Volunteers sign up to safeguard Scotland's environmental heritage thanks to grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund

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Today, HLF announced awards totalling over £2million to six diverse projects which will see many hundreds of volunteers taking custodianship of the natural environment. Their efforts will encourage others to step outside and enjoy Scotland's great outdoors, contributing to the £1.4billion a year that 'nature tourism' adds to Scotland's economy.

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund in Scotland, said: "No one can deny the beauty and impact of Scotland's landscape and wildlife. They are an important part of our tourism industry inspiring visitors from across the world to come and experience what we have to offer in all its diversity. However, they are just as important to our local communities and through these projects, people will have the chance to get involved, to have a say in how the environment is managed, to learn new skills and apply new technologies and spark a passion for our natural world and its long-term conservation."

Environment Minister Stewart Stevenson said: "Scotland's rich and diverse natural heritage is one of our greatest national assets, attracting visitors from home and abroad year round, making a valuable contribution to our economy. These projects will enable local communities across the country to play an active role in helping to protect and enhance Scotland's environment, encouraging more people to step outside and enjoy our great outdoors."

To date, the Heritage Lottery Fund has awarded over £50million to almost 300 natural heritage projects across Scotland with many thousands of dedicated professionals and volunteers at the heart of them.

Scotland's Coastal Heritage At Risk project
HLF grant: £307,000

Scotland's coastline is rich in heritage spanning centuries, from Neolithic settlements to Viking graves to 19th century fishing boats. However, climate change is impacting on coastal sites and, with increased storm frequency and intensity, many features synonymous with Scotland's identity will be lost. The first strand of this project, ShoreUpdate, will see 200 volunteers from around the country trained to become coastal heritage stewards. They will visit 950 high-priority sites around Scotland's 15,500km coastline to assess and record what they find using a specially developed website and mobile phone app.

As well as destroying heritage, erosion can uncover it such as Skara Brae and the 5,000year-old Orkney Venus. The second part of this project, ShoreDig, will see twelve detailed investigations undertaken at the most at-risk sites.

The information collected by the coastal heritage stewards and at the digs will improve the database of coastal heritage sites at risk from erosion and, working with Historic Scotland and local authority archaeologists will be used to inform a national paper on how to best manage this irreplaceable resource.

The Semple Trail Heritage project
HLF grant: £399,100

Castle Semple Country Park in Renfrewshire 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 and watersports centre to explore the rich natural and built heritage that exists in the surrounding countryside which includes the Semple estate and one of the busiest RSPB reserves in Scotland.

The project, which is being managed by Renfrewshire Council, will interpret the site as a whole for the first time, encouraging visitors to discover and explore its fascinating natural and built heritage through improved paths, conservation of the ice house, ornamental cascades and other historic structures, and the establishment of 'lookooteries', guide books and audio trails. Camera systems will be installed to view swallows in nestboxes and rarely seen species such as otters. The Semple Trail will draw together these heritage, access and participation elements.

The local community has been heavily involved in the plans as they have been developed and will continue to be involved with a pool of long-term volunteers who will be trained in biodiversity surveying and sampling, as well as through volunteer day events to refurbish nest boxes, construct otter holts and edit camera footage.

Enjoy Wild Orkney
HLF grant: £341,100

As many as four times as many people will learn about and enjoy Orkney's amazing wildlife through the Enjoy Wild Orkney project. Initiatives such as the creation of a Nature Festival, a mini-amphitheatre – 'the Lug in the Loons' – which will maximise the sounds of waders at the RSPB Loons Reserve, a brand new CCTV facility allowing everyone to get up close with local species, specially designed apps for mobile devices that will interpret the local wildlife whilst people are on the move about the island, and an inter-island ferry ranger, will make it much easier for locals and visitors to experience the islands' wildlife

Working with RSPB Scotland, local communities across Orkney will play an important role in implementing these initiatives. School children will be encouraged to 'adopt' their local reserve, helping to develop interpretation, design way markers and host open days for their families, while around 75 volunteers will be involved in delivering learning activities and conservation management.

Evanton Wood
HLF grant: £321,400

The community of Evanton, near Dingwall, will be able to buy its local woodland, improve access to it and launch a programme of community events thanks to the HLF funding.

The 64ha (150 acre) mixed woodland close to the Cromarty Firth is a special example of continuous cover woodland management and is home to red squirrel and woodpeckers. Its rich environment is matched by the associated folklore in particular with the extraordinary Black Rock gorge, which features in the Harry Potter film, Goblets of Fire.

The Evanton Wood Community Company is made up of over 75 local residents who are keen to manage the wood effectively while encouraging others, especially young people, to become involved. As part of the project they will plant 5,000 native trees and remove invasive species. They will also improve paths, signage and interpretation, and arrange a 5 year programme of community events and educational visits. There will be training opportunities in skills such as chainsaw operation and woodland management and a local firewood scheme to encourage more homes to use locally sustainable fuel.

Scotland's Mountain Woodland
HLF grant: £528,900

Once a naturally occurring part of the Scottish landscape, Scottish mountain woodland, sometimes known as montane scrub, has largely disappeared. Species such as aspen, rowan, willows, birch and juniper used to form a natural fringe to the forest growing above the altitude where trees can be grown commercially. Their existence is necessary to stabilise mountain soils, reducing the risk of flooding and landslip, as well as providing protection and shelter from the mountain weather for animals and rare species of plants such as sowthistle as well as smaller montane scrub species such as woolly willow, which are now only just surviving.

Highland Birchwoods will, through large-scale planting, re-establish mountain woodland with the aim that these areas will eventually be self-sustaining. The planting will take place across three sites: Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park; Dundreggan Estate; and Lochluichart and Scatwell Estates.

Volunteers will be heavily involved with 900 places available on survey days and 1,200 places on planting days. Free training courses will also take place at the three sites twice a year.

Cree Valley Woodland Heritage
HLF First Round Pass: £224,600 including £29,600 development funding

The Cree Valley Community Woodlands Trust has been given the green light to develop a project which will see the regeneration of 85 hectares of native woodland restoring habitats and encouraging rare species. A further 28 hectares of native oak woodland and 65 hectares of woodland fringe will be planted with the aim of creating a Forest Habitat Network which will link woodland throughout the Cree Valley.

Volunteers and community groups will play a key role in the project which will promote the link between the archaeology and historical use of native woodlands and show how it relates to the landscape through way-marked trails, interactive displays, leaflets and a website.

Notes to editors

- 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. To date, it has invested over £536million in Scotland's heritage.
- 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. However, a first-round pass does not guarantee the applicant will receive a grant although the chances of receiving a grant are high the second-round application will still be in competition for funding, and no money is set aside at this stage. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals.

Further information

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- Scotland's Coastal Heritage: Tom Dawson on 01334 467 172 or Joanna Hambly on 01334 462 904
- Castle Semple Trail: Susan Jones on 0141 618 7840

- Enjoy Wild Orkney: Leianna Padgett on 0131 317 4192 or 07713 392 172
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- Cree Valley Woodland Heritage: Peter Robinson or Linda Moorhouse on 01671 401 423