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The Ramblers' Association
Working for walkers

Dear LAF secretary,

The Access Management Grant Scheme (AMGS), which provides funding to local authorities to support the implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act 2000, has been vital to the successful introduction of the new rights of access in England.

It has supported a vast range of projects across the country, allowing increasingly effective management procedures to be put in place to lessen the need for restrictions and exclusions on the right of access, for the production of promotional materials and for the installation of the infrastructure needed to integrate access land within the wider countryside network.

This is the work that needs to be done to make the CRoW Act succeed in practice and AMGS is the only funding stream that can support it. Work on access land is a power rather than a duty and without this funding, access authorities will simply be unable to carry it out.

The AMGS is scheduled to end in March 2008. We believe strongly that funding is needed to ensure the continued smooth operation of the new rights, to maximise the benefits of the legislation for the public and to meet the management needs of landowners and nature conservation.

We have put together a short factsheet giving some background information on the AMGS, our research and lobbying work to date, and what part Local Access Forums can play. Please help us secure the future of this vital funding by writing to the chairman of Natural England, Sir Martin Doughty, stating your support for the continuation of the Access Management Grant Scheme and calling for a clear and immediate commitment to its extension.

Yours sincerely,

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Campaigns Officer

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The Access Management Grant Scheme (AMGS)

What is it?

The Access Management Grant Scheme (AMGS) was designed to support the implementation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, under which the public were granted a right of access on foot to mapped areas of mountain, moor, heath, down and common land. The scheme provides both an incentive and a means of support for access authorities in making use of the powers that they have been given to manage the implementation of the new right of open access at a local level.

Funding priorities

The AMGS scheme has five funding branches, covering everything from nature conservation to reducing the level of restrictions, and provides the ideal platform to think about all of these facets of access land use together. The five objectives of the scheme are:

- Protecting vulnerable features on nature conservation sites – research into the effect of increased access on sensitive species or habitats, often on designated areas like Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)
- Improving public safety – funding work into reducing the risk posed to the public, lessening the need for restrictions and investigating informal access management
- Reducing the level of land management restrictions – funding works where a restriction has been applied to lessen the likelihood of it being required again in the future
- Planning for fire prevention – providing proactive fire management and partnership working through the development of plans at an access authority level
- Making all other access land available for use – infrastructure and information provision, both on and off-site

This funding has proved invaluable over the last three years, with some fifty authorities applying for over £3 million in support of their access land projects. Work on access land is a statutory power rather than a duty and ongoing funding is essential to make sure that the access network remains open and accessible to as many people as possible. Without dedicated funding from the AMGS, money for this work would have to be found within the already stretched budgets of local authority rights of way departments, jeopardising future developments and threatening even the most basic maintenance.

Ramblers' Association survey results

We have been able to collect information that demonstrates just how valuable this funding has been. We sent a questionnaire to every local authority in England asking them about their experiences of using the scheme and how they adjusted during the suspension of funding in the summer of 2006. The results showed that:

- 72% of the respondents who applied for AMGS funding said that their ability to manage access land was compromised by its removal.
- 18 Access Authorities (just under half of all the eligible respondents) had projects that had to be suspended, or planned but never started, due to the removal of AMGS funding.

- For many authorities, the withdrawal of AMGS funding meant that they could no longer be proactive in their work on access land. This affected their ability to make long-term plans and devise projects, forcing them to be simple (and often selective) problem-solvers, reacting to issues as they were raised and seeking the quickest and cheapest solution.
- The revelations from local authority officers were often stark. Some of the comments include:
 - “We have no budget for ongoing maintenance, therefore there is no maintenance”
 - “Posts were lost due to funding cuts”
 - “Good opportunities to address access land issues were lost.”
 - “The budget is only really available for statutory duties. AMGS funding has allowed other projects to proceed which wouldn't have done otherwise”

Local Access Forums – How you can help

Local Access Forums (LAFs) are ideally placed to recognise the value of the AMGS and present a unified voice in the campaign to save and extend it. This funding benefits everyone with an interest in countryside access, both user groups and land managers, by improving the network and reducing the burden on local authorities. LAFs, as statutory advice-giving bodies and a resource of local expertise and knowledge, can also quiz local authorities on their own access land work and promote project ideas that they would like to see implemented.

You and your forum can:

- Ask your authority whether they have used AMGS funding and, if they have, what projects it has supported.
- Incorporate this information into a letter to Sir Martin Doughty, the Chairman of Natural England, stating your support for the Access Management Grant Scheme and calling for a clear and immediate commitment to its extension.

Sir Martin Doughty
 Chairman Natural England
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