

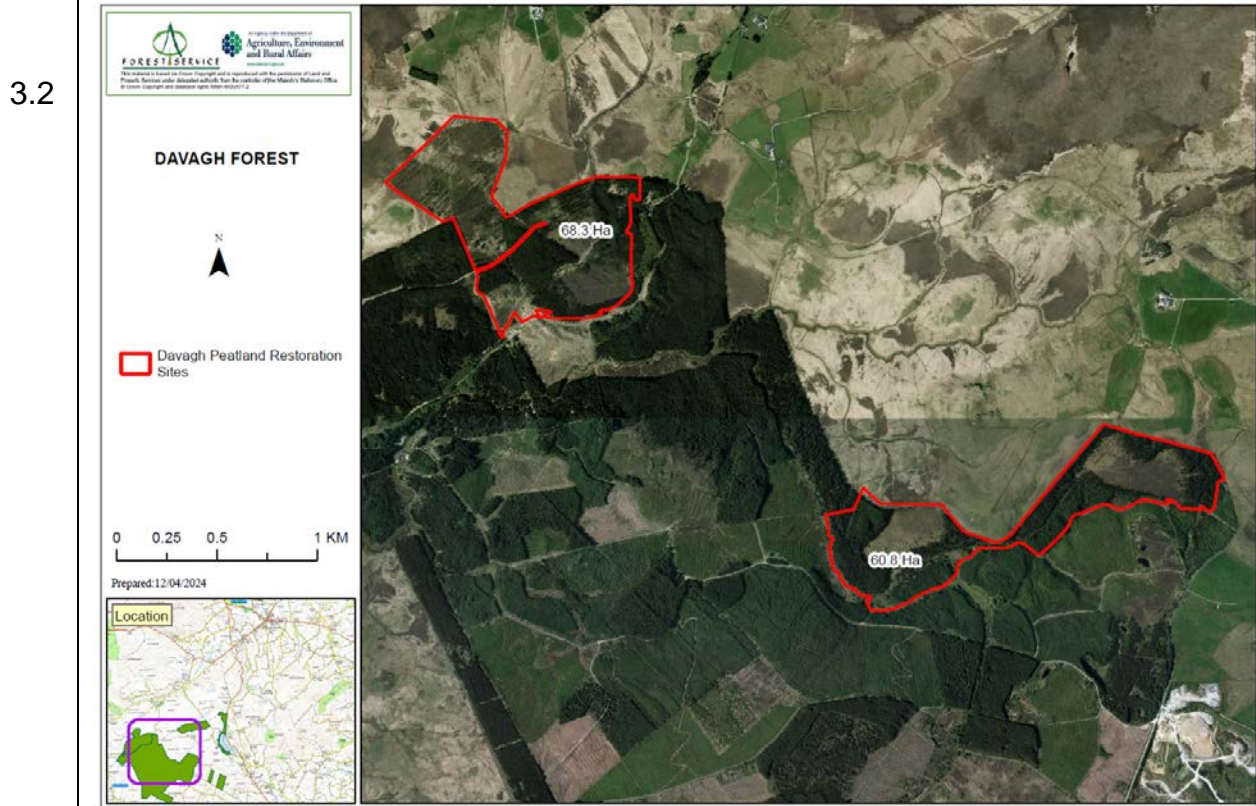
Report on	Consultation on Forest Service deforestation proposal
Date of Meeting	Tuesday 4 th June 2024
Reporting Officer	Lorraine Moon
Contact Officer	Melvin Bowman

Is this report restricted for confidential business? If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	Yes	
	No	x

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To inform members of a statutory consultation received from Forest Service, an Agency of the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in accordance with the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (as amended) in relation to a deforestation proposal at Davagh Forest, Co. Tyrone.
2.0	Background
2.1	<p>PROJECT DETAILS</p> <p>Townland and Location: Davagh Forest, Co. Tyrone</p> <p>Project Type: Deforestation – Harvesting of conifers followed by bog restoration.</p> <p>Project Area: Davagh North 68.3ha, Davagh East 60.8ha</p>
2.2	Forest Service on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) is required to form an opinion under the EIA (Forestry) Regulations as to whether the above project is likely to have a significant effect on the environment.
2.3	They have consulted with Mid Ulster District Council as a Statutory Consultee requesting any information relating to this project or considerations the Council may have which would assist them in providing an opinion in accordance with the Regulations.
2.4	Forest Service have included an initial screening of this project in respect of the Forestry EIA Regulations and is based on limited data only.
2.5	The consultation was received by email on 30 th April and a response is requested within 14 days. However, an extension of time has been requested due to the dates of the Committee meetings. Forest Service on behalf of the Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs (DAERA) is required to form an opinion under the EIA (Forestry) Regulations as to whether the above project is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. Forest Service have requested views on this project proposal which MUDC consider may be of assistance in providing an opinion in respect of the Regulations.

3.0 Main Report

3.1 The proposed deforestation scheme is located at Davagh Forest, Co. Tyrone xy co-ords Davagh North: 270160 387600 (H 70160 87600) – see map 1 below.



3.3 The proposal is a deforestation proposal, for the harvesting of conifers followed by bog restoration in two locations of 68.3ha and 60.8ha respectively.

3.4 In addition to the features identified in Forest Service's screening report, which is attached in appendix 1, we have the following comments to make.

3.5 According to DFI Rivers Flood Map the proposal site is not affected by any existing flooding issues or potentially by any climate change flooding issues according to strategic maps.

4.0 Other Considerations

4.1 Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications

Financial

Human:

Risk Management:

4.2	<p>Screening & Impact Assessments</p> <p>Equality & Good Relations Implications:</p> <p>Rural Needs Implications:</p>
5.0	<p>Recommendation(s)</p>
5.1	<p>Members are requested to note the contents of this report and agree to issue the consultation response attached in appendix 2.</p>
6.0	<p>Documents Attached & References</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appendix 1 – Forest Service Screening matrix - Appendix 2 – Consultation Response to Forest Service from MUDC (Draft – To be agreed)

Appendix 1

Screening Matrix for Deforestation Projects

File	ERA 23/24 - 47
Townland and location	Davagh Forest, Co. Tyrone XY co-ords Davagh North: 270160 387600 (H 70160 87600) and Davagh East: 273000 385850 (H 73011 85872)
Project Type	Deforestation- Harvesting of conifers followed by bog restoration.
Block/Area	Davagh North 68.3 ha Davagh East 60.8 ha
Type of woodland; Species; provenance of native species; age of trees; growth (good/poor)	Sitka spruce (SS) planted in 1957, 1960, 1961, 1978, 1997, 2001 & 2011. Lodgepole pine (LP) planted in 1957, 1960, 1963, 1978, 1980 & 1981. NS planted in 1957. Birch/Rowan/Common Alder/Willow planted in 1997. Willow planted in 2007.
If grant aided, is the felling to take place within the commitment period of the grant?	N/A
Is the area subject to a current felling licence?	N/A
Nature of the proposal	<p>The proposed works will contribute to the DAERA Climate Action Plan peatland restoration targets in line with the Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022. The proposal aims to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services through the restoration of afforested peatlands to fully functioning peat bogs. It will help reduce carbon emissions and contribute to capturing additional carbon by improving the hydrological conditions of degraded peatlands. The restoration will improve biodiversity by improving and extending the natural and semi-natural habitats for the range of priority species present.</p> <p>Davagh Forest is located Sperrin AONB and mainly within the Beaghmore Moors and Marsh Landscape Character Area. It is an area of commercial conifer plantation consisting mainly of Sitka spruce and lodgepole pine. It is in close proximity to Teal</p>

	<p>Lough and Slaghtfreeden Bog, Teal Lough part II and Owenkillew River ASSIs and Glenviggan Bog SLNCI.</p> <p>The forest and associated unplanted bog areas provide important habitats for golden plover, merlin, snipe, peregrine falcon and red grouse.</p> <p>The removal of the trees, and subsequent restoration back to blanket bog in this project would join adjacent areas (Glenviggan Bog) to create continuous areas of open blanket bog. The removal of conifer trees will provide a greater range of ecosystem services than retaining it in forest by improving the landscape impact, providing additional habitat for raptors, breeding waders and other priority species, recreating the blanket bog habitat by blocking drains, and acting as a carbon store. It will also provide benefits in terms of water quality and flood risk mitigation. The project may also assist in managing predator control which is considered a major factor in determining breeding success for ground nesting birds.</p> <p>The work may be phased over a number of years.</p> <p>The project proposes to cut and remove the conifer trees from site using forestry equipment and systems specifically designed to minimise ground compaction and maximise the removal of conifer timber and branches from the site to aid subsequent restoration operations.</p> <p>Proposed restoration operations, following the harvesting and removal of timber and forest residues, include stump flipping, ground smoothing, backfill trenching, furrow blocking and furrow re-profiling and installation of dams to restore the site hydrology to aid the re-establishment of the natural bog habitat.</p>
Land Use	Conifer plantation
Soil	Deep peat

Vegetation	There is limited vegetation under the tree canopy – pockets of Sphagnum moss and Vaccinium myrtillus are present in Davagh north site.
Water	There are drains and water courses within the sites. Small streams run through and along the boundaries of the sites.
Designated areas - Within a 2km radius of project - SAC, SPA, ASSI, RAMSAR, proposed (SAC & SPA & ASSI), hen harrier breeding sites, breeding wader sites. Within 1km - red grouse. Within 100m – SLNCI, AWI, prop SLNCI, fens. Adjacent to AONB or NNR ASAI - Areas of Special Archaeological Interest	Teal Lough and Slaghtfreeden bog, Teal lough part II and Owenkillev River are within, or within 2km, of the site. SPA – None Ramsar – None Hen Harrier breeding sites – None recorded. Breeding Waders – Within 1km and 2km of Davagh East. Just outside the 2km zone of Davagh North. Red Grouse – 2 sightings within 1km of Davagh East in 2004. SLNCI – Glenviggan bog adjacent to Davagh North AONB – Sperrin AWI – None Fens – None ASAI – Beaghmore
Non-designated priority habitats (see NIEA website); Breeding Sites (priority species and species of conservation concern, species protected under Wildlife (NI) Order); Veteran trees and Deadwood	Badger setts, Golden Plover, Merlin, Snipe and Peregrine Falcon have all been recorded on or close to these sites.
Built Heritage/ Archaeological Features	None known within the confines of the sites or within a 100m radius. A megalithic tomb is recorded just outside the 100m radius of Davagh North.
Impact on people, including neighbours	The restoration site is in a remote location with no dwellings within the site. There will be minimal to no impact on the public. Blocking of drains may create some deep pools of water in the short term but peat dams will also offer a “bridge” for crossing.
Topography, Landscape Character Assessments & Impacts	Beaghmore Moors and Marsh LCA A relatively elevated, rolling plateau of wide shallow valleys and broad, rounded ridges to the south and east of the Sperrin Mountains. Extensive glacial deposits form irregular ridges and mounds throughout the area. Slopes typically have shallow, smooth

profiles, although some quarried outcrops have an irregular skyline. This is an expansive, relatively homogeneous landscape, fragmented in some areas by small conifer shelterbelts protecting the whitewashed farmsteads from the prevailing wind. Despite the conifer woodlands, the area feels exposed. Broad, peaty marsh extends across the shallow valley floors. The pastures on the lower slopes are divided by open, straight drainage channels; in more elevated areas they are often enclosed by low stone walls. Scrubby, stunted hedgerows and wire fences surround fields where stone walls are absent. Extensive conifer plantations on the shallow valley slopes often mask the landform. The plantations have hard, geometric edges and sometimes form an abrupt transition at the edges of the valley marsh. There are some deciduous woodlands in gullies on valley sides and the incidence of woodland increases towards the slopes of the Sperrins to the north west. Roads crossing the valley marshes are generally straight and raised on embankments, crossing the many streams at stone, hump-backed bridges. There are no large villages, only scattered farmsteads, and occasional groups of cottages on higher land. The buildings are typically white-washed and stand out clearly against the dark green backdrop of the shelterbelts. Farm buildings often have red roofs. The farmsteads are prominent and form a visual focus throughout the area.

Slieve Gallion LCA (Davagh East partial)

Slieve Gallion is a prominent peak on the far eastern fringe of the Sperrins. It is a volcanic plug and has a distinctive profile, with a steep-sided, flatter summit than the surrounding mountains and an uneven slope profile. The solid geology of the Slieve Gallion area is particularly complex, with igneous rocks of volcanic origin surrounded by areas of granite. Granite extends up onto the southern slopes of Slieve Gallion, producing a particularly scenic and unusually verdant landscape on the shores of Lough Fea. The upland plateau to the west of the

	<p>summit is dominated by extensive blanket bog, small rounded loughs and the conifer plantations of Davagh Forest. A resistant band of limestone outcrops at the foot of Slieve Gallion and is deeply dissected by numerous streams within deep, narrow valleys. The lower slopes of Slieve Gallion have a diverse landscape pattern, with an irregular patchwork of fields, punctuated by small blocks of woodland. Many of the narrow glens are densely wooded and there are a few small conifer plantations, fringed with deciduous trees, on the granite ridges to the south of the summit. The fields become smaller on steeper slopes and on the valley floor and there are some larger arable fields on the ridgetops. All the fields are enclosed by hedgerows, although there are some granite stone walls on the south-eastern slopes of Slieve Gallion. In addition to the larger woodlands, there are copses and numerous hedgerow trees, creating a secluded, soft sheltered character at the foot of the mountain slopes. Within the valleys, the vegetation becomes more scrubby and there are willows alongside the streams and in the hedgerows. There are no large settlements; the many scattered farms and cottages are connected by narrow, twisting lanes. Red-roofed barns are a characteristic feature of the larger farmsteads.</p>
<p>Mitigating measures</p>	<p>This work is being carried out in compliance with the UK Forestry Standard (UKFS): The UK governments' approach to sustainable forestry '.</p> <p>The 4th edition of the UKFS encourages the restoration of open habitat where it is proven to benefit priority habitats and species. The following extracts are relevant to this project.</p> <p>Forests and Biodiversity General Forestry Practice Requirement 4 states "Particular consideration should be given to conserving, enhancing or restoring priority habitats and species identified in the statutory lists of priority species and habitats for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland,</p>

through the delivery of country biodiversity strategies and local level plans.”

Forests and Biodiversity Guideline 2 states “Consider options to extend and improve priority habitats and to increase and extend populations and ranges of priority species; plan forest operations to minimise any adverse impacts on biodiversity”.

Forests and Biodiversity Guideline 24 states “Consider practical opportunities to restore open habitats where their value could be reinstated and sustained.”

Forests and Climate Change Guideline 8 and Forests and Soil Guideline 25 states “Consider the balance of benefits for carbon and other ecosystem services before making the decision to restock on soils with peat exceeding 50 cm in depth.”

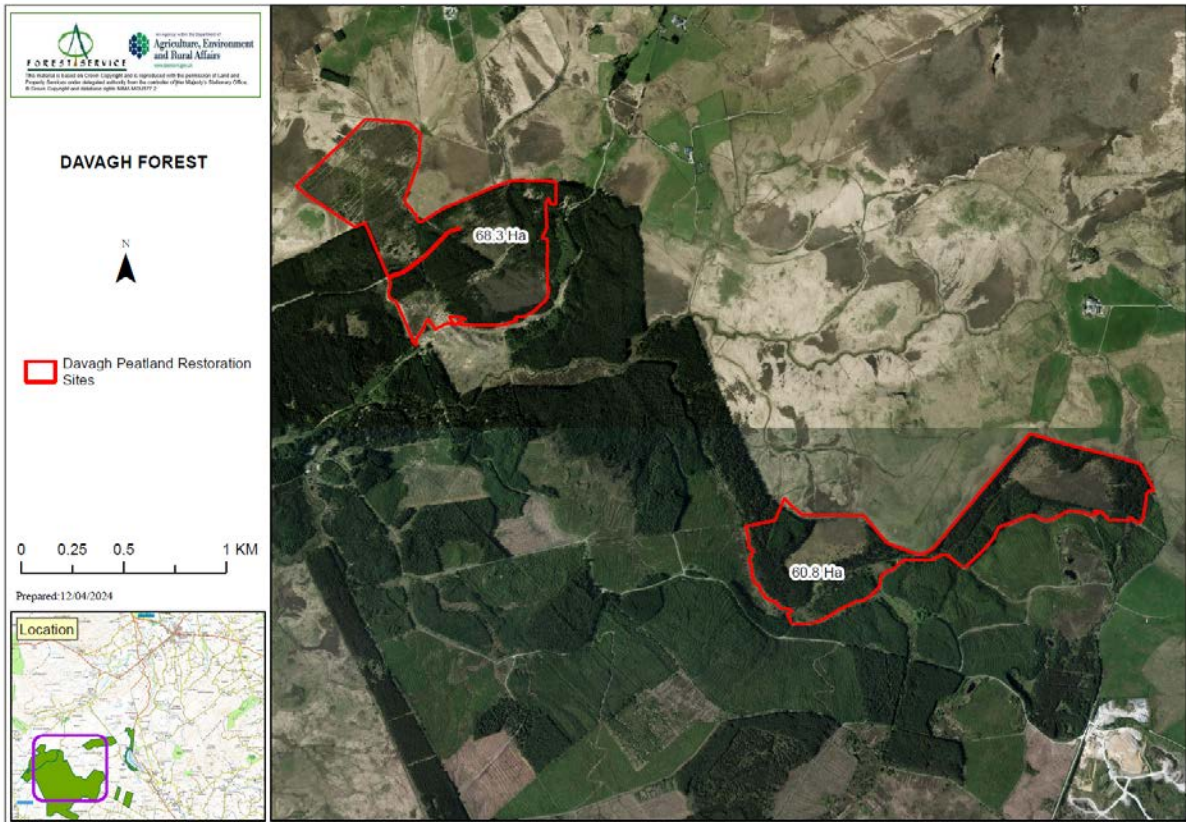
Water quality – Prior to any restoration work all drains on the site will be blocked with peat dams. This will ensure that minimal sediment will escape in surface water during the construction. When carrying out restoration work such as ground smoothing or stump flipping, buffer zones will be left around watercourses where no disturbance will take place.

Biodiversity – Relevant authorities and organisations such as the NIEA and NI Raptor Study Group will be contacted prior to restoration work commencing to ensure that there will be no unnecessary disturbance of wildlife e.g. by not working during the nesting season if required. The remaining conifer blocks within the wider forest area provide important habitat for Kestrel nesting sites.

Precautions will be taken to avoid disturbance of nesting birds such as raptors (birds of prey) and breeding waders (particularly Snipe), between 01 March and 31 August. Activity by birds of prey will be monitored during this period and advice on mitigation of disturbance sought from the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group. If

	<p>works during the breeding season are unavoidable, the Northern Ireland Raptor Study Group will be consulted regarding the presence of breeding birds of prey and any trees or other vegetation to be removed will be checked by competent individuals prior to any works or removal of trees. Should breeding activity be detected, buffer zones of appropriate radius will be established around nests and works excluded from these. The buffer radius for any nesting bird of prey will be at least 500m.</p> <p>Operational Management - Tree removal and restoration operations will aim to minimise peat compaction and disturbance. Innovative harvesting systems that reduce compaction and disturbance will be deployed to protect these sensitive and vulnerable peatland sites. These involve whole tree harvesting or the use of specialised harvesting machinery implementing harvesting systems which minimise the need for conventionally spaced brash mats.</p> <p>The work will be carried out by fully trained and competent contractors who are already familiar with the sites and who have been instructed on the environmental sensitivity of the area. If at any time an issue arises that could have a significant adverse effect on the environment, work will be stopped immediately. Any machinery used will be in a sound mechanical order with no leaks. All machinery will be maintained/fuelled as per best practice, and away from drains and soakaways, where spillages and leaks can be contained.</p>
Screening by/ Date	Michael Keown 07/07/23
Result of NIEA (and where appropriate other) consultations	
Opinion – Relevant/ Not relevant	
Reasons for Opinion	
Signed by/ Date	

Map of area outlined in red





Mid Ulster District Council
Planning Department
Local Development Plan Team
50 Ballyronan Road
Magherafelt
BT45 6EN
Tel – 03000 132 132
Email: developmentplan@midulstercouncil.org

Mr Brendan Mulholland
Forest Officer
Brendan.mulholland@daera-ni.gov.uk
By email only

Your Ref: ERA23/24-47
Date: 05/05/2024

Dear Brendan,

Re: Deforestation Project at Davagh Forest, Co. Tyrone.

Thank you for your correspondence dated 30th April relating to the EIA screening of a proposed deforestation scheme at Davagh Forest, Co. Tyrone.

Mid Ulster District Council note the contents of your assessment of the site contained within the attached Screening Matrix. In addition to the information provided within your documentation and having carried out an assessment of the site and location, the Council have no comments to add for the purposes of this EIA screening exercise.

Should you have any queries then please do not hesitate to contact this office.

Yours sincerely,

For and on behalf of Mr Melvin Bowman
Head of Strategic Planning MUDC.