

Scottish Outdoor Recreation Alliance

DRAFT Manifesto for the outdoors – Holyrood 2021

Scotland's world-renowned landscapes and nature are a fantastic setting for outdoor recreation and enjoyment. Walking and cycling, mountaineering, running, paddling or horse-riding, Scotland offers a wide range of activity for everyone, whatever their ability, all year round. These are supported by our progressive and much-prized access rights, giving everyone the right to be on land or inland water for non-motorised recreation, as long as they do so responsibly.

Being active outdoors is crucial to our physical and mental health and wellbeing, as was recognised when the Scottish Government explicitly allowed outdoor exercise to continue during the strict Covid-19 lockdown period.

In addition, outdoor recreation makes a vital contribution to the nation's economy, particularly in rural areas; these activities can play an important role in supporting a green economic recovery strategy.

Scotland has a good policy framework relating to physical activity and wellbeing, yet we believe that so much more can be done to realise its potential. **We want to ensure that outdoor recreation is fully supported so that everyone across Scotland shares the benefits – and pleasure – of being active in the natural environment.**

We need long term, sustained investment in infrastructure, facilities, organisations, education and skills training, and the national leadership to champion outdoor recreation at all levels so it can fully deliver across many policy areas. This investment will also be crucial in creating and supporting jobs as we re-build local economies after Covid-19.

Our organisations already work hard to support, promote and deliver outdoor recreation to many people in Scotland. But we believe that even with modest increased investment we can make a proportionately greater impact for **everyone's** benefit. We are ready to work with partners and stakeholders to deliver our vision, which needs:

- **An Outdoor Recreation Champion within government to ensure all divisions understand the role outdoor recreation can play in delivering their policies.**
- **Full recognition of the wide ranging and valuable contributions made by outdoor recreation across all of society.**
- **Long-term investment in and support for the sector so that everyone, everywhere can enjoy all the benefits of being active outdoors in a way which respects the environment and nature while continuing to support our economy.**

Benefits to tourism and the economy of outdoor recreation

The value of outdoor recreation by Scottish residents is approximately £2.6 billion each year¹, with another study estimating a value of £600m to the economy from equestrianism alone². This economic activity supports cafés, accommodation, shops and hire centres, outdoor instructors, transport providers and many other businesses, particularly in rural

¹ <https://www.nls.uk/e-serials/Scottish-recreation-survey-annual-summary-report/604.pdf>

² The value of the equine industry to Scotland, 2019 British Horse Society Scotland <https://www.bhs.org.uk/bhs-in-your-area/scotland/resources>

areas. Even 18% of the economic value of the forestry industry in Scotland comes from tourism and recreation³. By way of comparison, golf tourism contributes £286 million⁴ and field sports £155 million annually to the economy⁵.

Recreation is also vital to our tourism industry with VisitScotland estimating that walking tourism alone contributes £1.26 billion to the economy⁶, and around 54% of all tourists enjoy a walk while on holiday⁷. Other studies show leisure cycle tourism is worth £345 million and mountain bike tourism £141 million.⁸ This is generally sustainable, low-impact tourism and there is much potential for growth without damaging our environment, especially in rebuilding the tourism sector post-Covid-19.

Yet to sustain this economic activity there needs to be strategic investment in infrastructure, such as paths, bridges and signage along with facilities like toilets and car parks and public transport hubs. This will help to manage visitors more wisely, especially at the most popular sites, and avoid damage to local communities, the environment and Scotland's reputation as a destination. Maintenance of local paths, woodlands and blue and green spaces is also vital to help us be active close to home; by contrast SNH has estimated that while upland paths contribute £110 million annually to local communities, they currently need £27-30 million investment⁹. All this investment would support jobs for ranger services, path builders, outdoor instructors and many other small businesses. In addition, access staff in local authorities and national parks need to be properly resourced so that they are able to manage, promote and maintain access and remove obstructions, as well as to educate everyone on their responsibilities.

The government provides £8.1 million in the block grant to 32 local authorities to cover access¹⁰, and there is some additional funding for outdoor activities from SNH, **sportscotland** and the national parks. Further limited investment has come as part of the Rural Tourism Infrastructure Fund, agricultural funding and woodland grants, but these are not sufficient to achieve our vision for Scotland. By contrast, this year there is £100 million in the Scottish budget for active travel, which itself is only around 3% of the transport budget. This £100m is welcome, but while some routes may be used for both leisure and transport purposes, there are many other areas which this funding doesn't often cover, especially peri-urban greenspaces and in rural Scotland.

We recognise that public funding will be constrained during the economic recovery period following the Covid-19 pandemic, but we believe that the investment needed to properly deliver our vision is modest in governmental spending terms and brings proportionately high benefits which help to build a better quality of life for all. As well as continued core public funding to local authorities and national parks, sources could include elements of future agricultural, forestry, tourism and rural development schemes, along with exploring creative opportunities to raise tourism revenue.

³ <https://forestry.gov.scot/forestry-business/economic-contribution-of-forestry>

⁴ <https://www.insider.co.uk/news/golf-tourism-ace-hole-scottish-10261778>

⁵ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-36989425>

⁶ <https://www.insider.co.uk/news/walking-tourism-generates-126billion-scottish-10922596>

⁷ <https://www.visitscotland.org/binaries/content/assets/dot-org/pdf/research-papers/scotland-visitor-survey-2015-16-overview.pdf>

⁸ <http://transformscotland.org.uk/blog/2018/06/25/new-report-sets-out-routes-to-growth-for-cycle-tourism-economy/>

⁹ <https://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/land-and-sea-management/managing-access-and-recreation/recreation-policy/managing-upland-paths>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/grant-aided-expenditure/>

Benefits to our health and wellbeing of outdoor recreation

Outdoor activity has a huge role to play in improving our mental health after the difficult experience of the Coronavirus pandemic. Much of this activity is free and doesn't need any special equipment or cost to individuals. It can be carried out safely outdoors by individuals, or even in groups if distancing is observed, with the social aspects and camaraderie providing great support to many people. Many others will find personal solace and comfort exploring Scotland's wilder places.

We know that many Scots aren't active enough for their health. **Physical inactivity contributes to over 2,500 premature deaths each year and costs the NHS in Scotland around £94.1 million annually**¹¹. It is now recognised that lack of physical activity is a risk factor in a number of diseases from type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart attacks and some common cancers. While good progress is being made in addressing some health issues, having a population which is more physically active could decrease the risk of dying early by 30%. Being active in the natural environment brings particular benefits, with a 30% reduction in the risk of depression achievable too¹².

In terms of equality, those living in the most deprived areas of Scotland visit the outdoors less often than in the least deprived areas (45% visit once a week as compared to 68% in more affluent areas), while 18% of those living in the most deprivation never visit the outdoors, which compares to 5% of those in least deprived areas¹³. Sadly, the wealthiest fifth of adults in Scotland are three times more likely to hill-walk or ramble than the poorest fifth¹⁴.

We need to ensure the health benefits are spread across all of society, with those living in deprived areas included and encouraged to take part. Together we are calling for our politicians to commit to working to ensure that outdoor recreation reaches its full potential in Scotland. As well as investment in outdoor infrastructure this can be done by:

- **Guaranteeing that every primary and secondary school pupil has at least one week away at an outdoor centre**, as well as taking regular classroom lessons outdoors. This restored commitment to Outdoor Education will play a crucial role in helping young people relate to nature and each other; and to understand and respect their access rights and responsibilities.
- **Expanding ranger services** to engage both adults and children with the natural world in formal and informal settings and learn about their responsibilities;
- **Increasing support for outdoor skills training** to ensure people enjoy their activities safely and learn important life skills such as working in a team and decision-making;
- **Increasing investment in activities suitable for older people or those with a disability**, such as health walks or riding groups, helping to reduce social isolation.
- A focus on **supporting people who live in deprived areas and BAME communities to engage with the outdoors**.

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, we have been pleased that the Scottish Government recognised the importance of daily exercise to maintain personal resilience and support physical and mental health and wellbeing.

Yet there is a danger that as efforts turn to rebuilding the economy, our communities and our society in the aftermath of the crisis, this understanding is lost amid so many other priorities.

¹¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/lets-scotland-walking-national-walking-strategy/pages/3/>

¹² <https://www.fsem.ac.uk/reduce-depression-and-cognitive-decline-by-up-to-30-with-regular-exercise/>

¹³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2018-scottish-household-survey/>

¹⁴ <https://www.ramblers.org.uk/news/latest-news/2019/november/major-research-highlights-what-stops-more-people-walking-in-their-free-time-in-scotland.aspx>

Outdoor recreation lacks a specific home within government, falling between different divisions – including natural resources, sports, health and physical activity, tourism, transport and communities. That's why we believe the appointment of an outdoor recreation champion will help to ensure that the value and potential of the sector is not overlooked. Even a modest level of additional investment will lead to a greater impact.

We want to see growth in the outdoor recreation sector and are calling for:

- **An Outdoor Recreation Champion within government to ensure all divisions understand the role outdoor recreation can play in delivering their policies.**
- **Full recognition of the wide ranging and valuable contributions made by outdoor recreation across all of society.**
- **Long-term investment in and support for the sector so that everyone, everywhere can enjoy all the benefits of being active outdoors in a way which respects the environment and nature while continuing to support our economy.**

This manifesto has been developed by the following organisations:



The manifesto is also supported by:

- Scottish Countryside Rangers Association
- Scottish Orienteering

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