

PE1662/D

Scottish Natural Heritage submission of 27 October 2017

Our statutory purpose

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) funded by the Scottish Government through Grant-in-Aid. We are the Scottish Government's advisers on issues relating to nature and landscape. Our statutory purpose is to:

- secure the conservation and enhancement of nature and landscapes;
- foster understanding and facilitate their enjoyment of them; and,
- advise on their sustainable use and management.

Scotland's nature and landscapes are recognised internationally, and this natural capital plays an important role in supporting economic growth, improving people's health and wellbeing, adapting to climate change and strengthening communities. We work with partners both nationally and locally to maintain and enhance these assets and to improve the public benefits generated from their sustainable use, both now and in the future.

SNH's role in outdoor access

In line with our role in facilitating enjoyment of nature and landscapes, we work with partners to promote informal outdoor recreation, in particular among disadvantaged groups. This work links strongly to the Scottish Government's national indicator to *Increase people's use of Scotland's outdoors*, which aims to realise all of the social, economic and environmental benefits that outdoor recreation provides. These include the considerable benefits to people's health and quality of life that result from physical activity and contact with nature, for example in helping to combat obesity and mental ill health. We are promoting these in conjunction with Forestry Commission Scotland and NHS Health Scotland through the *Our Natural Health Service* initiative.

SNH also has specific duties to publicise and promote understanding of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, which has been approved by the Scottish Parliament. The Code provides the key statutory guidance on responsible behaviour in the outdoors, although this focuses on preventing unreasonable impacts on other people and the environment rather than on the personal health and safety of participants.

Advice on ticks and Lyme disease

We fully recognise the very significant health risk that ticks can present, and it will clearly be important to provide practical and consistent advice to the public to help prevent tick-borne illnesses. It will also be important, however, to ensure that these messages are proportionate and reflect the considerable wider health and other benefits that outdoor recreation provides. Ticks are by no means the only potential risk to the health and safety of people taking part in outdoor activities, and advice on recreational practice is often best provided by recognised recreation bodies. We are also conscious that SNH is not an authority on public health, and such campaigns

ultimately rely on partners to provide or underwrite health-related messages – for example through the work that is currently being undertaken by the Scottish Health Protection Network.

Against this background, we are working with partners to address this in various ways:

- We have worked with NHS colleagues to help ensure that the NHS Inform website conveys messages about the risks posed by ticks, and other outdoor health hazards, in the context of positive messages about enjoying the outdoors (<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/outdoor-health/bugs-and-germs/avoiding-bugs-and-germs-outdoors>).
- We have previously worked with recreation and land management bodies through the National Access Forum to help distribute advice about ticks and Lyme disease. Forestry Commission Scotland has recently developed new promotional materials to encourage people to check for ticks (<https://youtu.be/Quoh5YFVsX0>) and this is also being shared through the Forum. We are currently considering how best to use these resources to provide suitable advice to the public on SNH National Nature Reserves.
- We provide targeted advice for professional audiences who are involved in conservation management, including deer managers (<http://bestpracticeguides.org.uk/people/lyme-disease> and <http://bestpracticeguides.org.uk/people/lyme-disease2>), and highlight tick-related hazards in the context of specific projects such as Peatland Action. This is of course accompanied by internal guidance and precautionary measures to minimise risks to SNH staff who may be exposed to ticks in the course of their work.

The petition suggests that education campaigns could include suitable warning notices at places such as visitor centres and car parks. We agree that this approach may be helpful under some circumstances, although careful planning would be needed to ensure that any such measures are effective and do not deter people from enjoying the outdoors. We would therefore suggest that any such messages are carefully focused on times and places where a particular risk is known to exist, and include positive action that people can take to manage this risk (rather than simply avoiding the area).

More generally, we would of course be happy to discuss any further action which would help to effectively address this issue, and we will continue to work with partners to monitor future developments.