



Scottish Outdoor Recreation Alliance
Manifesto for the outdoors
Holyrood 2021





Building on what we have

Scotland's world-renowned landscapes, waters and nature are a fantastic setting for outdoor recreation and enjoyment.

Whether you're walking, wheeling, mountaineering, running, paddling or horse-riding, Scotland offers a wide range of outdoor opportunities for everyone, whatever their ability, all year round. These are supported by Scotland's progressive and much-prized access rights.

The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 remains one of the stand-out achievements of the devolved parliament. It gives us all the right to be on land or inland water for non-motorised recreation, as long as we do so responsibly.

The Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened our understanding that being active outdoors is crucial to our physical and mental health and wellbeing. The outdoor sector also makes a vital contribution to the nation's economy, particularly in rural areas. Support for these activities can play an important role as part of a green economic recovery from Covid.

Scotland has a good policy framework for physical activity and wellbeing, yet we believe that so much more can be done to realise our sector's 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.

To make that a reality, we need long term, strategic investment in infrastructure, facilities, organisations, ranger services, 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.





Delivering our vision for Scotland

Our organisations work hard to support, promote and deliver outdoor recreation to tens of thousands of people in Scotland from many different backgrounds. But we believe that even with modest increased investment we can make a proportionally 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 that 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.

Outdoor recreation lacks a single, specific home within government yet it could help many divisions deliver their agendas, including environment, sport, health and physical activity, tourism, transport and communities.

An outdoor recreation champion will help to ensure that the value and potential of the sector is not overlooked.





Getting outdoors – for health and wellbeing

Outdoor activity has a huge role to play in improving both our physical and mental health. Much of this activity is free and without the need for specialist equipment or major cost.

It can be carried out safely outdoors by individuals, or in groups with social distancing where necessary.

The social aspects and camaraderie provide great support to many people, while many others will find personal solace and comfort exploring Scotland's wilder places – as well as their local parks and greenspace.

- We all need to be more active, more often. Physical inactivity contributes to over [2,500 premature deaths](#) each year and costs the NHS in Scotland around £94.1 million annually. It is a risk factor in a number of diseases from type 2 diabetes, stroke, heart attacks and some common cancers.
- Access to the outdoors is not equal. People living in the most deprived areas of Scotland [visit the outdoors less often](#) than those in the least deprived areas (45% visit once a week as compared to 68% in more affluent areas). The wealthiest fifth of adults are [three times more likely to hillwalk](#) or ramble than the poorest fifth.





Ensuring everyone benefits

The benefits of outdoor recreation need to be spread across all of society. This can be done by:

- **Guaranteeing 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 also to understand and respect their access rights and responsibilities. This will be valuable throughout their lives and for future generations.
- **Expanding ranger services** to engage both adults and children with the natural world in formal and informal settings where they can 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.







Getting outdoors – and helping the economy

The value of outdoor recreation by Scottish residents is approximately [£2.6 billion each year](#), which supports businesses and jobs – cafes, accommodation, shops and hire centres, outdoor instructors, rangers, transport providers – particularly in rural areas.

Recreation is vital to our tourism industry with VisitScotland estimating that walking tourism alone contributes [£1.26 billion to the economy](#). Other studies show leisure [cycle tourism](#) is worth £345 million and mountain bike tourism £141 million, with the value of [equestrian](#) expenditure at £355 million. This is generally sustainable, low-impact activity and there is considerable potential for growth without negatively impacting our environment and rural communities, especially in rebuilding the tourism sector post-Covid-19.

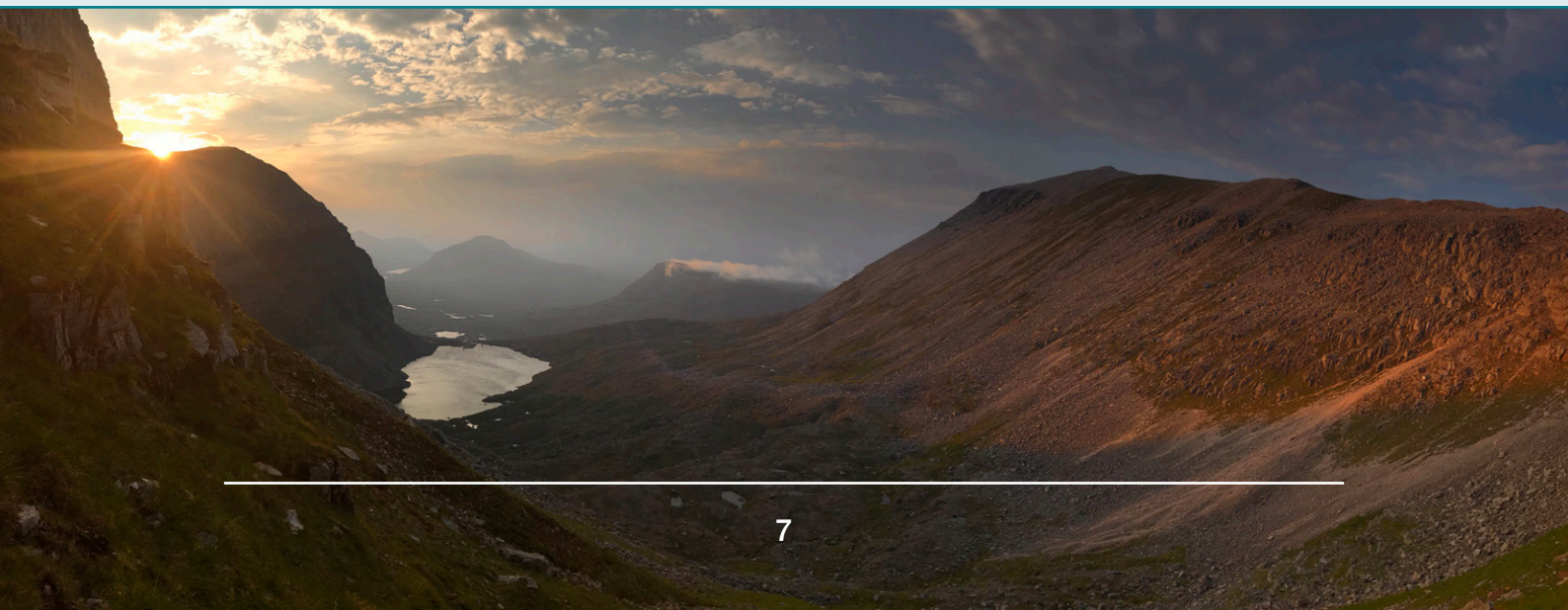
Supporting a green recovery

We recognise that public funding will be constrained in the coming years, but we believe that the investment needed to properly deliver our vision is proportionate in governmental spending terms and is preventative spend, helping to build a better quality of life for all.

Currently core public funding for outdoor access for local authorities and national parks supports key staff posts like access officers and ranger services. These roles are crucial for ensuring access rights are upheld, that people understand their responsibilities under the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and for having a strategic overview of access infrastructure. Yet staff numbers have [been drastically cut](#) in recent years. Just 36.5 full-time Access Officers now work across Scotland; down 27% within five years.

Other important funding sources are within agricultural, forestry, tourism and rural development schemes. We'd like to see these allocations increased. We also recognise the need to explore creative opportunities to raise tourism revenue as well as reducing the carbon impacts of recreation.

We support the creation of a standalone fund for recreation provision, including paths, signage and route development as well as maintenance and repair. This fund could also include an element of job creation and skills training to ensure the money supports a green recovery.



This manifesto has been developed by the following organisations:



The manifesto is also supported by:



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