



DEAR LANDOWNER



We, the public, need more access to nature.

We trespass your land today not in defiance of you, as the law currently defines it, but to start a conversation. Like other countries across Europe, including Scotland, Estonia, Norway and Sweden, we believe that a connection with nature is a birthright, not a crime. But with the English public forbidden from 92% of the land and 97% of rivers, the scale of our exclusion is neither justifiable nor tenable. Something must change.

In 2016, the State of Nature Report pooled data from over 50 conservation & research organisations to find the UK was one of the most nature-depleted countries in the world. But, without a connection to nature, it is no surprise that many people find it hard to comprehend the scale of our climate crisis and habitat loss. As the scientist Michael J Pyle wrote, "what is the extinction of a condor to a child that has never known the wren". People need a connection to nature in order to care.

Our health is declining, our NHS cracking under the pressure. Physically, we are suffering through our sedentary lifestyles, with both heart disease and obesity on the rise; mentally, we have urgent crises of stress and depression. Science has shown that all the above are linked to Nature Deficit Disorder, and that the symptoms can be alleviated by a renewed connection with nature. We trespass today because we know, in body, mind and soul, that nature can heal us.

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed the extent to which exclusion from nature is an issue of class and race, of justice as much as fairness. As research by the Office for National Statistics, CPRE and others have shown, it is the poorest and most marginalized communities which are the least likely to own any green space of their own, the least likely to live in a nature abundant area, to live in proximity to a National Park or AONB or to have the transport available to enjoy them. Wherever we live, whatever our income, whoever we are, the right to access nature should belong to us all.

The Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) act allows us to wander freely on 8% of the land.

But since much of this open access land is remote from much of the population, its benefits have been profoundly limited. To see a registrable effect on our nation's health, to alleviate the pressure on the NHS, we need to access nature regularly, which means we need it near to our homes. When rivers can regulate our stress levels, when woodlands can fortify our immune systems, when the open space of greenbelt land can offer us room to exercise, why are we forbidden from so much of our landscape? We need to bring CRoW to our doorsteps.

We appreciate the concern that access to the land has not always been met with respect for it. But when so many of us grow up excluded from nature, when the government has been spending just £2000/ year on publicising the Countryside Code, is it any wonder some people don't know how to behave responsibly? When the Scottish Land Reform Act of 2003 and the CRoW act of 2000 opened up the land to the public it also placed clear definitions on our responsibilities to it. Rather than inviting negligence into the countryside, extending our rights of access would allow the nation to forge a new relationship with the land, to learn and educate ourselves about the proper way to respect the countryside and its workings. The right to roam would reboot our connection to nature, and teach us first hand the responsibilities we owe it.

We appreciate that the countryside is a place of work. But we also see that your work is undervalued by society. Rather than interfering with your work, greater access rights would allow us a better recognition of the essential labour you put towards our lives and our society. We envision a future in which people come to the countryside not just to be in it, but to support and improve it in partnership with those who live and work within it.

For our environment to survive, for our society to thrive, our countryside cannot simply be the preserve of those fortunate enough to own it. We want to be a part of the countryside; we urgently need to reconnect to nature. And until we can have a conversation about how best to make this happen, respectfully, we will keep coming back.
Sincerely,



&



**extinction
rebellion**

