

PE1678/R

Forest Enterprise Scotland submission of 1 March 2018

Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES), through the stewardship of Scotland's National Forest Estate, is the largest manager of informal outdoor recreation in Scotland. We employ staff in different roles and at different grades who contribute to the management of our visitor sites, facilities and experiences.

We have a small number of staff who are employed as recreation rangers. They tend to be based at our busier sites where visitor engagement and management is a priority (for example Glenmore Forest Park) or in areas where engaging local communities is a high priority (for example in and around Glasgow).

We have a number of other staff who fulfil aspects of a recreation ranger's role, including woodland wardens and forest craftsmen. We expect all our staff to be able to engage positively with visitors, but we do recognise that not all staff will have the high level of motivation, skill and experience in this area that is expected of a countryside ranger. We do also employ wildlife rangers, who concentrate on wildlife and habitat management, including deer control. Their roles are largely outwith the SCRA definition of a ranger's role. We do not consider that FES has a 'ranger service' as such; rather that this is an important role in some of our recreation teams. We do not use the national ranger logo.

We recognise the value of the work that rangers and similar staff do. Engaging with current visitors, encouraging harder-to-reach audiences to engage with the countryside, and encouraging healthier and more active lifestyles are all key issues that rangers can lead on. Research has shown us that people who are less experienced and confident in the outdoors do value the help and reassurance that rangers can offer. In the past, our rangers and others have often worked with schools and groups as the local expert providers of environmental education and awareness. Due to resources, this valued service is now far less prevalent.

Research and feedback from staff shows an increase in the number of countryside visits made each year in Scotland. This is the case on Scotland's National Forest estate where we have experienced an increase from 9 million to 10 million visits per annum over the past two years. Feedback from staff also suggests an increase in the recreation-related issues we have to deal with including newer issues such as enduro mountain biking, commercial dog walking and the use of drones.

The Land Reform Access legislation and Scottish Outdoor Access Code promotes responsible access and arguably has raised public expectations as to what visitors can and should be able to do in the countryside. Many private sector businesses also benefit from increased access.

Increased visitor numbers can bring benefits of countryside recreation to more people and to the wider visitor economy. But it can also increase the costs of providing facilities, services and managing access responsibly especially in more acute instances where high footfall is experienced and unfortunately irresponsible behaviours are exhibited by a minority.

Users are often reluctant to pay or do not expect to pay for recreation facilities and services more especially if they are provided by public or third sector organisations. Charging as a legitimate means of offsetting cost for managing responsible access, facilities and services even if it were deemed desirable by users, is often difficult especially in more remote and less frequented locations.

In summary, the issues raised by SCRA are recognised and we recognise the role of countryside rangers within a professional countryside recreation management context including what SCRA members contribute to ensuring a sustainable approach to managing countryside recreation.