

## Media Release

for immediate release

### **Study to assess damage to Scotland's hills from bulldozed tracks Call for evidence ahead of major report next spring**

#### **Contact details**

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Conservation bodies are calling on outdoor enthusiasts to help them assess the damage caused to Scotland's iconic mountains by controversial vehicle tracks.

The Scottish Environment LINK Hilltracks group wants hill-goers to photograph or video any instances of upland tracks that are harming the landscape or environment. Anyone who comes across what they think might be a new or expanded track should email [hilltracks@scotlink.org](mailto:hilltracks@scotlink.org) or tweet using hashtags #Hilltracks or #NoMotorsUpMountains.

This evidence will help the group – which includes many of Scotland's biggest outdoor and conservation organisations – compile a new report in spring 2018 into whether current legislation is working.

There have been concerns for decades about such tracks, and whether their primary purpose in every case fits within the intention of permitted development. Mel Nicoll, who has recently been appointed to help with the LINK Hilltracks campaign, said: "People are often shocked to learn that landowners generally can't be refused permission before they bulldoze new tracks in Scotland's hills as long as they are claimed to be for agriculture or forestry, including in some of our wildest, most untouched landscapes and national parks.

"Since 2014, landowners have had to notify councils before constructing or upgrading these tracks, but they still don't need to apply for planning permission in most cases.

"We want hill-goers to send us photos and videos, with the map reference if possible, so we can better gauge the level of damage and assess whether the 2014 law change has helped improve standards. We'll publish the results in a report next spring."

In the last two years, major new vehicle tracks have appeared in a number of popular walking areas including Glen Clova, Blair Atholl, Glen Shee, Drumochter and the Aberdeenshire hills.

The LINK Hilltracks group monitors local authority planning websites, looking for new proposals and expresses concerns or comments on specific tracks. Tracks relating to hydro power or other infrastructure schemes in the uplands will have received full planning permission but are still of interest to the group, as construction methods and restoration works can often be poor.

The campaign has the backing of the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS), Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group, Cairngorms Campaign, National Trust for Scotland, North East Mountain Trust, Ramblers Scotland, RSPB Scotland, Scottish Campaign for National Parks and Scottish Wild Land Group.

It has also received generous funding from Scottish Environment LINK Discretionary Project Fund, British Mountaineering Council and Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

For more information, go to [scotlink.org/work-areas/link-hill-tracks-campaign](https://scotlink.org/work-areas/link-hill-tracks-campaign)

## Editors' Notes

(1) Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 35 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

Have you heard about [LINK Local](https://scotlink.org/local) ? LINK's one year trial of a matchmaking service for local groups working on environmental issues across Scotland. Why not find out more at [LINKLocal](https://scotlink.org/local) or follow us on facebook

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