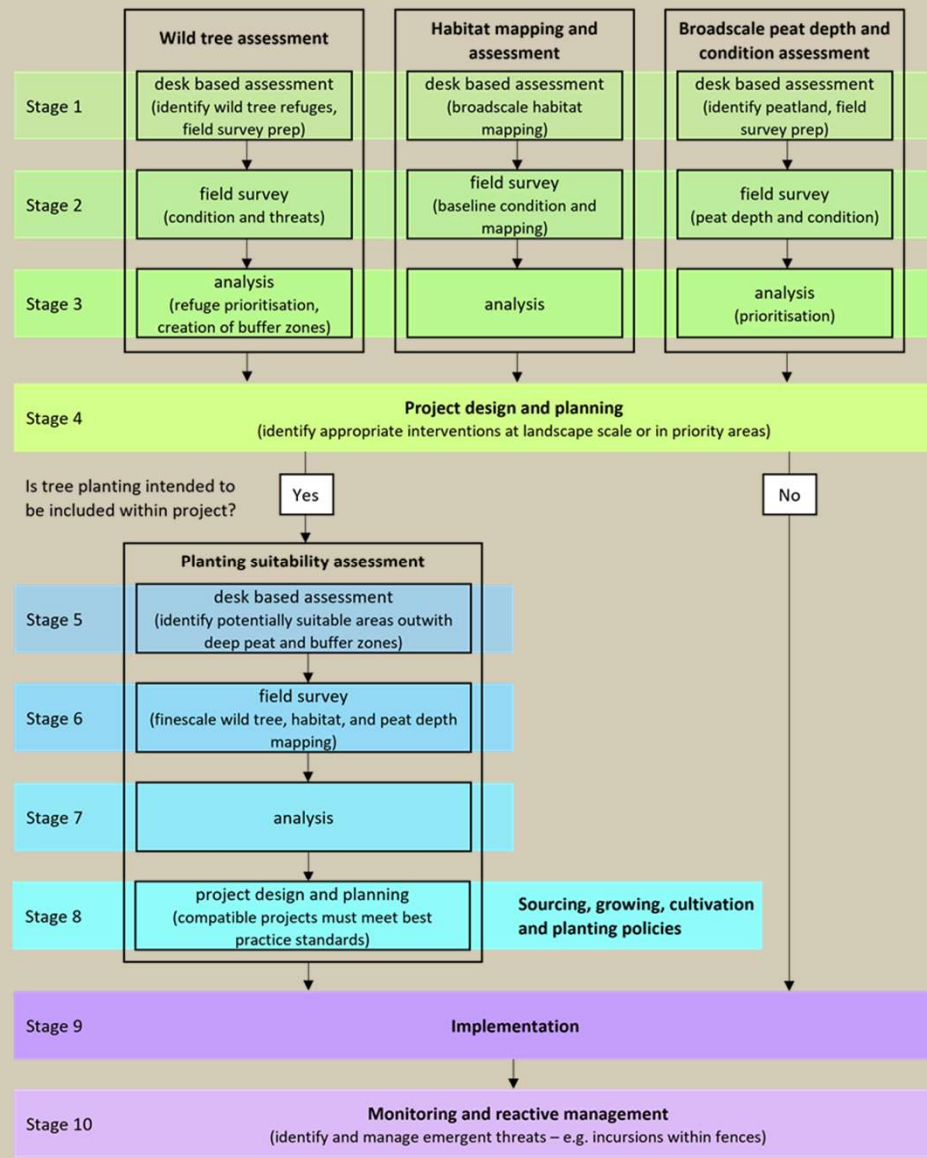








Framework for prioritising wild trees and wider ecosystem restoration





Why might land owners/managers want to work with us?

- We are not working for profit
- Our proposals are based on finescale scientific field surveys and although they have ecological agenda we see people being able to prosper whilst living and working in the landscape as equally important
- We can access funding from novel sources to deliver projects
- Affric Highlands branded Natural Capital credits, such as carbon, can be sold at a much higher price due to the ecological integrity
- We have demonstrated that this increased income from natural capital can benefit communities.

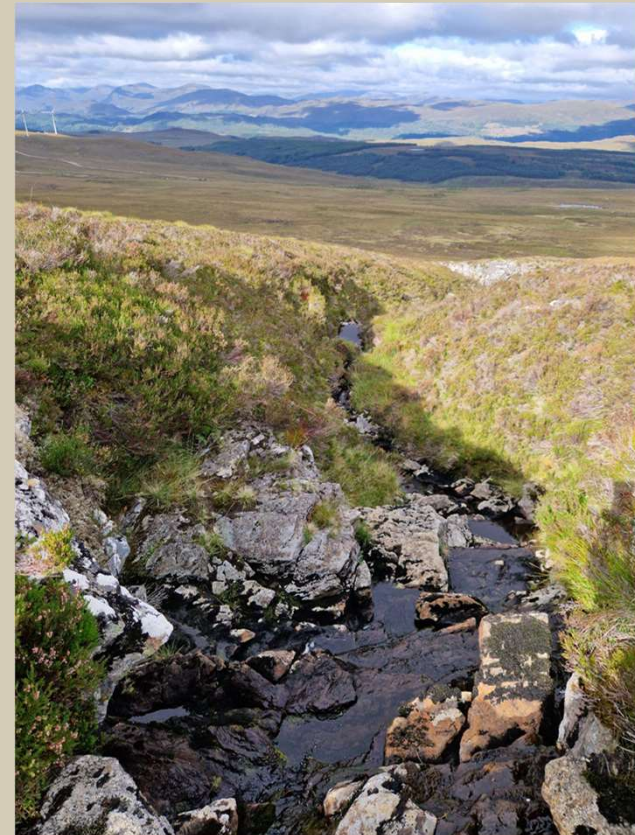


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Who am I working with?

- District Fisheries Boards and Rivers Trusts
 - Beaully
 - Ness
 - Kyle of Lochalsh
- Landowners in the AH area
 - Private
 - NGO's
 - Statutory
 - Communities
- Funders
 - Government - FGS
 - Trusts and Foundations
 - Corporate
 - Private





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**Wild trees: genetically unique
and high diversity = resilience**

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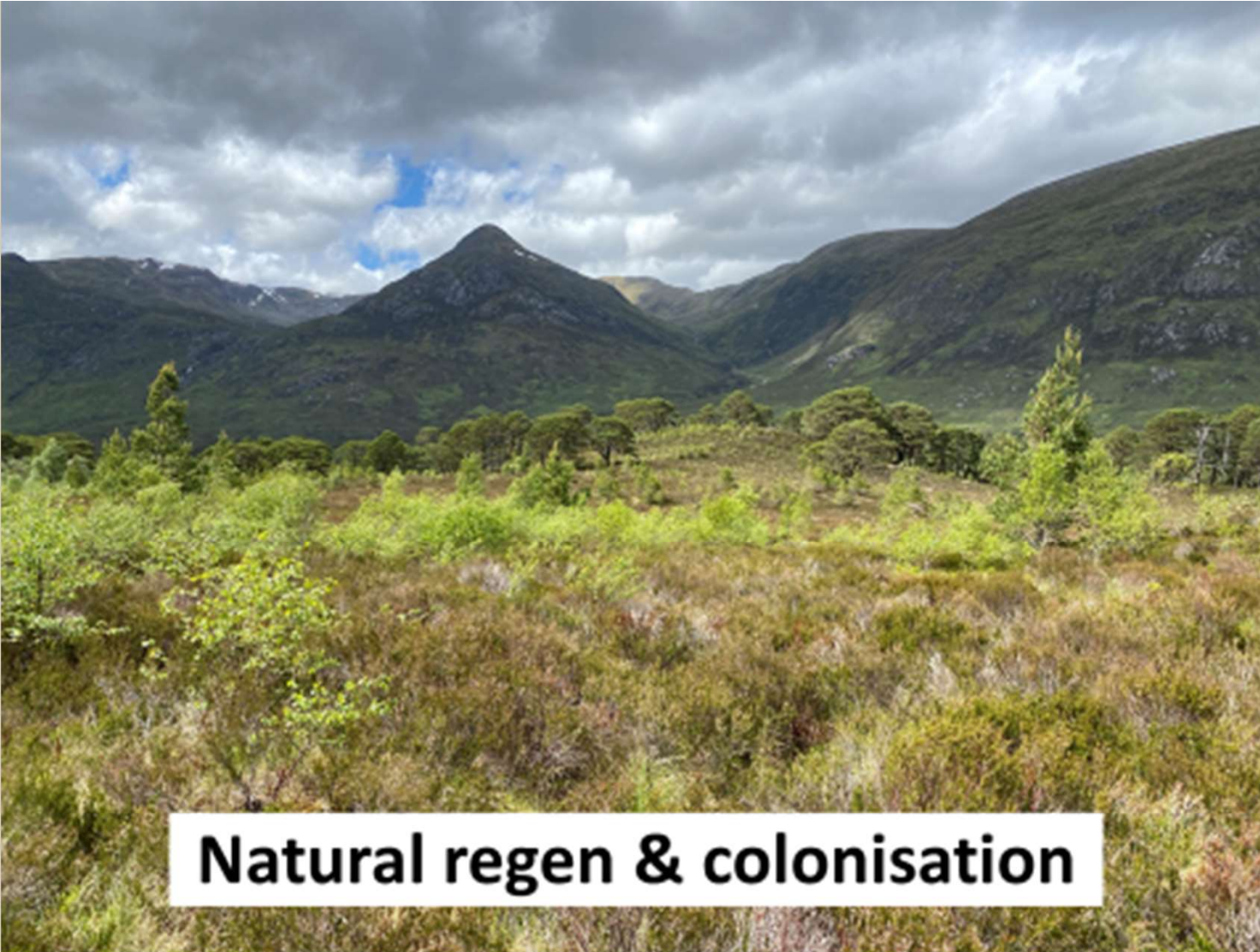
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Wild trees: varied forms

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Natural regen & colonisation





Creates structural complexity





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Progress

- Slightly slow start
- We have funds to start projects
 - Rewilding Europe
 - Corporate
- Application in with Scottish Power Foundation for projects on the River Enrick
- Landowners on board in Glenurquhart
- Begun surveying with a view to proposing potential sites soon
- Use as demonstration projects show we can deliver





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Financing projects

- Capital costs
 - fences, gates etc
 - trees and planting
- Complex to finance
 - FGS not suited to Riverwoods
 - Innovative funding required
 - Natural Capital
- AH Natural Capital
 - Carbon
 - Biodiversity
 - Social

