# **New Seasonal Access Ranger Team start patrols within the Highland Council area**

Last weekend saw the first patrols of The Highland Council’s new Seasonal Access Ranger team. The team are based throughout the Highlands to promote and advise on responsible access to the countryside through the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. This follows some preliminary Saturday patrols by Access staff who saw a gradual increase in campers particularly in the Lochaber area.

In response to last summer’s issues with ‘dirty camping’ in many Highland locations, where many communities & land managers were appalled at the behaviour of some of the visitors, The Highland Council has developed a multi-service Visitor Management Plan and allocated £1.5M to implement it. A key part of that plan was £300,000 for the establishment of a ten-person Seasonal Access Ranger team. This team will cover a third of the Scottish land area or nearly 26,500 square km which was identified as a considerable task for ten people. Working in collaboration with a number of partners The Highland Council’s Outdoor Access Manager submitted a bid to NatureScots Better Places Green Recovery Fund for a further seven posts. Confirmation of this funding was received last week.

Working with Skye Connect, Wester Ross Biosphere, The Applecross Trust and Visit Inverness Loch Ness the bid has secured seven more rangers to be managed by The Highland Council. These extra posts allowed a redistribution of the original ten posts to ensure more areas of Highland have a ranger patrolling the popular scenic places.

Cllr Gordon Adam, Chair of Highland Council’s Tourism Committee, said “We are delighted to have received additional funding from NatureScots Better Places Green Recovery Fund that allows a total of seventeen new Rangers to be deployed in the Highland Council area throughout the season. A key role for the Rangers will be engaging with the public and raising awareness of the Outdoor Access Code and communicating to people that as individuals we all play an important role in ensuring that the beautiful outdoor spaces are protected for all to enjoy for future generations. Thank you to the Outdoor Access team for their foresight and for working in partnership with other organisations to secure the funding that will allow an additional seven Rangers to come on board this season.”

Rangers will patrol sites and engage with visitors to ensure awareness of the Outdoor Access Code, they will monitor use and report incidents to the relevant Council teams or emergency services. The rangers will also carry out duties to keep tidy, maintain and manage Council owned sites, core paths and work with communities and land managers on other sites to protect the habitats and respect for the landscape. Where possible, the rangers will work with local volunteers to engage with visitors.

Responsible camping will be a key priority and in most cases this will mean a ‘no fires’ message. There is a significant fire risk throughout the Highlands in the summer months and lighting camp-fires on peaty ground, woodland, grassland or moors is irresponsible and contrary to the Code. It is also irresponsible to light fires close to buildings, historic monuments and within 30m of a public road. Even small fires cause significant damage to our natural environment from the scorch marks, the trees cut down or the dead wood housing insects. Much of this damage takes years to recover and leaves behind a disruptive mark on the beautiful landscape.

The Rangers will work in small teams of 2 or 3 in six areas around Highland these are; Lochaber, Skye, Wester Ross, NW Sutherland, East Highland and Loch Ness Ross & Nairn. Note that Rangers will work weekends and will not be available Tuesdays or Wednesdays. People can contact the Ranger team, but we do ask that people are realistic in their expectations, that the team are not an emergency service and are there to educate & engage rather than enforce. The team can be contacted by email at accessrangers@highland.gov.uk or by phoning the Senior Rangers on 07881 298503 for the South (Skye, Lochaber & SW Ross)  and 07909 051223 for the North (all other areas)