



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01678

Name of petitioner

Robert Reid on behalf of Scottish Countryside Rangers Association

Petition title

National strategic framework for Countryside Ranger Services in Scotland

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to implement the strategic framework for the network of Countryside Ranger Services set out in the document Rangers in Scotland (SNH 2008).

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

We have:

- Discussed this issue with Christina McKelvie MSP
- Distributed copies of booklet Scotland's Rangers (SCRA 2014), which explains what Rangers do, using examples of projects, to all Ranger Services with accompanying letter asking them to circulate to Councillors, Board members or Committee members, as appropriate to each service; and to other relevant bodies
- Convened the Ranger Development Partnership annually since 2009 to take a strategic overview of Rangers in Scotland, including issues relevant to this petition e.g. loss of posts; dilution of national identity; use of volunteer rangers; improving promotional activities;
- Convened a Ranger Manager Forum biannually to share good practice e.g. Ranger identity (badging), and address common issues
- Met the Chair of SNH in 2016 to seek continuing support for Ranger Services through grant aid and on-going promotion of what Rangers achieve, given SNH's responsibility for advocacy of Rangers' roles in natural heritage and outdoor access management
- Liaised regularly with nominated member of SNH staff to exchange information and address concerns
- Sent letters to Highland Council re the threat to disband their Ranger Service in 2016 and 2017, and circulated a press release
- Given guidance to our members on how to promote the services they deliver, and their achievements
- Continued to provide low cost, high quality training to Rangers and other Countryside professionals across Scotland in support of their employers' commitment to staff development.

Petition background information

What Rangers do

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Uniquely Rangers work mostly outdoors in places of natural and cultural heritage value. They are the interface between the landowner/manager and the visiting public and know their “patch” intimately. They welcome visitors; provide interpretation; observe and report on maintenance needs necessary not only for visitor safety, but also quality of visitor experience; and, in many Services, they lead school groups on outdoor learning experiences and/or train teachers to do this compulsory part of the Curriculum for Excellence. They monitor wildlife, particularly nationally and locally important habitats and species, and identify threats from wildlife crime and alien invasive species, to meet obligations of the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Increasingly their role in providing opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside and coast is being recognised for its benefits to the health and well-being of many people, helping to reduce the burden on NHS Scotland and to meet the Scottish Government’s targets for a Healthier Scotland.

Where and how they are employed

Scotland’s Rangers are employed by over 60 different employers including the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority, Forestry Commission Scotland, Historic Environment Scotland, local authorities, national NGOs (eg the National Trust for Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, John Muir Trust), private land owners (e.g. Rothiemurchus Estate), and community groups (e.g., Tiree, Knoydart). Most Rangers wear the national badge – sometimes “double-badged” with the employer’s logo - making them recognisably part of the national network.

Before 2008 most Ranger Service programmes were supported by grant aid from SNH and its predecessor, the Countryside Commission for Scotland. From 2009 the Scottish Government transferred funding for core functions directly to local authorities for them to allocate, thus reducing the influence, leadership and networking opportunities formerly given by CCS/SNH,. SNH continues to give substantial grant support, together with advice, to voluntary and private sector Ranger Services, as does the Cairngorms National Park Authority for those Services operating within the Park.

Recent Reductions in Services and Posts

The loss or reduction of grant aid support together with cuts in public expenditure over the last ten years has directly led to fewer Ranger posts and impacted adversely on co-operation and partnership working between Ranger Services.

The number of permanent posts has fallen and there is a significant decline in the number of Seasonal Ranger posts. Seasonal Rangers are engaged over times of peak demand in the summer months, but these short term posts also act as a vital training ground towards suitable permanent posts. A few local Authorities no longer have a Ranger Service and almost all have a substantially reduced Service. Scotland is in imminent danger of losing its internationally renowned network of well trained professionals across a spectrum of public and private organisations. Also at risk are the countryside facilities that Rangers manage. Again, there have been decades of investment by public, private and charitable funds to enhance the visitor experience and meet the requirements of modern visitor expectation. There is a strong case to encourage a wider demographic to access the outdoors to help address health inequalities and promote wellbeing. Ranger Services are uniquely placed to help facilitate that connection but this is gravely threatened by the loss of posts and services.

Impact of Reduction

SCRA is concerned that the cutbacks in public sector expenditure, loss of knowledgeable and experienced managers who recognised the benefits of a strong network, and the pressures on the remaining Rangers is putting at risk this national network built over 50 years. There are significant implications for cornerstone government policies in health, recreational access, biodiversity and visitor experience. As the professional body representing Rangers, we are also concerned about the impact that these pressures are having on the health and wellbeing of our members.

Mitigating the impact

The framework set out in Rangers in Scotland was signed up to by the members of the

The framework set out in Rangers in Scotland was signed up to by the members of the Ranger Development Partnership comprising representative of the major Ranger employers, SNH and SCRA, and also by COSLA. It sets out how the agreed approach to providing Ranger Services can be delivered in practice and the actions required by all relevant parties. What is needed now is a renewed recognition by all relevant parties to the value of what Rangers deliver for the people of Scotland and visitors to Scotland, creative solutions to the problems of reduced resources, and fresh commitment to delivering the framework.

What implementation should achieve

- Improved recognition by the Scottish Government, employers of Rangers and the public, of the role that Rangers play in looking after Scotland's natural and cultural heritage and in welcoming visitors, helping them to enjoy, appreciate and make better use of these resources.
- Recognition of the unique contribution that Rangers make to delivering biodiversity, outdoor access, outdoor learning, health and wellbeing (social services), building on the substantial investment of public money over the last 50 years
- Strengthening of partnership working across all Ranger Services
- support for the use of the national Ranger Service badge as a symbol of professionalism, widely recognised by the public
- clarification of the roles of, and relationship between, Ranger Services and volunteers supporting them
- support for the 3 stage approach designed by SCRA, with grants from SNH, to developing knowledge and skills vital to being a Ranger (Wildlife Champions for 5-11 year olds; Junior Rangers for 12-18 year olds; and the Scottish Rangers Award/CPD for professional Rangers and Apprentices)
- Facilitation of sharing good practice across Ranger Services.

Unique web address

<http://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01678>

Related information for petition

Rangers in Scotland (2008):

http://www.snh.org.uk/pdfs/publications/heritagemanagement/ranger_booklet.pdf

Scotland's Rangers
(2014):

<http://scra-online.co.uk/component/phocadownload/category/2-library?download=190:scotland-s-rangers-booklet>

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

18 / 12 / 2017

Comments to stimulate online discussion

Question: Do you support the need for implementing the national strategic framework for the network of Countryside Ranger Services in Scotland?

Please explain why you support the need for implementation of the strategy.