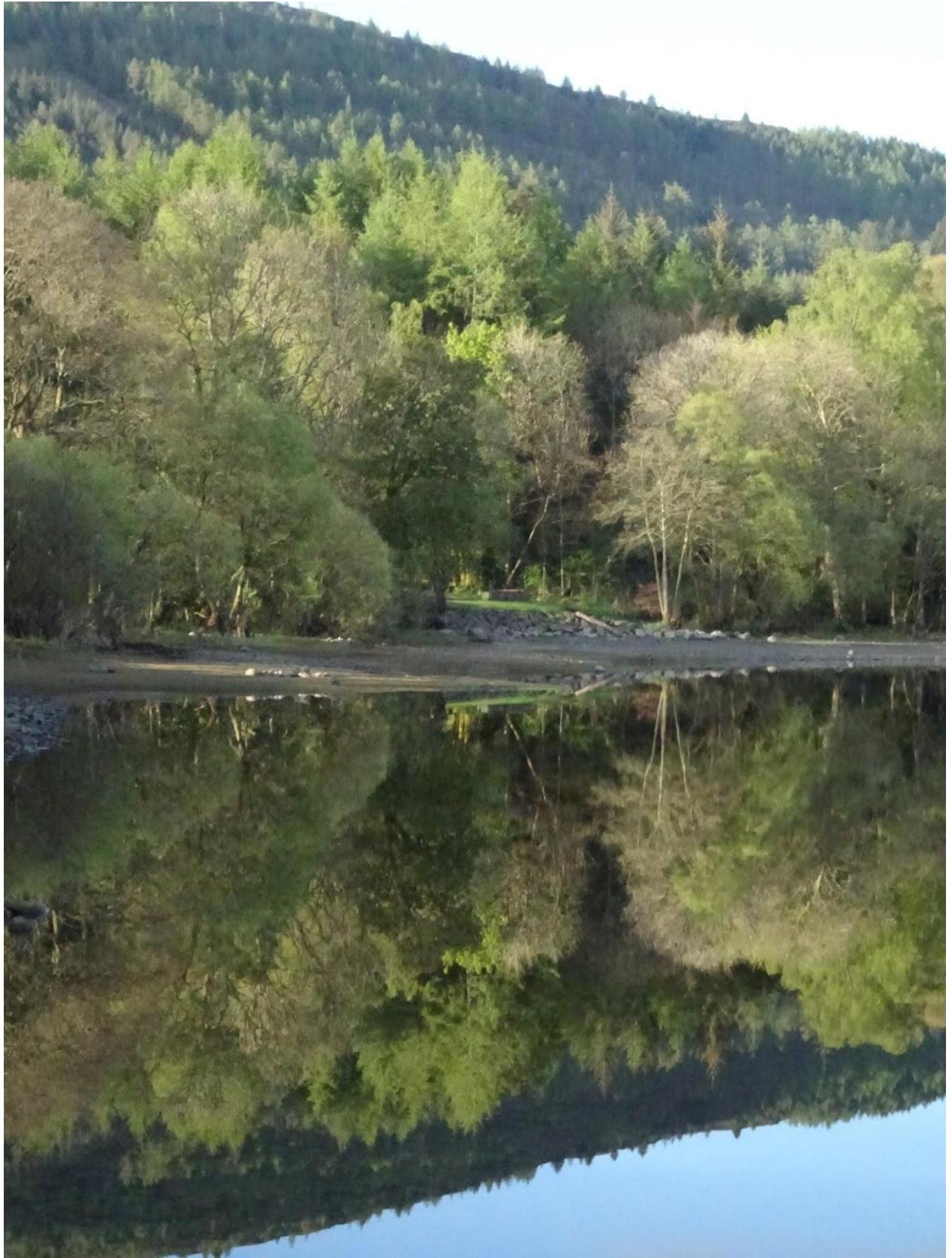


South Loch Venachar : Worth Protecting



“ The woodland frames the sinuous shore and structures the landscape further by framing near and distant views to the opposite shore and high mountain tops.”

A description of the landscape qualities of Loch Venachar and the Trossachs from the NatureScot publication on the landscape qualities of LL&TNPA.

This photo was taken in April 2020, during the first lockdown, sadly two of the prominent trees are no longer here, cut down for firewood and many others have lost limbs and branches - changing permanently the characteristics of the loch shore. Just one example of the price everyone pays when we fail to value and properly protect our loch shores.

Towards the end of the 2021 season there are many other examples of the destructive impact of unmanaged visitor/tourism pressures on the small fragile area of Loch shore at SLV.

Impact of vehicles and parking

When you allow this.....



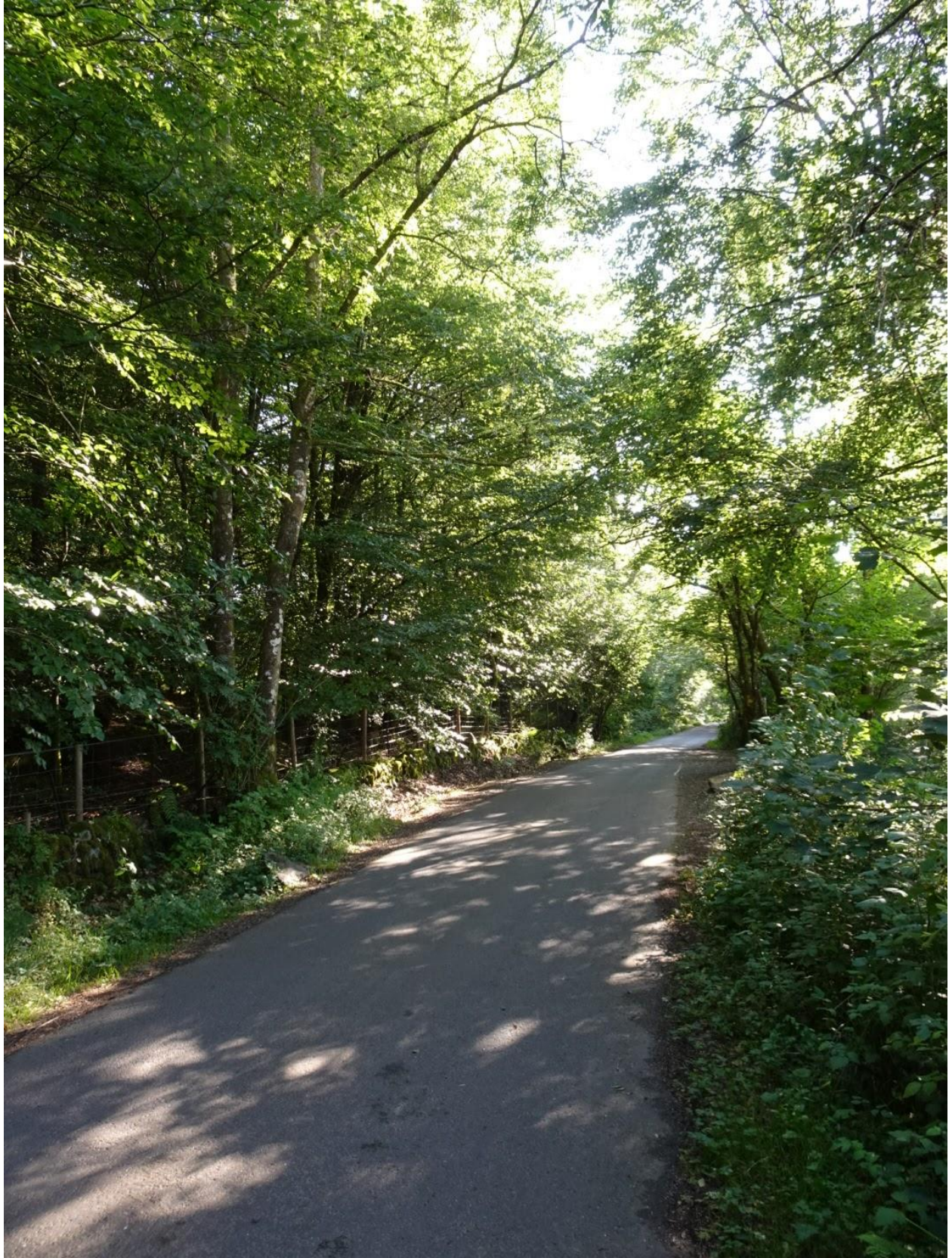
then it's no surprise that the verges are damaged - leading to loss of vegetation, shrinking woodland margins, reduction in plant diversity, increases in invasive species, impacts on wildlife and reduction in visual amenity.





In areas where parking has not been possible because of the topology there are still glimpses of what the shore road used to look like.





Visitor numbers and footfall

As a result of unregulated parking - high numbers of visitors, many with camping gear, water sports equipment etc have created direct paths from car door to shore, trampling grassed areas and vegetation and fragmenting the woodland areas.





Unmanaged Camping

Residents agreed to a season where camping numbers would be limited to 3 permits and within a more confined area of Loch shore. In fact these management controls were rarely implemented leading to consistently high levels of camping activity throughout the shore area and affording no protection to the two specific areas the residents had asked to protect - the high shore and the main bay. When you allow this.....





then it is no surprise that the damage to the high shore area has intensified with grass burn, tyre tracks, clearly visible and significant long term overall degradation to vegetation.





In all areas where there has been intensive camping in such a dry season (with or without permits) there is evidence of vegetation degradation, campfire burn and legacy fire circles.

Fires and tree damage

Linked to the levels of unmanaged camping the levels of tree damage and destruction to provide wood for campfires has continued unabated and is now particularly acute in the popular but vulnerable riparian shore margins where almost every tree shows signs of recent damage.









In some instances trees have been pulled out by the roots - an example at the main bay has permanently altered the sense of enclosure that used to be part of the attraction of the area. In other areas trees have been completely denuded of branches leaving them stark and ugly on

the shore




Residents have repeatedly asked for better protection for the SLV woodland. They have asked for a ban on fires, as operates in vulnerable areas of Cairngorm National Park. They have requested signage to make clear that visitors should not light recreational fires and should in no circumstances use live wood.

While the trees on the south shore at SLV are allowed to disappear - above the north shore of Loch Venachar - Scotland is investing thousands of pounds to recreate the Great Trossachs Forest. Trees are amongst our most significant weapons in the fight against climate change and yet the trees at SLV, which the community so value, continue to be casually destroyed with no significant effort to protect them.

Land and Forests Scotland - sets out the significance of riparian woodlands to Scotland's ecosystems and habitats. It is hard to understand why so little effort is made here at SLV.

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- Woodland
- fringes
- Atlantic woodland
- The riparian zone**
- Rhododendron control
- Deadwood
- Open habitats
- Water courses
- Fox control
- Species Licencing
- The climate emergency
- Historic environment conservation
- Tourism and recreation
- Renewables



Why is riparian woodland important?

Native woodland on the riparian zone is a vital part of the water ecosystem. It helps regulate the temperature of the water by providing shade, while falling leaves and insects feed the hungry animals below.

Even when they die, these trees contribute to the environment – rotting wood provides good habitat for invertebrates that ultimately provide food for fish and other aquatic life. Large branches and whole trees that fall into the water provide shelter for animals and help change the water flow, creating a variety of habitats on the river bed.

Some of our most iconic species rely on healthy riparian and aquatic habitats, including otter, osprey, white-tailed eagles and Atlantic salmon.

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The loss of a vital habitat

Until the 1980s, we saw the riparian zone on the land we manage as just another place to plant trees. We planted conifers right up to the water's edge.

The resulting deep shade and acidification upset the delicate chemistry of the water. Soil from forestry operations and road building blocked streams and rivers. Pollution from machinery became a problem too. As a result, life drained from the water.

Restoring the riparian zone

Fortunately, modern woodland management is now addressing these problems and Scotland's precious riparian resource is now recognised for its contribution to species richness and diversity.

During our land management planning, we now identify all the watercourses that need conservation action. In the northern Highlands, for example, we plan to restore almost 5,000 hectares of riparian woodland. This will give every watercourse the breathing space it needs by establishing permanent buffers of native woodland and scrub up to 100 metres wide.

In recent years, we've spent millions of pounds on this valuable work, combining it with other conservation measures, including the control of invasive non-native species such as [rhododendron](#) and mink.

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Fires and Fire Circles

With the low water levels many visitors have chosen to light campfires on the exposed shore area. Large boulders from the reinforcing structures that form the harbour area and extend along the shore to protect the woodland from erosion have been displaced. Stone fire circles now dominate the shore view in many areas and are often a repository for waste, broken glass,

toxic burnt out plastic and cans.



Recent efforts have reduced some of the more conspicuous waste materials but as rainfall begins to restore water levels - much of this waste material will simply be washed into the loch to the detriment of local wildlife.

Position at end September

For the last two years residents have tried to ensure that the characteristics and qualities of this special environment were valued and protected by the NPA and partner agencies. A range of measures were put in place but have not been effectively implemented or enforced and the consequence in terms of further damage and degradation to the environment is significant. This is a deeply unsatisfactory outcome for everyone concerned.

The Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park's primary purpose is to "conserve and enhance" the landscapes entrusted to its care. South Loch Venachar urgently needs effective, meaningful protection from further pressures and commitment from all partners to restore and enhance this much valued and enjoyed corner of the Trossachs.

Sue Berits on behalf of SLV residents

28/9/21

