

Nature at the heart

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Scotland's natural capital is at the heart of its economy

In a lecture at the Edinburgh International Book Festival, First Minister Alex Salmond covered a range of topics including Scottish culture, Homecoming, as well as the economy. He pointed out the important role that the environment plays in contributing to Scotland's economy. He said that "the environment is one of Scotland's chief assets – a source of natural capital that can drive broad-based sustainable growth."

As part of the Government's focus on delivering sustainable economic growth, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has a strategic role in making sure that nature and landscape contribute to the Government's overall purpose. Sitting alongside our mainstream areas of work, such as halting biodiversity loss, is a key target to increase the contribution of the natural heritage to the rural economy.

Natural heritage is increasingly being recognised as a growing contributor to economic success, supporting rural economic diversification and sustainability, and also attracting investment. SNH was the lead partner in a research project that found that one in seven of all full-time jobs in Scotland and 11 per cent of the country's total output is dependent on the natural environment.

SNH's recent publication *Valuing our Environment*¹ highlights that Scotland's economy benefits to the tune of £17.2 billion a year from the sustainable use of the natural environment. The environment also supports 242,000 jobs or 14 per cent of all full-time jobs in Scotland.

Much of this is generated by traditional sectors such as farming, fisheries and forestry. However, the benefits extend beyond these sectors with a fifth of all industries dependent to a large extent on the environment. These include other sectors such as food and drink production, water supplies, renewable energy, tourism, timber processing and recreation.

Scotland's nature and landscapes present a powerful image in people's minds, and SNH is building on the links between nature and agriculture to promote good land management



Spectacular landscapes, like this beach at Horgabost on Harris, are the main reason that people choose to holiday in Scotland

and quality food. As an example, we are a key partner, with the NFUS and the local authority, in the 'Food from Argyll' initiative. Fergus Younger, the Argyll Agricultural Forum's development manager, explained that this project promotes Argyll's agriculture and produce via a touring marquee showcasing delicious and healthy food at events and festivals across the UK. He said: "We are using the 'Food from Argyll' brand to promote Argyll as a producer of quality food, as a key destination for visitors and for wider promotion of the area."

SNH is also working to help businesses realise the benefits of the natural heritage in Dumfries and Galloway, for example, by funding a member of staff at the Cream of Galloway to explain to visitors the links between their produce and the natural environment. Cream of Galloway produces ice-cream and frozen smoothies from an organic farm on the edge

of the Fleet Valley National Scenic Area. The farm is managed to encourage biodiversity and promote nature to their visitors.

Working with the Deer Commission for Scotland, we promote activities that ensure the management of healthy wild deer populations. Deer make a significant contribution to the local economy in many parts of Scotland through sport shooting, high quality venison products, and opportunities for wildlife tourism. Overall, the industry supports over 2,500 jobs and generates £105 million per year.

The contribution the natural environment can make to local economies is particularly important in remote and rural communities. One significant way that SNH provides support is through grants to projects that generate economic benefits in rural areas. In 2007/08, we contributed over £10 million directly to the rural economy via grants and management agreements. We estimate that, last year, the full

impact of our spending on the rural economy was over £60 million.

Another way our work contributes is through support for ranger posts on private estates throughout Scotland. These are particularly important for raising awareness about wildlife and for effectively managing this alongside wider land management objectives.

In Lochinver we provide support for two new full-time staff to work on developing the North West Highlands Geopark. These new staff will act as critical links in delivering benefits to the rural community. The North West Highlands Geopark is already raising awareness of the area as a tourism destination and is generating economic activity locally. Last year, it hosted the European Geopark conference, which brought about £150,000 into the local economy.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in Scotland, employing over 200,000 people and generating approximately £4 billion annually. Scotland's environment is a significant part of the tourism industry.

An area like Glen Nevis attracts around 400,000 people every year, with over 100,000 making it to the top of Ben Nevis. These sorts of numbers generate significant revenue for the local economy. SNH supports the Nevis Partnership with a grant worth nearly a quarter of a million pounds over five years. Our role here is one of investing in infrastructure to ensure that the quality of the visitor experience remains good and not spoiled by visitor numbers.

Tourists make around 750,000 visits each year to our National Nature Reserves to see some of Scotland's best known wildlife and inspiring landscapes. The network of reserves includes sites like Clyde Valley Woodlands and Loch Leven, both of which are readily accessible from the large population centres of the Central Belt. In contrast, the more distant reserves, like Noss on Shetland and Beinn Eighe, Wester

Ross, can bring significant numbers of visitors into our most remote communities. One focus of our work on NNRs is to ensure a high quality visitor experience; examples include major investments in facilities and paths at Creag Meagaidh and an all-ability path at Beinn Eighe. Nearly half of all visitors to our reserves come from outside Scotland, bringing in external sources of funds to local economies.

A VisitScotland survey showed that scenery and wildlife are among the main reasons that visitors choose to holiday in Scotland. The

Our distinctive natural environment is fundamental to quality of life

2008 Visitor Experience Survey highlighted that the scenery was the most important reason for choosing to holiday in Scotland for 92 per cent of visitors. But our unique landscapes and wildlife are of far greater significance than just as the backdrop for a successful tourist industry.

According to the Valuing the Environment report, two-thirds of businesses believe that Scotland's natural environment benefits their company. Businesses also said that the environment strongly influences their decision on where to locate. As broadband connection improves, there is a greater opportunity for many businesses to locate anywhere in the country. Many individuals and companies are making the decision to be located in rural areas and towns in order to benefit from the opportunities and quality of life that the countryside offers.

In many parts of the country, rural communities are making the most of

environmental assets to build capacity and generate economic opportunities. The success stories of places such as the Isle of Gigha have been well documented but there are many other communities taking innovative approaches to stimulating the local economy.

There are increasing numbers of community land initiatives throughout Scotland, particularly in the Highlands and Islands. These areas contain some of Scotland's most distinctive wildlife sites and landscapes. We are currently involved with a number of community land initiatives from community woodlands across the Borders and the Central Belt to community buyouts in the Highlands.

SNH actively supports the LEADER programme, as part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP), which is aimed at promoting economic and community development within rural areas. A wide range of community-led projects have been approved through LEADER and SNH is planning to make £320,000 available over the six-year programming period from 2007.

In Aberdeenshire, 24 projects with capital costs of £2.1 million, and a total LEADER commitment of over half a million pounds, demonstrate the positive impact that LEADER has in revitalising communities.

Ewen Cameron, Scottish Natural Heritage Operations Manager and LEADER Local Action Group member, said: "The natural environment plays a crucial part in supporting the quality of life we all enjoy in north-east Scotland. Many rural businesses, especially in tourism, food and outdoor recreation thrive where sensitive development goes hand in hand with good environmental management, understanding and appreciation. SNH's investment of staff time and money in support of the LEADER programme has had significant payoff in terms of sustainable development."

These are a few examples of the range of SNH's activities that impact on the economies of rural areas. Our distinctive natural environment is fundamental to the wealth of our rural areas and the quality of life for us all. Our work in building capacity in local communities, protecting and enhancing our wildlife and landscapes, and working to promote sustainable tourism and land management is central to creating a flourishing future for our rural economies, and for Scotland as a whole.

¹ Find out more about Valuing our Environment at www.snh.org.uk/pubs

THE ARRAN WILDLIFE FESTIVAL: 13-20 MAY

Thousands of people have been enjoying activities at Arran's 4th Wildlife Festival. The first festival, in 2006, was organised by a partnership of RSPB, SNH and the local community and the festival is now run by the Arran Natural History Society with ongoing financial and staff support from SNH.

Over eight days, visitors are invited to take part in 65 events and activities from expert-led walks to see raptors, otters and badgers to sea-kayak wildlife-watching and a masterclass in bird-survey techniques. The festival has resulted in a higher profile for the island, with increased visitor numbers throughout the year, and benefits to nature as revenues from the festival are reinvested in wildlife and conservation work on the island.

The achievements of the Arran Wildlife Festival were recognised in a motion lodged at the Scottish Parliament by local MSP Kenneth Gibson on April 28. Among other things, he commended the festival for raising Arran's profile at a local, national and international level and the benefit that enabling visitors to experience wildlife firsthand has in encouraging people to protect their natural environment.