

## **Lynx UK Trust select Kielder and Borders as their preferred trial reintroduction site**

*After several months of consultations with national stakeholders and ongoing research, the Lynx UK Trust, who are leading efforts to reintroduce Eurasian lynx to the UK, have identified Kielder Forest as their preferred site for a trial reintroduction, and will now begin local level consultations across the region.*

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It was just over a year ago that the Lynx UK Trust announced their hopes to reintroduce Eurasian lynx to the British Isles. Suggesting five potential sites for a trial reintroduction they introduced many people to these mysterious and beautiful forest cats that shy away from human contact, and offer a pivotal role in the ecosystem controlling an unchecked deer population overgrazing our forests.

After several months of autumn and spring consultations with national stakeholders including farming unions, wildlife groups and statutory agencies the Trust have now identified Kielder Forest, spanning Northumberland and the Scottish Borders, as their preferred site for a trial reintroduction to take place.

A range of research was carried out alongside consultations, and is presented in a site selection document commissioned by the Trust and produced by AECOM, identifying several key factors favouring Kielder;

- Largest area of continuous forest largely contained from sheep farming
- Economically deprived area, where the gross value added by each individual lynx to the economic product of the region is up to £15,000
- Low human population density and few human barriers and threats such as roads and railways.

“Within the team we always suspected Kielder had the right mixture,” comments Dr Paul O'Donoghue, Chief Scientific Advisor for the Trust, “but it was important to really investigate what each site offered and to pay real attention to what stakeholders were telling us. Balancing up the many factors Kielder has continually stood out as a place where the lynx can flourish and bring huge benefits to the local community.”

Consultations with regional stakeholder organisations have now begun, and **the Trust will host an informal event on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> August to meet and talk with locals** about the potential reintroduction. A full schedule of local consultations and other research alongside legal advisors Clifford Chance and the University of Cumbria will be announced in the near future.

“This is by no means a final decision or a foregone conclusion,” emphasises O'Donoghue, “we're very interested in what everyone in this region has to say about the idea. They could be living and working alongside the lynx in the near future, which really is an unprecedented opportunity in the history of UK wildlife reintroductions.”

Eurasian lynx are a rare modern wildlife success story. Dwindling to just 700 individuals in Europe in the 1940s, a series of conservation efforts, reintroductions and recolonisations (where an expanding population reintroduced itself to several countries) have seen numbers climb to around 8,000 in Europe, with no evidence of any attacks on humans by healthy wild lynx and an extremely low predation rate on agricultural animals, with each

lynx averaging just 0.4 kills of sheep per year.

“So far we've enjoyed incredible engagement with the project from the general public and the many stakeholders consulted,” explains Roger Leese, a partner of Clifford Chance who provide free legal advice to the Trust, “and it's thrilling to move to another stage in the process and get to hear more voices. The UK Government has a general legal obligation to bring back extinct species, and the Eurasian lynx really is a wonderful candidate for a trial reintroduction that would show whether it would be practical and viable to bring these charismatic cats back permanently.

“The Trust has assembled an ambitious and highly skilled team we're very proud to be a part of and I'm in no doubt that this ongoing consultation process, and the final licence application, will be equally world class.”

Funded entirely by donations from the general public and pro-bono support from a range of ecological, legal, research and media partners, the Trust is an entirely independent CIC that receives no funding from public funds.

“The team have taken the project an incredible distance on very scant resources,” comments Trust fundraising advisor, Katherine Johnston, “and we're incredibly grateful to everyone who has supported us so far; this isn't a tax funded project, and we can only continue to make it happen with continued support from everyone who would like to see the lynx have a real chance at returning to the UK.”

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Site selection report from AECOM is available at;

[www.lynxuk.org/consultation/aecomprovisionalsiteselection.pdf](http://www.lynxuk.org/consultation/aecomprovisionalsiteselection.pdf)