

	CONSERVATION	1
	FARMING	2
	WOODLANDS	2
	FISHERIES & FISHFARMING	3
	MARINE	4
	POLITICS & PARLIAMENT	4
	GENERAL ENVIRONMENT	4
	ENERGY	5
	RECREATION & TOURISM	8
	NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS	8

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CONSERVATION

BEAVER TRIAL

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has published a report on the effect which beavers are having on rivers and streams in Knapdale following their reintroduction as part of the Scottish Beaver Trial [May 09]. In autumn 2010, researchers from the University of Stirling re-surveyed 12 rivers and streams in the area used by the beavers. Bankside vegetation, the size and shape of the stream channel, the stability of the banks and the amount of woody debris in the stream were examined. The results show that there has been minimal change in the streams since the beavers were reintroduced. Small dams have been built but these were limited in number and scale.

Angus Tree, who manages the independent river habitat monitoring for SNH, said: "It's notable that the beavers are having little effect on the streams in the area. They have been concentrating nearly all of their activity around the lochs where they were originally released and have now settled. However, it's probable that they'll begin to use the rivers and streams more in future years, as their numbers increase and they spread further afield.

"This particular survey didn't cover the lochs, such as Dubh Loch, where more obvious changes are being seen, but that will be covered in a separate report to be published next year. Beavers have complex effects on the environment, and measuring these changes is essential. The results of the monitoring work we're doing with our partners will give the Scottish Government the information they need to decide whether beavers should be permanently reintroduced to Scotland."

BUTTERFLY NUMBERS

The State of the UK's Butterflies 2011 has been published by Butterfly Conservation and the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology. Populations have stabilised in Scotland while their UK counterparts have continued to decline. In Scotland, the total abundance of widespread butterflies increased slightly (by 11%) in the past ten years. Several species have expanded their range dramatically in Scotland, including the speckled wood, comma, peacock, and orange-tip [Oct 10]. Some specialist species are still declining, such as the pearl-bordered fritillary.

The marsh fritillary, although it had previously been lost from large parts of Scotland, has reversed its recent decline and expanded from strongholds in Argyll. Intensive work by Butterfly Conservation and its partners helped farmers enter 3,000 hectares of marsh fritillary habitat into wildlife-friendly grant schemes to ensure suitable management for the butterfly.

The report is based on data gathered by two long-running citizen science projects — the Butterflies for the New Millennium and the UK Butterfly monitoring schemes.

SQUIRRELPOX

The Herald reports that squirrel parapoxvirus, squirrelpox, has been detected by the Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project around the River Tweed [Jul 10]. It is hoped that the outbreak can be contained by intensive action against grey squirrels in Berwickshire. The

organisation has requested that the public cease feeding red squirrels at garden feeders, to help stop the spread of the virus from grey squirrels.

The *BBC News* website reports that squirrelpox has also been confirmed in a grey squirrel at Culzean Country Park in Ayrshire. Until now, cases had been confined to the far south of Scotland. National Trust for Scotland (NTS) rangers and staff from the Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project detected the virus.

Lindsay Mackinlay of NTS said: "This is a very worrying development as we had until now hoped that the Southern Uplands, together with the active control of greys by many concerned landowners further south, were acting as a barrier and preventing the further spread of this virus north. However, we now know that there are some other areas in Ayrshire with 'positive squirrels', near Mauchline and Stair, suggesting the disease has spread south-westwards from there.

"We would appeal for other landowners in the area to work with Red Squirrels in South Scotland Project and attempt to contain the spread. The last thing anyone wants to see is the virus reaching Glasgow. Squirrel pox is playing a major role in reducing the population of red squirrels and we must prevent the further spread of the virus, before it reaches the areas where red squirrels are still well-established."

Further testing is taking place at Culzean to see how widespread the virus is. Deirdre Mackinnon said: "The park had a population of red squirrels until about five years ago, but they have since disappeared totally."

- Bell Ingram has received a £400,000 grant from the Scottish Government to help combat grey squirrels. The company will use humane live-capture traps over a five-year period.

- The red squirrel population in northeast Scotland has remained stable this year. The *Press & Journal* reports that Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels volunteers surveyed 14 sites in spring and 32 in autumn. Most had grey and red squirrels present in spring, whereas in autumn, the greatest percentage of sites had only reds. Red squirrels were recorded in parts of Aberdeen where they have not been seen for many years. Grey squirrels have been culled in an attempt to slow down their colonisation and to reduce the area they cover so that reds can return. The project, a partnership between Scottish Wildlife Trust, SNH, Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Land & Estates, hopes to reduce grey squirrels across the whole of Grampian which would help to protect populations in the Highlands.

SEA EAGLES

RSPB Scotland has released the 2011 breeding figures for sea eagles. 43 chicks fledged, compared to 46 in 2010. Bad weather in May is thought to have responsible for the fall in numbers, with some nest sites damaged in the stormy conditions. However, 57 territorial pairs were recorded, compared to 52 last year.

MAR LODGE

The NTS has examined the eight recommendations in the Mar Lodge Estate

Independent Review, and broadly welcomes them as constructive and helpful in planning for future management [Nov 11]. The NTS has now published an action plan which sets out the actions and time-scales for taking forward the recommendations of the report. A public meeting will be held early in 2012. See: www.nts.org.uk/site/docs/news/final_-_mle_action_plan_-_19_december_2011.pdf



FARMING

CROFTING SUPPORT

A conference, co-hosted by the Scottish Crofting Federation, the National Trust for Scotland and the Skye & Lochalsh Environment Forum, called for a comprehensive, stand-alone crofting support programme to be a key element of future rural development policies.

The conference focused on the key issue of how agricultural support in Scotland can be reformed to promote biodiversity and traditional crofting practices and was designed to influence the current decision-making process on the reform of the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

There was much interest at the conference in creating a specific crofting agro-ecology support programme.

RESPONSES FROM THE HILLS

The Herald reports that the Scottish Agricultural College has published a report on Scotland's hill-farming sector, *Responses from the Hills*. The report, by Steven Thomas, says that farmers are adapting their businesses rather than focusing on CAP headage payments. This has resulted in changing herd or flock sizes and different breeds or type of stock. The shift from the hills to the low ground is continuing, with evidence of localized increases in sheep and cattle numbers. Suckler cows and sheep in the Less Favoured Areas have returned to profit in the uplands. Hill sheep systems are 'just about wiping their face.'

The report identifies how reduced stock numbers and the abandonment of steeper, less productive land is impacting on the environment and biodiversity. The reduction in grazing pressure accounts for the decline in the numbers of farmland birds; higher numbers of deer and predators are present with the increase in rank vegetation.

See: www.sac.ac.uk/news/currentnews/11n149responsefromthehills

CEREAL HARVEST

The Final Estimate of the Cereal & Oilseed Rape Harvest 2011 has been published by Scotland's chief statistician. Cereal production for the 2011 harvest is 211,000 tonnes (6.9%) lower than the provisional estimate published [Oct 11]. It increased by 135,000 tonnes since 2010 (4.9%), to 2.856 million tonnes. Areas increased by 21,000 hectares (4.9%) while average yields remained unchanged at 6.4 tonnes per hectare.

Total barley production increased by 133,000 tonnes (8%) to 1.798 million tonnes. This includes an increase in spring barley production of 147,000 tonnes (11.1%) caused by an increase in area of 21,000 hectares (8.5%) alongside a 2.4% increase in yields. Winter barley production decreased by 14,000 tonnes, due to a 5.3% decrease in area. Wheat production increased by 15,000 tonnes or 1.6% to 933,000 tonnes. Areas increased by 4,000 hectares or 3.6% while average yields decreased by 1.9% to 8.1 tonnes per hectare.

The production of oats decreased by 13,000 tonnes (9.7%) to 122,000 tonnes. This decrease was due to both a 5.6% decrease in area and a 4.4% decrease in yield. Oilseed rape production increased by 28,000 tonnes (23.1%) to 150,000 tonnes because of both an increase in area of 6.6% and an increase in yields of 15.4%.



WOODLANDS

WOODLAND COVER

The Herald reports that farmers are being offered subsidies of up to £4,500 per acre to plant trees within a kilometre of a town of more than 2,000 people under Scottish Government plans to increase woodland cover from 17% to 25% of the country [Oct 11]. This could effectively double the value of land in some areas.

NFU Scotland wrote to rural affairs minister, Richard Lochhead, asking for the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group (WEAG), of which it is a member, to debate the overall merits of the target of 25% tree cover. It fears that much prime agricultural land, especially in the central belt, would be destroyed.

Nigel Miller, president of NFU Scotland, said: "In a small country like Scotland, there will always be tough choices to be made over land use priorities and it is already clear that permanent change to tree cover brings this debate into sharp focus. The terms of reference of the woodland group currently prevent the group from commenting on overall targets for woodland and confine any recommendations from the group to suggesting solutions for delivering woodland expansion. The focus of future woodland expansion is likely to be on Macaulay class 4 and 5 land. Such land is the engine room of Scottish livestock production and further loss of these grazing areas could have a significant impact on Scotland's capability to provide food."

The Scotsman claims that Nigel Miller has threatened to withdraw from the WEAG. Mr Miller said: "There is a real conflict which could be a disaster for agriculture unless it is resolved. It is imperative that the group is allowed to discuss targets as the government has ambitious targets for food production as well as forestry ... Future land use should not be a choice between farming or forestry, renewables or conservation. There is an important role for forestry within Scottish farming and woodlands can be integrated into agricultural land use without compromising the ability to produce livestock and crops or the significance these activities to local economies, biodiversity and communities."

Jonnie Hall, of NFU Scotland, said: "This is all in the name of climate change on the basis that the more trees we plant, the more target we capture. But at the same time we want to increase food production. So clearly we have the pinchpoint of trying to increase woodland cover but at the same time retain a viable agriculture. The trouble is that the land the government would like to see forested is often the prime grazing fields near towns. We are not against trees. We are against displacing agriculture and the food it produces, not least grain for whisky. Do we therefore import more food — burning carbon — and simply export our climate change problem? Do we diminish our agriculture, the backbone of rural Scotland?"

He said that farming was already losing an estimated 1,200 hectares of the best land every year to urban development. Increasing the tree

cover to 25% would involve the planting of some 650,000 hectares of forest.

George McRobbie, of UPM Tilhill, said that his industry won't need as many trees as the government aims to plant. Trees are not just for chopping down, but are important for recreation.

Residents close to the edges of towns are concerned about trees blocking their views; the Campsies, Kilpatrick, the Angus glens and Ettrick Valley are seen to be key locations.

Forestry Commission (FC) Scotland said that it 'goes through hoops' to ensure that everybody is happy with new woodlands. It encourages developers to consult neighbours, but do not always insist that they do so. A spokesman said: "It is very important to ensure there is a balance because of the competing demands for land in Scotland from other sectors, including agriculture."

Gordon Davidson, of *Scottish Farmer* magazine, said: "You don't need planning permission to plant a tree, but it can change a piece of land for a generation. A lot is being said by the government and land-use advisers about 'putting the right tree in the right place' but whether this is filtering through to the people doing the planting is debatable."

Carol Evans, the director of Woodland Trust Scotland, wrote in a letter to *The Herald* that Scotland is one of the least wooded countries in Europe: "Only 18% of our land area is forested compared with the European average of 44%. Our native woodland, one of the most biodiverse habitats we have, only covers 4% of the country. There is strong support across the forest industry for the Scottish Government's plans to expand the woods and forests. I fully support its ambition to double native woodland cover by the middle of this century."

"At the Woodland Trust Scotland, there is no appetite to create new woodland on prime agricultural land. There is ample land available to achieve woodland expansion without compromising food security. Historically, trees and agriculture have been viewed as competing land uses. This dichotomous view is unhelpful and needs to be addressed. Our view is that an increase in tree cover on farms can be shown to support productive farming; providing shade and shelter to improve animal welfare and increase food efficiency, reducing wind damage to crops and reduced evaporation, providing an alternative source of on-farm energy and timber. But it requires a re-evaluation of timber in an agricultural landscape."

WOODLAND QUALITY

A report by Plantlife, *Quality & Quantity: Revitalizing Scotland's Woodlands*, warns that Scotland's woodland plants and wildlife will continue to decline without a radical shift in the way that woods are cared for. One in six of Scotland's woodland flowers is under threat of extinction whilst there has been a dramatic decline in woodland wildlife. Only 1% of Scotland's wooded area is protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Many woodlands are suffering neglect, either by under-management or by unsustainable numbers of deer; much new tree planting is a case of 'wrong tree, wrong place.' Plantlife is calling on the Scottish Government to focus on the quality not the quantity of woodland.

Victoria Chester, Plantlife's chief executive, said: "Scotland has more woodland than 50 years ago, yet we are continuing to see our woodland flowers and wildlife declining. The government's ambition of creating thousands of hectares of new woodland in Scotland every year is missing the point. More woodland is good, but what we

really need is better woodland. The reality is that newly planted woods will take years to have any real conservation value — whilst some of our really special ancient woodlands are slowly but surely going down the pan."

See: www.plantlife.org.uk/uploads/documents/118217.pdf

DEER CULLS

The Press & Journal reports that FC Scotland has been hiring private contractors to cull deer in Scottish forests. Gamekeepers on private estates have claimed that the practice is reducing the number of animals available for sport and could have serious implications for deer welfare. FC Scotland pays up to £140 per deer carcass. Jamie McGrigor MSP said: "FC Scotland used to cull the deer using their own rangers. Now they have put it out to tender there is a bounty of £90 an animal. The majority of them are being shot at night with a spotlight and it is reducing the status of red deer to vermin. FC Scotland seem determined that the only good deer is a dead one."

One stalker said that stalking is worth millions to the tourism industry, which can be forgotten if this 'merciless cull' continues.

An FC Scotland spokesman said: "The assertions made are without foundation. FC Scotland carries out planned deer management operations by the book and to the provisions of the deer management legislation and our approved deer management plans. We employ contractors who are qualified to the highest level, who are also trained hunters and appear on the Scottish Natural Heritage's 'fit & competent' register. They use conventional woodland stalking methods and are fully conversant with industry best practice."

EMBO

The Embo Trust in Sutherland has applied to the National Forest Land Scheme to purchase 1.23 hectares of land near Dornoch. The application aims to create a forest skills training unit and to create community orchard sections, composting site and a wormery. The trust aims to create an area of Common Good land for the benefit of local people.

Comments are invited by 21 January 2012. Contact: [Malcolm Wield, Forestry Commission Scotland, Highland Conservancy, 'Woodlands', Fodderty Way, Dingwall, Ross-shire, IV15 9XB; email: malcolm.wield@forestry.gsi.gov.uk; www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infid-8phnaf](mailto:Malcolm.Wield@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

JUNIPER

FC Scotland and Plantlife Scotland are promoting action to reverse the decline of juniper, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. Although Scotland is home to around 80% of the UK's surviving juniper stock, only a third of the sites in Scotland have strong and secure populations. Restoring juniper in woodlands and at woodland edges could make all the difference to juniper's chances of survival in Scotland, and ultimately in the UK as a whole.

New grants are available from the Scotland Rural Development Programme (SRDP) to help landowners conserve and regenerate small populations of juniper and improve its long-term survival in sites across the country.

Deborah Long of Plantlife said: "Juniper is badly affected by browsing and grazing animals, land clearance, land use change and uncontrolled muirburn — and old bushes aren't producing much viable seed. It's clear that juniper is not going to stage a comeback

without our help — and thankfully landowners can help solve these problems."

The grant support is available for projects that enhance juniper populations in and around new and existing native woods; add juniper to non-native and mixed planted woods; regenerate and expand small remnant populations and stimulate supply of planting material by registering and managing self-seeded juniper stands.

Plantlife and FC Scotland have surveyed the current status of juniper and are already working to conserve and regenerate existing juniper scrub areas. This includes assisting natural regeneration by controlling grazing and browsing, planting juniper in a bid to boost flagging or recently eliminated populations and planting juniper within existing woodlands to help broaden biodiversity.

Gordon Patterson of FC Scotland said: "Juniper is one of the Commission's six key woodland species identified for priority action and we are already doing a lot of work on the national forest estate. As well as identifying and managing juniper populations we are collecting seed to set up a future supply of young plants so that we can restore populations that are at risk. We are now looking to widen out the project and encourage other landowners to manage their juniper."



FISHFARMING & FISHERIES

AQUACULTURE & FISHERIES

The Scottish Government has begun a consultation to support a sustainable future for aquaculture and freshwater fisheries, and the effective management of interactions between these two sectors. It also includes proposals to update enforcement provisions for aquaculture and fisheries, and a review of the approach to cost sharing and charges. The government wants to increase the maximum penalty for breaching marine and aquaculture rules from £2,000 to £10,000. The consultation will inform the development of a new Aquaculture & Fisheries Bill, which will build on existing legislation, strategic frameworks and good practice.

The consultation will run until 2 March 2012. See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/12/06081229/0

FISH QUOTAS

At the annual December fisheries talks in Brussels, quotas have been increased for west coast haddock (200%), west coast nephrops (3%), North Sea haddock (15%), North Sea whiting (15%) and North Sea herring (94%). Several stocks rolled over, with a number of minor reductions in others. Many of these stock changes are part of a long-term management plan.

EU Fisheries Commissioner Maria Damanaki said that, after careful consideration, she had decided to accept Scotland's interpretation of article 13 of the Cod Recovery Plan (CRP) and will not now be proceeding with enforcing days at sea penalties on Scottish vessels [Nov 11]. The *BBC News* website reports that this allows for boats to fish if they are practising 'cod avoidance measures' such as eliminator trawls, which allow effective fishing for haddock and whiting while eliminating cod from the catch. However, boats will be confined to ports for longer making it harder to cash in on rises in fish quotas.

The Commission refused (for legal reasons) to agree to a pause in the annual days at sea reductions that are enforced through the CRP. These days can, however, be reinstated for vessels that adopt cod avoidance measures.

Fisheries secretary Richard Lochhead said: "We are very disappointed that, despite the call from many member states for a pause in the annual cut in days at sea for vessels that fish in the Cod Recovery Zone, Europe pressed ahead. There are other ways to protect cod stocks than keeping the fleet in port and we will work with those vessels affected to ensure they remain viable. The Commission blamed legal obstacles for not implementing a pause but we need their promised revision of the plan as soon as possible."

"In the meantime, our Conservation Credit Scheme can allow affected vessels to top up their days at sea by adopting cod avoidance measures. It is also very disappointing the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has yet again delivered such a chaotic and confusing set of negotiations. The Commission themselves have admitted that the CFP, including the Cod Recovery Plan, isn't working with the lawyers running the show to the detriment of conservation and the fishing industry. Next years' reform of the CFP cannot arrive soon enough ... Quotas are the lifeblood of the fleet and we have won increases for our key stocks in line with the science."

Prior to the talks, it was anticipated that cod fishermen could spend only four days in every fortnight at sea. The Commission insisted that its plans were based on the latest available scientific evidence, but fishermen fear that the restrictions will prevent them from getting to where some whitefish are in a better state of recovery. Struan Stevenson MEP said that skippers, particularly in the North Sea, would spend the few days at sea steaming to and from the fishing grounds and would not have time to fish.

Bertie Armstrong, of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, criticised the cuts in days at sea, which are estimated to be between 15% and 25%; details of how many days each boat can take to the sea will be worked out in the New Year. He said: "While fishing opportunity in terms of tonnage has always been vital, this time around it was the granting of enough time at sea to actually catch the fish that was under threat. This is a bitter blow for our fishing fleet, which is now going to struggle to maintain economic viability under the impact of these totally unwarranted cuts."

Xavier Pastor of Oceana Europe said: "Unfortunately nobody seems to be looking out for the welfare of the resources. This type of short-term approach will lead to the deterioration of not only fish populations, but also of the profitability of the sector and the viability of the fishing communities."

The European Fisheries Commission was seeking an overall reduction of 11% for the total catch in the Atlantic and North Sea.

The Scotsman reported that Dr Mireille Thom, of WWF Scotland, said: "In the past year, fish landings by Scottish vessels amounted to £438m, confirming the continued economic and social importance of the fishing industry in Scotland. While some fishing quotas are set to increase, 2011 was a bit of a mixed year for fish stocks and the fishing industry in Scotland. While we are disappointed that industry efforts to protect cod stocks are taking longer than hoped for, we are nevertheless pleased to see continued progress made towards more sustainable fishing practices in Scotland. As we go into 2012, it is essential that this momentum is not lost as the European Parliament debates reform of the

rules governing fishing. Everyone agrees the current way of making decisions in the EU on fishing is well past its sell-by date. It's crucial that industry, scientists, government and other stakeholders continue to work together to protect and grow Scotland's fish stocks. The future of Scotland's fishing industry depends on today's actions."

MACKEREL QUOTAS

Talks between ministers from Westminster, the EU, Norway, the Faroe Islands and Iceland about North Sea mackerel quotas concluded without an agreement being reached [Oct 11]. EU scientists had warned that mackerel stocks are dangerously vulnerable to overfishing. Richard Lochhead said: "The longer we continue without a coastal states agreement, the greater the threat to the mackerel stock."

Maria Damanaki said that negotiations for a new mackerel agreement to be held in January 2012 are the last chance for Faroes and Iceland to avoid sanctions as a result of overfishing their quota of shared stocks.

In 2011 the Faroes unilaterally set itself a mackerel catch of 150,000 tonnes, an increase of 75% on 2010 and more than five times their 2009 internationally agreed share. Meanwhile, Iceland, which caught very little mackerel prior to 2008, set its own increased quota of around 147,000 tonnes.



MARINE

DALGETY BAY

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has established a group of independent experts in radioactivity to help provide advice and guidance on the contamination at Dalgety Bay [Nov 11].

Dr Campbell Gemmill, chief executive of SEPA, said: "The situation at Dalgety Bay is different from anything we have dealt with before and we need to ensure that we have the best advice available. Having a team of distinguished scientific experts will ensure that we have all the scientific and technical recommendations needed to deal with the long term issues associated with the contamination of the foreshore. SEPA has drawn on expertise developed for the Dounreay particles and believes that this will ensure that a consistent approach is adopted and that any action can be independently scrutinised."

The *Sunday Herald* reported that, since 12 September, SEPA has found 442 contaminated items, far more than in any previous year. However, MoD monitoring of the same area in September detected 33 radioactive particles; the MoD missed the vast majority of the pollution.

Dr Paul Dale of SEPA said: "We have doubts about the MoD's survey. We've raised our concerns with the MoD and they say it was done competently but because of what we've found we've no grounds to believe them. We don't believe that the MoD's survey was effective."

At a meeting in Edinburgh between MoD and SEPA, released under Freedom of Information (FoI), Dr Dale argued that it was clearly unacceptable for the MoD to overlook 90% of the pollution. The MoD eventually accepted it had missed some highly radioactive contamination, and promised to examine 'discrepancies in monitoring data.' Iain Robertson, of the MoD's Defence Infrastructure Organisation, stated that 'SEPA do not need to tell the press' that monitoring has stopped.

Dr Andrew Tyler, of Stirling University, was appointed to the panel of independent experts. He said: "It is clear that SEPA's monitoring has been far more effective than that undertaken by the MoD. The fact that such high activity particles have been missed indicates that the MoD's monitoring may well have been inadequate and must be reviewed as a matter of priority. The big question is how many other particles like these remain in the environment?"

He said that the particles found at Dalgety Bay were similar to those found on the foreshore at Dounreay, which is closed to the public.

Annabelle Ewing MSP said: "It looks as if the MoD simply didn't look properly because it didn't want to find anything."

• The *Herald* reports that three additional sites have also tested positive for radiation. A FoI request revealed that contamination has been found at RAF Kinloss, RAF Machrihanish and a former Defence Aviation Repair Agency factory near Perth. Mike Weir MP said that ministers had told him that details were not available.

SOUND OF BARRA SAC

The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has given its full support to Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)'s proposal to designate the Sound of Barra as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive [Nov 11].

FISHING FOR LITTER

International environment agency KIMO said that fishing vessels have helped to remove 242 tonnes of marine rubbish over three years as part of a voluntary scheme. The project involved 162 vessels from 17 harbours around Scotland. Around half of the rubbish was plastic or polystyrene.

EMERGENCY TUGS

The *BBC News* website reports that the UK government has extended the temporary contract for two emergency tugs for Scotland until March 2012 [Oct 11]. Beyond March, the oil and gas industry has offered to support the Maritime & Coastguard Agency (MCA) by deploying its chartered vessels in emergencies off the Northern Isles.

Scotland Secretary Michael Moore said: "Detailed work is under way between operators, vessel owners and the MCA on working practices and necessary protocols governing the arrangements."

Western Isles Council (Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) has welcomed the extension to the tugs contract but warned that a long-term solution was needed for the west Highlands.



POLITICS & PARLIAMENT

CROWN ESTATE

The *West Highland Free Press* reports that Highland Council and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar met with the UK Scottish Affairs Select committee as part of the parliamentary inquiry into the future of the Crown Estate [Sep 11]. Following the meeting, MPs asked the council to contact community organisations in the area to ascertain views on how to redirect Crown Estate monies in the most effective manner.

Community Land Scotland has produced a policy document which underlines its support for money from the Crown Estate to be handed over to coastal communities.

Dr Michael Foxley, convener of Highland Council, said that issues such as strategic planning, foreshore and seabed resources should be managed by local authorities, who already have planning powers on the foreshore, or by harbour authorities and community land owners.

Orkney, Shetland, Western Isles, Argyll & Bute, Highland and Moray Councils united in a call to be allowed to take control of the benefits from offshore wind, wave and tidal energy projects from the Crown Estate.

The British Ports Association, however, gave evidence supporting the *status quo*.

The *BBC News* website reports that Scottish Secretary Michael Moore and Chloe Smith, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, said that the UK government has ruled out devolving control of the Crown Estate in Scotland to the Holyrood parliament. In evidence to the Scottish Affairs committee, Mr Moore said he wanted to see the Crown Estate become 'more open.'

The *Leach* reports that Philip Maxwell of the Islay Energy Trust gave evidence to the committee. He said: "Proximate or affected communities should be confident of having some proportion of the revenues with surplus going back (to central government) rather than top-down distribution." He stressed the importance of local communities in the planning, operation and economic aspects of marine renewables.

RENEWABLES

A round table discussion on Scotland's renewable energy targets took place in front of the Scottish Parliament's economy, energy & tourism committee. The discussion was held ahead of an inquiry into Scotland's renewable energy targets which will take place in 2012.

Speaking to the committee, Helen McDade of the John Muir Trust, said: "This inquiry has to ask the right questions. We don't doubt that Scotland has the best wind resource in Europe but the real question is how much of that wind can we usefully feed in to our system and afford it, and what that gets us in greenhouse gas emissions reductions. There's a huge risk that we spend a lot of public money on this, and then turn around at the end and ask, why aren't greenhouse gas emissions down?"

"The reason companies are coming to Scotland is not because we have the best wind in the world, it's because they are getting a lot of public money for it and I do think the politicians need to consider if wind is where consumer's money should be going, or if would we get a better return on energy conservation, and genuinely innovative research and development into some of the other renewables which have not had that discussion. Renewables Obligation Certificates were introduced to bring new technologies to commercial scale, yet wind power is a mature and we are still pouring public money into industrial scale wind projects to the benefit of millionaires and multi-national companies. Public money should now be focused on research and development on more efficient generation, and energy conservation."



GENERAL ENVIRONMENT

POISONING

A red kite, which fledged on the Black Isle this summer and was tagged, has been found poisoned by a banned pesticide. The carcass was found close to the Muirkirk & North Lowther Hills Special Protection Area in Strathclyde.

WILDLIFE CRIMES

A gamekeeper has pled guilty at Lanark Sheriff Court to poisoning four buzzards using the banned pesticide Alphachloralose. He was employed at Culter Allers farm in South Lanarkshire.

• Matthew Gonshaw was jailed for six months after admitting ten charges of theft and possession of rare eggs at Thames Magistrates' Court. Over 700 eggs were stolen from nests in Scotland (and Essex). He had previously been jailed three times for similar offences. He was arrested in June on the Isle of Rum for taking the eggs of several wild birds, including those of a golden eagle and osprey. He also took eggs of other birds including peregrine falcons, dotterels, redwings and merlins.

PEATLAND INQUIRY

Following the 18 month Commission of Inquiry on Peatlands involving over 300 individuals and 50 organisations, the findings have been published by the IUCN UK Peatland Programme [Jun 09]. The inquiry found that much of the UK's peatlands have been damaged, largely due to the way they have been managed, and as a result a significant amount of carbon is leaking into the atmosphere. Damaged peatlands also impact on the quality of our drinking water at source, leading to discolouration and associated increased treatment costs for water companies and consumers.

Clifton Bain, director of the IUCN UK Peatland Programme, said: "The good news is that this inquiry has shown that peatland restoration not only benefits wildlife, but has measureable carbon savings, and can quickly reduce the cost of treating drinking water. In identifying a clear strategy for action to bring our peatlands back from the brink, the inquiry points the way forward to avoid the social and environmental costs of further deterioration."

See: www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk/docs/002_057_publications_policies_IUCN_UK_Commission_of_Inquiry_on_Peatlands_full_report_1323085370.pdf

PROSECUTION

Irene Power Company Ltd has been fined £8,500 at Fort William Sheriff Court after carrying out unauthorised work to a burn. This contributed to a flood in August 2009 which caused damage to a nearby farm and blocked the A861 with rocks. The company did not have permission to construct an extra channel to take water from the stream to its £900,000 Roshven Hydro Scheme.

DUMFRIES SEAGULLS

The *BBC News* website reports that Dumfries & Galloway Council's programme of egg and nest removal has led to a marked reduction in seagull numbers in Dumfries and Heathhall [Sep 10]. An overall 11% drop in the number of nesting pairs was recorded this summer with a 20% decrease in the town centre. The £35,000 cost of the project, over three years, was met by the council and it is recommended to continue.

CLIMATE CHANGE TARGETS

The *BBC News* website reports that an Audit Scotland study, *Reducing Scottish Greenhouse Gas Emissions*, states that the cost of reaching Scotland's ambitious climate change targets could be more than £11 billion. Audit Scotland said that good progress had been made towards reaching the 42% reduction in pollution by 2020, but that, in order to remain on target, action was needed. Both the EU and the UK government

would need to do more as only one third of the planned reductions were coming from policies solely under Scottish government control. The UK government's climate change target is 34%, and the EU's is 20%.

Robert Black, the Auditor General for Scotland, said: "To meet the 2020 target, new policies will need to be delivered successfully, especially in transport. The challenges will be that much greater over the next few years when the pressures on Scotland's public sector finances are likely to increase."

AIR POLLUTION

WWF Scotland claims that provisional data for 2011 shows that Scotland has failed to meet European targets to curb air pollution, mainly as a result of fumes from road traffic. Levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution in parts of Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Perth are all in breach of EU targets for the second year in a row. WWF called on the Scottish Government to take urgent action to radically improve air quality rather than simply seek an extension from Europe to delay meeting air quality targets.

The Scottish Government suggested that it may not meet air quality targets until 2020.

CLYDE GREEN NETWORK

The Glasgow Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership and Clyde Waterfront Partnership have launched a Green Network Vision for the Clyde. The Clyde Waterfront Green Network strategy will guide future policy development and investment creating connections, maximizing recreational opportunities and assisting in the regeneration of this former industrial area. 12 projects will define 'key nodes,' such as the Kelvin Valley Park. This project, together with one in West Dunbartonshire and one in Renfrewshire, will be taken forward in the next six months following a successful funding bid for £60,000 from the Central Scotland Green Network Development Fund.

CAMPSIE FELS

The *Milngavie Herald* reports that a ten year action plan has been drawn up by the Campsie Fells Steering Group to develop tourism and protect biodiversity in the Campsies. The group says that the protection of the Campsies' unique geological features and wildlife is crucial. Funded by the Central Scotland Green Network, the action plan was developed following a consultation exercise earlier in the year. East Dunbartonshire and Stirling Councils are involved in the steering group, along with Forestry Commission Scotland and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH).

The Campsie Fells Strategic Review and Action Plan document is available on: www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk

LOCHABER GEOPARK

The *BBC News* website reports that Lochaber Geopark is continuing to promote its geology after the area lost its UNESCO recognition [Nov 11]. The park is to have 20 new geological interpretation panels which will be fitted by April 2012.

Professor Ian Parsons, vice chairman of the geopark and editor of the interpretation boards, said that the project had support from SNH, Scottish Government, European Community Highland Leader funds, Highland Council, British Geological Survey, SRK Consulting and BP.

LAND USE STRATEGY

The Action Plan for Scotland's Land Use Strategy has been published [Mar 11]. It brings together a joined-up set of commitments from across the Scottish Government, all of which contribute to the long term vision for land use and the management of Scotland's land and resources. Cooperation across land managers and users is required to achieve more sustainable land use, an ambition that once accomplished should bring increased prosperity and enduring benefits to Scotland. Research is also being commissioned to evaluate the application of the strategy in existing decision making, the findings of which will inform the first review of the Land Use Strategy.

Commitments in the Action Plan to deliver 13 proposals include development of an Agri-Renewables Strategy in summer 2012; submission of advice from the Woodland Expansion Advisory Group in June 2012; water environment mapping by Scottish Environment Protection Agency during 2012; creation of an Environmental Crime Taskforce in spring 2012 and the identification of pilot areas for peatland restoration.

See: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/Countryside/Landusestrategy



ENERGY

RENEWABLES REPORTS

The *BBC News* website reports that *Powering Scotland*, a report from Reform Scotland, stated that Scotland could become a world leader in renewable technology and could potentially earn £2bn a year by exporting green energy. Graeme Blackett, a trustee with the think-tank, said: "We would support the aim of a substantial increase in energy exports with a target of around half of electricity generated in Scotland being exported. Even using conservative assumptions on prices, this would increase Scottish exports by £2bn per annum, equivalent to around 17% of manufacturing exports to the rest of the UK. Given that some of the current fossil fuel and nuclear capacity will still be available in 2020, this is feasible if the 100% renewables target set by the Scottish Government is met."

The *Herald* reports that *Powering Scotland* says that, with the right policies, Scotland can be Europe's biggest exporter of low-carbon electricity. For that to be achieved, between 50% and 75% of electricity generated in Scotland would have to be made from low carbon sources so that enough electricity was generated from renewable sources to exceed Scotland's demand. Mr Blackett said that the policy of renewable energy development had to be extended; the Scottish Government should set longer-term targets with accelerated planning arrangements for renewable projects.

The group called for all of Scotland's nuclear power stations to be phased out and for energy powers to be devolved formally to Holyrood.

• *Renewable Energy: Vision or Mirage?* a report jointly released by the Adam Smith Institute and Scientific Alliance said that renewable energy cannot meet the UK's energy needs. The report argues that solar and wind power schemes have no prospect of becoming economically viable in an 'unrigged' market and claims that government policies to promote renewable energy will lead to higher costs for consumers. The report argues that wind and solar energy schemes cannot replace gas, coal or nuclear power generation because their energy sources are intermittent and effective energy storage technology is not

available. Wind turbines require back-up generating capacity which make any reduction in CO₂ emissions quite modest. Current targets for wind energy by 2020 would require the installation of five wind turbines every day in the UK. The decommissioning of coal-fired power stations and nuclear over the coming decade are a threat to energy security.

Report co-author Martin Livermore said: "For too long, we have been told that heavy investment in uneconomic renewable energy was not only necessary but would provide a secure future electricity supply. The facts actually show that current renewables technologies are incapable of making a major contribution to energy security and, despite claims to the contrary, have only limited potential to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Consumers have a right to expect government to place high priority on a secure, affordable energy supply."

Energy minister Fergus Ewing, speaking at a conference on the economics of renewables, said that not only do the sums on renewable energy add up, but that green energy, supported by modernised thermal generation backup, is the best long-term option. Mr Ewing said failing to take advantage of the opportunities renewables present would be 'a criminal waste'.

He said: "We understand the scale of the challenge before us but we are more than equipped to meet it. If we want clean, secure, safe and sustainable energy in future, we must deliver Scotland's renewable energy resources. I share Reform Scotland's view that Scotland could become the biggest exporter of low carbon electricity in Europe. We already produce 40% of the UK's renewable electricity and with the continued investment we are witnessing, Scotland's energy will continue to be used across the UK and Europe in all future constitutional circumstances, including independence."

RENEWABLE TARGETS

The latest Energy Statistics from the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) show that, over the first three quarters of 2011, Scotland delivered 94% of last year's totals of renewable energy. The Scottish Government said that, if the trend continues over the fourth quarter, 2011 will be a record year for renewable electricity in Scotland.

The statistics reveal that there is sufficient capacity in Scotland to meet its interim target of 31% of electricity demand from renewables in 2011. Installed capacity reached a record high of 4.3 GW over the year, while Scotland continued to be a net exporter of electricity in 2010, exporting 21% of electricity generated.

See: www.decc.gov.uk/assets/decc/11/stats/publications/energy-trends/3918-pn11-113.pdf

OFGEM

The BBC News website reports that electricity industry regulator, OFGEM, has published proposals which could lead to a decrease in the amount of money paid by renewable energy generators to connect to the grid. [May 11].

The UK's transmission charging regime has long been a source of frustration for the renewable energy industry and the Scottish government. Generators currently pay more if they are further away but OFGEM now wants to create a fairer pricing formula. Windfarms in the north of Scotland could see reductions of up to 60%, saving a large windfarm £1.5m per year.

Hannah Nixon of OFGEM said: "The current formula was designed for a different era when Britain's power all came from conventional sources like coal and gas. The mix of generators producing power is changing rapidly. More renewable and low carbon generators are connecting to the grid. So the charging formula needs to be updated to reflect the new realities of the generation mix. Renewable generators with a variable output are not using the networks continually. The formula needs to reflect this to ensure their charges are fairer."

OFGEM wants to retain a location-based charge but with improvements taking into account the type of generator and how often the network is used to generate power, allowing for variable production from sites such as windfarms. Islands will still pay connection charges and also underwrite a interconnector cable to the mainland.

Niall Stuart, of Scottish Renewables, said that developments on Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles still face huge charges, with a windfarm on the Western Isles paying £77,000 per MW of capacity in 2012 under the reforms, compared to a charge of £2,000 per MW in southwest England.

He said: "The charges quoted for the islands potentially make development uneconomic, meaning a number of highly productive wind farms may not go ahead — a blow to communities in Stornoway and Shetland which would have benefited from significant revenues over the coming years. Neither is it good news for consumers, with onshore wind on the islands being an extremely competitive source of clean renewable energy. It is also a blow to our emerging wave and tidal sector. Orkney, Shetland and the Western Isles all have major plans for marine energy developments as they have the best resource, but they also have the heaviest charges."

The Herald reports that Angus Campbell, leader of Western Isles Council, said: "This would in effect be discrimination against island areas which is illegal under European legislation."

Scottish Renewables said that under the new changes, the proposed Stornoway windfarm would pay more than £11m annually compared to a £300,000 charge for an equivalent-sized project in southwest England. Fergus Ewing said that there had to be a charging regime which did not penalise generators and developers in the very areas with the best renewable resource.

OFGEM is consulting on the proposals before making a final decision in April. Following that, National Grid would table proposals to change the industry rules, meaning the new regime could be in place in 2013.

BEAULY/DENNY LINE

The BBC News website reports that the Scottish Government has rejected calls to underground part of the controversial new Beauly/Denny upgraded transmission line [Oct 11]. Fergus Ewing told the Scottish Parliament that putting the line underground was not feasible and said that additional mitigation measures would be introduced in the Stirling area. He said that the existing line would be buried between Fallin and Glenbervie, some 7 km.

The minister said that he was 'acutely conscious' of the feelings of the communities in the Stirling area, but told MSPs: "Undergrounding on such a large scale would cost an estimated £263m and require large sealing end compounds at the points where

the line is undergrounded, which would have a significant landscape impact in their own right. According to the report of the public inquiry and external consultants, the impacts of the consented line at Stirling are moderate so I have concluded that due to the costs, technical problems and limited environmental benefits, the case for undergrounding has not been justified."

Stirling Council said it was extremely disappointed at the Scottish Government's decision as the current plans had been unanimously rejected by local communities.

Callum Campbell, chairman of the council's power line steering group, said: "Localised tower painting and some screen planting will not detract from the presence of 60 metre high pylons crossing a relatively flat landscape, and the power line will have a significant impact on the Wallace Monument and the Ochils Area of Great Landscape Value. The increase in high-voltage overhead power lines to the south of Pleau, where there are already twin-power lines passing close to the community, is very concerning and wholly unacceptable in terms of visual intrusion and health reasons."

COMMUNITY BENEFITS

The Scottish Government has announced that a new public register to help communities get the most from renewable energy projects will be established next year. The register will include details of community benefits agreed with renewable energy developers across Scotland, helping communities make a comparison with similar developments to inform negotiations. It will also encourage rural businesses undertaking small wind projects on farms and estates to engage with their communities and consider community benefit.

Details of the register will be established by the Scottish Government's Community Renewables Implementation Group. The register will be administered under the Scottish Government's community and renewable energy scheme, and will open from April 2012.

MOUNTAINS & WINDFARMS

The Herald reports that the Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS) has voiced concerns about the impact of windfarm developments on Scottish mountains, which they say have a significant economic and cultural value to the nation. MCoS called for a shift in planning policy, which it said favours large-scale land-based windfarm developments.

Brian Lington, president of MCoS, said: "We are pro-renewable energy and believe that Scotland's renewables targets can be achieved without recourse to the extensive development of mountain areas, areas which have international recognition as landscapes of outstanding natural beauty. They are an asset for the tourism industry, with its vital importance to the rural economy, sustainably supporting thousands of jobs in the Highlands, compared to transient job creation schemes represented by windfarm developments. The mountains benefit the majority, rather than the minority who benefit disproportionately from the profits and subsidies made by and to the multi-national wind power generation industry and landowners."

ONSHORE WINDFARMS

The Herald reports that the Scottish Government said that it has approved more than 50 energy applications since 2007; officials are considering another 40 applications of nearly 4 GW of renewables capacity. 2,738 new onshore wind turbines are in the planning process, under construction or with consent for building work,

taking the potential total number across the country to more than 4,000. 1349 turbines are in operation.

Analysis of the energy map from RenewableUK indicates an unprecedented surge in proposals for wind turbines, with 56 applications lodged for new sites compared to 28 in 2010, with a total of 530 new turbines proposed in 2011. There are 550 turbines in 22 windfarms under construction, with developers putting a further 151 sites into the planning process in the past year. 722 wind turbines have received planning consent in Scotland but have yet to be built.

However, space is running out for new developments. Banks Renewables claims that there are only three to four years of serious onshore development left as the number of suitable sites is decreasing.

Brendan Turvey, of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), said: "There is also an increasing difficulty in gaining consent for onshore developments and I think we are reaching the point where we are almost at capacity in some areas. There are some areas in the southwest of Scotland where there are significant amounts of development in the system and we are near the capacity of the landscape to absorb further windfarm development. We have worked out that the target of 100% translates to around 16 GW of installed capacity. When you look at what is already installed consented we are actually halfway there already. When you look at everything in the system, including offshore, from consented projects to those in the early planning stages, it adds up to around 29 GW. A substantial amount of this is from offshore wind, as well as wave, tidal and onshore."

Jenny Hogan, of Scottish Renewables, said: "There is only so much space in Scotland. Look at hydropower, where all the suitable sites have been used in Scotland. It can't keep going exponentially. Of course we are using up easier sites and we are moving into more difficult areas of onshore development."

The Scotsman reports that figures released by the government show that since May 2007, ministers have determined 25 applications for windfarms of more than 50 MW, with 20 being approved and only five refused.

WINDFARM UPDATES

Highland: The BBC News website reports that Highland council officials recommended approval of the 31 turbine Allt Duine Wind Farm planning application from RWE npower renewables. The site is in the Monadhliaths to the west of Newtonmore and just outwith the Cairngorms National Park [Oct 11]. However, councillors deferred the decision until 2012, pending a site visit. Planning papers show six windfarms within 40 miles of Allt Duine plus four more which have been approved or are under construction. There are also nine applications which have not yet been decided. If all of them proceed, there would be more than 400 turbines in the area. The final decision on Allt Duine rests with Scottish ministers.

• The *Badenoch & Strathspey Herald* reports that councillors have refused plans for Carbon Free's 20 turbine windfarm at Moy near Tomatin. Planners said that the turbines would badly affect the view for motorists on the A9 and also train passengers. The proposed windfarm is in conflict with the draft Highland-Wide Local Development because of its visual impact. The Scottish Government is now considering the scheme after the council failed to reach a verdict for the application within the

statutory four-month period.

• SNH has advised the Scottish Government that a proposed windfarm at Beinneun near Fort Augustus could be accommodated without major problems for wildlife or landscape. The proposal lies adjacent to the existing Millennium windfarm and is also close to a Special Protection Area for two rare breeding bird species, black throated diver and common scoter. However, SNH advised these would not be affected by the windfarm. The removal of some turbines would avoid any impacts on views from the A87, an important tourist route.

Lewis: An extension to the existing 33 Muaitheabhal windfarm by Crionaig Power on the Eiscein Estate on Lewis has been approved by Scottish ministers. Six additional turbines will increase the 104 MW capacity by 21 MW. The extension was granted despite the fact that the original project, approved in January 2010, has yet to start. Helen McDade, of the John Muir Trust (JMT), said that approving the extension potentially brings further destruction to one of the UK's best wildland areas.

Moray: The Herald reports that the Dorenell windfarm, close to Cairngorms National Park, has been approved by Scottish ministers following a public inquiry. Infinergy's 59 turbine, 177 MW windfarm is to be built on the Glenfiddich estate, near Dufftown. Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland objected to the proposals. The RSPB raised concerns over disruption to golden eagle hunting sites in the area. Moray Council, which had objected to the application because it conflicted with its strategy for windfarm location, said that it had no plans to appeal the minister's decision. Speyside Business Alliance claimed that there would be a risk to tourism as 'tourists, unsurprisingly, prefer to be in areas that represent great natural beauty without compromise.'

Ochils: Wind Prospect has filed planning applications for 18 more wind turbines at the Burnfoot Hill windfarm, bringing the total number of turbines to 31 on three adjacent sites.

The Friends of the Ochils have warned that the hills between Stirling and Perth will become 'one giant windfarm' resulting in a disaster for visitors, hill-goers and local residents and the 'industrialisation' of the wilderness.

Malcolm Best, a committee member, said: "Friends of the Ochils believe the Ochils are a critically important recreation area and clearly recognised as such by the significant funding the Heritage Lottery Fund has given to the Ochils Landscape Partnership. Clackmannanshire has already designated their part of the Ochils as an Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) and the Rhodders site is in the AGLV and while the other two are in Perth & Kinross they will be highly visible from the AGLV. The erection of these turbines tears at the heart of the Ochils ... this development would turn the Ochils into a landscape of windfarms rather than a landscape of beautiful hills with some windfarms."

South Lanarkshire: The Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) has objected to SSE Renewables' 171 MW Clyde extension windfarm in the Upper Clyde valley [Jul 08]. If consented, SWT claims that the 57 turbine extension could have the highest risk of collisions to pink-footed geese in the UK; it is estimated that there will be about 214 pink-footed goose fatalities per year. SWT has asked for the collision risk to merlin to be reassessed and for focal surveys to determine the movement of breeding merlin within the windfarm area. The windfarm

would also cause significant damage to blanket bog habitat, which has European protection. The existing Clyde windfarm has 152 turbines with a total capacity of 781 MW, one of the largest onshore windfarms in Europe.

Sutherland: The JMT has objected to Wind Energy's proposed Glenmorrie windfarm on the Kildermorie and Glenalvie estates, west of Ardgay. JMT considers that the effect of the 43 turbine windfarm on the landscape would be significant and completely inappropriate for an area of wild land. Some of the wind turbines would be just 150 metres from the edge of an area identified by SNH as a Search Area for Wild Land. It will also have a significant impact on other local landscapes with high wildland character. Beyond the immediate area, views from Ben Wyvis, the Fannichs and Beinn Dearg, and from the Dornoch Firth will be affected. The *Northern Times* reports that Ardross Community Council said that it is 'not keen' on the project.

SNH has advised the Scottish Government that a windfarm at Glenmorrie could be accommodated if five of the turbines are removed from the plans. This would address SNH's concerns about nationally significant impacts on the Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area, from which these five turbines would be visible. SNH also highlighted significant impacts on landscape around Ben Wyvis and expressed concern about the cumulative impacts of windfarm development in the area.

• WKN AG is planning 22 wind turbines on the Sallachy & Duchally Estates near Lairg.

Wigtownshire: BBC News website reports that RES is to appeal Dumfries & Galloway Council's decision to reject its plans for an 11 turbine windfarm at Glenchamber, between New Luce, Kirkcowan and Glenluce [Sept 11]. The council expressed concerns over its 'significant adverse impact' on the landscape.

OFFSHORE WINDFARMS

Aberdeen: The Herald reports that Dundas & Wilson, solicitors for Donald Trump, have told the Scottish Government that a public inquiry is necessary into plans for a windfarm offshore from the golf development at Menie Estate [Oct 11]. Mr Trump maintains that an inquiry is needed to show the impact that the windfarm will have on his resort. Donald Trump Jnr said that he wasn't sure that people in the northeast had fully grasped the impact that the development would have on the coast and how close the turbines would be to the shore.

Dumfries & Galloway: The BBC News website reports that Dong Energy has reached agreement with the Crown Estate to examine windfarm potential in coastal waters off Dumfries & Galloway. A feasibility study will be carried out in the Outer Solway over the next four months. The potential site would be at least 8 km from the shore; Dong Energy said it was looking at an area south of Luce Bay and to the north of the Isle of Man. The waters off southwest Scotland were identified in a report by Marine Scotland Science as a potential location for offshore windfarms [Nov 11].

Alex Fergusson MSP said: "It is not long since a campaign of public opposition resulted in the withdrawal of plans to install a windfarm in Wigtown Bay and another next to Robin Rigg. It was a very hard fought campaign. This new step towards another, much larger, proposal will require an even greater effort if it is to be rejected — that effort starts now.

Fife: The *Irish Times* reports that 2-B Energy is to test new two blade 6 MW vertical axis wind turbines.

ANGUS HYDRO

The Scotsman reports that Scottish & Southern Energy (SSE) plans to build a 'run of the river' water abstraction scheme at the Reekie Linn and Big Slug waterfalls in the Angus Glens. Concerns are being raised by the Tay District Salmon Fisheries Board and the Kirriemuir Angling Club about the potential impact of the scheme on vital spawning grounds for the Tay, one of Scotland's main salmon rivers, and angling on a popular beat on the River Isla.

The 10 MW hydroelectric scheme would involve water being fed through an underground pipeline system to a generating station before being returned to the river six miles downstream, just above Alyth.

A spokeswoman for SSE said that mitigation measures to protect salmon stocks would be included in an environmental statement due to be published in spring 2012.

LOCH LOMOND HYDRO

The Scotsman reports that Loch Lomond & the Trossachs Park Authority is planning dozens of small-scale hydropower schemes over the next five years. The park has over 22 large lochs, and 50 rivers or large burns — an under-realised economic and renewable energy resource. Development of these will help Scotland to meet its renewable energy targets without detracting from the highly valued landscapes forming the basis of the tourism economy.

Mapping software is being used to guide developers to river sites with a steep enough gradient to generate more than 50 kW of power. Altogether, there is believed to be potential to generate 73 MW of electricity from hydro schemes, with about 30 MW likely to be built within the next five years. Four schemes are complete, another two are being built and 16 are in the application process.

A large number of applications have been made for windfarms circling the park. Gordon Watson of the park authority said: "Undoubtedly windfarms are very difficult to reconcile with protecting the scenic qualities of the park."

Colin Anderson, director of Banks Renewables, said much of the land outside the national park was 'a developed landscape' in the form of farmland. "[The park authority] is taking a principled stance against windfarms but I don't think it helps their credibility."

OFFSHORE OIL & GAS

The *BBC News* website reports that the UK Department of Energy & Climate Change has awarded 46 new exploratory drilling licenses to firms looking for oil and gas. The awards were initially held back due to environmental concerns but the government says it is now confident that exploration in the regions, including the North Sea (central and southern areas) and the west of Shetland, is safe.

The licensing round, launched in 2010, excluded possible sites in the Moray Firth in order to protect marine wildlife.

WASTE-TO-ENERGY

The Herald reports that Glasgow City Council has formally approved plans for a £150m waste-to-energy plant at Polmedie, which will be open by 2015. Viridor will build and run the plant, which will process 200,000 tonnes of municipal waste *per* year. The plant had received opposition from the Greens and SNP, who fear that the plant, a 'rebranded incinerator', will provide an incentive to produce more rubbish and recycle less.

**RECREATION & TOURISM****GREENSPACE**

The Sunday Herald reports that a survey for Greenspace Scotland shows that the number of people using greenspaces in towns and cities is declining [Sep 11]. Government cutbacks mean that open spaces are becoming less attractive and are perceived to be more dangerous places than previously. The survey was commissioned from Progressive Partnership, with backing from Scottish Natural Heritage, and results compared to a previous study undertaken in 2009. The proportion of people who used their local parks or woods at least once a week dropped from 63% in 2009 to 54% in 2011.

LOCH LOMOND

The Scotsman reports that there has been a significant reduction in the number of people wild camping and incidents of littering in Loch Lomond & the Trossachs National Park [Mar 11]. New bylaws threatening £500 fines were introduced on 1 June.

257 tents were erected outside official campsites during April and May, the number fell dramatically between June and September, when 84 tents were recorded. 160 bags of litter were collected during April and May and the number fell to 94 between June and September.

Comparisons with 2010 are even more marked. Preliminary data shows that over June and July in 2010 and 2011, there was a 93% reduction in the number of tents outwith designated campsites, and a 97% fall in the amount of litter.

Whilst no-one has been charged under the legislation, the national park authority emphasises that its 'preventative' stance is working. There has been an increase in visitor numbers this year, especially families, bringing the annual tourist total to around four million.

Despite the apparent success, some park users are questioning the true effectiveness of the bylaws, pointing out that anti-social behaviour has been displaced to other areas of the park such as Loch Venachar and parts of Loch Katrine. The park rangers, who enforce the legislation, are also being targeted.

TOMINTOUL BIKING

The Herald reports that the Cairngorms National Park Authority has approved plans for a mountain bike centre with two new trails near Tomintoul. The centre will be built on land owned by the Crown Estate in commercial softwood forests at Carn Meilich and Carn Daimh on the Glenlivet Estate.

FORESTRY PARKING

The Press & Journal reports that the Forestry Commission Scotland said that pay-and-display machines would be introduced at a number of forestry car parks throughout the country, including Bennachie in Aberdeenshire. The money raised will support footpath maintenance and forest facilities.

ORKNEY WILDLIFE

A project to promote Orkney as a wildlife tourism destination has been awarded £300,000 from the European Regional Development Fund. RSPB Scotland hopes to raise a further £500,000 for the project, which will allow field teaching and interpretation of local wildlife.

**NEWS OF ORGANISATIONS****ABERDEEN COLLEGE**

Aberdeen College has announced that its Clinterty Centre, at Bucksburn, will shut next summer. Its animal-care and horticulture courses will move to the nearby Scottish Agriculture College campus at Craibstone.

CROFTING COMMISSION

Proposals to provide an election process for Scotland's Crofting Commission have been passed by the Scottish Parliament. For the first time, six people will be democratically elected by Scotland's crofting community to represent their interests, with the remaining three spaces filled by ministerial appointment. Contact: *email: elections@crofterscommission.org.uk*

GWCT

Gemma Davis has been appointed Policy Officer Scotland with the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT).

LINK

Scottish Environment LINK (the umbrella body for Scotland's environmental NGOs) has announced that Ross Finnie is to become its next president. Mr Finnie was an MSP from 1999-2011 and cabinet minister for rural affairs & the environment between 1999 and 2007. He takes over from Dr Helen Zealley OBE.

RSFS

Major Alastair Harding, of Castle Douglas, Dumfries & Galloway is the new director of the Royal Scottish Forestry Society.

RBGE

Sir Muir Russell has been appointed as chairman of the board of trustees at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh until 2015.

SEPA

The Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) has appointed Professor James Curran MBE as chief executive. He is currently SEPA's director of science & strategy, and he takes over from Dr Campbell Gemmell.

SNH

The Guardian reports that major conservation projects are being threatened by spending cuts imposed on Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) by the Scottish Government. Proposals to cut or abandon some projects are being discussed after Scottish ministers warned that SNH's budget would be cut by at least 20% over several years. SNH expects to have cuts of up to 10% in 2012, losing a further £6m in funding. SNH fears that Scotland could fail to meet its legal obligations on the environment, leading it to face court proceedings from the European Commission for breaching habitat and *wildlife* directives.

The Guardian understands that SNH has decided not to fund any future expansion of the programme to reintroduce sea eagles across Scotland, once the current five-year project in eastern Scotland ends. Plans to find another site to release European beavers in Scotland, once the project at Knapdale in Argyll is complete, may also be abandoned. SNH is also reviewing its funding for the major multi-agency project to protect red squirrels in southern Scotland and the Highlands; funding for Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels ends in April 2012.