



COMMISSIONED REPORT

Summary

Responsible behaviour amongst recreational users and land managers: 2007 monitoring

Report No: F05AA602 (c)

Contractor : MVA Consultancy

BACKGROUND

This report presents the findings from the final year of a three year study commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) to monitor responsible behaviour among recreational users and land owners/managers. It investigates changes in behaviour arising from the introduction of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (The Code) and compares the results to the baseline survey which was conducted in 2002/03 (referred to as the baseline survey). This summary presents the main findings from the third year of the monitoring programme, in which three target groups (recreational users, land managers and outdoor recreation managers) were surveyed between August and November 2007 using a third party approach to distribute postal self-completion questionnaires.

METHODOLOGY

This third year report has met the objectives of the three year monitoring programme by:

- building on the findings of the previous year of awareness, attitudes and actual behaviour of the key target groups: recreational users and land managers (private sector).
- continuing to implement a method of survey to obtain more information from birdwatchers as a new subset of the recreational users target group.
- continuing to include information from land managers from key public and voluntary sector organisations within the land managers target group.
- gathering information from Scottish Ranger Services, and other appropriate access staff, in order to obtain a balancing view on the levels of responsible/irresponsible behaviour reported by the two target groups.

It has not reported on or compared the results with data from the monitoring of the general public, nor with the baseline, as this will only be done at the end of the three year monitoring programme.

MAIN FINDINGS

Key characteristics of recreational users and land owners/managers

Recreational users generally felt comfortable when pursuing leisure activities in the countryside – 72% reported being “very comfortable”.

The majority of recreational users used the countryside mainly for more active recreational pursuits (74%), with over half of them (52%) using the countryside at least once a week. Walking (over 2 miles) was the most common activity undertaken within the last month (75%), followed by walks of up to 2 miles (60%).

Over half of visitors were accompanied by friends or family on their last visit (54%) while a quarter (25%) were alone. Recreational users were most likely to visit mountains or moorland (40%) or forest and woodland (19%), with off-road tracks or routes and footpaths the most common surfaces used.

Just over a quarter of land owners/managers (28%) reported no problems in the last 2/3 months, with the rest reporting a range of problems associated with public attitudes, including litter, gates left inappropriately open/closed, fly tipping and problems associated with dogs.

Awareness, perceptions of key responsibilities, and impact of The Code

Ninety-seven per cent of recreational users and 94% of land owners/managers had heard of The Code. A high percentage of respondents from both groups were also aware of its content (77% and 70% respectively).

More active recreational users (79%) were more likely to be aware of the content of The Code than those who used the countryside for more general leisure activities (71%).

Agents/land managers were most aware of The Code (100% said they were aware of its content). Awareness was higher the larger the size of the farm or estate, amongst those whose land is used for recreational purposes and amongst owners/managers who received support or advice from a public body.

Both recreational users and land managers showed a high awareness of the responsibilities associated with access or management respectively.

Fifty per cent of recreational users and 37% of land owners/managers reported that The Code had had a large or some effect on their activities or land management practices.

Perceptions of the audiences of The Code

Most recreational users and land owners/managers felt that The Code was primarily aimed at the general public (94% and 91% respectively). However, both groups were less likely to consider public bodies as a target audience for The Code (56% and 35% respectively) than other audiences.

Problems and their effects as encountered by and from different groups

Thirty percent of recreational users experienced at least one problem when accessing the countryside. The most commonly reported problems were coming across a locked gate or a path blocked by overgrowing vegetation (each of these problems was reported by 10% of all respondents who visited the countryside for recreational purposes in the last month).

Three quarters (76%) of land owners reported that they had experienced a problem within the last 2-3 months, including people dropping litter, 54% of the full sample mentioned this as an issue. Notably, the key problems land owners/managers felt had got worse over the last three years were problems with people dropping litter, problems with dogs and people leaving gates inappropriately open or closed. The most frequently reported problem with dogs not being kept under proper control by their owner while on land owners/managers' land was dogs in fields with livestock (36% of all respondents).

Perceived behaviour of different groups utilising the countryside

Recreational users were asked how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements about the behaviour of land owners/managers. Recreational users were generally more negative about land owners/managers than the land managers were about them. The biggest concerns amongst recreational users regarding the behaviour of land owners/managers were about planning and conducting land management to minimise interference with people accessing the countryside; working in partnership with local authorities, recreation organisations and public bodies; providing clear/constructive advice to event organisers; and informing the public of the extent and duration of management operations.

Land owners/managers were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements about the behaviour of visitors. However land owners/managers gave responses which illustrate that they tend to have a neutral view of the behaviour of recreational users expressing a number of concerns, particularly in relation to problems with the control of dogs and helping land managers to work safely and effectively.

Given the likelihood that the views expressed by recreational users and land managers would be opposing or contrasting, the views of outdoor recreation managers were also examined in order to provide a balanced overview. Overall the findings imply that outdoor recreation managers tend to have a positive view of visitors to the countryside, believing that they behave appropriately with regard to the behaviours asked about. Across all the behaviours mentioned (with the exception of keeping dogs under proper control) the outdoor recreation managers had a slightly more positive perception of visitor behaviour than the views held by land owners/managers.

Similarly, outdoor recreation managers have a more positive view of the behaviour of land owners/managers than that held by recreational users. Throughout all the behaviours asked about, the recreation managers appeared to hold a more positive opinion of land owners/manager behaviour than the views held by recreational users.

Perceptions of recreational users' positive behaviour varied considerably. Seventy one per cent of outdoor recreation managers said that they had seen instances or evidence of the general public helping them or nearby land owners/managers within the last two to three months. Only 26% of land owners/managers, however, could recall receiving any help from the public within the last month.

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