

The Socioeconomic Impacts of Nature Networks

In this research by ClimateXChange and the University of Glasgow's Centre for Public Policy, Nature Networks are assessed for their ability to deliver social and economic benefits to people and communities across Scotland.

The Scottish Government has embedded delivery of Nature Networks into the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Delivery Plan as a clear step to combat habitat fragmentation, which poses a threat to the health of Scotland's biodiversity.

Nature Networks are developed by **linking habitat and nature areas together via natural corridors or stepping stones**. This allows plant and animal life to migrate across the landscape. They are intended to be delivered by each local authority, alongside partners and with the involvement of local stakeholders.

We reviewed international evidence and spoke to people across Edinburgh and Moray to better understand the range of benefits associated with nature connectivity across rural and urban areas. Our research shows that Nature Networks can offer health and wellbeing benefits, benefits to communities and people, economic benefits, and climate resilience benefits. These are delivered best in cases where place-based collaboration takes place, and where there is sufficient local authority capacity.

These pages illustrate the range of **wider socio-economic benefits that an investment in Nature Networks can offer** to local communities.

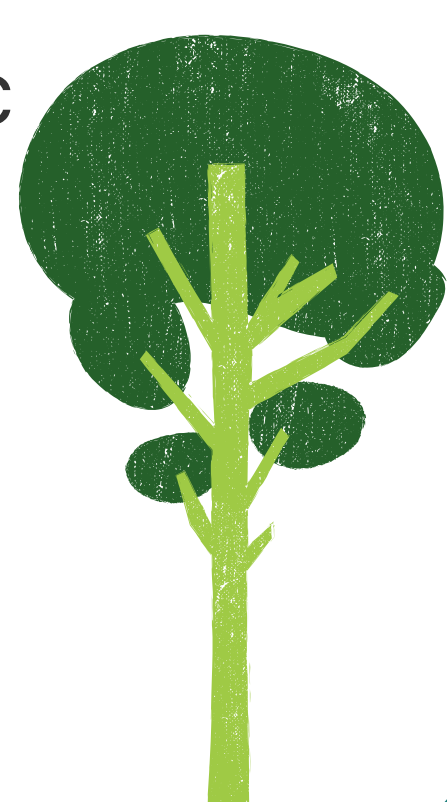
Ecosystem Contributions

Nature Networks provide clear contributions to the flow of ecosystem services that support our human wellbeing and economic activity.

These networks **support food production, regulate access to water, and improve soil health**.



Communities and people



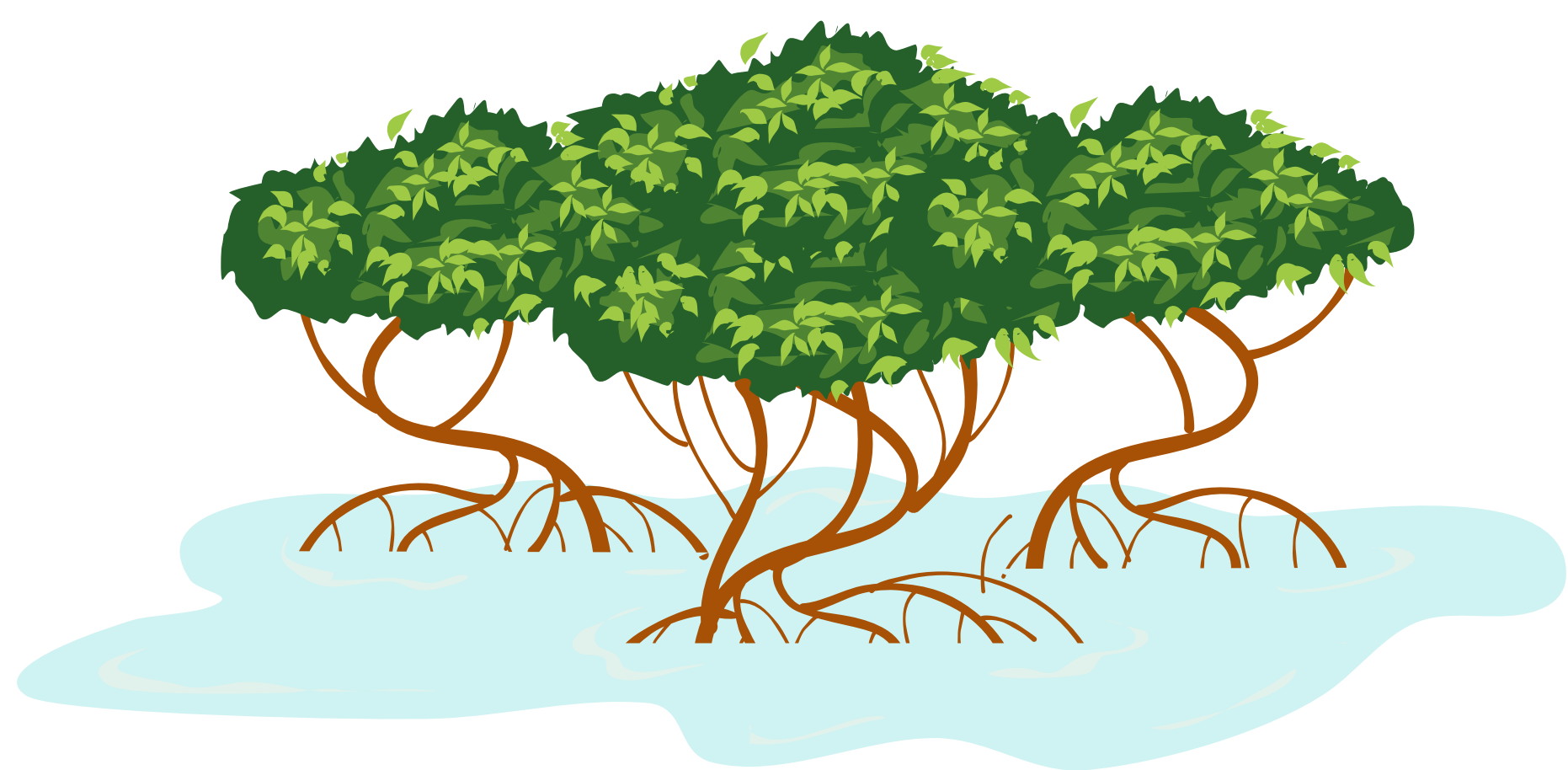
Nature networks **strengthen social cohesion**, participation and connection to place.



“...Our theory of change is very much rooted in [the idea that] the more people feel connected to this place and [have] **a sense of belonging as part of it**, [then] they're more motivated to also do their part in taking care of it. (Participant 12).”

This is primarily through:

- Increased **community engagement** and activity
- Enhanced education and skills development
- A stronger sense of place and **environmental stewardship**



Climate adaptation and resilience

There is a clear and significant role for nature networks in helping communities adapt to climate change and build resilience.

This is seen through:

- Reduced flood risk and drought impacts
- Improved temperature regulation
- Enhanced water management and soil health

Economic impacts

Restoring habitat connectivity can support:

- Growth in tourism and recreation economies
- Job creation and local contracting
- Indirect cost savings e.g. flood prevention, health benefits

Participant 14 points out both aspects: ...it's good for tourism, it's good for the environment. Sometimes it's cheaper to plant some trees instead of a wall when it comes to flooding, and for the shade, it's 1,000 [more] benefits.

If we are working to lower water temperatures, or mitigate flood risk, or improve water security in terms of climate resilience, [then] especially downstream communities are going to see over time a tangible benefit in that way. **There's a kind of resilience piece that nature restoration creates, which is ultimately a community benefit and benefits local businesses** (Participant 12).

Health and Wellbeing Benefits

Nature Networks indirectly contribute to people's physical and mental health through:

- Improved **mental health and wellbeing**
- Increased **physical activity**
- Reduced **heat related health risks**
- Improved **air quality**

The Moray Climate Action Network conducted research into why individuals in the region grow their own food, a process that could provide connectivity with particular patches of the nature network, and found that "**mental health and wellbeing came out on top** of actually healthy food. All the stuff that we're doing is actually good for your mental health (Participant 14).

Limitations and Trade-Offs

The report emphasises both key research constraints alongside limitations to the benefits nature networks may deliver. Econometric and cost-benefit analysis of the economic impact of nature networks is lacking. Better data will be needed make the economic case for dedicating private land to restoration of nature connectivity, in particular for farmers and landowners across Scotland.

Additionally, the benefits uncovered are not universal. Rather, they differ between rural and urban contexts, may be unevenly distributed, and can depend on the scale of the nature restoration.



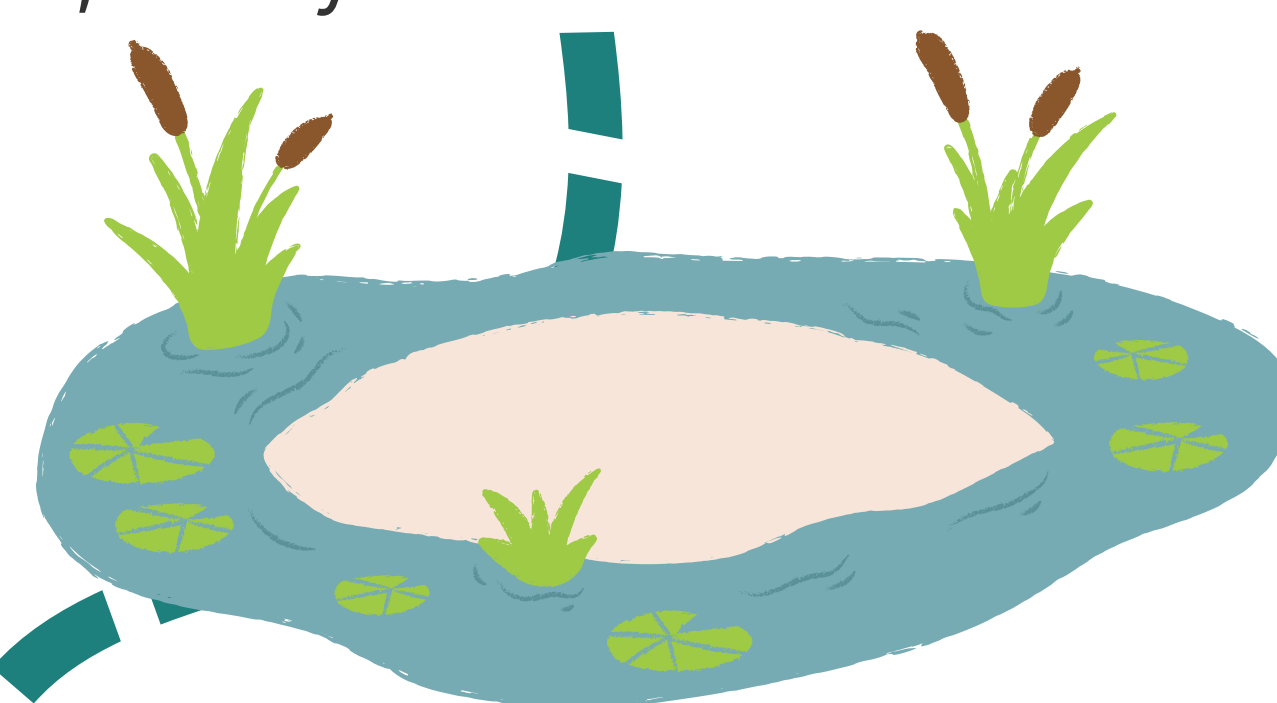
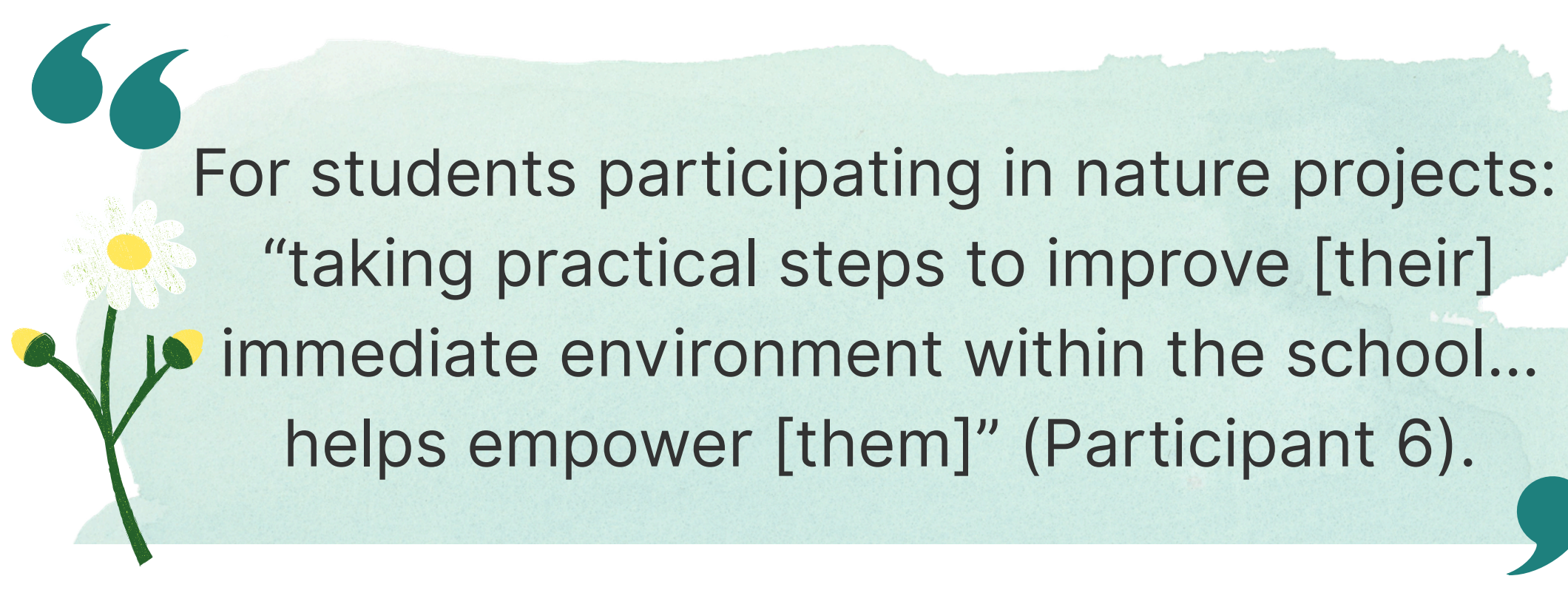
The Benefits

The report shows that nature networks can deliver significant socioeconomic benefits across multiple domains, including health, community wellbeing, economic opportunity, and climate resilience.

These benefits should be seen in the context of being scale-dependent, often indirect or long term and challenging to measure.

As a result, the greatest value of nature networks lies in their ability to deliver **integrated, place-based co-benefits**, rather than single, easily quantifiable outcomes.

Place-based collaboration and sufficient local authority capacity are necessary to deliver these benefits.



ClimateXChange provides independent advice, research and analysis to support the Scottish Government as it develops and implements policies on adapting to the changing climate and the transition to a low carbon society.

The Centre for Public Policy is where evidence meets practice. The Centre’s convening power brings together experts across disciplines, sectors and communities to help policymakers deal with the many challenges they face.

References

Salamon, H. (2026) 'Assessing the Socioeconomic Benefits of Nature Networks', ClimateXChange. <https://doi.org/10.7488/era/7510>.

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Scottish Government, & NatureScot. (2024). A Framework for Nature Networks in Scotland. <https://www.nature.scot/sites/default/files/2024-11/30x30-nature-networks-november-2024-accessible-1.pdf>

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