

An industry-leading pilot project to enhance natural habitats in Scotland has begun

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Network Rail Scotland is committing £329,000 for Forestry and Land Scotland (FLS) to use in what is the most ambitious biodiversity enhancement project ever to take place on Scotland's Railway.

The two-year project will help to compensate for biodiversity lost during safety-critical tree and vegetation management works across Scotland's rail network.

The project area sits within Scotland's endangered Atlantic rainforest zone. The removal of non-native plant species, management of deer browsing, fencing improvement work, wet woodland enhancements and tree planting will take place across approximately 200 hectares to protect, restore and expand rainforest and peatland habitats.

FLS manages the land where the work will take place and the area forms part of the dramatic setting of the Glenfinnan viaduct, which can be seen by passengers travelling on the Mallaig Line.

The first phase of work is now underway with the removal of non-native plant species across the woodland and peatland habitats where the project is taking place. Invasive species which threaten native habitats

will continue to be removed throughout the project.

In the short term, the scheme will help remove threats to vulnerable and internationally important woodland and peatland habitats. Longer-term, it will deliver biodiversity benefits, increase carbon storage and enhance climate resilience by helping to protect, enhance and expand these unique habitats for generations to come.

Alex Hynes, managing director of Scotland's Railway, said: "We're delighted to be partnering with Forestry and Land Scotland and contributing towards the vital work being carried out to protect and enhance Scotland's unique natural environment.

"This project will allow us to balance the removal of trees and vegetation elsewhere on the railway on a scale that would not be possible by replanting purely within our own boundaries.

"Rail is already one of the greenest forms of transport and we are committed to working to reduce our industry's impact on the environment through further electrification of our network and also by supporting innovative projects like this one."

Simon Hodgson, chief executive of FLS, said: "We are looking forward to working with Network Rail Scotland over the next two years to deliver this important pilot project within Scotland's Atlantic Rainforest zone.

"This support from Network Rail is helping to supplement our national rainforest restoration programme, funding activity to protect and enhance threatened habitats. Work has already started on site, and we look forward to seeing biodiversity at Glenfinnan flourish into the future as a result.

"The longer-term objective is to restore ecosystem processes over 10 years which will support full habitat recovery and ongoing resilience. Thanks to these initial interventions funded by Network Rail, as well as ongoing management and maintenance undertaken by us, we are on track to achieve that goal."

Photo credit: Network Rail