Funding Boost for Scotland's Biodiversity

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Today, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) announced funding of £720,000 to repair 94kms of eroded mountain paths in the Cairngorms as well as indicating initial support for access projects round Loch Leven and in Castle Semple Country Park totalling almost £650,000. The awards bring HLF's total investment in Scotland's land and countryside to over £71million.

The largest continuous area of high ground above 1,000m in Britain, the unique landscape of the Cairngorm National Park attracts 1.4million visitors a year with the even the remotest of paths clocking up 12,000 users annually. There is set to be further pressure on this landscape as the 'staycation' becomes a more economic holiday option. This continuous wear along with the harsh climate conditions has caused path braiding resulting in unsightly scars to the landscape, considerable damage to the important habitats.

This four year project will improve 17 upland paths with some of the routes dating as far back as the Middle Ages when they were used as droving tracks moving cattle from Aberdeen to the West of Scotland. The work will be carried out by hand with helicopters flying in building materials thus protecting the habitat, home to the Scottish Crossbill – the only bird unique to Britain, from the damage that would be caused by using large machinery. Eight traineeships in conservation will bring vital skills to the area and a range of interpretation projects will give schools, volunteers and communities a chance to better understand the magnificent natural heritage on their doorstep.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: "This is the International Year of Biodiversity, a year when we are encouraging people to connect with nature. The stark beauty of Scotland's mountain heritage attracts and ever-growing number of walkers, climbers and tourists each year. This is a boon to our significant tourist economy, but we have to balance it with the conservation of our landscape, its flora and its fauna so that people can continue to enjoy it for years to come."

Danny Alexander MP – whose home is in the village of Aviemore, at the heart of the Cairngorm National Park – said: "Scotland's natural landscapes and wildlife are enormously valuable for their own sake, but they are also a major element of our tourist industry. Especially where there is pressure from visitor numbers, as in the Cairngorms, it is important that we are active in maintaining our asset for the future. It is excellent news that the Heritage Lottery Fund is enabling this investment to go ahead. It will enable thousands of people to continue to visit every year without damaging the special environment which they come here to enjoy."

Dougie Baird, Trust Manager, Cairngorms Outdoor Access Trust, commented: "COAT is absolutely delighted with the award as it will allow us to make a huge difference to the Cairngorm mountains. It is great that so many people come and enjoy our mountains, but it is really important that people also understand that this can create damage, through path erosion, that needs to be managed so that people can experience a pristine mountain environment now, and for future generations. The project will deliver important conservation work, create employment and involve people in the care of some of Scotland's most valuable heritage assets."

The Heritage Lottery Fund awarded a first-round pass* for an award of £394,800 and Development Funding of £34,800 to the Semple Trail Heritage Project in Renfrewshire indicating its support for the project at this early stage in

development. Castle Semple Country Park is a popular recreational location with around 350,000 visitors a year. While the park is easy to get to fewer than 20% of its visitors venture past the Visitor Centre to explore the rich natural and built heritage that exists in the surrounding countryside which includes the historic estate. The original Castle Semple was built around 1500 by Lord Sempill who founded a Collegiate Church in 1504 where he was buried after his death at the Battle of Flodden. There are 17 historic structures in the park including a scheduled peel tower, built in 1540 by the 3rd Lord on an island in an attempt to protect his family from warring clans.

Although there is no longer a castle there is a rich landscape heritage, rare surviving Georgian water gardens and the Kenmure Hill 'temple'. The park is also rich in natural heritage with woodlands, lochs, ancient trees, rare flowers and one of the busiest RSPB reserves in Scotland supporting nationally important breeding birds and wintering wildfowl.

Visitors will be encouraged to explore this heritage through improved trails and interpretation, the establishment of 'lookooteries', guide books and audio trails. Camera systems will be installed to view existing species like otters and other species like ospreys that the project will encourage to come.

Another biodiversity-related project, Loch Leven Heritage Trail, has also been awarded a first-round pass for a grant of £241,500 including Development Funding of £11,500 by the Heritage Lottery Fund. The project builds on the success of previous HLF investment which helped create an access trail around 13.5km of Loch Leven. This project will complete access round the loch with an additional 6kms of path providing improved access to the varied wildlife and habitats around the loch. The picturesque Loch Leven Nature Reserve is the largest loch in lowland Scotland and one of the most important sites for waterfowl in Britain. Its position, size, shallowness, richness and variety of habitats provide a unique environment that has been recognised both nationally and internationally. It is a key example of eutrophic standing water, which has been identified as a priority within the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, hosting the largest concentration of breeding ducks found anywhere in the UK, and many thousands of migratory ducks, geese and swans every autumn and winter.

The path will, as well as providing ideal vantage points for these flocks of birds, link to the built heritage of the area including the 19th-century mills which put Kinross amongst the world leaders in the production of cashmere. The economic development of the area will be explored through school projects, interpretation and volunteer workshops.

Notes to editors

*A first-round pass means the project meets our criteria for funding and we believe it has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported 33,900 projects, allocating £4.4billion across the UK.

Further information

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