

Anglers urge MSP to help them 'save The Pentlands'

Frustrated anglers have sent a plea to their MSP in a bid to protect the Pentlands which last weekend saw up to 50 tents pitched, fires lit for BBQ's and parking problems caused by hundreds of visitors.

Jim McComb (pictured), chairman of Mallyen Angling Ltd (MA Ltd), in his letter to Gordon MacDonald MSP for Edinburgh Pentlands, said: "This is a cry for help to protect our treasured Pentlands environment and save lives."

Local residents, he said, feel they can no longer use the area safely and are staying away.

Non-profit-making Mallyen Angling administer fishing at Harlaw and Threipmuir Reservoirs above Balerno and McComb said the organisation takes respecting and protecting the local environment seriously.

Bailiffs have noted litter, including tents, discarded plus instant BBQ's, beer bottles and cans and even noted soiled toilet paper in the woods around the popular venue.

He added: "We see one of our roles as guardians of the environment at Harlaw and Threipmuir. MA Ltd accept that the Pentlands Regional Park is open for all to enjoy. Since the fishing season opened on 29th May, MA Ltd has been plagued by poachers."

McComb said the current one-way pedestrian public traffic to and from the car park is ignored by many, fires are being built, not dampened down, and the debris left in place.

This increases the risk of woodland fires. Indeed, the fire brigade were called to one on Sunday.

Trees, young and old, including young saplings, he added, have been used as firewood.

Areas with new trees which MA Ltd, along with the local ranger, helped plant a few years ago have been, he said, "maliciously cleared" for the erection of tents.

Rubbish is left lying, including broken glass, which is dangerous for dogs and children. Dog poo is left lying in small black bags on the roadway or in woodland.

McComb, in his letter, said: "No toilet facilities are open at Harlaw House. Human excrement, soiled paper and waste is left on open and woodland ground.

"Groups of 20 to 40 people are meeting and not social distancing. Any comment by a bailiff is normally met by a rebuke.

"Numerous inflatable crafts being used, some by young children with no life jackets. Harlaw is a deceptive reservoir, as it is several feet deep only a few yards from the shore and, in places, quickly reaches up to 60 ft. I do not want to see a life lost to drowning.

"Swimmers enter the water beside anglers or swim close to an angler's fishing line. They have no regard for the angler trying to enjoy his sport or the danger that a hook embedded in the flesh can cause.

"Youths are drinking alcohol and then swimming, which is a dangerous combination. The result of the above is self-evident and poses a significant risk to safety, health and the environment.

"I know of local residents in Balerno who no longer feel they can safely use the area around Harlaw and Threipmuir."

Robert Ross, a director of MA Ltd, visited Harlaw early on Sunday and described it as "terrible".

He was told by one camper that Harlaw is recommended on Facebook as parking is free and any restrictions can be ignored as nobody bothers to enforce rules.

He added: "When I arrived at 6am (on Sunday), I counted 39 cars in the car park and when I left at 7am the count was 50. I counted 40 tents around the bankside.

"Harlaw has become a health a safety hazard. There are no toilets open. Trees are being chopped down for firewood, fires built indiscriminately and glass bottles simply smashed on the ground.

"I worry that, unless there is action, we will have a woodlands fire or a life will be lost in the water."