



# Policy Statement

## Land and Communities: Openness in Ownership

Policy Statement no 03/03

---

**SNH believes public bodies which own land should set an example of best practice in the stewardship and sustainable management of that land, and that this should involve and secure benefits for local communities as well as national interests.**

### Land Owned by SNH

SNH owns a little over 34000 hectares of land, the majority of which lies within National Nature Reserves.

Of the 71 NNRs in Scotland, SNH owns nearly 100% of the land on 17, over 50% on 6, and less than 50% on a further 11.

There are another 37 NNRs which are operated under a lease or though a Nature Reserve Agreement, where we do not act in the capacity of landowner.

This document focuses on our present and future practice for those NNRs over which we have a majority ownership.

### Community involvement

In the past, NNRs were often thought of as being important only for their natural heritage interest. That has changed. Today, SNH regards NNRs as places where we look after the natural heritage specifically for the people of Scotland, for them to experience and enjoy.

In taking this view, we see the people closest to each NNR as particularly important

We wish to encourage involvement and understanding of communities with the NNRs on their doorstep. SNH will continue to improve links with the local communities on NNRs where we are majority owners.

### Good Relationships

SNH as a landowner has several kinds of relationships with the local community – neighbour, employer, provider of a facility, and staff as residents in the community, particularly access for recreation and environmental education, both of which we encourage.

We have formal liaison groups or informal local liaison arrangements for the majority of our Reserves.

## Land management plans

SNH is fully committed to local consultation about NNR management. For the future, we have already undertaken to consult the local authority, the local community representatives and others during the preparation of NNR plans. We encourage local groups to use the NNRs for education, demonstration and enjoyment.

## Optimising local employment

SNH now contracts out many of the major tasks on NNRs including building works, fencing works, path construction and maintenance, deer stalking, and biological survey. In many cases local people are awarded the contracts.

The new style of business plans for NNRs will identify opportunities for local employment. SNH will continue to use local contractors for estate management work on reserves wherever possible. This need for additional labour with skills in countryside management, e.g. footpath construction, is not unique to NNRs. Our long term plans include investigating whether increased use of work experience and student placements on NNRs would help to develop relevant skills in the local community.

## Positive impact on local sustainable development

Our new policy for NNRs confirms that one of the essential attributes is that they exhibit 'primacy of nature' in the way they are managed. This is sustainable management of land, but it is distinct from sustainable management of the land where there is a crop or livestock harvest.

The NNR is being reserved for nature, the benefit of the wildlife and the nation; although on some reserves a crop of sheep, venison or trees is a by-product of running the Reserve.

From a wider perspective, NNRs are complementary to other areas where greater prominence is given to other rural development.

The business plans will also identify any opportunities to develop the visitor management activities, and capitalise on the many people who visit Scotland to observe and enjoy its scenery and wildlife.

This use of NNRs will contribute substantially to the sustainable development of the local economy.

SNH will, of course continue to offer support for the sustainable development of local communities in other ways through its broader programme of work.

**Contact:** Rachel Hellings, Scottish Natural Heritage, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth  
PH1 3EW  
**Phone:** 01738 458 638  
**Email:** [Rachel.Hellings@snh.gov.uk](mailto:Rachel.Hellings@snh.gov.uk)  
**Date:** 1999