

Wildcats at Clashindarroch



The presence of the Scottish Wildcat at The Clashindarroch Forest is something that has been considered and examined thoroughly as Vattenfall have prepared plans for the Clashindarroch II Wind Farm proposal.

Research undertaken

To provide a basis for the assessment of the potential effects of the proposed wind farm on protected species (including wildcat, otter, pine marten, red squirrel, water vole, badger and bat species) a range of surveys of the potential wind farm area were initially completed in 2015 and 2016. These surveys allowed the mapping and assessment of habitat suitability and quality for each species. Also completed was a systematic search for field signs within or near to the proposed development, and the mapping, assessing and describing of any features that could provide suitable shelter (e.g. den sites for wildcat, badger setts, bat roosts).

Further, more targeted surveys, were in 2017, 2018 and 2019, which took into account the emerging wind farm design and the areas that would potentially be affected by the tree felling proposals. In addition to these surveys, during autumn 2018 and summer 2019, baited and un-baited wildlife camera traps and thermal imaging cameras were used to monitor use of particular areas or features by wildcat, pine marten and badger.



Further information on Clashindarroch II Wind Farm proposal can be found here:

www.vattenfall.co.uk/clashindarrochII



Find out more about Vattenfall's environmental work here:

<https://group.vattenfall.com/uk/what-we-do/our-projects/environment>



Protecting the wildcats

An outline protection plan for wildcat, and for the other protected species, has been developed which sets out the proposed approach to preventing significant disturbance to wildcat during the felling and construction process through pre-works surveys and best practice during the works to ensure that any wildcat dens, and other areas of shelter, are fully protected from damage or disturbance.

Forestry & Land Scotland and Scottish Wildcat Action (SWA) provided data, for the proposed development area and the wider Clashindarroch Forest, including the results of their camera trapping surveys between 2013 and 2018 and data from several wildcats that had been fitted with satellite collars during the same period. This data was used as background information in the assessment of the use and relative importance of habitats within the proposed development area for wildcat.

The proposed wind farm site was known to be located in an area that overlaps with several wildcat territories. Wildcat territories vary greatly in size with males tending to range further than females. The whole of Clashindarroch Forest, which is about 59 square kilometres, has the potential to support a population of about 9 female wildcats.

Findings from the research

The surveys and other data sources confirmed the presence of wildcats and hybrid wildcats within the general area of the proposed wind farm and in the wider Clashindarroch Forest. Wildcat activity was mostly concentrated along the main forest access tracks and banks of watercourses, with very little evidence of wildcat using areas where the wind turbines would be located. This finding was consistent with previous assessments of habitat quality, in terms of wildcat prey availability, the favoured movement corridors and the distribution of features that wildcat may use for cover and as resting sites.

The proposed wind farm would require relatively small areas of tree felling, most of which would be re-planted following construction. The proposed felling would all be commercial non-native conifers, trees that would be felled at some point in the normal forestry rotation. Only about 87 hectares, mostly around the bases of the proposed wind turbines, would be left un-planted for the life-time of the wind farm, about 25 years. To put this into some context, 87 hectares is about 1.4% of the whole of the Clashindarroch Forest.



Habitat Management Plan

An outline Habitat Management Plan (HMP) for wildcat has been developed, in consultation with Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry & Land Scotland. The plan is intended to address the potential long-term effects of the proposed wind farm on wildcats. The HMP would include measures to improve habitat connectivity for wildcat between Clashindarroch Forest and large woodland blocks within the wider Strathbogie Wildcat Priority Area. There are also measures to protect and enhance important wildcat habitats within Clashindarroch Forest, to ensure that there is no loss of shelter and denning opportunities as a result of the construction of the wind farm and so that potential habitat fragmentation effects are also addressed.