Scottish Environment LINK – 2027/28 Budget asks

October 2026

Increase the groundbreaking Nature Restoration Fund by 10%, committing to at least £71.5 million over the course of this parliament.

The Nature Restoration Fund was established in 2021. Over £65 million was invested in hundreds of projects across Scotland in the previous parliament, and this was extended by a further year into 2026-27.

The NRF is the Scottish Government's flagship funding stream to deliver the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy and to meet our legal targets, to be set under the Natural Environment Act, to restore nature.

An interim evaluation of the NRF found that the scheme:

- Funded nearly 800 projects to promote nature recovery across 309,000 hectares
- Enabled a wide range of successful projects, including woodland creation, species-rich grassland management, riparian habitat restoration, and large-scale invasive non-native species (INNS) control
- Enabled projects that would not have been possible through other funding sources, filling a critical gap in Scotland's nature conservation funding landscape
- Actively built the skills base of contractors across Scotland[1]

Why the NRF?

It is essential that the NRF is extended for the full duration of this parliament. Failure to do so would undermine our ability to meet restore nature, adapt to climate change, and benefit communities.

A multi-year commitment would also send a strong signal to landowners, land managers and conservation organisations about the Scottish Government's intentions, allowing those key partners to contribute to meeting legal nature targets.

Why 10%?

The commitment to a £65 million fund over 5 years was made in 2021. Cumulative inflation since 2021 has been almost 30%[2]. A significant rise in cash terms is necessary to maintain the value of the fund, and a 10% rise is the bare minimum needed. Ideally, over the course of this parliament, further real-terms increases would be implemented.

[1] https://www.gov.scot/publications/interim-evaluation-nature-restoration-fund/pages/2/

[2] The Bank of England inflation calculator gives an inflation rate of 28.6% between 2021 and Aug 2026. https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator

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Provide a real terms increase for other nature budget lines to invest in our native woodlands, peatland restoration, and the health of our rivers.

Funding for nature falls across a number of budget lines, including dedicated funding for peatlands, the water environment, and woodland creation. These budget lines are essential for our climate and nature goals.

Alongside a 10% uplift in the Nature Restoration Fund, other funding for nature should see at least a real terms increase.

Protect the budgets of environmental agencies in real terms to allow them to play their role in meeting our nature and climate targets.

Environmental agencies have key roles in delivering for nature and have a range of responsibilities including flood risk management, land management, environmental monitoring, and regulation.

The issues raised by LINK's Nature Protection Scorecard show that public bodies are already struggling to deliver some of their core responsibilities due to insufficient resources.[3] The budgets for environmental agencies must be protected in real terms.

This is particularly important as the planned merger of agencies will involve additional costs which should not undermine frontline functions.

Scottish Environment LINK is the forum for Scotland's voluntary environment community, with over 50 member bodies representing a broad spectrum of environmental interests with the common goal of contributing to a more environmentally sustainable society.

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[3] https://www.scotlink.org/nature-protection-scorecard/