

# ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEERING IN SCOTLAND

## SNH STATEMENT OF POLICY AND PRIORITIES

Environmental volunteering<sup>1</sup> provides opportunities for people to become closely involved in the natural heritage, learn more about it and take action for its future. Volunteering offers opportunities for people to improve their well-being, for example by gaining new skills and experience and improving their physical and mental health and well-being. It improves quality of life within the wider community by helping to create and maintain places where people want to live and visit and by developing a shared sense of ownership and responsibility.

Whilst some choose to volunteer close to home, others take the chance to spend time working in a new environment, often contributing to the care and protection of Scotland's special places for landscape and nature. Other volunteers help out in offices and visitor centres, share their skills and expertise with others, or support environmental campaigns.

By working with others to promote the right volunteering opportunities, we aim to involve a wide range of people in taking action for the natural heritage, including those from currently under-represented or disadvantaged groups. By promoting and supporting good practice in volunteer management we aim to ensure that all volunteers enjoy, and benefit from, their involvement in volunteering.

Our vision for environmental volunteering is that:

**Through environmental volunteering, more people in Scotland will take positive action for the natural heritage, and in doing so will enjoy benefits to their quality of life and well-being.**

To achieve this vision we will work with others towards the following outcomes:

- 1. Through volunteering more people take responsibility for the management of the natural heritage, particularly close to their homes or at Scotland's special places.**
- 2. Volunteering in the natural heritage contributes effectively to realising benefits for individuals, communities, and the natural heritage.**
- 3. SNH offers high quality volunteering opportunities, both at National Nature Reserves and elsewhere.**
- 4. People from all backgrounds take up volunteering opportunities.**
- 5. Effective systems have been developed to support volunteering in the natural heritage.**

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<sup>1</sup> The Scottish Volunteering Strategy defines volunteering as '*the giving of time and energy through a third party which can bring measurable benefits to the volunteer, individual beneficiaries, groups and organisations, communities the environment and society at large. It is a choice undertaken of one's own free will, and is not motivated primarily for financial gain or for a wage or salary*'.

To meet these outcomes, we have identified the following key objectives. These will be taken forward through the development of SNH policy and procedures, advice and guidance, grant support and partnership working:

**1. Through volunteering more people take responsibility for the management of the natural heritage, particularly close to their homes or at Scotland's special places.**

- Develop environmental volunteering as a basis for increased community management of the natural heritage.
- Develop more opportunities for volunteers to support the conservation of nationally and locally important landscapes and wildlife.
- Make information about volunteering opportunities widely available and accessible.

**2. Volunteering in the natural heritage contributes effectively to realising benefits for individuals, communities, and the natural heritage**

- Strengthen and promote the role of volunteering in improving people's health and well-being.
- Develop links between volunteering, creating stronger communities and the promotion of responsibility and citizenship amongst young people.
- Develop the role of volunteering in learning about the natural heritage and its management, and particularly in meeting gaps in natural heritage related skills.

**3. SNH offers high quality volunteering opportunities, both at National Nature Reserves and elsewhere.**

- Ensure that our procedures for recruiting, supporting, managing and training volunteers meet good practice guidelines.
- Increase the number and diversity of volunteers working on SNH managed NNRs.
- Examine opportunities to increase the range of volunteer roles within SNH, including in offices and in biological recording.
- Encourage our staff to get involved in volunteering within their working life.

**4. People from all backgrounds take up volunteering opportunities.**

- Build commitment to volunteering, and the environment, from a young age by increasing opportunities for young people to volunteer.

- Work with On the Ground partners, members of the Forum of Environmental Volunteering Activity and others to promote volunteering and raise awareness of opportunities among potential volunteers.
- Encourage participation in volunteering by groups which face particular barriers to enjoying the outdoors and becoming involved in the natural heritage.

## **5. Effective systems have been developed to support volunteering in the natural heritage**

- Support exchange of information and best practice across the field of environmental volunteering through the Forum for Environmental Volunteering Activity and other networks.
- Promote and support good practice in the management of volunteers in the natural heritage and improve training in volunteer management.
- Gather information on volunteering and volunteers so that trends can be identified and management needs met.
- Carry out research to increase our understanding of the value of natural heritage volunteering and improve support for volunteer involving organisations.

## **The Benefits of Volunteering**

In working towards these goals, we will look to gain these benefits for volunteers, communities and for the natural heritage. These include;

### **- to the volunteer:**

- **Quality of life and well-being.** Individuals benefit from volunteering in a number of ways. Volunteering should be an enjoyable experience, offering physical exercise and mental refreshment, and opportunities to bring people together to share experiences and build self-confidence and a sense of achievement.
- **Understanding of the natural heritage.** Volunteering gives people close first hand experience and offers opportunities to develop peoples' understanding of the natural world, and ways in which it can be cared for and improved, in a way that is not usually possible through other outdoor activities.
- **Commitment to positive action for the natural heritage.** Volunteering connects people to the environment and builds commitment to caring for it's future. Involvement in volunteering can lead to people taking further positive action for the environment, and to developing more sustainable lifestyles, as they make links between the health of the natural heritage and resource use.

- **Skills and career development.** Volunteering offers the opportunity to gain work experience and develop new skills, and is an important route into employment in the natural heritage.

#### - to communities

- **Stronger communities.** The local environment is of common interest to all in a community, and volunteering has an important role in bringing communities together around a common cause. Volunteering close to home increases social capital by encouraging citizenship and responsibility, developing a shared sense of ownership and increasing pride in the local environment.
- **A better local environment.** Voluntary action for the local natural heritage makes a significant contribution to creating places where people want to live and visit. It supports the development and use of path networks, conservation and enhancement of biodiversity, and the regeneration of poor quality landscapes. The involvement of local people will help to ensure that action for the natural heritage is relevant to local people's lives, and accessible to all.

#### - to the natural heritage

- **Achievement 'on the ground'.** People giving their time and expertise voluntarily offers a wealth of skills, enthusiasm and experience to the management and improvement of our natural heritage.
- **Skills.** Volunteering is an important way of maintaining and developing specific skills related to the conservation and management of the natural heritage, such as plant and animal identification. Volunteers also have an important role in passing on these skills to others.
- **A flexible resource.** Volunteers can offer their time and skills to a schedule which would not suit paid employment. This can be significant in working for the natural heritage, where the demands of the natural world may not fit with the working day or week.

### Policy Context

The natural heritage has traditionally held a strong role in volunteering in Scotland, reflecting people's enthusiasm to become involved, especially in their local place. The **Scottish Biodiversity Strategy** (2004) places people at the heart of its agenda for action. It recognises the need to strengthen the links between people and biodiversity, through encouraging enjoyment, involvement and understanding, and so building commitment to its care. The **Scottish Sustainable Development Strategy** (2005) also puts action by people at local level at the centre of change.

The **Scottish Volunteering Strategy** (2004) aims to embed a culture of volunteering in Scotland, and the **Vision for the Voluntary Sector** (2005) sets out the needs of the voluntary sector in Scotland. Both recognise the sector's role in building strong

communities through volunteering. Guidance on **Community Learning and Development** (2004) encourages local authorities to involve individuals and communities in tackling real issues in their lives through community action, and environmental volunteering has a strong contribution to make to this. **More Choices, More Chances** (2006) aims to reduce the proportion of young people not in education, employment or training in Scotland. It recognises that volunteering has a role to play in meeting its aims. Finally, the **Community Regeneration Statement** (2006) stresses the importance of community involvement in regeneration activities and the opportunities that these present for individuals to acquire new skills and increase their employability.

The overall context for SNH's approach to volunteering is provided in its policy statement on **Enjoying the Outdoors**. Many opportunities for volunteering also arise through our work to support the involvement of local communities in care and management of their local natural heritage, and also through our support to voluntary sector organisations.

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