Scottish Outdoor Access Code promotion in 2021

Purpose

This paper from NatureScot invites views from the Forum on priorities for SOAC promotion in 2021.

Action

Members are asked to comment on the suggested priority topics and audiences, and any other aspects of Code promotion during the coming year.

Background

NatureScot has a statutory duty to promote the Scottish Outdoor Access Code, and the approach taken has been informed by considerable previous discussion at the Forum. This has highlighted ongoing priority topics such as responsible camping and access with dogs, and identified new emerging themes, in particular resulting in a greater recent focus on "entry level" messages about the need for responsible behaviour and the existence of the Code. Recent NatureScot campaigns are making increased use of social media approaches, which can achieve greater reach and more effective targeting, but also allow campaigns to operate on a broader front (with a greater diversity of messages and audiences) than has previously been the case.

It is not yet clear exactly when or how the current lockdown will end, but a marked increase in outdoor visits is likely at some stage in early spring, and clear and sustained SOAC messaging will be required from that time onwards. The timing of different parts of the campaign will also however need to reflect the seasonality of some issues – for example relating to dogs and livestock.

The suggested themes that have so far been identified are summarised in the following table.

Key proposed topics and audiences

Topic	Some key audiences	Comments
Overarching COVID-specific visitor management messages (eg. travel, group size, physical distancing)	All audiences	Will need to change over time to reflect status of restrictions.
General high level Code awareness, including key principles and interactions with land management	New outdoor users Visitors from elsewhere in the UK	
Camping	Inexperienced/novice campers "Party" campers	"Party camper" audience is likely to require different approaches (eg. influencers)
Litter, fires, human waste	General audience; also camping audiences as above.	Further discussion is planned regarding "fires" messaging.

Parking	General audience; also camping audiences as above.	Not included in access rights, although advice is provided in the Code.
Campervans	Campervan users	Not included in access rights. Messaging to be developed with key stakeholders.
Dogs	Dog owners.	Livestock, dog waste etc.
Wildlife disturbance	General audience; also dog owners as above.	
Shared use	New outdoor users Visitors from elsewhere in the UK	

Taking forward the 2021 campaign

This year's campaign will of course be set in the context of the collaborative national Visitor Management Strategy (VMS) to respond to the pressures resulting from COVID-19, as described in a separate paper. Code promotion will therefore be shared between a range of key public bodies including NatureScot, VisitScotland, Forestry & Land Scotland, the National Park Authorities and Zero Waste Scotland, and co-ordinated through the VMS Education & Marketing sub-group. This significantly increased level of partnership working should considerably increase the combined reach and impact of the campaign.

This combined effort is likely to involve a combination of online/social and traditional media, including both new educational materials and existing resources such as the video animations for young people that we have developed in partnership with Young Scot. The VMS Education & Marketing sub-group will develop a toolkit of resources which can be used by partners to help promote Code messages to various audiences. This should facilitate local promotional activity, in particular by access authorities, which will be important in order to maximise the effectiveness of the overall campaign and link to local visitor management activity. These resources will also of course be available to Forum member bodies to help spread the word.

One specific design point may be worth noting. The "*Know the Code before you go*" branding strip has now been in use for some time, although this strapline has not been universally popular. To support the planned campaign we would propose to introduce a refreshed branding strip, retaining the same recognisable overall appearance but replacing "*Know the Code…*" with "*Scottish Outdoor Access Code*" as the main text. This approach would advertise the Code more directly and strongly, which could be particularly important for novice outdoor users and 'staycation' visitors from elsewhere in the UK where different access rights apply. This would also be simpler, clearer and better suited to social media applications viewed on small screens.

Comments on any of the above, including suggested topics, key audiences or the wider overall approach to this year's campaign, would be very welcome.