

Debate, Thursday 11 February  
**Motion S5M-23892: The potential for a Galloway National Park**

**Summary**

Since their foundation, our two national parks have been influential in supporting the health, economy and the natural and cultural heritage of their areas – and the country as a whole. The Covid-19 pandemic has underlined the importance of the benefits to health and well being of being outdoors in the natural environment, and that these benefits need to be shared across the whole population. It has also demonstrated the need for greater investment in recreation and visitor management to ensure that rural communities are supported to welcome visitors in a sustainable way, and also able to benefit from the economic contribution that tourism brings.

Where there is strong local support, as in Galloway, we believe a national park could help boost jobs, promote sustainable businesses and enhance tourism within rural communities, as well as bringing higher levels of protection to our environment, tackling climate change and promoting outdoor recreation opportunities.

**Introduction**

Ramblers Scotland welcomes this debate and supports the call by the Galloway National Park Association for a new national park in Galloway for the reasons set out in the motion.

The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the extent to which people recognise and value the benefits to their health and wellbeing of being active in the natural environment, with 80% of Scots visiting the outdoors at least once a week last summer [according to NatureScot](#), up from 64% in summer 2019. While this is to be welcomed, the impact of higher than normal visitor pressures did lead to problems in some more popular areas, including in Galloway around Loch Ken and Leadhills in particular.

Yet there are also many opportunities which arise from this renewed interest in the outdoors, especially in terms of the boost to the rural economy that visitors bring, if it can be effectively harnessed. With the right encouragement and investment in infrastructure and management, we believe this interest could lead to both sustainable business opportunities for rural communities and also to a lifetime of personal enjoyment of Scotland's natural and cultural heritage for a whole generation.

Galloway is particularly well placed as a location for a new national park, which could build on existing initiatives such as the Biosphere Reserve and Dark Sky Park with a strategic level of management. This would help to promote the south of Scotland to a new audience and capitalise on the desire for those enjoying outdoor recreation and tourism activities to visit beautiful, natural places in their own country.

**The benefits of national park status**

National parks bring significant social and economic benefits, directly through the work generated in park planning and management, but also indirectly through tourism. Our two national parks have shown they are playing an integral role in boosting the Scottish economy. A [report](#) by VisitScotland in 2012 showed that over a million UK residents visited Scottish national parks, spending £243 million. International visitors are especially alert to the location and opportunities provided by

national parks as they recognise that these areas encompass the best scenery, wildlife and facilities for enjoying the natural environment.

As the leading internationally-recognised designation for our natural and cultural heritage, national park status brings higher levels of protection to our most treasured landscapes and wildlife, improved opportunities for the restoration of damaged habitats. There are also more opportunities for influencing wider land management practices to be more sustainable in approach, especially in addressing the climate emergency and biodiversity crisis. The Scottish Government has already committed to increasing protected areas for nature from the current 23% to 30% by 2030, as put forward in the international [Campaign for Nature](#). Creating new national parks would be one way of achieving this aim.

### **The contribution to the economy of outdoor recreation**

Galloway's natural beauty is already recognised as a magnificent setting for outdoor recreation. Our two existing national parks have led the way in managing access and recreation, supporting more people to enjoy the outdoors by producing comprehensive core paths plans, creating excellent materials to promote recreation and taking a positive, firm stance on protecting threatened access, including through court action. Infrastructure and promotion are particularly important in engaging new audiences not traditionally associated with recreation to enjoy the outdoors.

Across Scotland the value of outdoor recreation by Scottish residents is approximately [£2.6 billion](#) each year. This economic activity supports cafés, accommodation, shops and hire centres, outdoor instructors, transport providers and many other businesses, particularly in rural areas. It also supports jobs in ranger services, biodiversity protection and visitor management. Even 18% of the [economic value of the forestry industry](#) in Scotland comes from tourism and recreation. Recreation is also vital to our tourism industry with [VisitScotland](#) estimating that walking tourism alone contributes £1.26 billion to the economy, and around 54% of all tourists [enjoy a walk](#) while on holiday. Other [studies](#) show leisure cycle tourism on the national cycle network alone is worth £345 million and mountain bike tourism £141 million. This is generally sustainable, low-impact tourism and there is much potential for growth without damaging our environment, especially in rebuilding the tourism sector post-Covid-19. Galloway is well placed to benefit from this activity, but national park status would bring an additional draw to the area for visitors along with a more strategic approach to promotion.

### **Conclusion**

Given the local support evidenced by the Galloway National Park Association, we believe there is a strong case for a national park in Galloway which would help to balance development and environmental pressures in the area and bring considerable social and economic benefits. It would also be excellent if Scotland could demonstrate through a Galloway National Park that fine landscapes and recreational opportunities are to be found in areas away from the more famous Highland and Islands landscapes.

Ramblers Scotland helps everyone, across Scotland, enjoy walking and protects the places we love to walk. We are the representative body for walkers in Scotland, recognised by **sportscotland** as a governing body of sport. We have around 6,500 members in Scotland with 54 local walking groups entirely run by volunteers. Over 1,200 of our members are active volunteers, and normally organise thousands of led walks and social activities for their groups each year.

We were heavily involved in developing the Scottish national parks legislation enacted in 2000 and we have long called for more national parks to be established in Scotland. We were pleased to support the [Unfinished Business](#) report produced by the Scottish Campaign for National Parks and the Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland in 2013 and we continue to support their Scottish national parks strategy project.

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