

Cabinet Secretary, Roseanna Cunningham, MSP

6<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Cabinet Secretary, Fergus Ewing, MSP

Dear Cabinet Secretaries

### **Looking beyond Lockdown in the countryside**

**On behalf of:** John Muir Trust, National Trust for Scotland, RSPB, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust Scotland, Plantlife and Trees for Life

The above group of organisations collectively manage a significant amount of greenspace across Scotland and like others in the peri-urban and rural areas of Scotland we have closed our visitor centres, car parks and properties to support government advice. Many of us have furloughed staff but continue to do what we can to manage the impacts of Covid 19, and the necessary lockdown, on our organisations, on biodiversity and on the communities where we live and work.

Following recent constructive discussions with a number of public sector bodies (Cairngorms National Park, Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, SNH, Forestry and Land Scotland and Scottish Forestry) it was evident that there was much to be gained by greater collaboration.

Our shared expectation is that any easing of lockdown restrictions is likely to result in an increase in visits to the countryside and our shared desire is to ensure this is a process which is safe and well managed.

As land owning eNGOs we actively wish to support the Government as it moves beyond lockdown. To do this well will require clarity on what is being proposed in advance, so that we can collectively plan both the operational details of opening our estate(s) up to wider access, and effective, cohesive communication to our supporter bases and the wider public.

We would also welcome involvement in the development of relevant outdoor working guidance for conservation delivery. All land owning eNGOs who would normally be supporting the government in addressing the climate and biodiversity crises (and helping to meet international and domestic obligations) are currently largely unable to do so.

In support of our request, we would raise the following critical points:

- We want to be part of the solution, working jointly with the public sector to safely manage pressure in rural locations, recognising both the desire to see visitors return in order to restart economic activity and the need to manage the risks associated with an opening up of the rural environment;

- We wish to avoid unintended damage (through disturbance etc) to both the natural and built heritage and to fragile rural communities. This further underlines the need for a coordinated response.
- Involving us in advance is critical to our being able to plan operationally, rather than having to react “in the moment”. It will also enable us to plan our communications ahead of the easing of lockdown and ideally coordinate those communications with public sector colleagues;
- We will need the government to strongly message to the public the need for restraint (don’t all rush out at once), the importance of compliance with social distancing guidance, and that people should check with organisations in advance as to which sites are accessible and what facilities will be open.
- It is essential to involve Police Scotland in helping to shape this, in order to ensure their ability to successfully enforce the new guidance where needed. There is likely to be value in early discussions with other bodies such as Scottish Mountain Rescue.

We stand ready to work with you and are grateful to the public sector bodies for their openness and desire to help make this work well for all. Our objective should be to re-open the countryside in a way that supports the economy, protects nature and people, and ensures we win the fight to defeat coronavirus.

Given the fast pace of developments on Government restrictions, the recently updated Covid19 Framework for Decision making and the First Ministers indication that increased opportunities to spend time outside are likely, we would welcome an early opportunity to engage with government to progress these matters.

Please respond directly to Anne McCall, Director RSPB Scotland in the first instance.

Yours sincerely



Anne McCall,  
Director, RSPB  
Scotland



Jo Pike, Chief  
Executive,  
Scottish Wildlife  
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Stuart Brooks, Head of  
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