

Recreation and amenity

Scotland's natural and historic environment provides opportunities for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities and attracts millions of visitors each year.



Summary

Scotland's natural and historic environment provides a fantastic backdrop for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities. These can include simple pleasures like walking the dog or visiting the park, visits to historic buildings and sites and activity-based pursuits like mountain biking, climbing and kayaking. The environment also provides opportunities for environmental and heritage education and volunteering. Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 gave the right of responsible access to most land and inland water, providing people in Scotland with even greater freedom to enjoy the outdoors.

Introduction

People enjoy and are inspired by the outdoors in many different ways – from the simple tonic of breathing fresh air and enjoying familiar landmarks, views or heritage sites, through to experiencing the peace and quiet of the natural world or the physical challenge and excitement to be found there.

Outdoor recreation activities include informal family outings and picnics, more specialist pursuits such as mountain biking, climbing, kayaking or wind surfing, which may require the use of dedicated equipment or infrastructure, and visits to historic buildings, gardens and sites. Outdoor recreation can be enjoyed in a countryside, urban or marine environment and in any number of settings, such as parks, woods, beaches, mountains, cliffs, lochs and rivers.

In many outdoor areas, particularly in some of the country's more remote and wild areas, little or no additional provision is required for visitors. Elsewhere, formal provision of paths, ranger services, interpretation and places managed explicitly for outdoor recreation, and located close to residential areas, provide a range of recreational opportunities for new, less confident or less mobile users. These places include public parks, gardens and other green spaces, local nature reserves, country and regional parks and historic gardens, sites and buildings. Managed places that are further from large population centres provide additional opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors and include national parks, forests and national nature reserves.

Why outdoor leisure and recreation is important

Visiting the outdoors can help deliver many social, economic and environmental benefits. In recognition of this contribution, a key target for the Scottish Government is to '[Increase people's use of Scotland's outdoors](#)', and this has been measured since 2006.

The main benefits of visiting the outdoors are recognised as:

Improving health and well-being: walking is recognised as the most cost-effective means of improving physical health. Enjoying the outdoors and participating in challenging activities can also contribute to mental health and well-being, by building self-confidence in assessing risk and taking responsibility for oneself and others.

Increasing understanding of the natural world: participation in outdoor recreation and activities such as volunteering provides opportunities for people to learn more about the natural world, to gain a sense of responsibility and to care for a resource of value to the whole community, creating a sense of community cohesion.

Increasing understanding of our cultural heritage: visits to historic attractions and sites can help provide a sense of place and cultural identity and help to ensure we can confidently hand on these assets to the next generation. Visitors also have the opportunity to appreciate and learn about Scotland's history.

Contributing to the economy: in 2011, people living in Scotland spent an estimated [£2.7 billion](#) on visits to the outdoors. Tourists from outside Scotland, inspired by our natural and historic environment, also make a significant contribution to our economy.

Social inclusion: the outdoors can offer opportunities for everyone and appropriate promotion and education, tailored facilities and public transport provision can improve inclusion.

Walking also contributes to developing sustainable travel; making everyday journeys on foot or by bike can help address the issues of congestion, pollution and climate change associated with car dependency.

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Description of the recreation environment



Description of the outdoor recreation environment

Scotland's outdoor environment offers a diversity of experience. It includes mountains, moorland, farmland, forests, wood, rivers, lochs and reservoirs, beaches and the coast, open spaces in towns and cities as well as historic monuments, buildings and sites.

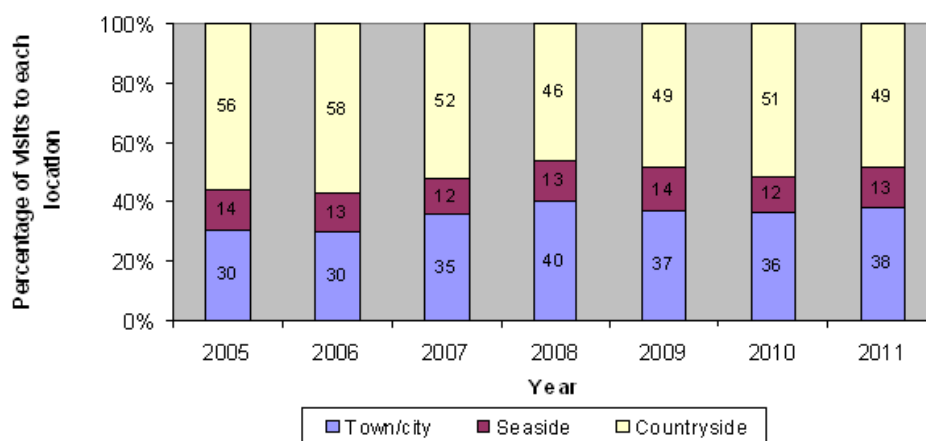
Visiting the outdoors

Frequency of visits

In 2011, [the Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that 83% of adults in Scotland made at least one visit to the outdoors for recreation, a statistically significant increase compared with figures recorded between 2006 (the baseline year for these data) and 2009, which were in the of range 79–80%. Just under half (46%) of adults in Scotland visited the outdoors for recreation at least once a week in 2011, down slightly on 2010 (48%), although the longer-term trend for weekly visits remains stable.

Outdoor recreation takes place in a variety of settings (Figure 1). The countryside accounted for around half of all outdoor visits in 2011 (49%), whereas visits made to and within towns and cities (including visits to parks and other urban open spaces) accounted for 38% of the total (up from 30% in 2004).

Figure 1: Type of environment for outdoor recreation visits 2004–2011.

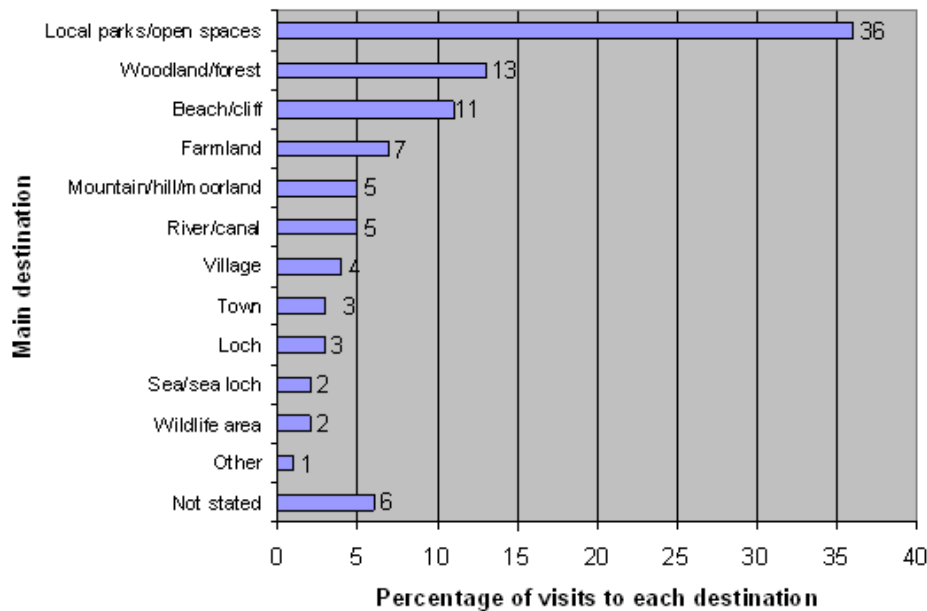


Source: [Scottish Recreation Survey](#).

In 2011 the [Greenspace Scotland Public Attitudes Survey](#) estimated that 78% of Scottish adults living in towns and cities live within a 10-minute walk of their local green space, and that more than half (54%) use this space on a weekly basis for recreation (down from 63% in 2009). Improved access to good-quality urban green space, along with improvements in the provision and promotion of paths (especially paths close to home), is likely to play a key role in increasing recreation in urban areas in future.

As in previous years, local parks/open spaces were the most popular destination for outdoor visits in 2011 (Figure 2). They were the main destination of 36% of all visits made by adults living in Scotland and the main destination of 63% of all visits made in towns and cities. Visits to woodlands/forests (the main destination of 13% of all visits) and beaches/cliffs (the main destination of 11% of all visits) were the next most popular.

Figure 2: Main destination of outdoor visits 2011.



Note: % do not sum to 100% due to rounding. Source: [Scottish Recreation Survey](#).

National parks

Scotland's two national parks, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs (established 2002) and the Cairngorms (established 2003) were created under the National Parks (Scotland) Act to safeguard areas of outstanding and diverse landscapes, habitats and communities.

Together, the national parks offer visitors and local communities a wide variety of opportunities to enjoy our natural and cultural heritage. These include walking and cycling, mountain biking and climbing, kayaking, horse riding and visits to historic and cultural properties and sites.

Paths and routes

Paths and routes encourage access to, and enjoyment and understanding of, our natural heritage. They can also help safeguard the interests of land managers and help manage access by reducing impacts on wildlife, habitats and landscapes.

The development of more accessible routes close to residential areas is essential for improving outdoor access for a wide section of the population, including those with disabilities, older people, people with pushchairs and those who feel less confident about visiting the outdoors.

Paths and trails for all abilities, such as those found on a number of Scotland's national nature reserves, improve access to the countryside for everyone, as does being able to source information about the accessibility of a path before arriving on site. The Fieldfare Trust, a UK charity, works with people with disabilities and countryside managers to improve access to the countryside for everyone. The Trust's [Phototrails](#) website allows users to view countryside routes through a series of photos and descriptions of path features, allowing disabled visitors to decide if a trail is likely to be accessible to them. With support from Countryside for All and a national advisory group, the Trust has developed a set of [Physical Access Standards](#) to meet the needs of path users and to provide best practice standards for service providers. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)'s 2011 research on [Path Attributes](#) explores how best to provide information describing the physical characteristics of a path to allow potential users to decide if it is likely to be suitable for them – and demonstrates the challenges in reaching consensus on moving towards the adoption of a consistent methodology.

In 2011, the [Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that 76% of visits to the outdoors for recreation involved the use of a path or network of paths and 56% involved the use of a path with signposting or waymarking.

In 2003, the Scottish Paths Record estimated that there were around 84,000 km of paths in Scotland, including:

- community paths (such as core path networks, rights of way, local footways and cycleways);
- long-distance routes;
- the national cycle network;
- heritage paths;
- upland paths;
- other types of paths such as farm, forestry and estate roads, canal tow paths, coastal and riverside paths.

Over the last decade the path network in Scotland has been improved. Many paths have been created, additional long-distance routes have been established and many popular mountain paths have been successfully restored. Scottish Government monitoring of the access authorities indicates that, as at March 2011, there were 21,177 km of signposted or waymarked paths in Scotland.

Core paths networks

A core paths network is a basic network of routes provided by the 32 local authorities and two national park authorities (i.e. access authorities), which gives the public reasonable access throughout the area. The core paths planning process, begun in February 2005, is now nearing completion.

As at March 2011:

- 20 out of the 34 access authorities had adopted a core paths plan, covering 8,320 km of core paths;
- of these, 4,929 km (59%) were signposted or waymarked and 3,770 km (45%) were maintained by the access authority.

Rights of way

A right of way is a route that has been used by the general public for at least 20 years, links two public places (usually public roads) and follows a more or less defined route. [the National Catalogue of Rights of Way](#) records almost 7,500 rights of way, covering a total of more than 15,000 km.

Long-distance routes (LDRs)

Long-distance routes are routes on which the public can make extensive journeys on foot, cycle or horse and which are wholly, or mostly, off-road. There are four officially designated long-distance routes in Scotland, with a total length of 743 km. In 2010, [Developing the Network of Longer Distance Routes](#) identified a further 29 LDRs (i.e. routes of 32 km or more that are signed, maintained and promoted to some extent), with a total length of 2,797 km, as well as an additional eight routes with a total length of 678 km at an advanced stage of development or planning. In 2013, 23 of these routes, covering 2,400 km of well-managed paths, are being marketed as [Scotland's Great Trails](#).

National Cycle Network

The national cycle network in Scotland provides more than 2,400 km of traffic-free, quiet lane and on-road cycling routes around the country, taking in all of Scotland's major cities as well as more remote areas of natural beauty.

Heritage Paths

Heritage paths are old paths or roads, once used for a specific purpose. They can include, for example, roman roads, drove roads, pilgrimage paths and shieling paths.

Upland Paths

Much work has been undertaken to provide well-managed footpaths in Scotland's uplands to prevent erosion and protect the fragile mountain environment.

Recreation activities

Walking

Walking, ranging from short, local walks to longer-distance walks and hillwalking, is the most popular outdoor activity enjoyed by adults in Scotland – and is the main activity on at least seven out of ten of all outdoor visits each year. In 2011, [the Scottish Recreation Survey](#) estimated that more than half of walking trips included a dog (59%). Walking is also a popular pastime for people taking a holiday or short break in Scotland. In 2011, the [Scotland Visitor Survey](#) estimated that 45% of summer visitors in Scotland took a short walk and 35% took a longer walk or hike during their visit. In 2005, [The Walker's View of Walking](#) in Scotland found that holidaymakers rate the Scottish walking experience very favourably, highlighting in particular the natural environment, the diversity and quality of walks, the supporting infrastructure and the opportunities to experience our culture, history and people.

Mountain biking

Scotland's outstanding natural environment and the availability throughout the country of both constructed and natural routes also make it one of the best destinations in the world for mountain biking. Specially constructed trail facilities, such as the 7stanes network in the south of Scotland and centres such as Laggan Wolftrax and Learnie Red Rock in the north, attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year as well as producing significant economic benefits for local communities. The Economic Value of Mountain Biking in Scotland¹ estimates the total number of mountain biking visits made in Scotland each year at more than 1.3 million.

Water-based activities

With thousands of kilometres of coastline, over 800 islands, numerous sea and inland lochs and whitewater rivers, Scotland's renowned water environment appeals to both sailors and paddlers. A recent audit undertaken by the Royal Yachting Association Scotland (RYAS) indicated that 16,356 adults and 38,960 junior and youth members currently participate in sailing activities in Scotland. Although much of Scotland's Canadian canoeing and kayaking activity is informal and takes place outside of organised clubs, membership figures provided by the Scottish Canoe Association (SCA) indicate a growing level of interest in the sport, with both the number of member clubs (85 in 2009) and the number of individual members (2,600 in 2009) up by around 20% on the previous 4 years. The Great Glen Canoe Trail, a 95-km route through the Great Glen from Fort William to Inverness, was formally opened in March 2012.

Scotland also plays host to a number of watersports events each year including the Tiree Wave Classic, a windsurfing national championship event which attracts some of the world's best windsurfers to the island each autumn.

Scotland's beaches and coasts also provide endless opportunities for family outings and other informal activities such as walking, paddling, swimming and exploring rock pools.

Equestrian activities

Membership of the British Horse Society Scotland (BHSS) has grown by around 22% in recent years – from 4,095 in 2006 to more than 5,000 in 2012, accounting for 7% of total British membership (71,000).

In 2011, the British Equestrian Trade Association's [National Equestrian Survey](#) estimated that 3.5 million people in Britain had ridden during 2010–2011, with 1.6 million riding at least once a month. Equine passport data along with data from three Horse Counts undertaken since 19932 suggests that there are currently more than 100,000 horses in Scotland. Using BHSS membership figures as a guide, and assuming a 7% share of 2011 National Equestrian Survey activity in Scotland, we derive an estimate of 245,000 riders, almost half of whom ride at least once a month.

Golf

Scotland has one of the highest golf participation rates in the world with 240,000 golf club members in 2012, representing 5% of the population. The 2011 [Scottish Household Survey](#) estimated that 12% of men and 2% of women had played golf at one of the country's 580 courses in the 4 weeks prior to interview. Known throughout the world as the home of golf, the country also offers a unique experience to visiting golfers, with many high-quality courses, including 117 links courses, often set in spectacular landscapes.

Fishing

Scotland offers extensive opportunities for world-class game and coarse angling on its rivers and lochs and sea angling from its shoreline or from a boat. [The Scottish Household Survey](#) Culture and Sport module 2007/2008 estimated that around 2% of adults in Scotland go fishing, and Visit Scotland's [Consumer Fishing Market](#) research, undertaken in 2007, indicates that the majority of this activity (71% of trips) is game angling.

Culture and history

Scotland's distinctive character has been shaped by over 10,000 years of human activity. Past generations have left their mark in the form of thousands of historic monuments, buildings and sites located in the countryside and towns. These sites attract millions of visitors each year, providing opportunities for people to enjoy the outdoors and to learn more about our history and culture.

The 2011 [Scottish Household Survey](#) estimates that 21% of adults had visited a historic or archaeological site in the 12 months prior to interview. Opportunities for volunteering and other initiatives to widen participation (e.g. volunteer guides at sites, participation in initiatives such as the [Adopt-a-Monument](#) scheme and heritage open days) will ensure that people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities continue to enjoy and engage with our [Historic Environment](#) in future.

Further results on cultural attendance and participation are available from the [Scottish Household Survey](#) 2011.

References

- ¹. *The Economic Value of Mountain Biking in Scotland. A report for Scottish Enterprise. EKOS Ltd, 2009.*
- ². *BHS Scotland Horse Count 1993, 'A demographic approach to equine disease in the Northern UK' 1997, 'The Equine Population of the UK' 2001.*

Pressures affecting the recreation environment



People's enjoyment of the outdoors brings many positive benefits and it is likely that increased participation in outdoor recreation and contact with nature helps foster an interest in and a concern for the natural and historic environment. However, outdoor recreation also has the potential to put pressures on the locations in which it occurs. Recreational disturbance of wildlife, historic buildings, sites and gardens, the erosion of footpaths and other sensitive sites and conflict between those exercising access rights and those who own or manage the land or water over which access rights apply, occasionally can occur. These disturbances and conflicts can generally be resolved through positive management, education and the provision of paths and other facilities.

Development can, in some instances, adversely affect the amenity value of the outdoor environment in terms of visual impact. Well-sited developments, on the other hand, can offer additional outdoor recreation and learning opportunities

Climate change has the potential to affect the feasibility of some types of outdoor activity in future, particularly those reliant on snow, ice and water, as well as impacting on access to and the availability of particular sites.

Consequences of a change in the recreation environment



The health benefits of a physically active lifestyle and their role in reducing the incidence of chronic health conditions are well documented³ as is the high prevalence of inactivity in Scotland⁴ Increasing the proportion of adults visiting the outdoors for recreation will help deliver [UK – wide targets](#) for physical activity.

Increasingly, connections are also being made between mental well-being and visits to the outdoors. *Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours*⁵ for example, reports that those who visit green space are more likely to be satisfied with life than those who never do.

An improved understanding of our natural and historic heritage is likely to foster an interest and concern, helping to safeguard this heritage for future generations. Delivering opportunities for recreation, volunteering and education is particularly important in this context, especially among young people, in whom early involvement in the outdoors as a focus for social and physical activity has the potential to generate a lasting interest or commitment into adult life.

The Scottish Recreation Survey estimates that visits to the outdoors made by people living in Scotland generated around £2.7 billion in expenditure in 2011. *The Economic Value of Mountain Biking in Scotland* estimates that mountain biking alone generates around £119 million per annum and predicts that it will grow over the next 5 years, with potential additional revenue estimated to be around £36 million per annum. Events such as the Mountain Bike World Cup and Mountain Bike and Trials World Championships, held regularly at Nevis Range near Fort William, attract crowds of around 20,000 as well as worldwide TV audiences. *Scottish Golf Tourism Market Analysis*⁶ estimates that golf tourism (not including day visitors, most of whom are Scottish residents) is worth almost £220 million annually.

Our outdoor environment and the opportunity to take part in a range of outdoor recreational activities is of great importance in attracting visitors from outside Scotland and the contribution made to the economy by tourism is significant.

Alongside these positive impacts, consideration must also be given to minimising and managing potentially negative impacts. As discussed, these can include disturbance of wildlife, pressure on historic sites, the erosion of footpaths and other sensitive sites, traffic congestion in popular scenic areas, especially those close to large centres of population, and instances of irresponsible behaviour (e.g. littering, dogs not kept under proper control).

References

- ³. Telford, R.D. (2007). *Low physical activity and obesity: causes of chronic disease or simply predictors?* *Medicine and Science in Sport and Exercise*.
- ⁴. Shaw, A., McMunn, A., Fields, J. (eds). (2000) *The Scottish Health Survey 1998*. Edinburgh: The Stationary Office.
- ⁵. *Scottish Environmental Attitudes and Behaviours, Scottish Government Rural and Environmental Analytical Services Division, 2009*.
- ⁶. *Scottish Golf Tourism Market Analysis. Report to Scottish Enterprise. June 2009. SQWconsulting*.

Response by society



[Enjoying the outdoors](#) is important in its own right but it can also help deliver many social, economic and environmental benefits. Recognition of the role of the natural and historic environment in providing recreational opportunities and delivering benefits for human health and well-being, as well as the potential for negative impacts, has led to a number of responses by society.

The Scottish Government has a key target to '[Increase people's use of Scotland's outdoors](#)', which has been measured since 2006. In addition, there are increasingly strong policy links being made between outdoor recreation, access, health and well-being, sustainable transport, education and tourism. On-going strong partnership working across the public, voluntary and private sectors and further research into the policy links will help to ensure that the benefits of outdoor recreation are supported in both policy and practice.

SNH's policy statement, [Enjoying the Outdoors](#), sets out a vision in which everyone in Scotland is able to enjoy the outdoors as part of their daily life. An on-going programme of research will help those involved in providing opportunities for outdoor recreation to understand the differences in Scotland's people and is key to encouraging participation in people from the broadest range of backgrounds, abilities, cultures and needs.

Access to the outdoor environment is key to achieving the benefits on offer and this has been greatly enhanced by the introduction of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, which established the right of responsible access to most land and inland water in Scotland – and also new responsibilities for visitors to the outdoors and for land managers. These rights and responsibilities, which came into effect in February 2005, are set out and explained in detail in the [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) (the Code).

Responsibility for promoting the Code is shared between SNH and Scotland's 34 access authorities (32 local authorities and the two national park authorities), which also have a duty to uphold and facilitate access rights at a local level.

A national access forum (NAF) represents the views of both recreational users and land managers and will continue to advise SNH and others on national issues relating to the implementation of access rights. Local access forums play a role in the development and management of access rights at a local level.

Research indicates that awareness of the Code by the general public, active recreational users and land managers increased significantly between 2002 and 2008. SNH's on-going programme of communications and education work will continue to help raise awareness and understanding of the Code's messages. This includes communications targeted at key audiences, for example young people, campers and dog-owners, and developed in response to specific issues. A series of good practice guides offer guidance on responsible behaviour for participants in individual activities (e.g. canoeing, horse-riding, cycling) and at specific sites (e.g. beaches, riverbanks, woods, fields with animals).

Alongside access rights, the formal provision of paths, ranger services and places managed explicitly for outdoor recreation will widen the opportunities for participation, help address mobility constraints arising from the economic or environmental costs involved, and increase public enjoyment and understanding of the natural world. Forestry Commission Scotland, for instance, actively encourages the use of the national forest estate by walkers, cyclists and horse riders, and has developed path networks and mountain bike trail centres throughout the country.

The current range of parks, reserves and other recreational destinations has been established for a range of different purposes, and with little overall co-ordination. This has resulted in a patchwork of provision in which some geographical areas and sectors of the community are better served than others. A number of current initiatives will create opportunities to increase the extent and accessibility of these managed places:

- national planning policy encourages local authorities to prepare open space strategies to guide future provision within their areas, in particular through the planning system;
- the Central Scotland Green Network (CSGN), a large-scale interconnected system of natural spaces and linking routes and corridors, is being developed to enhance landscapes, wildlife and recreational opportunities in central Scotland. One of the goals proposed for the CSGN is to deliver a network of high-quality routes for active travel and recreation;
- core path networks: local and national park authorities are now concluding the planning phase of core path development. Core paths support a range of policy agendas, including health, active travel and sustainable tourism;
- a strategic approach to the future development of mountain biking in Scotland has been taken with the production of a [National Strategic Framework for the Sustainable Development of Mountain Biking in Scotland](#), involving key stakeholders at both local and national levels.

The Scottish Government is committed to promoting and supporting the historic environment in recognition of the benefits that participation brings, to both individuals and communities. The [Scottish Historic Environment Policy](#) sets out Scottish ministers' policies on issues such as access to historic sites, the promotion of Scotland as a place to live and work, the generation of income and jobs and the important recreational opportunities afforded through volunteering and participation in Scotland's historic environment.

A number of initiatives illustrate the ways in which potentially negative impacts can be managed and minimised. The presence of ranger services, for example, can help connect people with the places they visit and spark a greater understanding of the natural environment. A code of conduct, like the [Scottish Marine Wildlife Watching Code](#), designed for all those who watch marine wildlife around Scotland, raises awareness of the need for responsible behaviour and offers practical guidance for both visitors and commercial operators. [The Mountains for People project](#), launched by the National Trust for Scotland in April 2009, aims to conserve and repair some of the most challenging upland routes in the Trust's care in Torridon, Glencoe and on Arran. The [Cairngorm Outdoor Access Trust](#), a charity promoting sustainable access to the Cairngorms, is also working to repair eroded mountain paths in the area, ensuring that access can be sustained without damage to the landscape and environment. And the Hillphones and the [Heading for the Scottish Hills](#) pilot web service will help walkers plan routes that are unlikely to disturb deer stalking.

The SNH guidance document, [Good Practice During Windfarm Construction](#), discusses good practice regarding positive provision for access as part of windfarm developments and maintaining and managing access safely during the planning and construction of windfarms. The provision of ranger services and paths and trails for walking, cycling and horse riding at windfarm sites can provide additional recreational opportunities for local populations, as demonstrated at Whitelee windfarm on Eaglesham moor near Glasgow.

[Paths and Climate Change](#), SNH's 2011 investigation into the potential implications of climate change on the planning, design, construction and management of paths in Scotland evaluates the potential impacts of predicted climate change trends on path features and considers possible adaptations to minimise these effects and protect the significant investment already made.