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VINE is a not-for-profit organization that encourages discussion on values and ethics related to nature conservation, wildlife and the countryside with the aim of helping to inspire people in their working or volunteering lives. More information about us can be viewed on our website at: www.vineproject.org.uk

To: THE RIOTS, COMMUNITIES AND VICTIMS PANEL.

Submission from VINE – Values In Nature and the Environment.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for submissions to be made to you. The following is a brief review of the main responses that were made during the late summer and autumn by Members on our web-based discussion forum.

At first sight it might be thought that VINE, through having its focus on nature conservation, the natural environment and countryside, might not have much to say about the riots which mostly occurred in the urban environment. However you will see that we believe that people who experience the natural world ‘close-up’ tend to develop an environmental responsibility that affects the way they live their lives. We are delighted to say that there are increasingly many places in urban environments where people can get this experience by visiting green spaces, local nature reserves, parks and gardens. VINE’s research¹ has shown that people who have an early-life opportunity to link with the natural world develop an early sense of values which stays with them throughout life.

¹ *Ref: The nature of nature conservationists - freeing the spirit or toeing the line? ECOS 31(3/4) 2010. N.B. The re-search has been described as 'helping express the soul of the UK nature conservation movement'. http://www.vineproject.org.uk/project_documents.html).*

We commend this submission to you coming as it does from a section of the ‘concerned society’.

Over-view comment:

It is worth bringing to your notice that there was a recurring theme throughout our discussions, namely that there needs to be a fundamental re-balancing of priorities – especially when it comes to education, political agendas, the media and the economy. Moreover it was also strongly felt that the way our own (and indeed the global economy) encourages inequality is unsustainable. Until this changes, social discontent and protest will grow as a direct response. (It is noteworthy that social networking sites, such as Avaaz.com, who have started lobbying against injustices across the world are now receiving unprecedented global support). There is a ‘spirit for change’ that is clearly evident and I hope that your Panel will not only reflect this development but suggest actions that seriously address the fundamentals. The market economy is not the only thing that is global. It is clear that unless we begin to understand and take seriously our global responsibility towards our planet, our climate, the environment, towards each other and towards equity and fairness, then we stand no hope of tackling social unrest...other than, of course, through suppression and the building of yet higher walls.

The original question posed by one of our Members on the VINE electronic discussion forum on 22 August was:

“My question is about how conservation and wider environmentalism should react to these riots. What do we have to say about them? Do we feel our subject has anything fresh to offer to the post-mortem on what has happened? How does and should the natural world figure in trying to repair the fractures in economies, society, communities and individuals, which lead to these events? I ask because it strikes me that these are the issues upon which we (like any other force for change in society) should be judged. If we dismiss the riots as simply an 'urban issue', with little connection to the natural world beyond, or regard the economic and social tools to tackle these problems as being outside our immediate concern as conservationists, then we risk underlining the peripheral importance of our subject in the national debate”.

So here is the gist of some of the main points made by our Members. We have attempted to group them according to the main theme discussed in each. They address a wide range of issues from the need for example-setting by those in authority, fundamental problems with our economic systems, how contact with the natural world and nature can help, indoor and outdoor education to the need for social changes. (N.b. we have retained use of the first person throughout, but comments were posted by many individuals):

1. The need for setting of a better example by those in authority.

- Why should modern youth respect authority?

- They have watched the bankers who have conducted their businesses in a self-serving and arrogant manner and abused their positions of trust on a major scale, and appear to have gotten away with retaining both their bonuses and their pensions, and their respect.
- They have seen the media manipulate society's fear of modern youth as hoodies who cannot be trusted or as NED's with no prospects.
- They've seen the same media 'collaborate' with the Police as cash changes hands.
- They have seen the police's record of abusing their position of trust
- They have seen too many politicians using the system to greedily receive more than their fair share.
- Media responsibility: the diet that the media feeds us at its simplest is about taking, and taking with no thought for the future; it's all about the present, the now, the me, the 'I want' and 'I need'.
- I fear that junk TV and violent films do much damage, and we know from our own experience that young people are massively influenced by music lyrics.

2. Our economic systems - cause and effect?

- Root and branch economic change: one of our Members presented a well argued case for root-and-branch change to our economic and tax systems in order to develop a fairer society. It is presented in full as [Appendix 1](#) at the foot of this submission. Please do take a moment to look at it. It makes some fundamental and thought provoking points.
- Youthful hope for the future? What chance do young people think they have of getting a decent education, or a decent job, or a decent home, or of having a decent old age? What chance do they think they have of living without violence and fear? What chance of living peacefully in a decent and fair society? We need a society that's less unequal, both in money and in access to decent education and community facilities. For most young people I suspect the issue is simply that they do not have any hope for the future.
- Equality for everyone: Read Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett's book 'The Spirit Level'? The subtitle is 'Why equality is better for everyone'. And they do mean everyone - even including Tory MPs, investment bankers and people living off other people's sweat, as well as 'the underclass' and all the rest of us in between, because more equal societies are better places to live for everybody. Not just because there aren't riots in happy peaceful fair societies, but because everything is better, like people's health, education, civic values... The regression analysis in the book, which shows the correlation between disparity rich and poor and several measures of health & well-being is compelling.
- Ensure nature is free to those who are disaffected.
- There is so little one can do in a capitalist urban environment without money.

3. What can nature conservation offer?

- Conservation is about long-term security and personal commitment – the exact opposite to what is put out in the popular media! We need to focus on raising our children as citizens rather than consumers. Citizenship here must surely be about subscribing to a set of shared values within the whole of society, both urban and rural. The interconnectedness of it all mirrors the fundamental nature of ecology.
- We need policies that: make sure everybody lives within a short distance of somewhere they can get out and experience nature; make sure everybody lives within a short distance of good schools, public libraries and bookshops; make sure everybody can join in practical conservation activities; make sure everybody can see good enjoyable and informative stuff on the television (not just a diet of mindless pap that will make people mentally unfit and mentally diabetic); policies which share out power and wealth far more fairly.
- We need more living things in our villages and towns and cities. We all need to be able to look out of our windows and see trees, or at least some green. We all need to be able to walk to a green space just a few minutes from our homes. But I'd also add that we all need to live in beautiful buildings, in beautiful surroundings. If our towns and cities were beautiful then more people would be happier living in them, even if they did also need to get out to the countryside to renew themselves, just as we country-dwellers need to go to cities to refresh ourselves culturally.
- Early years guidance: I have been fortunate that I have received guidance from parents, peers and other mentors to develop values e.g. of respect for others, joy in feeling connected to the natural world.
- Wilderness: perhaps this is already tucked away amongst the discussions of relationship with nature and the outdoors, nature deficit disorder, blood guts & poo etc but I would like to suggest more strongly that we need to be more sensitive to needs for wild. Wild place and wild land for sure. And also the wildness in us.
- The benefits of manual work: what a lot of young males in particular would most benefit from is stimulating manual work and access to land and the means of production. In a society like Britain that has shelved out its manufacturing to far eastern sweatshops, that can most easily be found in the countryside.
- The benefits of growing things: I think more young disenfranchised people would connect with nature through activities such as growing things, vegetables, fruit, and community woodlands and so on. Conservation volunteering activities would also be ideal.
- The need for urban nature: our country desperately needs more Urban Nature, plus folk who are prepared to teach and preach it. This is something Richard Louv is now advocating strongly. I strongly suspect that the scale and impact of 'nature-deficit disorder' is grossly under-estimated, and that it is a massive problem in the westernised world, in both young and adult people. I suffer from it – 2 days in the office, a 'Nature-free zone', seriously upsets me. The scale of peer pressure is massive – and not just in youngsters. As suggested, hopelessness breeds pointlessness, and we need drama (real or fantasy world) to obviate the boredom. **A recent** joint university psychology study found that the more urbanised people become the more religion (and wider spirituality) decline. Nature is intrinsically part of this.

- Our society's relationship with Nature is effectively shattered. The National Trust is developing a long-term programme to get people Outdoors & Closer to Nature. This will help many people, though it will not be a panacea. But an equally big challenge is getting nature closer to people, both in the cities and in the countryside.
- Early contact with nature: "my mates and I used to go bird-watching on the Moors, which were within easy walking distance. This interest widened and I subsequently graduated in Botany-with-Agricultural Botany and then gained a PhD in Plant Ecology".
- Inner city nature: we should be putting more effort into conservation in places that are close to these inner-city areas..... this is one of the things, among others, that will help to give people a stake in the future of themselves and their own areas - surely one of the ultimate factors in these areas that seem to have no stake and no future.

4. **Education (including outdoor education):**

- 5 tips for reaching marginal kids are:
 - The right teachers – and training are essential to get through to kids who switch off to authority as they do not trust it. Marginal kids need a strong mentor who has personal strength of character and who has got the ability for the kids to say this person is worth listening too.
 - Give them knowledge they can value – they need to get a buzz out of what you are teaching and it has to be relevant – the blood, guts and poo!
 - Use live animals if you can – you cannot beat living breathing animals – so many wildlife education programmes fall down as they do not have wildlife to show to the kids!
 - Time and repeatability important – some kids need hours as in reality we are making up for their under parenting.
 - Small class sizes – and disabling the peer group pressure to lark about and look cool
- One of the best antidotes to consumerism is love of nature, if only because it is thoroughly rewarding. How do we get re engagement with nature? Blood, guts and poo often stimulates a sudden interest in what you are saying.... "a dragon fly gets around by shooting water out of its backside" - lots of laughter and a sudden interest in natural conditions. After engagement with ones audience then move one notch along the board to making people appreciate the outdoors and engage with the multitude of habitats on their doorstep. 'Global care starts with Local care'. The Wow factor. Difficult but we need to show by photos, by actions, by being out there how wonderful nature is.
- We should consider environmental education in its broadest sense: I believe that movements such as the Outward Bound Trust have a tremendous amount to offer children and young adults from all backgrounds. Experiences such as climbing, canoeing, mountain expeditions and caving are life-enhancing, and offer inspirational opportunities to engage with the natural world. Residential outdoor education programmes challenge young people, taking them out of their 'comfort zone', encouraging them to take risks and helping them to achieve more than they ever thought possible. Teamwork and leadership skills are drawn out, along with an awakening of self-awareness and a deeper understanding and generosity towards the world

around them. I have seen them awe-struck by the stars; living under constant light-pollution, many have never seen the night sky before.

- Unfortunately, thanks to sweeping cuts to education budgets and an ever-increasing culture of league tables, outdoor education is no longer prioritised as it should be. The expense of running residential programmes is such that without any subsidies or grant aid, they are only available to children from privileged backgrounds, rather than to those who may stand to gain most from outdoor education.
- ‘Hip, cool and trendy’ nature: but there's perhaps something 'positive' we should take from the riots - its the fact that it demonstrates that when caught up in a 'movement' with their peers, large groups of (young) people can be motivated to do stuff they'd perhaps not normally do. So if environmental role models were hip, cool and trendy many more youth might give it a passing thought and become more motivated to care. E.g. rappers with an environmental message include: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5TS6A9XSRM>; <http://www.greenrapper.com/2008/04/11/a-survey-of-environmental-rap-artists-on-the-internet/>; http://www.treehugger.com/files/2007/11/trees_dr_octagon.php; <http://www.livescience.com/7682-rap-music-brings-science-urban-youth.html>
- Placed based learning: we are lucky in Scotland in that we are placing a major focus on this using principles from the Norwegian model of: experience, discover, learn, love, care, connect, return. Visits to National Nature Reserves and other reserves are seen as complimentary to regular real world learning experiences in the community. Training of teachers is seen as being crucial to this approach.
- Scottish studies: things are moving in the right direction and should be strengthened when the Scottish Government introduce 'Scottish studies' as an organiser into the new curriculum. This will not be designed to be narrow & parochial and will give excellent opportunities to bring different subject areas together often in an outdoor context. The major drivers will be Scottish cultural and natural heritage plus enterprise & creativity - with a focus on key historical figures. There are obvious political reasons for the Scottish Government investing in 'Scottish Studies' at the moment but many of us believe it has the potential to further highlight the importance of place based learning.
- The Scottish Real World Learning Partnership (RSPB, SWT, John Muir Trust, FSC, EcoSchools, National Trust for Scotland, Grounds for Learning, WWT, Association for Science Education, Woodland Trust, Play Scotland, Scottish Outdoor Education Centres, Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Children in Scotland). We lobbied hard from 2006 onwards, and had a fair degree of success with our policy asks - e.g.: achieving recognition for outdoor learning in the new Scottish Curriculum 3-18. We have an outdoor learning guidance document; having outdoor learning highlighted as a key component of sustainable development in a major policy document, to mark the Scottish Government's renewed commitment to the UN Decade for Education for Sustainable Development; having two government funded outdoor learning posts created within the National Parks and one created centrally with Learning & Teaching Scotland (now Education Scotland); ensuring some financial support for outdoor learning at LA level - particularly to support the development of Forest Schools; persuading the government to provide training in outdoor learning for classroom teachers and lecturers in Initial Teacher Education; funding of study tours to Norway & Finland for primary & secondary teachers - to see examples of good practice in outdoor learning; General Teaching Council for Scotland giving 'outdoor learning' professional recognition.

- Teaching of philosophy: especially as a practical tool for life - to explore ethics, critical thinking & decision-making. This has been piloted in some schools in Scotland with very positive feedback from teachers, parents and pupils - but as with all things that develop 'soft skills', it hasn't been able to 'measure' the benefits in a way that has made sure it will be funded & supported..... To decide what we should do rather than what we can do.....we need to use philosophical tools, and as with all tools, there is a need for some guidance.
- “Every child outdoors”: there's a huge amount of excellent research which has been carried out internationally over the past ten years, which clearly shows the benefits of outdoor learning. A good summary of this can be found in the relatively recent RSPB publication 'Every Child Outdoors' - www.rspb.org.uk/childrenneednature. In the UK, much of this research has been brought to the attention of decision makers/politicians via the Real World Partnerships - a wide group of NGO's who have come together to promote outdoor learning because of the growing disconnection with nature at all levels of society.
- What we really need are more local, charismatic teachers who can enthuse an interest in the locality. It is not much use doing courses on the ecology of North Wales or Dartmoor. It must be local!!
- One VINE Members reasoned critique from 25 years experience developing the educational potential of schools in the most challenging circumstances is presented as Appendix 2. Please do take a moment to look at it. It makes some fundamental and thought provoking points by looking back at what has worked and what has not over 25 years.

5. Social actions required:

- Stop allowing youth services to be significantly wound down by hard pressed local authorities.
- Self respect and confidence: the more self-respect and confidence you've got, and the more you've got a sense of yourself as part of something bigger, the more likely you are to be a good citizen.
- Linkages: what are the links between what is happening in society just now (greedy bankers, dishonest MPs, rioting & looting young people, corrupt press & police, frantic lifestyles, an advertising industry that encourages selfish individualism) and the fact that people at all levels in society have largely become totally disconnected from the natural world?
- People need to be stakeholders in their own community and area.
- Housing density & quality are major issues. How many of the UK's trouble spots are not in areas of poor housing / built environment? Would Welwyn Garden City riot? People are living here in different realities, many of which are artificial or social constructs.
- People in more equal societies feel more public-spirited: for example, they give more in aid to poor countries, do more environmentally friendly things such as recycling, and businesses are more likely to comply with environmental regulations. More research around such things would be useful, but the basic pattern seems clear.

APPENDIX 1:

One VINE Member's reasoned critique of the need for a new economic approach.

- The riots and its causes are of course complex, but underneath the many social and individual issues lays a simple, yet subtle, economic truth. Because our economic system has no capacity to value our marginalised youth in the same fashion it has no method of valuing nature and our natural assets except in a way that exploits them for private advantage of the privileged few.
- In my view the problem is natural assets, namely access to land, natural resources and intellectual assets that are the essential bedrock of income creation and economic success for any young man or woman.
- We live in a society that has created an economic and legal system that allows a very few (mostly old people), both in this country and abroad, to own all the natural assets that people need. This system has subtly evolved over many years and been adopted across the world as it benefits those with the greatest power to effect legal and economic change, while at the same time being complex enough to obfuscate any insight into its workings by the average 'person in the street'.
- Our country is one of great wealth, the majority of that wealth is tied up in the land, much of which is held far from the reaches of the taxman, in opaque 'offshore' financial vehicles, trusts and shell companies and laws have been lobbied for and adopted that give these asset owners very favourable tax terms or turns a blind eye to tax avoidance in illegal, semi legal and legal offshore financial services. An unthinking cabal of our wealthiest have found a way of taking their wealth out of our economy and creating a vast system of speculative 'financial capital' that for tax purposes belongs to no one, but is used by a financial service industry to invest in creating bubble and busts in the gifts of nature that should be shared by us all. At present this financial capital is the chief cause in commodity food speculation that is starving millions, children are dying today of malnutrition just so an unthinking and uncaring elite can increase their wealth.
- Our 'neo classical' economic system assists in the process by allowing economists to hide the role land, natural and intellectual assets play in creating monopolies that extract the wealth created in our 'real' economy, and absorb the productive efforts of the majority. An upshot of such a system of monopolies is that it lowers the 'margin of production'.
- The "margin of production" is a key concept in economics and is fundamental to the creation of an underclass of people, who have no hope of ever being part of the productive economy. The upshot of which is since the start of our current depression we have seen youth unemployment in black areas, the areas of the riots, shoot up disproportionately with that of other socio-economic groups. This immigrant group has been the least successful in securing access to the 'means of production' and natural assets and as such is the most marginalised.
- Google the 'margin of production' if you want its full explanation, but it is a concept that sets a floor on wages and thus the point at which people are able to leave dependency on state benefits. The rent of land is the key factor in setting the margin of production and at what point the poorest in society can earn a living wage. So high rents are the real cause of poverty and disaffection and what ultimately lead to riots.
- Throughout history the relationship between earning and rents has been the determining factor in crime, unemployment and even riots.
- When your only option for earning money is to become a wage slave serving others in a menial capacity that offers you no more advantage than stopping on state benefits that is the point that you become marginal and play no economically productive role in society. This is the true meaning of being marginalised and so all of your potential is wasted and so we see that manifested in self-harm, criminality and vengeance against a 'rigged' system.
- A solution to the riots, and to conserving nature, is through a system that stops marginalising so many people and enshrines common ownership of all nature's bounty. Everyone, and all of nature, should be valued, and feel valued. This can be achieved through common ownership of all of nature's riches. The most efficient method for this will be a tax on the unimproved value of land, natural mineral wealth and nature's other freely given assets, such as the electromagnetic spectrum.
- If the government collected its revenue through such a system, after paying for our existing public services there would be a surplus that could be distributed as a citizen's dividend to everyone equally;

this would give everyone a very basic income and stop poverty. (this is key to stopping poverty across the world and protecting nature – I would urge all to read Fred Harrison’s wonderful book on the subject– ‘The Silver Bullet’: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Silver-Bullet-Fred-Harrison/dp/0904658104> or watch is film <http://www.fredharrison.com/?p=230>)

- **The advantages of such a system are huge:**
 - There would be no poverty trap so any work done would go untaxed and go straight to the worker, allowing them to experience an observed benefit to productive effort.
 - Land in cities would be much cheaper (due to a tax on the monopoly portion of their value) to buy or rent and this would in turn increase the margin of production. Such an increase would expand opportunities to set up a business. At present land values are so high it is very difficult to get access to the natural resources and land needed to start productive businesses as so much of the profits are swallowed up in the ‘economic rent’ paid to access land and natural resources. Just think of the colossal ground rents of a corner shop in worst part of London and see how rents, piled one on top of another through the economic supply chain cascade across society, hoovering up the productivity from the productive many to the monopolistic few.
 - No more bad taxes; at the same time the rents of accessing opportunity are reduced so the taxes on work are removed, with income tax, national insurance contribution or VAT, opportunities will avails themselves to our poorest and jobs will be created in the most economically depressed areas. Lowering unemployment and creating lots of jobs for these disaffected young people.
 - Nature would benefit too as ‘natural’ land would be very expensive to develop as you would have to start paying tax on it, so marginal land would revert back to nature.

APPENDIX 2:

One VINE Member’s reasoned critique from 25 years experience developing the educational potential of schools in the most challenging circumstances:

- I have managed many projects that have lasted between 3 and 12 years and worked alongside teachers, senior managers, LA staff and pupils. Critically for this debate this work has been in some of the 'poorest' areas of UK.
- These projects were funded by a range of interventions aimed at such areas (such as Single Regeneration Budget; European Social Fund; Surestart and related; Teacher Development Agency).
- Most focused on high quality interactive learning through promoting talk and literacy’s; with an environmental education context and often across the primary-secondary transition in clusters of schools.
- In some cases the schooling systems, for a myriad of reasons, were at a low ebb/breaking point. All these schools served areas of deep deprivation and poverty - and most importantly families that would fit within the 'hard to reach' category - and to me the hopelessness was a direct consequence of the pernicious impact of government of all colours policies of 'structural unemployment' ... in essence 'structural unemployment' has written off swathes of our community and created the well-researched notion of 'underclass' and NETs - not a temporary state but a generationally permanent condition to a lesser or greater extent.
- While the reasons for the riots are complex and multiple - poverty, underachievement, being written off, hopelessness and disillusionment are basic causal factors - and highly resistant to intervention (especially given the constant re-assessment and re-direction of policy and focus) because they are so deeply engrained into the social system - just like at the other end of the scale the bankers will always get away with big bonuses and multi-nationals with tax avoidance.

- Because I worked in neighborhood projects I could give a myriad of examples of working with stunningly bright primary kids from massively challenging backgrounds who slowly blossomed as readers and writers and shone on 'Earthkeepers' (A SUPERB PROJECT TO ENGAGE PUPILS IN NATURE AND THE PLANET!!); who then started to head back down under in a failed state secondary and by Y8/9 were non-attending, drifting into the margins; bullied by a system and our chances of helping them faded away. There was one missing ingredient i.e. jobs and employment prospects. Without that the young people really saw little point . . . and I, for one, cannot blame them.
- On Monday 29th August film director Ken Loach - was interviewed for the Guardian G2 and this sums things up . . ." I think the underlying factors for the riots are plain for anyone with eyes to see . . . it seems to me any economic structure that could give young people a future has been destroyed. Traditionally young people would be drawn into the world of work; and into groups of adults so that transition from adolescence to adulthood was destroyed consciously and knowingly".
- The core issue is how we (and I mean the whole of society) re-balance the failure of a fundamental economic policy of structural unemployment in terms of it's social cost - and a situation that I sense will only become more challenging and entrenched by the current debt reduction savagery.
- Research/reports: Dr Sandra Munoz's review of literature on nature and children's health
<http://www.countrysiderecreation.org.uk/Children%20Outdoors.pdf>;
<http://www.childrenandnature.org/downloads/C&NNHealthBenefits.pdf>;
<http://www.professormarkvanvugt.com/files/AvertingtheTragedyoftheCommons.pdf>

VINE is a forum for nature conservation professionals, land managers and all people who care about nature. We aim to promote a broad spectrum of ideas, values and emotions generated by people's engagement with nature. We believe that the process of thinking deeply about what we do and why we do it will help conservationists to be more creative and effective in their working lives. We also celebrate the natural environment for its own intrinsic value.