# Scotland’s wildcats at the heart of ambitious 30-year Affric Highlands rewilding project



# Scotland’s Endangered Wildcats Could Be Saved in a Bold Rewilding Initiative

Scotland's native wildcats, once a common sight across the UK, are now teetering on the brink of extinction, with fewer than 300 of these iconic mammals remaining. However, hopes are rising as the newly launched Affric Highlands charity sets out an ambitious plan to restore habitats across a vast area of 800 square miles, stretching from Loch Ness to the west coast. This 30-year initiative aims to regenerate vital ecosystems while bolstering the local economy through sustainable practices.

The rewilding project is anchored in a vision that integrates nature recovery with community engagement, ensuring local landowners are both involved and benefit from its outcomes. Affric Highlands aims to promote sustainable timber, fishing, farming, and wildlife tourism, thus creating a robust economic framework that supports both the environment and local livelihoods. The charity's initiative, with the Scottish wildcat at its heart, aims to rejuvenate the wilderness, restore native woodlands, peatlands, and delicate riverside habitats.

In its statement, Affric Highlands highlighted its commitment to not only providing a safe habitat for wildcats but also supporting other endangered species such as red squirrels, mountain hares, and Atlantic salmon. This ecosystem-centric approach is particularly critical, given that Scotland has been identified as one of the most nature-depleted countries globally. The region's ecological damage stems from centuries of deforestation and overgrazing, leaving iconic landscapes like the Caledonian forest in fragmented states and peatlands emitting carbon rather than sequestering it.

Stephanie Kiel, executive director of Affric Highlands, described the initiative as “a community-focused vision of hope” intended to bring together the intertwined fates of nature and local economies. “It’s hugely inspiring to be setting out as a new charity on this ambitious journey to take large-scale nature recovery to a new level,” she said, emphasising the importance of collaboration between local communities and conservation efforts.

Moreover, the scale of this undertaking has attracted international attention. The Affric Highlands project has been nominated by the UK and Scottish governments for UN World Restoration Flagship status, a recognition that would highlight its pivotal role in global conservation efforts. Spanning over 500,000 acres, this initiative serves as a model for how community involvement in ecological restoration can yield mutual benefits for both nature and economic vitality.

Early groundwork has already begun, with Affric Highlands having secured backing from 19 landowners covering approximately 225 square miles. This foundational support reflects a growing recognition of the necessity for sustainable land practices that benefit both wildlife and human communities.

Local rewilding efforts have already commenced, focusing on restoring native woodlands and peatlands, in addition to introducing new tree cover along riverbanks to provide essential shade and nutrients for Scotland’s struggling salmon populations. Such measures, according to Steve Micklewright, chief executive of Trees for Life, are vital for breathing new life into the Highlands. He assured that the work already undertaken positions Affric Highlands for success as it enters a new phase as an independent charity.

The rewilding efforts aim to create a thriving ecosystem that not only supports the re-emergence of the Scottish wildcat but also benefits a broad spectrum of wildlife including golden eagles, black grouse, and ospreys. By sustaining these efforts comprehensively and collectively, the initiative seeks to enrich the social fabric of Scotland’s rural areas alongside the natural world.

As Affric Highlands embarks on this transformative journey, it paints a picture of hope in addressing environmental degradation while enhancing economic opportunities, firmly demonstrating that nature recovery and community prosperity can go hand in hand.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotlands-endangered-wildcats-could-saved-35186581)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotlands-endangered-wildcats-could-saved-35186581), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/pioneering-scottish-rewilding-project-among-global-nominees-for-recognition-by-united-nations-3734867), [[3]](https://www.ruralnetwork.scot/news-and-events/news/affric-highlands-rewilding-project-recommended-global-un-flagship-status)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotlands-endangered-wildcats-could-saved-35186581), [[5]](https://treesforlife.org.uk/affric-highlands-launched-to-rewild-half-a-million-acres-of-scottish-highlands/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotlands-endangered-wildcats-could-saved-35186581), [[2]](https://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/pioneering-scottish-rewilding-project-among-global-nominees-for-recognition-by-united-nations-3734867)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotlands-endangered-wildcats-could-saved-35186581), [[4]](https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20216826.affric-highlands-project-recommended-global-un-flagship-status/), [[6]](https://www.the-independent.com/climate-change/news/scottish-highlands-people-loch-ness-b2103105.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[3]](https://www.ruralnetwork.scot/news-and-events/news/affric-highlands-rewilding-project-recommended-global-un-flagship-status), [[7]](https://www.ross-shirejournal.co.uk/news/hopes-for-highland-based-leading-rewilding-project-to-get-pr-278677/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/scotlands-endangered-wildcats-could-saved-35186581> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.scotsman.com/news/environment/pioneering-scottish-rewilding-project-among-global-nominees-for-recognition-by-united-nations-3734867> - The Affric Highlands rewilding project, covering over 500,000 acres from Loch Ness to the west coast, has been nominated by the UK and Scottish governments for UN World Restoration Flagship status. This 30-year initiative aims to restore native woodlands, peatlands, and riverside habitats, benefiting species like the Scottish wildcat, golden eagles, and red squirrels. The project emphasizes community involvement and sustainable land-based jobs, showcasing how nature, local communities, and livelihoods can thrive together.
3. <https://www.ruralnetwork.scot/news-and-events/news/affric-highlands-rewilding-project-recommended-global-un-flagship-status> - Affric Highlands, a 30-year rewilding project led by Trees for Life, has been recommended by the UK and Scottish governments for UN World Restoration Flagship status. Spanning over 500,000 acres from Loch Ness to the west coast, the project aims to restore native woodlands, peatlands, and riverside habitats. It seeks to protect native species, boost biodiversity, sustain new nature-based jobs, and support the re-peopling of the region, demonstrating how nature, local communities, and livelihoods can thrive together.
4. <https://www.heraldscotland.com/politics/20216826.affric-highlands-project-recommended-global-un-flagship-status/> - The Affric Highlands rewilding project, covering over 500,000 acres from Loch Ness to the west coast, has been recommended by the UK and Scottish governments for UN World Restoration Flagship status. This 30-year initiative aims to restore native woodlands, peatlands, and riverside habitats, benefiting species like the Scottish wildcat, golden eagles, and red squirrels. The project emphasizes community involvement and sustainable land-based jobs, showcasing how nature, local communities, and livelihoods can thrive together.
5. <https://treesforlife.org.uk/affric-highlands-launched-to-rewild-half-a-million-acres-of-scottish-highlands/> - Trees for Life has launched Affric Highlands, a 30-year rewilding initiative covering over 500,000 acres from Loch Ness to the west coast. The project aims to restore native woodlands, peatlands, and riverside habitats, benefiting species like the Scottish wildcat, golden eagles, and red squirrels. It emphasizes community involvement and sustainable land-based jobs, demonstrating how nature, local communities, and livelihoods can thrive together.
6. <https://www.the-independent.com/climate-change/news/scottish-highlands-people-loch-ness-b2103105.html> - The Affric Highlands rewilding project, covering over 500,000 acres from Loch Ness to the west coast, has been recommended by the UK and Scottish governments for UN World Restoration Flagship status. This 30-year initiative aims to restore native woodlands, peatlands, and riverside habitats, benefiting species like the Scottish wildcat, golden eagles, and red squirrels. The project emphasizes community involvement and sustainable land-based jobs, showcasing how nature, local communities, and livelihoods can thrive together.
7. <https://www.ross-shirejournal.co.uk/news/hopes-for-highland-based-leading-rewilding-project-to-get-pr-278677/> - The Affric Highlands rewilding project, covering over 500,000 acres from Loch Ness to the west coast, has been recommended by the UK and Scottish governments for UN World Restoration Flagship status. This 30-year initiative aims to restore native woodlands, peatlands, and riverside habitats, benefiting species like the Scottish wildcat, golden eagles, and red squirrels. The project emphasizes community involvement and sustainable land-based jobs, showcasing how nature, local communities, and livelihoods can thrive together.