



Foundation
Scotland

Philanthropy: Giving for a Greener Future

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Introduction

Foundation Scotland recognises the urgency of the climate emergency and the responsibility to engage, inform, and influence communities to take positive action at a local level. Central to this work is the Philanthropy Team, which leads the foundation's donor advised funds, stewards endowments, and manages national and thematic funding programmes. This dedicated arm of the foundation operates separately from the Communities Team and Social Investment, ensuring a clear focus on how philanthropy can be mobilised to address climate challenges.

In 2020, Foundation Scotland became one of 60 UK charitable foundations to sign the Funder Commitment on Climate Change, marking the beginning of a long but vital journey toward net zero. Through its philanthropy function, the foundation has sought to embed environmental considerations into programme design, support applicants to national grant programmes, and explore green investment strategies for the stewardship of endowments and private funds.

Scotland needs all hands-on deck to answer the climate call. From small volunteer projects to climate advocacy, dynamic ideas are emerging across neighbourhoods. As Giles Ruck, CEO of Foundation Scotland, explains:

"At Foundation Scotland we do feel a responsibility to take action as best we can on climate, given that we are Scotland's community foundation, and we need to stand up and show our credentials on what we are doing both internally and on funding. Whilst we're not a huge foundation, we wanted to play our part in making that difference. And as an organisation, we decided that we needed to look inside ourselves as well as outside to the communities that we support. We wanted to make sure that all our staff and all our trustees, in fact all the volunteers gathered around the foundation, really understood the issues well."

This commitment has set the philanthropy team on a learning journey—embracing climate literacy, embedding environmental considerations into donor advised programmes, and strengthening stewardship of endowments to align with sustainability goals. While the work is ongoing, Foundation Scotland acknowledges there is still a long way to go. Yet each step forward demonstrates how philanthropy can play a pivotal role in tackling the climate emergency and building resilient communities across Scotland.



What we do

Foundation Scotland is an independent funder, and is Scotland's only Community Foundation.

We have been growing our roots deep within Scotland's communities for almost 30 years, learning as we go and building our knowledge of local, regional and national priorities – and aspirations.

We act as a connecting bridge between independent funding sources and communities, helping to strengthen them by putting money directly into their hands. We provide financial support in two main ways:

Distributing in partnership with others

Much of our work involves helping others give well. This includes:

- ▶ **Funding through Philanthropy** – we work with individual, family and corporate philanthropists, managing their funds and grants, as well as creating bespoke funding programmes that suit their charitable preferences.
- ▶ **Place-based funding** – we support grantmaking from place-based funds provided by the renewables sector, for example, community benefit funds linked to wind farms.

Using our own financial resources

We also use our own funds to respond to need where we see it, across the country. This includes:

- ▶ **Thematic funding** – we have established our own funds to tackle specific issues, such as our Tackling Inequalities Fund and our Response Fund.
- ▶ **Social investment** – we offer affordable, blended finance to social enterprises and charities, helping them grow sustainably while delivering social value.

Mostly, we strive to walk alongside and respond to communities, channelling funds where they are most needed. We also recognise the value of looking beyond traditional funding models, addressing the reasons why inequalities happen in the first place, and adapting accordingly, all of which enables us to distribute differently.

Our Philanthropy Team

The Philanthropy Team at Foundation Scotland supports donors to give with purpose, aligning their wealth with their values through thoughtful, tax-efficient, and impactful giving. Working in partnership with professional advisers-including financial planners, estate specialists, and lawyers-the team helps clients create tailored funds, steward endowments, and manage donor advised programmes, as well as national and thematic funding initiatives.

We provide simplicity by handling administration, flexibility to adapt giving over time, and strategic guidance to maximise impact. By connecting donors with communities across Scotland, we enable philanthropy that strengthens local ties, supports multigenerational legacies, and contributes to lasting social change.

We work alongside and support a diverse range of philanthropists – individuals, families, Charitable Trusts and Foundations as well as corporate donors, who want to do what they can to strengthen the building blocks of communities.

And sometimes, donors will add some of their resources to our own, pooling funds to try out new things and to address community need.

Many of our partnerships are long-standing and have enabled us to provide support to organisations and individuals across the country.



The Rise of Green Philanthropy: Sector Insights

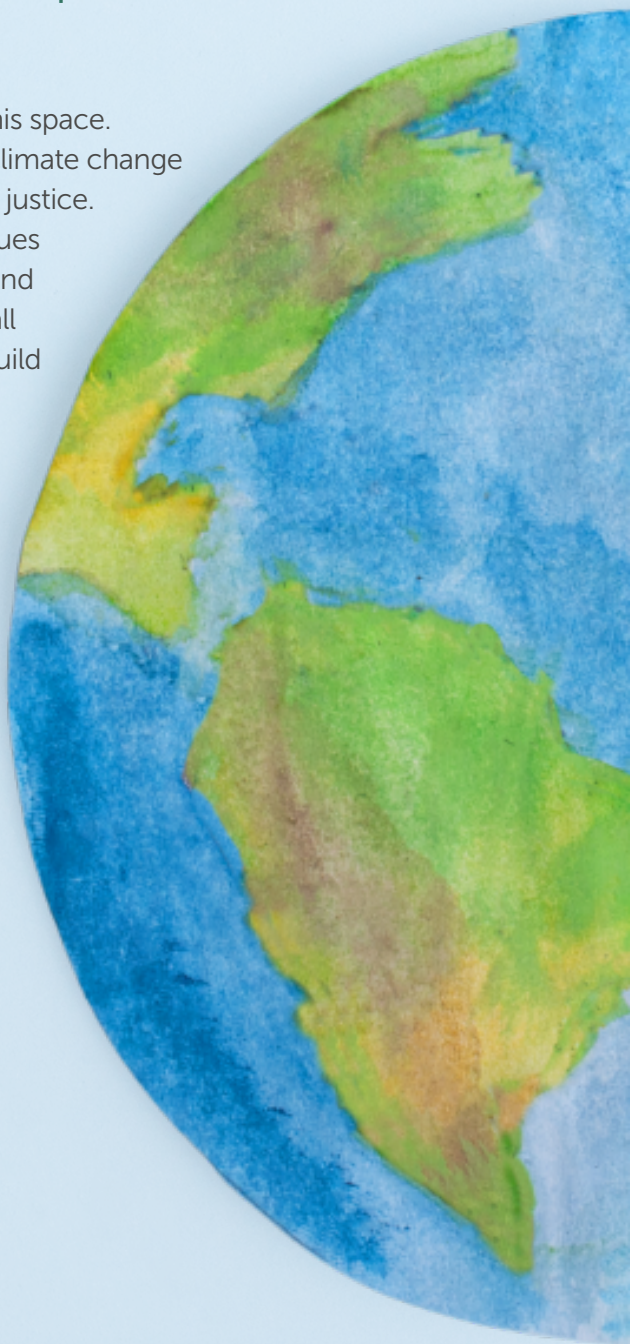
Green philanthropy is no longer a niche corner of charitable giving - it's becoming one of the most dynamic and forwardlooking areas of the philanthropic landscape. As funders grapple with the realities of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation, the sector is beginning to recognise that environmental action is inseparable from social progress.

To set the scene, it's helpful to clarify two key concepts shaping this space.

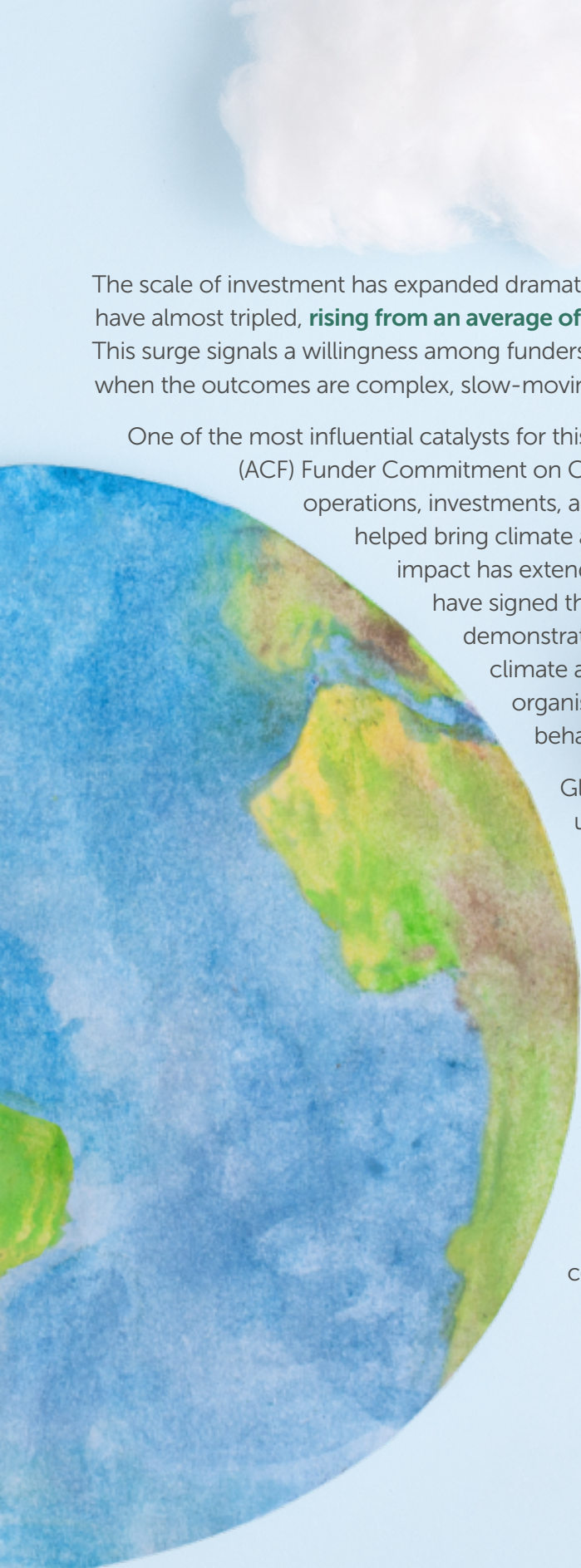
Climate philanthropy refers to grantmaking that directly targets climate change - reducing emissions, supporting adaptation, or advancing climate justice.

Environmental philanthropy casts a wider net, encompassing issues such as biodiversity, air pollution, natural resource conservation, and ecosystem health. Together, these fields form what we broadly call green philanthropy: funding that aims to protect the planet and build longterm resilience for communities and ecosystems.

Despite its growing visibility, green philanthropy still represents a relatively modest share of overall giving - but the momentum is unmistakably upward. **As of 2024, environmental funding accounts for around 8.5% of total UK foundation giving, up from 5.8% in 2018**, according to the Environmental Funders Network¹. This shift reflects a sector increasingly aware that environmental issues underpin everything from public health to economic stability.



1 [EFN-Annual-Report-2024-FINAL-compressed.pdf](#)



The scale of investment has expanded dramatically. Environmental grants from UK-based foundations have almost tripled, **rising from an average of £204 million (2016–2018) to £606.5 million in 2021/22**. This surge signals a willingness among funders to engage with long-term ecological challenges, even when the outcomes are complex, slow-moving, or difficult to measure.

One of the most influential catalysts for this shift has been the Association of Charitable Foundations' (ACF) Funder Commitment on Climate Change. By encouraging funders to align their operations, investments, and grantmaking with climate goals, the commitment has helped bring climate action into the mainstream of philanthropic strategy. Its impact has extended far beyond the UK: today, **769 funders worldwide** have signed the International Funder Commitment on Climate Change, demonstrating a growing global consensus around the urgency of climate action. That said, these commitments often focus on internal organisational practices rather than directly transforming donor behaviour or dramatically expanding climate-specific giving.

Globally, the picture remains one of both progress and underinvestment. Environmental and climate-related funding is estimated to account for **just 2% of total foundation grants, amounting to £7.5–12.5 billion out of £810 billion in 2021**¹². Given the scale of environmental challenges, this gap highlights the enormous potential - and responsibility - for philanthropy to do more.

Several factors help explain why green philanthropy has not yet reached its full potential. **Climate change disproportionately affects the poorest nations and communities, often far from funders' immediate surroundings**. Unlike local poverty or community safety initiatives, climate impacts can feel abstract or geographically distant, making it harder for donors to connect emotionally or see tangible results.

Environmental projects also tend to be long-term and complex. Habitat restoration, ecological regeneration, or climate adaptation work may take decades to show measurable outcomes - and in some cases, the benefits may not be fully realised within our lifetimes. This stands in contrast to traditional philanthropic areas where impact can be more immediate and visible.

Cost is another barrier. Many green projects - especially those involving land management, conservation, or ecoconstruction - require significant upfront investment. Compared to community programmes or sporting initiatives, environmental interventions often demand larger budgets and longer-term commitments.

And above all, despite growing awareness, climate change is still widely perceived as **a future, existential threat rather than a present crisis**, which can dampen donor urgency.

Yet the sector is evolving in promising ways. Funders are becoming increasingly skilled at demonstrating the intersectionality of climate change with other societal issues - from health and housing to inequality and community resilience. This shift is helping to reposition environmental giving not as a standalone cause but as a foundational element of social justice and long-term wellbeing.

Organisations such as Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Environmental Funders Network, ACF, and Philea have played a vital role in elevating the profile of green philanthropy. Through research, convening, and publications like *Where the Green Grants Went*, they have helped build a stronger evidence base and a more connected community of practice.

The challenge now is to sustain this momentum - and to inspire more donors, foundations, and communities to see environmental action not as an optional extra, but as essential to the wellbeing of people and planet alike.



Foundation Scotland's Approach to Green Giving

Since 2021, Foundation Scotland has been tracking its philanthropic activity against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Over the past five years the philanthropy team has awarded **100 grants** with **SDG 13: Climate Action** as their primary focus. Of these, **54 were donor advised**, reflecting the strong role of individual philanthropy in driving environmental impact.

In total, **£1,188,703.23** has been distributed, reaching and benefiting **802,760 people** across Scotland, the wider UK, and overseas.

This section of the report will provide a detailed analysis of the facts and figures emerging from this activity, highlighting the scale, reach, and outcomes of our climate-related philanthropy.

International reach: **17 grants were awarded outside the UK, showing strong global engagement.**

- **England:** 16 grants went to English regions, including Bristol, West Devon, and East Hampshire.
 - **Scottish focus:** The majority of grants were distributed within Scotland, with **City of Edinburgh** and **Highland** being the top recipients.
 - **Regional spread:** Smaller but notable allocations went to Perth and Kinross, Argyll and Bute, Moray, Scottish Borders, and Dundee City.
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Urban concentration: **Edinburgh dominates, reflecting its role as a hub for philanthropy and climate-related initiatives.**

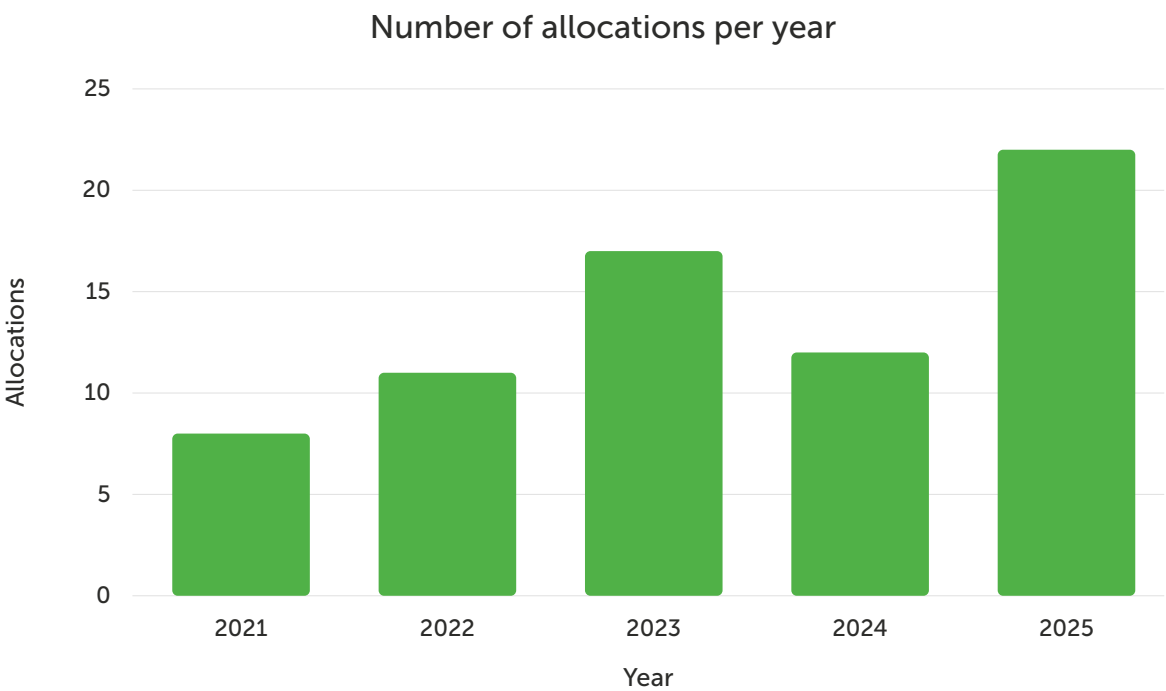
- **Rural and regional impact:** Highland and Argyll and Bute show strong representation, aligning with outdoor education, conservation, and community-led sustainability projects.
 - **Balanced portfolio:** Grants are spread across both **urban centres** and **rural communities**, while also maintaining **international commitments**.
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Largest award: **£67,500.00**

- **Smallest award:** £25.00
- **Average grant size:** £11,887.00

Timeline of distribution

Allocations have risen overall across the five years, with a sharp increase in 2025 indicating growing demand or expanded programme capacity.



Donor-Advised Awards (54 total):

These awards originated directly from individual philanthropists. This route highlights the influence of individual donors in shaping funding priorities, often reflecting personal values, interests, or strategic goals. Donor-advised giving typically allows for more flexibility and responsiveness, enabling philanthropists to act quickly and target specific causes.

Open Grantmaking Programmes (Remaining awards):

The rest of the awards were allocated through structured grantmaking programmes. In this model, panels were convened to evaluate applications and make collective decisions. This approach emphasizes transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, as funding decisions are based on agreed criteria and peer review rather than individual discretion.

Foundation Scotland’s climate-focused philanthropy demonstrates both scale and diversity. The balance between donor-advised awards and open grantmaking programmes reflects the complementary strengths of individual initiative and collective decision-making. Overall, this activity positions Foundation Scotland as a key driver of climate action within Scotland’s third sector.



Climate Champions: Success Stories

Beyond the numbers and statistics lies the true heart of our climate philanthropy: the people, communities, and activities that bring these grants to life. Each award represents more than funding—it is a catalyst for action, enabling projects as varied as community beach cleans, repair workshops, ecological restoration, and climate adaptation initiatives. Together, these efforts showcase the creativity and resilience of individuals and groups working to protect our environment. They remind us that philanthropy is not only about financial investment but also about nurturing hope, collaboration, and long-term change. In the following pages, we share some of the most inspiring stories that have emerged, shining a light on the human impact behind the figures.

Ullapool Seam Savers – Charitable Trust

In 2018, while snorkelling in their local kelp forests, six young people from Ullapool saw the damage plastic pollution caused their beloved sea and shores.

This set the young co-founders Arwen, Caillin, Hamish, Josh, Megan and Poppy on a journey to help their village become plastic straw free, the first village of its kind in Europe. This first taste of how passion, coupled with action, can have real results gave life to Ullapool Sea Savers (USS).

Ullapool Sea Savers became a new space for young people to protect their incredible marine environment, supporting connection to Nature and in turn positive mental health. The young people designed their own logo and asked a local childminder to help with the admin (and snacks!).

From the start, the six co-founders wanted to make sure other young people felt empowered to do something about what was happening to the sea they loved, which was a big part of their childhood and community. Ullapool Sea Savers went on to develop a culture of support, respect for science and evidence-based action, collaboration, joy, and togetherness.

Today, that ethos and culture is as strong as when the original 'kids' created it as they mentor new Sea Savers. Together, they support each other to find positive, proactive, ways to meet the challenges facing our oceans and seas.

In 2022, a philanthropy grant of £3,000 was awarded to Ullapool Sea Savers to support a youth-led project to support climate action in the region. **Ullapool Sea Savers** was initially formed in 2016 when local children were involved with the Scottish Wildlife Trusts (SWT) 'Living Seas' project, which was set up when the local Marine Protected Area status was assigned. This work with schools led to a group of children being particularly motivated and inspired to do more about local conservation, leading to the Plastic Straw Free Village project in 2017 and setting up Ullapool Sea Savers.

The primary project activities included peer-mentored pod sessions per month, accessible boat trips and remote beach cleans. All project activities occurred within the Wester Ross Marine Protected Area (MPA) – based in Ullapool but benefited all communities around the shores of the MPA. USS state that up to 1,700 young people directly benefited from project activities directly, and this represents the local youth population of this highly rural area.





West Harris Trust – Corporate Fund

In the northwest of Scotland, the Outer Hebrides and Western Isles are known for their remarkable natural landscapes and rich biodiversity. Protecting this fragile environment has become increasingly important. The region's wild fisheries are especially valuable, with many waters supporting rare and significant populations of wild Atlantic salmon. One striking example came in 2020, when the Fincastle Dam - after 120 years of operation - developed a major leak. Water levels in the loch fell so low that salmon could no longer reach the waterfall leading to their spawning grounds. This put the entire ecosystem at risk, raising real fears that the local fisheries could collapse without urgent intervention.

In recognition of the value of Fincastle to the local community, West Harris Trust partnered with Borge Lodge Estate to apply for funding to contribute to the cost of repair from the Wild Salmonid Support Fund which was overseen by the philanthropy team. In May 2022, the project was awarded £35,000.00 by a decision-making panel made up of experts in wild fisheries as well as aquaculture.

With another Summer of dry weather expected, work quickly commenced to save Fincastle Dam from ruin. In July 2022, a specialist team travelled from Glasgow to drive 4m long interlocking sheet piles down the turf centre of the dam wall. The 20-ton vehicle proceeded onto the estuary sands at low tide and manoeuvred the piles into place. The dam now has a steel spine down its centre which has assured the integrity of the dam wall for many decades to come. The top of the wall will be bolstered with topsoil and turf to cover the protruding steel, and the landscape will be restored to blend in with its surroundings.

Quick intervention from all parties ensured that the leak was fixed, and the Fincastle Dam can now continue to support wild fisheries for future generations.

Keen to celebrate the success of their repair work, West Harris Trust and Borge Lodge Estate held a community fishing day at the dam in August 2022. This interactive event was open to all ages and provided angling demonstrations, games and an information point which showcased the repair work. 40 people from the local community were in attendance and the day proved to be a great opportunity to educate those on wild fisheries and celebrate the beautiful landscape of West Harris.

Looking to the future, the Fincastle dam will continue to play an important role in the island's ecosystem as well as its local heritage. This project is just one example of the ways in which The Wild Salmonid Support Fund is helping communities to restore wild fisheries habitats across Scotland and protect the local environment.

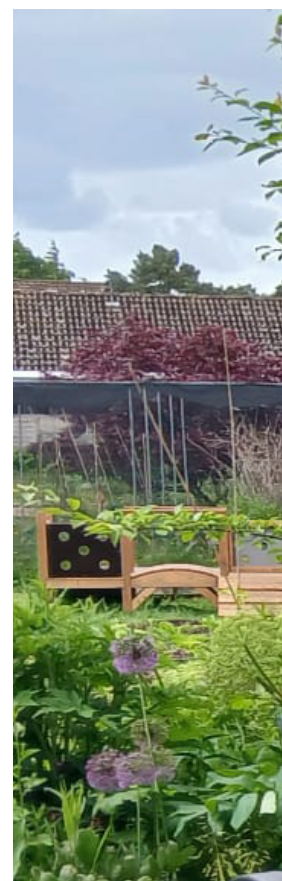


The Woodland Trust – Donor Advised

The Woodland Trust is the UK's largest woodland conservation charity, dedicated to protecting, restoring, and expanding native woodland. It manages thousands of woods across the country, campaigns for stronger environmental protections, and supports communities to plant and care for trees. The charity works to tackle biodiversity loss, address climate challenges, and ensure that future generations benefit from thriving, accessible natural spaces.

Over the years, the Woodland Trust has received donations from Foundation Scotland from a range of private and corporate supporters, whose unrestricted giving has enabled the charity to focus on its core work. In the past 12 months, The Woodland Trust's recent work includes rescuing and restoring UK temperate rainforests, purchasing Buckland Wood, and planting over 300,000 trees in Scotland. It reintroduced pine martens to Devon, fought more than 200 planning cases to protect ancient woodland, and campaigned for stronger legal protection for veteran trees. It also expanded community tree planting schemes and published major research on rainforest conservation.

Funding big national charities can make a real difference for Scotland. Groups like the Woodland Trust have the people, skills and long experience needed to look after many wild places at once. They can take on large projects, bring in volunteers and work with partners across the country. Their work helps protect Scotland's landscapes, supports local communities and keeps nature healthy for future generations. By supporting organisations like this, funders help make sure Scotland's wild places stay special, cared for and open to everyone.



Join us

Foundation Scotland's recent climate-focused work shows how philanthropy can help communities respond to complex environmental challenges with practical, grounded action. The figures highlight clear progress, but the stories behind them reveal something deeper: a growing movement led by people who care about the places they call home. From youth-led advocacy in Ullapool to conservation projects across rural and urban Scotland, donors and communities are working side by side to create change that lasts.

The journey is far from complete. Stronger climate literacy, better tools, and continued collaboration will be needed in the years ahead. Yet the direction of travel is clear. By pairing thoughtful philanthropy with community energy, Scotland is beginning to build the resilience required for an uncertain future.

Foundation Scotland remains committed to supporting this shift, ensuring that resources, expertise, and local ambition come together to protect both people and planet. We hope that this report will inspire others to join us on this journey.



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