

NEWS

Landowner feels call of the wild

By Peter John Meiklem

THE HOWL of a lonely wolf in the night has been the stuff of Scottish legend since the last one was killed more than 300 years ago.

But that iconic animal – along with bears, lynx and boars – will again stalk the Scottish Highlands if the vision of a millionaire businessman becomes reality.

Paul Lister, a dedicated environmentalist, bought 50 thousand acres of land in Easter Ross and Sutherland last year, planning to create an African-style game reserve. But instead of elephants and lions he hopes thousands of tourists will be attracted by the reintroduction of ancient European and Scottish species to the Highland landscape.

However, to keep the animals in one place Lister plans to build a 50-mile electrified fence, arguing this is the only way the Executive will sanction the reintroduction of controversial species like wolves and bears. He said the recent decision not to reintroduce beavers proves his plan is the only realistic option if ancient indigenous species are ever to exist in the Scottish wild again.

Walkers' groups are outraged by his plan to fence off such a large chunk of the Highlands, which includes the Munro, Seana Bhragh. They say it contravenes the spirit of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act, which gives Scottish walkers some of



Reintroduced: wolves are among the species planned for the reserve

the best access rights in Europe.

Lister, whose Alladale Estate appears on a special BBC 2 programme on October 9, said the reintroduction of ancient species was a "real passion". He urged everyone to "get behind an initiative that can actually happen".

He said his plans would restore the reserve's landscape back to its ancient glory. "We're going to reintroduce the natural predators and when the deer numbers drop you're going to see natural regeneration. You'll see stuff grow where it doesn't now because there are too many deer."

Ian McCall, Ramblers' Scotland campaign and policy co-ordinator,

said Lister would need a special exemption from the Scottish Executive to build the reserve. He said he was in favour of reintroducing extinct species "in principle", but that he would never support a project that entailed reducing public access. "What if all estate owners follow his lead and want to do the same," he added.

He said he supported the reintroduction of wolves but without fencing them in, the way it had been done in other European countries. "If we can't reintroduce them without putting a big fence around them then it is not worth doing," he said.