

SCOTTISH
NATURAL
HERITAGE



ENJOYING THE OUTDOORS

SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION AND SHARING THE BENEFITS



Enjoying the outdoors is important in its own right. It can also help deliver many social, economic and environmental benefits, from more sustainable travel and increased tourism to better health and quality of life.

Encouraging participation, promoting responsible outdoor access and supporting sustainable development are key to realising these benefits.

This policy statement sets out SNH's vision and key priorities for taking forward this exciting agenda. It builds on SNH's first policy statement on Enjoying the Outdoors published in 1994 that made an important contribution to the significant developments in outdoor access that have taken place in recent years. In providing comparable leadership and a clear long-term vision, it is our ambition that this new policy statement will have a similar positive impact.

SNH's Vision

Everyone in Scotland is able to enjoy the outdoors as part of their daily life and they have improved opportunities for participation in outdoor recreation, education and volunteering. Closer links have been developed between outdoor recreation and everyday journeys for work, school and other local trips.

The benefits will be improved quality of life, better health and well-being, greater understanding and care of the natural world, more sustainable patterns of travel and economic development and stronger communities.



INTRODUCTION

1. Enjoying the outdoors is a term we use to cover outdoor recreation and leisure activities, pastimes and access. It embraces:
 - formal and informal activities;
 - passive and active experiences;
 - the emotional response to the outdoors and the physical challenge it can present; and
 - the common place and the very special

Scotland has a long and cherished tradition of enjoying the outdoors, often based on non-statutory customs of access to open ground for outdoor recreation, holidays on the coast and active pursuits such as fishing or climbing. But enjoying the outdoors is equally relevant to urban areas and greenspace in and around our settlements as well as for everyday journeys close to home.

2. There is a close and positive relationship between enjoying the outdoors and the remit of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Our interest lies across a wide spectrum of outdoor activity, with a specific focus on the following activities to which the public right of responsible access to land and inland water applies¹.

Family and social activities, pastimes, active pursuits (such as walking, cycling, horse-riding and carriage driving, rock climbing, hill-walking, running, orienteering, ski touring, ski mountaineering, caving, canoeing, swimming, rowing, windsurfing, sailing, diving, air sports and wild camping) and educational activities

SNH has specific statutory responsibilities for facilitating public enjoyment of the natural heritage and promoting awareness and understanding of the right of responsible access. These duties sit alongside others relating to the protection, understanding and sustainable use of the natural heritage. Our policy approach is further detailed in the Annex.

¹ See pages 9-10 of the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#)

3. Reflecting the Scottish Parliament's commitment to better provision based on rights and responsibilities, Scotland now has some of the most progressive arrangements for outdoor access in Europe. SNH contributes to the delivery of these arrangements through the implementation plan prepared by the Scottish Government. As part of this framework, Scottish Ministers have set SNH an aspirational target of increasing participation in countryside recreation². This challenging target is dependent on wider changes in society which would make enjoyment, engagement and understanding of the natural world part of everyone's daily lives. It will need collective effort and investment by many stakeholders, a range of inventive approaches capturing the attention of different audiences, and a long term commitment by all.

2 SNH Corporate Plan 2005-2008. "Improve public enjoyment of the countryside as measured by increases in the number of walkers visiting". This is a previously published Scottish Executive Natural Heritage Target.



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4. People enjoy and gain inspiration from the outdoors in many ways – be it the simple tonic of breathing fresh-air or seeking out new or familiar landmarks, views and wildlife, through to experiencing the peace and quiet of the natural world and the physical challenge and excitement to be found there. For some people, the natural and historic dimensions of the outdoors engage their intellectual curiosity, and this can be a basis for increased appreciation and more detailed study, or involvement in its care through volunteering. The outdoors also provides an important resource for formal education, both for learning about our environment and also for developing wider life-skills of independence of action and social engagement. There are many benefits that stem from all this activity, each helping to make Scotland wealthier and fairer, stronger and safer, healthier, smarter and greener.

Delivering economic benefits Some 200 million domestic visits for informal recreation are made each year, putting some £3.6 billion into the economy. A third of Scotland's £4.2 billion income from tourists is also inspired by and focused on the outdoors, with our growing international reputation for wildlife watching, mountain biking, cycle touring and other activity-based holidays helping to support further growth in tourism. Some £6 million of new funding for the management of outdoor access has been provided through the Rural Development Plan, providing payments to land managers who actively maintain paths and develop new opportunities for access.

Improving health and well-being Walking is now recognised as the most cost effective means of improving physical health, with up to 20,000 people taking part in health walks each week as part of the Paths to Health Initiative. Experience of the outdoors and participation in challenging activities can also contribute to mental health and well-being. It can help to build individual capacity and self-confidence in assessing risk and taking responsibility for oneself and for others.

Serving local transport needs Walking and cycling can play a key role in serving local transport needs and help to address the issues of congestion, pollution and climate change associated with car dependency. The links to healthy living and well-being are very strong as many “everyday journeys” on foot or bike also serve fitness and enjoyment needs.

Increasing understanding and responsibility Through outdoor recreation and activities such as volunteering, people can learn more about the natural world and gain a sense of responsibility and care for a resource of value to the whole community, and this can help create a sense of community cohesion.

Seeking social inclusion Opportunities for enjoying the outdoors are often influenced by income and ability. Nevertheless, the outdoors can offer opportunities for everyone. Appropriate promotion and education, tailored facilities and public transport provision can improve inclusion. The development of open space and core and local path networks and the establishment of urban woodland and other greenspace to enhance the quality of the local environment play an important role.

5. Nearly everywhere that access rights now apply are places where people also live and work. Use of the land is vital to the local economy and helps to maintain the places and landscapes that people use and enjoy. Continued effort to help integrate access and land management is therefore needed. At the same time, the importance of enjoying the outdoors is reflected in the increasingly strong policy links between outdoor recreation, access, health, sustainable transport, education, tourism and well-being. While some of this wider agenda was emerging in 1994 when SNH produced its first policy statement on this subject, there is now a need for the clearer establishment of priorities.



KEY PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

6. In 1994, SNH identified two main priorities for action: the provision of greater opportunities for outdoor recreation, particularly close to home, and; the better management of recreation and other land-uses in various settings. The development of the Paths for All initiative and the establishment of the Access Forum were significant moves towards fulfilling this agenda. The new priorities are being shaped by implementation of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the increased emphasis by the Scottish Parliament on social inclusion, health and sustainable development.

7. Within this changed context, SNH's new vision for enjoying the outdoors is a broad and inclusive one, requiring strong partnership working across the public, voluntary and private sectors. To help secure improved opportunities for enjoying the outdoors for all of Scotland's people and to fully realise the social, economic and environmental benefits from this, we believe that this effort should be focused on the following priorities and actions.

Key Priority 1 – Participation and Benefits

8. *The benefits from enjoying the outdoors should be shared by all of Scotland's people*
 - Opportunities to enjoy the outdoors should be actively promoted both locally and nationally.
 - Greater motivation and confidence to enjoy the outdoors needs to be developed across all sectors of society. Special effort is particularly needed to provide people of all abilities, ethnic minorities and less advantaged communities with a range of opportunities.
 - Continued research and survey work is needed to increase understanding of environmental, social and demographic changes, and their implications for enjoying the outdoors for all groups in society.

Key Priority 2 – Close to where people live

9. *Path networks and greenspace should be developed close to home to provide communities throughout rural and urban Scotland with opportunities to enjoy the outdoors*
 - Access, open space and local transport strategies and core paths plans should be developed and implemented with the active input of local communities to provide a better local network of paths and places for enjoying the outdoors.
 - Safer routes to work, school and local facilities are needed to provide opportunities for healthier lifestyles and everyday contact with the natural world.
 - New development and other land use change should enhance opportunities to enjoy the outdoors rather than erode them.



Key Priority 3 – Promoting Responsible Behaviour

10. *On-going effort is required to influence responsible use of the outdoors through partnership working, education and awareness raising*
 - Continued effort and resources are needed to develop the necessary understanding, skills and capacity among stakeholders. Support for local access forums will be critical to this effort.
 - The Scottish Outdoor Access Code ('the Code') needs to be widely promoted and understood by people who enjoy the outdoors or who manage the land and water over which access rights apply. It needs to be kept under review and updated to make sure the guidance is useful and based on good practice.
 - Through education, training and the provision of opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation, young people in particular should be given the skills, the opportunity, the confidence and an interest in enjoying the outdoors.

Key priority 4 - Better provision and management

11. *Provision for enjoying the outdoors should be well managed, effectively integrated with other land uses, and meet the needs of all interests*
 - Scotland's national and regional countryside infrastructure for outdoor recreation – the National, Regional, Country and Forest Parks and the strategic national and regional routes - require on-going development and investment.
 - Continued commitment is needed to repair and maintain well-trodden paths in our most popular hills and to protect the special qualities of some of our most remote and wild countryside, coasts and places for nature.
 - Effective management of some areas will require special attention and guidance, including places where different user needs will need to be addressed or where concentrations of individual or group activity is causing generic problems for conservation or land management.

Key priority 5 – Valuing the Resource, Developing the Links

12. *The importance of enjoying the outdoors to people's quality of life should be recognised and championed in policy and practice*
- More emphasis should be placed on protecting or sustaining the resources, settings and specific locations which are important for enjoying the outdoors, both locally and nationally.
 - To help deliver social, economic and environmental benefits, the provision of opportunities to enjoy the outdoors should be given greater priority in the funding streams of the public sector and others.
 - Stronger policy links and practice should be developed between healthier and more sustainable lifestyles and access and enjoyment of the outdoors.



DELIVERING THE AGENDA

13. Delivering this agenda is not for SNH alone, but one we share with the Scottish Government and its agencies, local authorities, communities, voluntary organisations and businesses. Developing wider support for this policy statement and agreeing the new work needed to take forward these priorities for action will be essential in the development of this shared agenda for enjoying the outdoors.

14. We have started this process by engaging a range of organisations in the development of this statement. The next step is to prepare with these partners an action plan which sets out specific outcomes and activities for each of the priorities identified above that SNH and others will deliver during the next 3-5 years. These actions will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure progress is being made, and that the benefits from enjoying the outdoors are being shared by more of Scotland's people.

Annex - SNH's role and policy approach

1. Enjoyment of the outdoors is at the heart of SNH's remit. It is difficult to envisage enjoyment of the outdoors that is independent of some natural feature or attribute. Many activities in fact bring people closer to the natural world and SNH has a dual interest in facilitating enjoyment, understanding and responsible use on the one hand and sustaining the natural resource on the other.

SNH will champion people's enjoyment of, and access to, the outdoors. Working with others, we will support efforts to increase participation in outdoor recreation, education and volunteering, and to increase commitment to the sustainable and responsible use of the natural resources these activities depend on. We will seek to ensure that the benefits from enjoying the outdoors are shared across all parts of society, including those with special requirements.

2. SNH's remit is focused on the enjoyment of the natural heritage, though we increasingly recognise the overlap in policy and practice between outdoor recreation and every day journeys for work, school and other local trips. Similarly, Government policy has begun to make more of the positive links between promoting enjoyment of the outdoors and wider social and economic objectives for economic development, health, stronger communities, social inclusion and sustainable transport.

SNH will promote the contribution that enjoying the outdoors can make to economic development, health, stronger communities, social inclusion and sustainable transport. We will continue to develop our understanding of these links and support actions and initiatives which develop and reinforce them.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003

3. SNH has a central role in putting into effect the access legislation, contributing to its success and keeping its outcomes under review.

SNH will work with the Scottish Government to provide advice, to monitor national trends in responsible use, to undertake necessary research and develop good practice and training. We will also promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code ('the Code') and keep its contents under review, advising Ministers on changes to it which may be required.

4. There are some long-standing challenges which need to be addressed, particularly the development and management of path and open space networks, promoting responsible use and supporting land managers. The lead rests with access authorities but SNH together with the other national and local stakeholders many of whom are represented on the local and national Access Forums have an important role to play.

SNH's involvement in local access forums will focus on the opportunities to promote understanding and enjoyment of the natural heritage and providing advice on its care and enhancement, and to promote responsible access and land management practice. We will contribute to the development of core paths plans and provide support to the implementation of wider path and open space networks.

Promoting Enjoyment and Understanding

5. SNH's responsibilities for enjoyment and access to the outdoors complement those SNH has for understanding of the natural heritage and its better care. This relationship is two-way. Enjoying the outdoors is hugely dependent on the quality of the places and landscapes people can visit and use for outdoor recreation. And people develop a better understanding of, and a concern to care for, what they most enjoy. Alongside access rights, the formal provision of paths, places (such National, Regional, Country and Forest Parks, National and Local Nature Reserves) and ranger services has a key role in widening participation in enjoying the outdoors and increasing public enjoyment and understanding of the natural heritage.

Through increasing participation in enjoying the outdoors, SNH can encourage a better understanding of the natural heritage

and help raise people's commitment to care for it. We will actively manage our NNRs to achieve this objective and support others in promoting opportunities for outdoor recreation, education, interpretation and volunteering.

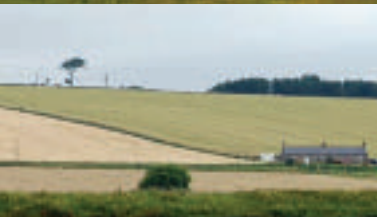
Caring for the Resource

6. People's enjoyment of the outdoors brings many positive benefits to individuals, communities and the natural heritage. But it also has the potential to put pressure on the locations in which it occurs. In a few places, the type or scale of some activities can impact significantly on the needs of others, be they for peace and quiet, for nature or landscape conservation or for land management and other commercial activities. In most cases, these issues can be resolved through education, positive management and the sensitive provision of paths and other facilities.

Where problems arise as a result of people enjoying the outdoors SNH will assist in looking for the solutions that support the continued exercise of the right of responsible access and help to manage the activity in ways which are compatible with the needs of others.

7. To meet our local, national and international commitments, safeguards are occasionally required for the most fragile of our natural and cultural heritage. Resolution of conflicts between outdoor activities will also require active management at times. Through advocacy and continued development of people-centred approaches, we will encourage others to contribute to this, especially in sectors which share the benefits of enjoying the outdoors.

In those few cases where enjoying the outdoors would result in significant adverse impacts on natural heritage interests of national or international importance which cannot be mitigated or avoided, SNH will normally seek to secure the long term care of those interests. We will continue to support this work with appropriate research, guidance, demonstration and discussion with key stakeholders.





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