Working with Scotland's people to care for our natural heritage

Scottish Natural Heritage
is a government body responsible to the Scottish Executive and Scottish Parliament.

Our mission statement is:
Working with Scotland's people to care for our natural heritage.

Our aim is:
Scotland's natural heritage is a local, national and global asset. We promote its care and improvement, responsible enjoyment, greater understanding and appreciation, and sustainable use now and for future generations.

Our operating principles are:
We work in partnership, by co-operation, negotiation and consensus, where possible, with all relevant interests in Scotland: public, private and voluntary organisations, and individuals.

We operate in a devolved manner, delegating decision-making to the local level within the organisation to encourage and assist SNH to be accessible, sensitive and responsive to local needs and circumstances.

We operate in an open and accountable manner in all our activities.

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Towards Responsible Use: Influencing Recreational Behaviour in the Countryside

Natural Heritage Management

Planning for visitor management – the wider context

Scottish Natural Heritage, in association with a number of key land managing organisations, has developed *'Management for People'*. This publication, aimed at all those involved in access management, presents, in five modules, a recommended process of planning for visitors. *'Management for People'* explores how to make informed decisions and review their effectiveness in achieving sustainable visitor management. The five modules are:

• Involving and communicating with people
• Planning and objective setting
• Visitor care and welfare
• Monitoring
• Analysis and assessment

"Towards Responsible Use: Influencing Recreational Behaviour in the Countryside" is part of a complementary suite of material offering more detailed topic-specific advice about management for public access to the outdoors, building on the foundation provided by *'Management for People'*.

'Management for People' is available from November 2004 from: Scottish Natural Heritage Publications Section, Battleby, Redgorton, PERTH PH1 3EW   Tel: 01738 444177

Towards Responsible Use:
Influencing Recreational Behaviour in the Countryside

Foreword

How do you encourage visitors to your site to behave differently? This is a question many site managers will have pondered over the years when faced with unacceptable impacts by visitors, whether intentional or unintentional.

This guide describes the stages involved in seeking to influence visitors' behaviour in the countryside, in order to reduce impacts at recreational sites, and instil a more responsible attitude amongst visitors and recreation user groups. It has been produced to assist people such as rangers and land managers to develop techniques relevant to particular user groups, that will help to influence visitors' behaviour on their site.

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

People are attracted to the countryside for a wide variety of reasons and activities. Sometimes the pursuit of these activities results in unwanted impacts on the natural environment, on land management, on other recreational users, or on the local community.

This guide aims to assist managers to reduce the impacts experienced on their sites and instil a more responsible attitude among users (which will have consequential benefits at other sites). The guide sets out general principles and a recommended sequence of stages to go through when seeking to influence visitor behaviour. The process put forward seeks to deepen mutual understanding of the needs of those providing and those taking part in country-side recreation and show that both land managers and users have a role in minimising impacts. SNH's broad approach is that:

Recreational use of land and water should be founded on the three key principles of: respecting the interests of other people, caring for the environment and taking responsibility for your own actions. (Scottish Natural Heritage, 2004).

Who is this guide for?

The aim of this guide is to help all those who are involved in managing areas of countryside used by the public for informal recreation, whether at a strategic planning level overseeing a number of sites, or as individual site-based managers. It is intended for use by managers of places like country parks, nature reserves and other areas used by the public whether under public, private or voluntary ownership.

What is the guide based on?

The guide is based in part on a study undertaken for SNH by Glasgow Caledonian University (Foley, 1997) which reviewed information, theory, practical examples and informed opinion on how best to practically encourage positive attitudes and behaviour in the countryside and reduce detrimental impacts.

How does the guide work?

The guide considers the different kinds of problematic behaviour that site managers encounter and the possible reasons for it in Section 2. It is important to understand the 'what' and the 'why' of the problem before attempting to deal with it and Section 3 outlines the steps in assessing the problem. Section 4 presents a range of different techniques used in a number of recent initiatives which you can use to influence visitor behaviour on your site. Section 5 is a checklist for action and section 6 contains some sources of advice and further reading.

Key Concepts

- All techniques should aim to influence people's basic **attitude** towards their behaviour i.e. to consider all of the potential impacts their actions may cause. Changes in attitudes prompted by a range of techniques may reduce impacts across all areas visited.

- In all cases the sequence of key stages that should be followed are:
  - identify and assess the issue(s);
  - identify target group(s);
  - consider range of methods for influencing behaviour;
  - implement chosen method;
  - monitor and evaluate its success.

- The behaviour of visitors to areas used for countryside recreation is not only influenced by actions on-site. Opportunities exist to convey messages both before and after trips are made.

- Whenever possible the recreation target group(s) should be involved in planning the technique to be used so that groups feel a party to and supportive of the methods to be implemented. This kind of collaboration should ensure that the investment made in trying to influence behaviour is cost effective.

2. WHY DO VISITORS BEHAVE AS THEY DO?

People visit the countryside for a wide variety of reasons. It helps to think of these as being either non-specific or specific:

Non specific (not related to the particular qualities of your site or a particular activity) such as;

- to stroll casually or get some fresh air;
- to picnic;
- to walk the dog;
- to get some light exercise;
- to have a cheap day out;
- to visit somewhere with family and friends;
- to pursue an informal activity e.g. playing games, football.

Specific (directly related to the particular qualities of your site or activity) such as:

- **outdoor activity**, e.g. climbing, caving, orienteering, mountain biking, hill walking, horse riding, fishing, field sports, water sports, paragliding;
- **outdoor interests**, e.g. wildlife, bird-watching, botany, archaeology.

In practice most people use the countryside for non-specific reasons but obviously the nature of your site will partly determine the kinds of experiences on offer, and therefore the 'profile' of your visitors, e.g. family groups, or mainly climbers etc. The unwanted impacts your visitors may cause will vary depending on many factors including their numbers, the nature of the activities they come for, the characteristics of the area and the level of provision made for visitors.

It is important, when thinking of what action to take, for managers to realise that impacts may be a result of behaviour which is either intentional or unintentional. Generally it will be easier to tackle unintentional behaviour.

MALICE
CASUAL DISREGARD
IGNORANCE

In order to deal with unwanted impacts, it helps if this continuum is understood. Malicious behaviour, such as theft, is unlikely to succumb to a friendly tap on the shoulder or a polite request to cease.

Casual disregard may be difficult to change if your request for less damaging behaviour means that you are asking the people doing it to stop something that is the essence of the activity, e.g. trying to get mountain bikers to dismount on steep, fast downhill sections.

Carelessness based on ignorance may be easier to influence if your visitors have a generally positive attitude to the environment such as liking flowers and refraining from picking them once they understand that this stops flowers re-seeding themselves.

People's motivation to visit an area or pursue a particular activity may be influenced by a number of factors. You may have little ability to influence these driving forces, but it is a useful part of the process of understanding why people behave as they do:

Intentional impacts include those caused by anti-social activities such as:

- vandalism;
- intimidation;
- theft at car parks, etc;
- 'egg theft' and other illegal country activities;

Unintentional impacts can be divided into those which are a **direct** result of recreational activity such as:

- erosion;
- habitat damage and wildlife disturbance;
- stock disturbance and crop damage.

These are often the unintentional results of people pursuing their interest or activity whilst not realising or not meaning to cause any damage.

There are also **indirect** unintentional impacts such as:

- littering;
- user conflict (indirect result of a range of activities in the same area or general crowding);
- dog fouling;
- loss of resident's privacy;
- fire damage (lighting fires, broken glass, discarded cigarettes etc.);
- 'pink paper syndrome' (inadequate toilet facilities, inconsiderate wild camping);
- inconsiderate parking.

These behaviours arise from various attitudes or states of mind lying along the continuum:

- **social and cultural factors**
  race, gender, peer group, socio-economic group and family background, as these affect people's beliefs, values and norms;

- **economic factors**
  recreational activity costs including transport, parking, food, gear, entry charges;

- **psychological factors**
  the desire for thrills, excitement, or a challenge, achievement, peer acceptance, self esteem or increased knowledge.

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3. ASSESSING THE PROBLEM

To do this you will need to try to answer as far as possible the following questions. Knowing the reasons behind the problem and objectively assessing its extent are essential before you can really deal with it.

A.   What is the problem?

Is it a direct or indirect consequence of recreational activity, e.g. eroded footpath, damaged fences, dog mess, car theft, trespass, wild flower decline?

B.   How serious is it?

You will need to make a judgement about its importance relative to the sensitivities of the site. There may be several different kinds of impact: Is it seasonal? Does it occur only in certain places? You will need to assess whether it is getting worse or whether the scale of impacts are acceptable in this location.

C.   What is the behaviour that causes the problem?

For example: lateral spread of walkers around a bog, picking wild flowers, short cuts to a hill top for paraglide take-offs.

D.   Who is doing it?

Is it everybody, i.e. sheer numbers, or are there specific target groups?
Can they be involved in planning an intervention?

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E.   What is the motive, attitude, emotional state underlying the behaviour?

Is it intentional or unintentional, malicious, for thrills, a result of peer pressure?

To answer these questions you may need to gather some information on your site and the target groups among your visitors who are causing the unacceptable impacts. This will help you to choose the best techniques for resolving the problem, a range of which are outlined in examples in Section 4. Methods of gathering more information include:

- observing behaviour;
- informal and formal on-site interviews, focus groups, questionnaires;
- carrying capacity measures – these might stem from decisions and measurements about how much change on a site is acceptable and how much visitor pressure it can take before its character is threatened or damaged.

Once you have some answers to these questions you can move on to deciding how to tackle the problem.

4. WHAT WILL YOU DO ABOUT IT?
Some techniques to influence behaviour

You now have to think carefully about how you are going to encourage those identified as causing unacceptable impacts to behave differently. There have been many attempts in recent years to get people to change their behaviour, and research, though still in its infancy on recreational sites, shows some approaches that have an effect.

To start with it is helpful to think of when and where you can change people's behaviour. Problem impacts are not just limited to the recreation area itself but may stem from other aspects of people's decision to go out for a day, e.g. car use. If you think of a visitor coming to your site in terms of a journey involving several decisions, each decision linked to a series of behaviours, then you can decide when it is best to intervene to influence a decision and thus its associated behaviour.

You may then choose at which point to use the most appropriate of the techniques briefly outlined below, bearing in mind some are suitable for on site use, and others are better at influencing decisions at other parts of the 'journey' and their associated impacts, e.g. road congestion and pollution. It is also important to remember that some methods take a longer time to have an effect, for instance environmental education takes years to hopefully turn children into responsible, aware adults. Other methods, e.g. speed bumps, are more immediate!

As far as possible the target groups should be involved in planning your intervention to ensure their support and help to maximise its effectiveness.

The following sections (4.1 – 4.5) are based on actual case studies and offer ideas of different techniques that can be adopted to influence visitors' behaviour depending on the circumstances involved.

The stages of a 'recreational journey' showing when visitors may be receptive to behavioural messages

A   Decision to go
  • whether to go
  • where to go

B   Travelling to the destination

C   Arrival at the destination

D   On-site behaviour

E   Departure, return trip and reflection on the experience; influence on future trips
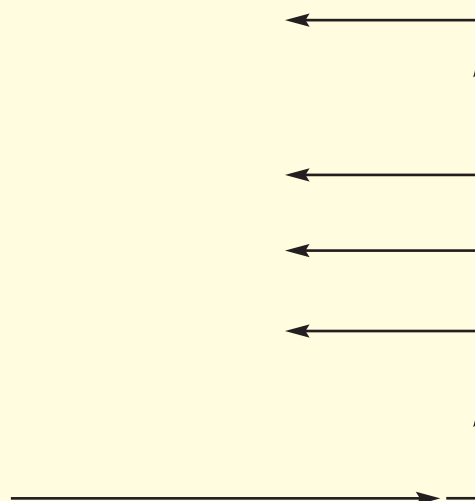
4.1 CODES OF GOOD PRACTICE

Background

In a national park in England there was concern by park staff and landowners about erosion caused by four wheel drive vehicles and motorised trail bikes.

The Approach

Park staff and user groups discussed the scale of the problem, the reasons behind it and the causes of concern. A trail hierarchy was agreed with voluntary restrictions on some sensitive routes. The impacts on the area were specific and direct, with unintentional damage arising from a mix of casual disregard and ignorance. Recognising the particular nature of the two target groups, a range of possible solutions were considered.

The Solution

Two leaflets were produced – one for each group. The four wheel drivers' leaflet contained information on approved routes, plus a code of good practice, while the trail bikers' leaflet was based on a cartoon style to reflect the youth culture of this group. The codes were aimed at the responsible user and relied on peer pressure for effect. Both were distributed through relevant clubs. As both groups were aware of the many routes available, it was more effective to highlight which routes were most appropriate and what behaviour would cause least problems, rather than attempt to restrict information on less appropriate routes for each group.

Points to Remember
- Consult with all relevant groups thoroughly in developing voluntary restraints such as codes of good practice;
- Target responsible users so that they will exert peer pressure on those less responsible;
- Use established club networks to get messages across effectively;
- Design your communications, whether leaflets or other forms of communication, with the target groups in mind, e.g. cartoon format for youth bikers.

4.2 VISIBLE PRESENCE AND SURVEILLANCE

Background

At a country park near Glasgow damage and theft from large car parks was a significant problem.

The Approach

Site managers recognised that the problem behaviour was intentional and malicious. Various options were considered in the light of available staff and other resources and the policies of the managing organisations.

The Solution

A 2-pronged approach was agreed; site patrols by uniformed site assistants and closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance. CCTV evaluation, using evidence initially from other areas, e.g. urban and speed cameras, and from the site itself has been positive. As a result there has been a significant reduction in damage.

Points to Remember
- You may have to spend money physically redeveloping parts of your site;
- Surveillance needs both personal (staff) and impersonal (CCTV) approaches to both deter and persuade;
- Your site should look managed to build visitor confidence;
- Use of these methods on remote sites is questionable;
- Site staff may be seen by visitors in a more overtly policing role than they may be comfortable with.

4.3 INTEGRATING NEWER ACTIVITIES WITH "TRADITIONAL" USERS

Background

In the late 1980's a Scottish regional park found difficulties arising between mountain bikers and more traditional recreational users such as hill walkers. Impacts were varied, from erosion to the paths and disturbance of other recreation users from dangerous practice, to a conflict between biking and traditional wild country aesthetics. Initial biking leaflets, including codes of good practice and route maps, were withdrawn as only the map section appeared to be used by bike users.

The Approach

Mountain bikers were surveyed, revealing distinct groups - some explorers, others using bikes for more athletic reasons. The impacts of mountain bikers were direct and appeared to be mainly unintentional, stemming from casual disregard or ignorance. Some elements, however, such as speeding downhill, may have had an element of wilfulness about them.

The Solution

Using information gathered in a survey, warning signs were placed at potential accident black spot areas where erosion was concentrated. Park rangers were encouraged to actively intervene to point out dangerous behaviour. A new code of good practice leaflet was produced without a map and peer pressure of responsible users was encouraged to influence a decrease in dangerous behaviour.

Points to Remember

• If both route maps and behavioural messages are required, the design should be integrated, otherwise people may just use the map;
• Established users are likely to feel a sense of ownership (a proprietorial attitude) over a familiar place. This can be useful in monitoring newer uses but may also result in intolerance of other groups;
• It may be useful to physically segregate, if possible, new uses from established ones;
• Some groups see the outdoors mainly as a natural gymnasium, not necessarily sharing other groups' values, such as outdoor aesthetics.

4.4 MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

Background

A national agency for health education has, over recent years, developed and evaluated a series of media campaigns designed to influence behaviour leading to poor health, e.g. drug abuse and smoking. These campaigns involved significant expense and were aimed at large geographically widespread groups. They may be best suited to strategically planned attempts to influence behaviour by large organisations managing large areas and many sites. Some examples related to smoking and recreation are outlined here.

The Approach

As with any approach the scale of the problem needs to be surveyed and target groups, such as young smokers, identified before any method is selected. Most behaviour that leads to poor health stems from casual disregard or ignorance which in turn may be related to a whole range of psychological, social, economic and cultural reasons. Two main approaches were developed; general approaches promoting good health to all and specific approaches for specific groups. A specific initiative used well-known role models to promote walking as a good form of exercise, but evaluation found that whilst many felt positive, few were inspired enough to change their behaviour.

The Solutions

All health improvement campaigns were tied together with a simple, memorable slogan such as "*Health for you*". Each specific programme contained an element of this, reinforcing a standard overall message. In a recreational context a message might be "*Tread Carefully*".

A specific programme was developed for three target groups of smokers:

1. A phone advice service – Smokeline – was allied to a TV commercial targeted at confirmed adult smokers. It received 250,000 calls in two years and was very successful;
2. 14-18 year old smokers were targeted through cinema adverts;

3. Younger smokers were approached through outdoor posters based on the social drawbacks of smoking and a magazine using youth interests such as fashion and the environment as vehicles. All were distributed through schools.

Other smoking related initiatives included a national "*No Smoking Day*" and a "*Quitter of the Year*" competition with national winners given prizes in a national press photo call.

Points to Remember
- All elements of a varied campaign need to reinforce each other, using an easily understood statement of values or a "brand". People should remember your message when they behave in the way you want to change;
- You need to understand which approaches will best work on the target audiences you need to influence most;
- People generally do not appreciate the different roles and responsibilities of various organisations, such as those involved in outdoor recreation. It is important then to make sure the same message comes across all the time otherwise different 'signals' will dilute an overall idea. One clear message promoted by everyone will be most effective and this in turn means genuine consultation among the organisations involved;
- Media events can raise awareness and be cost effective;
- Role models can be useful at getting across information and grabbing attention but may not be so good at getting people to change their behaviour;
- Adverts are good at giving information and forming attitudes but need to be backed up by other methods.

4.5 OTHER APPROACHES WORTH CONSIDERING

There are some other approaches to influencing behaviour that are worth looking at, though they are not presented here in detail.

Community Approaches
Several recent initiatives have been aimed at local communities working through agency or agency sponsored staff. An example is the Parish Paths Partnership in England, which facilitates local volunteer groups to get involved in rights of way survey, repair and promotion. The underlying idea is to directly influence attitudes and behaviour towards the countryside by getting local people involved, and as a result, spreading messages by word of mouth about using local access opportunities in a responsible way.

There is some evidence of increased use of rights of way due to these approaches but less so of changes to attitudes to the wider countryside. Also some groups such as suburban incomers may be more susceptible than traditional country communities.

Site Based Information, Interpretation, and Environmental Education
For many years organisations and site managers have tried to influence general behaviour in the countryside and address specific site issues by developing various kinds of interpretation and environmental education initiatives. These have included guided walks, publications, exhibitions, events and environmental game playing. It is possible to use these techniques to help manage a site by, for instance, using self guided trails to guide visitors away from more sensitive areas or to help raise awareness before behaviour becomes a problem. The main purpose of all these initiatives is to increase understanding, instil a sense of value and personal responsibility, and thus reduce negative impacts caused by casual disregard and ignorance.

Other approaches not analysed in detail but also worthy of consideration are:

Transport Management Approaches
e.g. speed controls, speed bumps, limited car parking signs requesting considerate parking;

Local Agenda 21 Measures
e.g. community recycling events;

Vandalism Control
e.g. regular maintenance programmes.

4.6 PLAN TO MONITOR AND EVALUATE

You will need to check whether your methods are having an effect and if necessary refine or change them. At a particular site this will involve mainly:
• surveys of people - observed or reported examples of behaviour;
• surveys of sites - the quality of the environment in relation to the activities that are pursued there.

At a strategic level evaluation should concentrate on spotting long term changes in attitudes across large groups in different situations.

4.7 SUMMARY – YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Bearing in mind the general guidance above and the examples of recent initiatives, you should also make the most of opportunities to network with local and national sources of advice. This can include practical and realistic experience from nearby sites who often have to deal with similar problems; professional associations and representative bodies; local authorities; neighbouring landowners and specialists in local universities, consultancies, or government agencies.

5. CHECKLIST FOR ACTION	
1. IMPACT AND BEHAVIOUR	What is the behaviour you want to change and what is it doing to the area?
2. TARGET GROUP	Who engages in the unwanted behaviour and why do they do it? Can you engage them in planning an intervention?
3. INTERVENTION	Which technique will you use?
4. WHAT TO SAY/DO	What messages do you want to convey to the target group or what site works do you wish to construct?
5. HOW TO SAY/DO IT	Which "vehicles" are you going to choose to convey your message to your target group, and at what stage in the visitor journey?
6. MONITOR AND EVALUATE IT	Monitor how the methods you are using are working and evaluate the results, e.g. effect on level of impact.

6. REFERENCES, FURTHER READING AND SOURCES OF ADVICE

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Sources of Advice

If you are planning a project or programme aimed at influencing the behaviour of visitors and recreation user groups, then you could seek advice from any of the following:

Ranger Services operating in the area – see www.outdooraccess-scotland.com

Officers from the local offices of Scottish Natural Heritage – see www.snh.org.uk

The representative or governing body of a particular outdoor activity or sport – contact details available from **sport**scotland – www.sportscotland.org.uk