



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors

National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027



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Front Cover Images:

Suir Blueway, County Tipperary

Stand Up Paddle Boarding, Derg Isle, Scarriff, County Clare

Western Way, near Leenane, County Galway

Minister's Foreword



Our Rural Future sets out a long-term vision for a vibrant and sustainable rural Ireland, transforming the quality of life and opportunities for people living in rural areas. **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors**, the new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy is integral to this transformation.

Over the next five years, **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors** will shape the future of outdoor recreation in Ireland. It will provide a strong strategic focus to underpin the unprecedented investment in the sector with €1.6 billion invested over the past four years. This investment is just the start and will be built upon over the coming years.

More than ever people are participating in outdoor recreation activities and the last number of years have seen a rapid growth of the sector. The health benefits to spending time outdoors are immense and support our social, mental and physical health.

The strategy will enable inclusive, safe and accessible opportunities to get outdoors. It will focus on increased participation for underrepresented groups, better education on how to enjoy the outdoors responsibly while respecting our environment as well. It acknowledges the essential role that landowners play in facilitating access to their lands and also acknowledges that this goodwill must be respected by users.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors will bring a cohesive and joined-up approach to the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure at both a national and county level. This will include the creation of county stakeholder forums and county outdoor recreation committees to ensure that local needs are identified and local voices are heard.

Significant stakeholder and public engagement has been at the core of the development of this strategy. I would like to thank the members of Comhairle na Tuaithe and its subgroups for their tireless work in developing this strategy. Thanks to the high level of stakeholder and public engagement **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors** is a truly collaborative strategy that will set the stage to strengthen and support the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland for years to come.

This is a forward thinking strategy that will act as a stepping stone for the future of the outdoor recreation sector and it is also a strategy that will adapt over time to meet the ever changing needs of the outdoor recreation sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Humphreys".

Heather Humphreys TD
Minister for Rural and Community Development

Comhairle na Tuaithe Chairperson's Foreword



Comhairle na Tuaithe, the Countryside Council, plays an important role in the strategic development of the outdoor recreation sector as it brings the outdoor recreation stakeholders together in an advisory role. The importance of the outdoors and outdoor recreation amenities has become clearer than ever due to the Covid-19 pandemic over the past few years. Being restricted to exploring the outdoor opportunities that exist within our 2km, 5km or 10km has shown us the wealth of opportunity we have to enjoy, as well as its importance for our physical and mental health. A positive consequence of the pandemic is that more people are now enjoying the outdoors and therefore it is essential that the growth in demand is met with sustainable and responsible development in the outdoor recreation sector.

In 2020 Comhairle na Tuaithe was tasked with the important role of developing a new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy that would strengthen the outdoor recreation sector while protecting and respecting the environment. This strategy has become **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors** and will address ongoing issues in the sector while providing opportunities for the sustainable development of outdoor recreation in Ireland.

A crucial factor in the development of this strategy was stakeholder engagement. This engagement spanned government departments, state landowners, farming organisations, recreation providers and National Governing Bodies, as well as two open public consultations. This level of collaborative working will no doubt ensure that **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors** will be a strong and successful strategy for the next five years and will be a strong base to build on for the future of the outdoor recreation sector.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank the Strategy Working Group and all those who contributed to the strategy development process for their work and commitment in producing the new National Outdoor Recreation Strategy **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors**.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Liam Twomey', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Liam Twomey
Independent Chair of Comhairle na Tuaithe

1

Strategy at a glance



Garrettstown Beach, County Cork



Geokaun Mountain, Valentia Island, County Kerry

Our Vision

Ireland's outdoors, a world of activities for all

Our Mission

To lead, guide and facilitate the sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation and increased participation, in order to realise social, health and economic benefits. We will do this whilst respecting the custodians of land and water, caring for the environment and promoting responsible recreation.

Outdoor recreation has seen unprecedented growth and transition over the last five years, which has been further accelerated by COVID-19 and supported by increased levels of government investment.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors provides a strategic, collaborative framework to facilitate the consolidation and sustainable growth of the outdoor recreation sector. The strategy addresses the challenges facing the sector as well as embracing the many benefits of outdoor recreation for our communities, including the mental and physical health benefits, as well as economic and social benefits.

Policies and strategies at national level, and in particular 'Our Rural Future', have set the context for the development of **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors**.

Given that the natural environment is the setting for outdoor recreation, protection of the environment is central to this strategy, with a focus on minimising recreational pressure on sensitive habitats and species.

The stakeholder landscape has also changed in response to the increased investment and rapid growth of the sector. Given this context, a stakeholder-led approach has been taken to the development of **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors**, led by Comhairle na Tuaithe, the national advisory body on outdoor recreation.

Over the next five years, this strategy will address the challenges and embrace the opportunities of outdoor recreation by achieving six key objectives.

Strategic objectives

Leadership

To create a more coordinated, cohesive approach at national and county level to ensure best use of our resources

Our ambition is to establish a clear leadership structure at national level and ensure funding is better aligned with national and county priorities. The Department of Rural and Community Development will be the lead government department and Sport Ireland will assume a co-leadership role. Comhairle na Tuaithe will retain the oversight and advisory role. At county level, our ambition is to achieve a more planned and coordinated approach, with the introduction of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee and Plan. This will ensure that county needs are identified and prioritised, as well as aligned with the national strategy.

Opportunities

To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups

Our ambition is to increase the number of people active in the outdoors and to support a rise in physical activity levels, with an increased focus on those with the lowest participation levels. Our ambition is also to expand the role of outdoor activities in formal education and early learning.

Awareness

To create awareness of our outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly

Our ambition is to significantly raise people's awareness of where to go and what to do in the outdoors. Our ambition is to ensure they understand how to enjoy the outdoors respectfully and are fully aware of their personal responsibilities.

Expertise

To improve the knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners

Our ambition is to equip those working in this area with the skills and expertise to be more effective in their roles. Guidance will be developed to instill good practices and a consistent approach, supported by training, events and seminars.

Strategic Objectives

Leadership

Opportunities

Awareness

Expertise

Environment

Access

Environment

To protect the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation, in keeping with best practice management of landscape and habitats

Our ambition is to protect our landscapes, habitats and built heritage by better planning where and how we develop our outdoor recreation infrastructure. Given the increase in visitor numbers, our ambition is to develop visitor management approaches for Ireland that prevent adverse impacts to sensitive habitats and species.

Access

To protect and improve access to the outdoors, for the benefit of all

Our ambition is to work with landowners to protect and enhance the access that is currently facilitated and seek to improve access in other locations. Ways will be explored such as through the expansion of the Walks Scheme and changes in legislation. Our ambition is also to change behaviour, so when people access the outdoors, that they do so with respect for other people, care for the environment and with responsibility for their own actions.

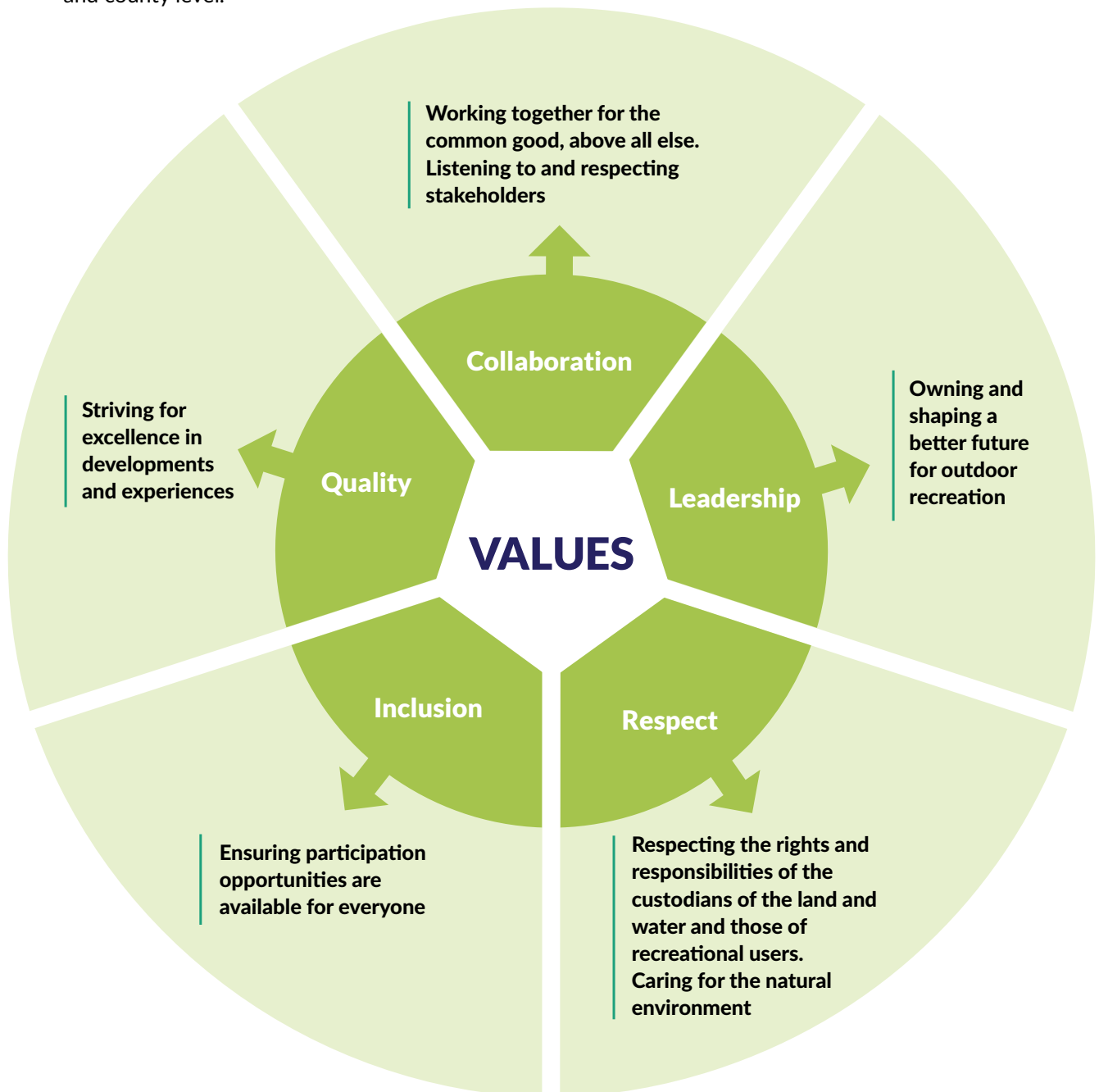
Strategy delivery

The vision, *'Ireland's outdoors, a world of activities for all'*, will be achieved through collaboration and engagement of all stakeholders in outdoor recreation at a national and county level. To this end, the strategy will bring the key stakeholders together for the development of outdoor recreation opportunities, in balance with our shared responsibility to protect the environment that supports these opportunities.

All actions set out in this strategy were agreed using a collaborative and participative approach. They are designed to encourage and facilitate ongoing application of this approach at national and county level.

They have been shaped by the considerations of Comhairle na Tuaithe, which is the national advisory body on outdoor recreation, comprised of representatives from farming organisations, recreational users of the outdoors, state bodies with a responsibility for the outdoors, as well as central and local government.

The strategy will be delivered in keeping with our values.



2 | What is outdoor recreation?

Royal Canal Greenway,
County Westmeath

What is outdoor recreation?

By 'outdoor recreation' we mean activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. A list of included activities is detailed below, however it should be noted that this list is not exhaustive (see Appendix 2 for further details).



Land-Based

Walking

Hillwalking/Hiking

Leisure cycling

Mountain biking

Horse riding

Running

Orienteering

Bouldering,
Scrambling,
Rockclimbing,
Mountaineering

Caving

Play in nature



Water-Based

Canoeing/Kayaking

Rowing

Wild swimming

Surfing

Coasteering

Wind surfing/Kite
surfing

Sailing

Diving

Angling

Stand Up
Paddleboarding



Air-Based

Paragliding

Hang-gliding

Passive enjoyment of the outdoors

Sandycove, Kinsale, County Cork



Case Study

Mountain bike trails,
Slieve Blooms, County Offaly

National Mountain Bike Trail Centre Slieve Blooms, Counties Laois and Offaly

One of the key benefits of outdoor recreation is the huge contribution that it makes to local economies. This primarily takes the form of visitor spend in local areas on accommodation, food and drink and services such as bike hire.

Kinnitty village is the location of one of the trailheads for the National Mountain Bike Trail Centre in the Slieve Blooms. When consultation with local residents and businesses began in 2016, there was some scepticism that visitors would come in sufficient numbers to bring life back into local businesses and provide employment in the area. However, Coillte had observed the benefits to local economies elsewhere, where the right trails were designed and constructed to meet riders' needs. With the support of the Department of Rural and Community Development, Fáilte Ireland and Laois and Offaly local authorities, Coillte embarked on trail construction in 2018. The total investment in the project was approximately €4.3 million, including €3.2 million from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. The visitor numbers to date have significantly exceeded all predicted demand and Kinnitty has benefited economically from this.

As a result of the trail development, a number of local businesses in Kinnitty responded strongly to serve the potential new market. Two local pubs and several accommodation providers, cafés and bike hire businesses have either opened as a new business or adapted their offering to cater directly for the increase in visitors and mountain bikers.

Simon and Siobhan Cannon opened Bloom E-Riders in Kinnitty to hire 'electric' mountain bikes in response to the growing market. The business is located 900 metres from the trailhead and offers bike hire, a bike wash station, toilet and parking facilities. Bloom E-Riders has expanded rapidly since the development of the trails, and Simon and Siobhan have now opened a new state-of-the-art bike hire centre.

“We opened our e-bike hire business in Kinnitty in response to the planned development of the Coillte MTB trails. The fast growth of the business has been incredible - we could never have imagined that so many people would come to Kinnitty to use the trails and the demand for bike hire would be so high.”

Simon and Siobhan Cannon, Owners, Bloom E-Riders, Kinnitty

“The development of the trails and trailhead at Kinnitty has been transformative for the village. The visitor number targets we set for the end of year 3 were being achieved before construction of all trails was even completed, with 35,000 riders by the end of 2020.”

Daithi de Forge, Head of Recreation, Coillte

3 | The importance of outdoor recreation



Achill Island,
County Mayo

The importance of outdoor recreation

Outdoor recreation plays a vital role in Ireland, bringing benefits to society by contributing to a wide range of areas, including physical and mental health, social inclusion, nature connectedness, community cohesion, environmental protection, rural and economic development.

During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, its importance was further emphasised.

This chapter evidences the benefits of outdoor recreation in Ireland. However, it is acknowledged that there is currently insufficient data to demonstrate the scale and breadth of its impact in Ireland. As part of the strategy delivery, a comprehensive study will be undertaken to measure the benefits (mental health, physical health, economic and social) of outdoor recreation in Ireland.

Magnitude of outdoor recreation in Ireland

There are very significant and sizeable levels of participation in outdoor recreation for both the population of Ireland and visitors to Ireland. Recreational walking is the most popular physical activity for the population in Ireland, with 74% of the population walking regularly in 2021ⁱ.

Statistics from Fáilte Irelandⁱⁱ show that the tourism demand is very strong for outdoor recreation. 2.7 million visitors to Ireland from overseas markets took part in outdoor activities in 2019 and included activities such as hiking, cycling and watersports.

In the CSO 'Our Lives Outdoors' surveyⁱⁱⁱ, carried out in spring 2022, 98% of respondents said they like to spend time outdoors.



There has been significant investment in Ireland's outdoor recreation infrastructure over four years. Funding of over €1.63 billion has been invested directly and indirectly through various central government funding programmes from 2019 to 2022 (see Appendix 3 for details).



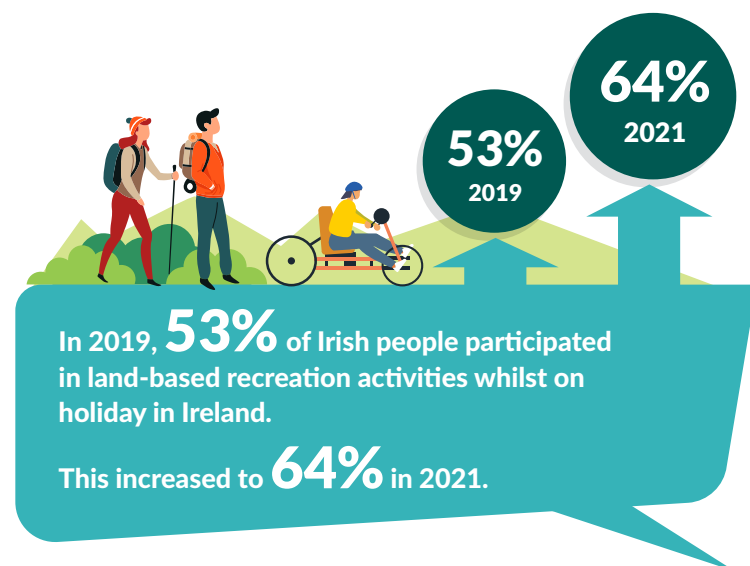
Growth in outdoor recreation in Ireland

The demand for outdoor recreation has grown significantly over the last number of years with more people than ever before enjoying the outdoors in Ireland. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the demand to visit the outdoors. The significant growth is evidenced by a whole range of stakeholder evidence and research.

The Irish Sports Monitor^{iv} shows that recreational walking is at its highest level ever recorded in Ireland. According to the CSO 'Our Lives Outdoors' survey^v, carried out in spring 2022, more than half of respondents (55%) said they spent more time outdoors than they did before the pandemic.



Coillte forests recorded their highest visitor numbers in 2021, which have almost doubled since 2018^{vi}. Irish people holidaying at home also showed a significant increase in participation in outdoor activities evidenced by Fáilte Ireland research^{vii}.



Economic benefit

The current economic impact of outdoor recreation in Ireland is very significant. Fáilte Ireland's research^{viii} shows that overseas tourists who participated in outdoor activities in 2019 in Ireland, spent €1.7 billion.



It is recognised however that there is currently a lack of specific data to demonstrate the full economic impact of outdoor recreation in Ireland. A comprehensive measurement of the economic value will be developed as a priority within the strategy which will underpin the investment in the sector and showcase the full economic value of outdoor recreation in Ireland.

The economic impact will also be considered under the lens of rural Ireland as outdoor recreation can provide significant opportunities for employment in rural areas through local businesses and local tourism.

Significant benefits for society

A large body of international and national research clearly evidences how outdoor recreation provides a significant number of benefits, including mental and physical health benefits, economic benefits and environmental benefits.

Mental Health Benefits

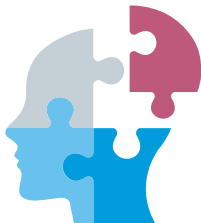
“Better mental health, better quality of life”

In Ireland, middle-aged and older adults walking 150 minutes per week report a better mental health status, better quality of life and overall wellbeing.^{ix}

According to the CSO^x, of the respondents who spent time in natural spaces over the past six months

93%
felt happier afterwards

97%
felt healthier



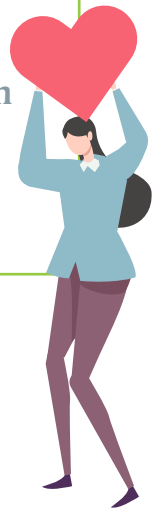
Environmental Benefits

“By being in green or blue natural spaces we foster a bond to nature which helps us become more environmentally aware.”^{xi}



Physical Health Benefits

“Inactivity increases the risk of cancer, heart disease, stroke and diabetes by 25- 30% and shortens lifespan by 3-5 years.”^{xii}



Preventative costs

Given the health benefits of outdoor recreation, the potential preventative health costs are great. 97,000 cases of disease were prevented in Ireland due to physical activity participation in 2019 providing a total cost saving of over €405 million.^{xiii}



97,000 cases of disease were prevented in Ireland due to physical activity participation in 2019 providing a total cost saving of over

€405 million

Case Study

Roscommon Woodlands for Health Programme
Lough Key Forest Park, Boyle, County Roscommon



Woodlands for Health

Widespread evidence shows the clear mental health benefits of spending time in nature and being active in the outdoors. The Woodlands for Health programme illustrates these benefits and the real life impact the outdoors can have on those with mental health challenges.

Woodlands for Health is a 12-week programme with weekly group walks undertaken in a forest setting and is offered to people connected to mental health services in Ireland. The national partners are Coillte, Get Ireland Walking, Mental Health Ireland, and NUI Maynooth. Programmes currently run in 24 counties, but this will be extended to the remaining counties.

Research conducted by NUI Maynooth^{xiv} demonstrated a 31% increase in wellbeing for programme participants. In addition, there was an increase of 11% in nature connectedness. In other words, not only did mental health increase but participants felt closer to nature.

“When you’re with the walking group, it’s your time and your time alone with the group. For me to be able to admit that I have been depressed for such a long time and it’s ok to say that and to know that it’s going to get better.”

Frank, Woodlands for Health participant, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown

“Being part of this group gave me the motivation and opportunity to get out and explore the beautiful places we have around us. I have become so much more mindful of nature and found these walks improved my mood.”

Sandra, Woodlands for Health participant, Waterford

“We are giving people the power to use walking and spending time in nature as part of a toolkit to support their own mental health. Whilst the concept is simple, the research and feedback consistently prove that it improves wellbeing.”

Niamh Ní Chonghaile, National Woodlands and Nature Project Lead, Mental Health Ireland

4 Strategic context



Wells House & Gardens,
County Wexford

Strategic context

A number of policies and strategies at national level, and in particular 'Our Rural Future', have set the context for the development of **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors**. National and global factors and trends have also been considered in the development of the strategy.

This includes the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has accelerated the demand for outdoor recreation to unprecedented levels. Heightened participation in outdoor recreation has exacerbated human pressure on natural ecosystems and biodiversity. Protection of the natural environment has become more critical and has been a constant consideration throughout the development of the strategy.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors aims to bring about a more cohesive and collaborative outdoor recreation sector in Ireland, focused on achieving responsible and inclusive participation, in harmony with the natural environment.

Key trends

A number of national and global factors, and trends, which impact outdoor recreation have been taken into account in the development of this strategy, including:

▶ A change in demand

The demand for outdoor recreation has grown significantly over the last number of years. This global trend is evidenced in Ireland by the increase in the population participating in recreational walking every week, rising from 64% in 2015 to 74% in 2021. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated the demand to visit the outdoors, presenting an unprecedented opportunity for outdoor recreation in Ireland.

▶ Ageing population

The population in Ireland is ageing, however, boundaries of age are shifting. Older people now benefit from better health, take better care of their appearance and wellbeing and have greater spending power.

▶ Wellbeing

The global trend to improve our mental and physical wellbeing has driven a desire to integrate health and wellbeing into leisure and tourism choices.

▶ Sustainability

Global trends show that people are increasingly concerned about the environment and behaving more sustainably. In the CSO 'Our Lives Outdoors' survey, respondents were most concerned about four environmental issues: climate change (58%), pollution of waters (57%), loss of habitats (47%), loss of biodiversity (46%).

▶ Activities

Whilst outdoor recreation includes adventurous pursuits such as caving and surfing, the biggest consumer segment is soft adventure which includes activities such as walking and cycling. This global trend is set to continue. There are also a number of growing activities also such as wild swimming.

Stakeholder growth

Many government departments, agencies and other organisations have a role to play in facilitating the development of outdoor recreation in Ireland. The number of stakeholders has grown significantly in recent years in response to the increase in investment and growth of the sector.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors provides a collaborative framework to facilitate improved coordination and partnership working between all stakeholders, so the sector can realise its potential in a way that avoids negative impact on the environment.

The strategy also seeks to provide opportunities for all communities to contribute, engage and participate in decision-making for the development of outdoor recreation through the establishment of County Outdoor Recreation Committees. This will result in better outcomes for communities and enhanced individual and community wellbeing.



Stakeholder-led strategy

The number of outdoor recreation stakeholders and the stakeholder landscape have changed significantly in recent years in response to the increased investment and rapid growth of the sector. Given this context, it was critical that a stakeholder-led approach was taken to the development of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*.

A collaborative approach was used to gather inputs and insights on key issues impacting outdoor recreation and to obtain agreement on the implementation of the actions to be included in the strategy. A rigorous approach to stakeholder engagement and the consultation process have resulted in a genuinely stakeholder-led strategy. The key processes and stakeholder groups are set out below.

Comhairle na Tuaithe

Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council) is made up of representatives from farming organisations, recreational users of the countryside, state bodies, government departments and other organisations with a responsibility or interest in the countryside. Comhairle established a Working Group (Appendix 4) to lead the strategy development process who consulted regularly with the full Comhairle na Tuaithe membership (Appendix 4).

National and regional stakeholders

Four online stakeholder workshops took place in May 2021. The events were well attended by a wide range of stakeholders including a significant representation from local authorities. Stakeholders were also invited to put forward their views in the general public online surveys.

Whole-of-government approach

An Interdepartmental Group (Appendix 4) was established and met to discuss the cross-cutting opportunities and synergies. In addition, numerous bilateral meetings took place with key government departments and agencies to reach agreement on actions and to ensure key government policies are reflected in *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*.

General public

Feedback from the public was invited through two online surveys. In June 2021, over 2,000 people gave their views on the challenges and opportunities for outdoor recreation. In May 2022, the general public had the opportunity to feedback on the strategic objectives and proposed actions (Appendix 5).



Environment at the core

Outdoor recreation takes place in the natural environment, a precious and finite asset that requires protection. Ireland's natural environment includes many places that are physically fragile and susceptible to damage from the impact of recreation, and many places that we have a legal responsibility to protect. Respect for the natural environment is at the centre of this strategy, with an ambition to protect our landscapes, habitats and built heritage through sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation.

Sustainable development is based on responsible interaction between people and the environment. This strategy reaffirms the Government's commitment to ensuring the effective implementation of its statutory and other responsibilities to the environment and biodiversity, as well as towards achieving a climate neutral society.

While this strategy aims to increase the levels of participation in outdoor recreation across society, it does so with respect for the framework of legal protection which applies to many parts of Ireland's natural environment. It is vital to ensure that the promotion of outdoor recreation and the development of recreational infrastructure do not cause significant negative impact to sites that are designated under European legislation as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPAs).

Similar consideration must be afforded to Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs) designated to protect habitats that are important in an Irish context.

Our state-owned Nature Reserves may be particularly vulnerable to wildlife disturbance or damage from recreational activity. Common across all these sites is that they are designated with nature conservation as a priority, and that decision-making with regard to accommodating recreational activity should be guided by the precautionary principle^{xv} which allows or requires protective measures to be taken without having to wait until the harm materialises.

This strategy aims to ensure that recreational activity will be focused towards suitable locations, where the environment can sustain the pressure of additional recreational users. Suitable locations may include less sensitive environments not currently used for recreation. The strategy recognises that in some locations there is a need to reduce current levels of pressure from recreational activity, possibly in tandem with habitat restoration.

The strategy aims to provide easily accessible information on the opportunities for recreation across Ireland. While this will likely increase levels of participation overall, it will also help to alleviate pressures on sensitive sites by encouraging the use of appropriate sites and opportunities available 'on your doorstep'. It is recognised that some communities currently have little or no access to green space.

This strategy aims to encourage the provision of accessible green space, including in urban areas, to facilitate regular activity without the need to travel.



Lough Boora, County Offaly

Given the high-level framework presented in this strategy, the actions or measures outlined do not constitute a detailed plan for delivery. However, the implementation plans which will flow from this strategy will be developed in accordance with established planning and regulatory frameworks. Any plan or project arising from this strategy, that could give rise to environmental impacts will therefore be subject to screening and further consideration under Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Environmental Impact

Assessment (EIA), Appropriate Assessment (AA), and Flood Risk Assessment as appropriate.

Due to the strong links between outdoor recreation and biodiversity, all plans and projects should be appraised in terms of their impacts on biodiversity, either through the processes above, or by undertaking an ecological impact assessment (EclA) that will inform the design of the proposal and ensure that ecological issues are fully addressed.



The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a set of 17 goals that aim to provide a blueprint for a more sustainable future. The goals aim to reduce inequalities, contribute to better health and wellbeing while protecting and respecting the environment. A key commitment under the government's SDG National Implementation Plan involves mainstreaming the SDGs across national policies, so that when relevant sectoral policies are developed or reviewed, Ireland's commitments under the SDGs will be taken into account.

The SDGs provide an important frame of reference for the development and implementation of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*. The spectrum of SDGs is well represented in the actions of the strategy with 14 of the 17 SDGs included. There are particularly strong links with SDG 3 Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG 4 Quality Education, SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production, SDG 13 Climate Action and SDG 15 Life on Land. Each action is directly linked to one or more SDGs and will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the targets associated.

National policy context

This strategy will operate in an integrated manner alongside other relevant government policies and plans, including Project Ireland 2040, Our Rural Future and the strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways. It will align with Ireland's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Regional and local government structures also have a key role to play in the delivery of measures at local level, including through Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans.

Project Ireland 2040

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors supports the objectives of Project Ireland 2040, which combines the National Development Plan (NDP) and the National Planning Framework (NPF).

Two strategic outcomes of the NPF are 'Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities' and 'Enhanced Amenities and Heritage'. The Framework recognises the key role rural areas play in defining Ireland's identity, in driving its economy and high-quality environment. It recognises that investment is required in amenities for rural areas, such as national and forest parks, activity-based tourism and trails such as greenways and blueways, linked to and integrated with built, cultural and natural heritage. Food Vision 2030, the new stakeholder strategy for the agrifood sector, acknowledges the links between agriculture and tourism, given that in many places, agriculture creates and maintains the landscapes upon which outdoor recreation takes place.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors will also contribute to other strategic outcomes in Project Ireland 2040, such as a strong economy supported by enterprise, innovation and skills, and transition to a climate-resilient and climate-neutral economy.

Our Rural Future

Our Rural Future, the Rural Development Policy 2021-2025, sets out a long-term vision for a vibrant and sustainable rural Ireland, transforming the quality of life and opportunities for people living in rural areas. Our Rural Future recognises that outdoor recreation is integral to this transformation.

The policy acknowledges that outdoor recreation plays a key role in achieving the ambition for rural Ireland to be a destination of choice for outdoor activities and adventure tourism. The increase in tourism will provide opportunities for employment growth in rural areas through local businesses and entrepreneurs using the tourism assets in their area in a sustainable way to support recreational activities such as walking, cycling and canoeing.

The policy also recognises the community and wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation. The development of green spaces and recreational amenities encourages community activity, increases connections between people in the area, and creates more vibrant communities, as well as supporting healthy, active lifestyles in local communities.

Our Rural Future contains several key commitments that support the development of outdoor recreation including references to cross-border tourism projects, such as the Ulster Canal.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors supports the vision set out in Our Rural Future and gives an operational focus to the ambition flowing from the Policy in relation to outdoor recreation.

Well-being Framework

Ireland's Well-being Framework (published in 2022) provides policy-makers and Government with a more holistic way of thinking about how Ireland is doing as a country. It focuses on quality of life, with a particular emphasis on equality and sustainability across economic, environmental and social issues. The well-being initiative is now being actively integrated across Government, including across the Budgetary process.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors is aligned with Ireland's Wellbeing Framework. In particular, the Framework emphasises the interconnected nature of policy, and the need for actions across a variety of policy areas to achieve desired outcomes. There is a focus throughout the Framework on outcomes important for the National Recreation Strategy including the built environment, the importance of green and blue spaces, mental and physical health and community.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors, through policy aims and strategic objectives, will pursue sustainable well-being as a policy goal, focussed on evidence and outcomes, while promoting cross-government work beyond traditional departmental silos and policy areas.

Other strategies and policies

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors complements and supports a wide range of other national policies, strategies and action plans that relate to outdoor recreation, outlined in Appendix 6. A number of these are particularly relevant, including:

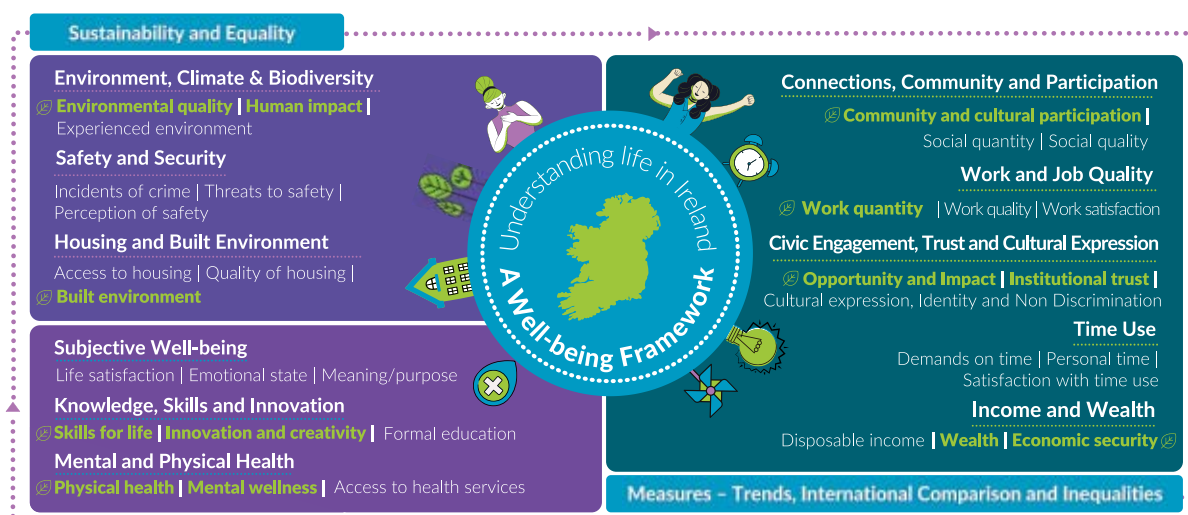
- Climate Action Plan, 2021
- Draft National Biodiversity Action Plan 2022-2026
- National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021
- National Land Use review (under development)
- National Marine Planning Framework, 2018
- National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland, 2016
- National Sports Policy 2018-2027
- Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors, 2020
- Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, 2018
- Sustainable Tourism Policy (under development)
- The Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025
- The National Forestry Strategy (under development)
- Tourism Recovery Plan 2020-2023

The aim of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* is to ensure that these policies and strategies are operating cohesively with this strategy for the benefit of outdoor recreation.



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Understanding life in Ireland A Well-being Framework



Investment in outdoor recreation

There has been significant investment in Ireland's outdoor recreation infrastructure in the last few years. Funding of over €1.63 billion has been invested through various central government funding programmes, from 2019 to 2022, to support the enhancement of natural spaces and the development of recreational amenities such as walking trails, cycleways, blueways, equestrian trails and greenways.

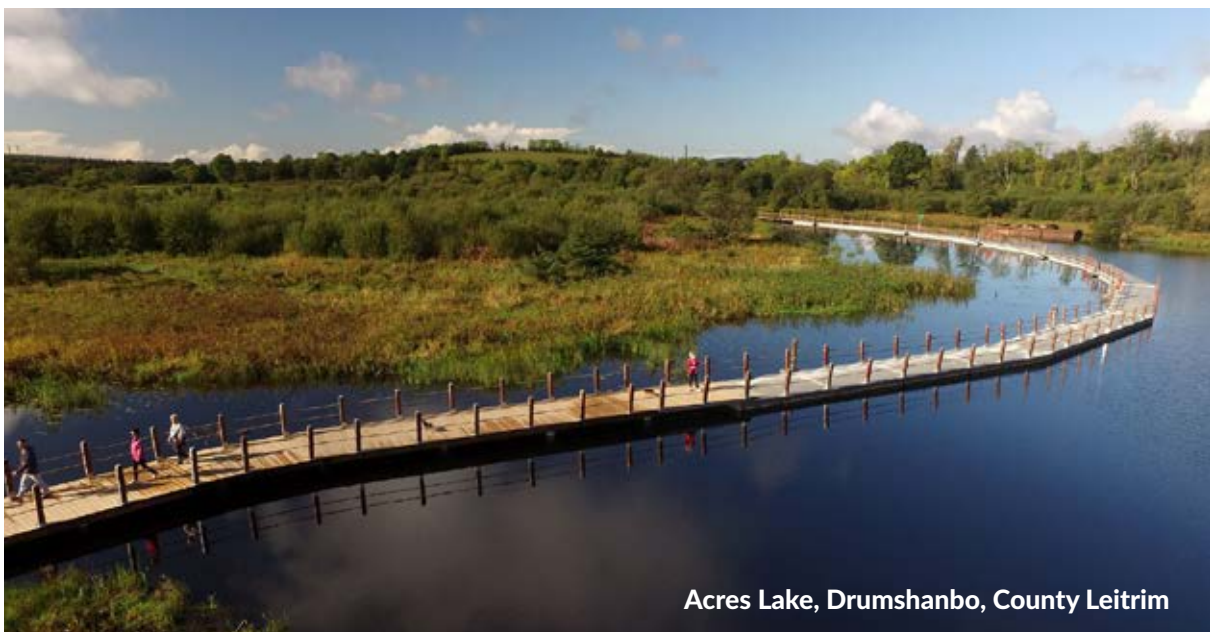
This investment comes from across the sector with many government departments providing funding for the development of outdoor recreation amenities. These include funding streams such as the Department of Rural and Community Development's Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme, the Department of Health's Get Ireland Active programme, the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media's funding for outdoor recreation facilities and tourism services and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government's Urban Regeneration Development Fund.

This figure also includes funding provided through the Department of Transport's Greenway funding, which is managed by Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), and its Active Travel Investment Programme funding which supports the development of high-quality new and improved walking and cycling infrastructure.



The Active Travel Investment Programme does not specifically focus on outdoor recreation, however the walking and cycling facilities developed through this programme provide a valuable and accessible resource for recreational users, as well as commuters.

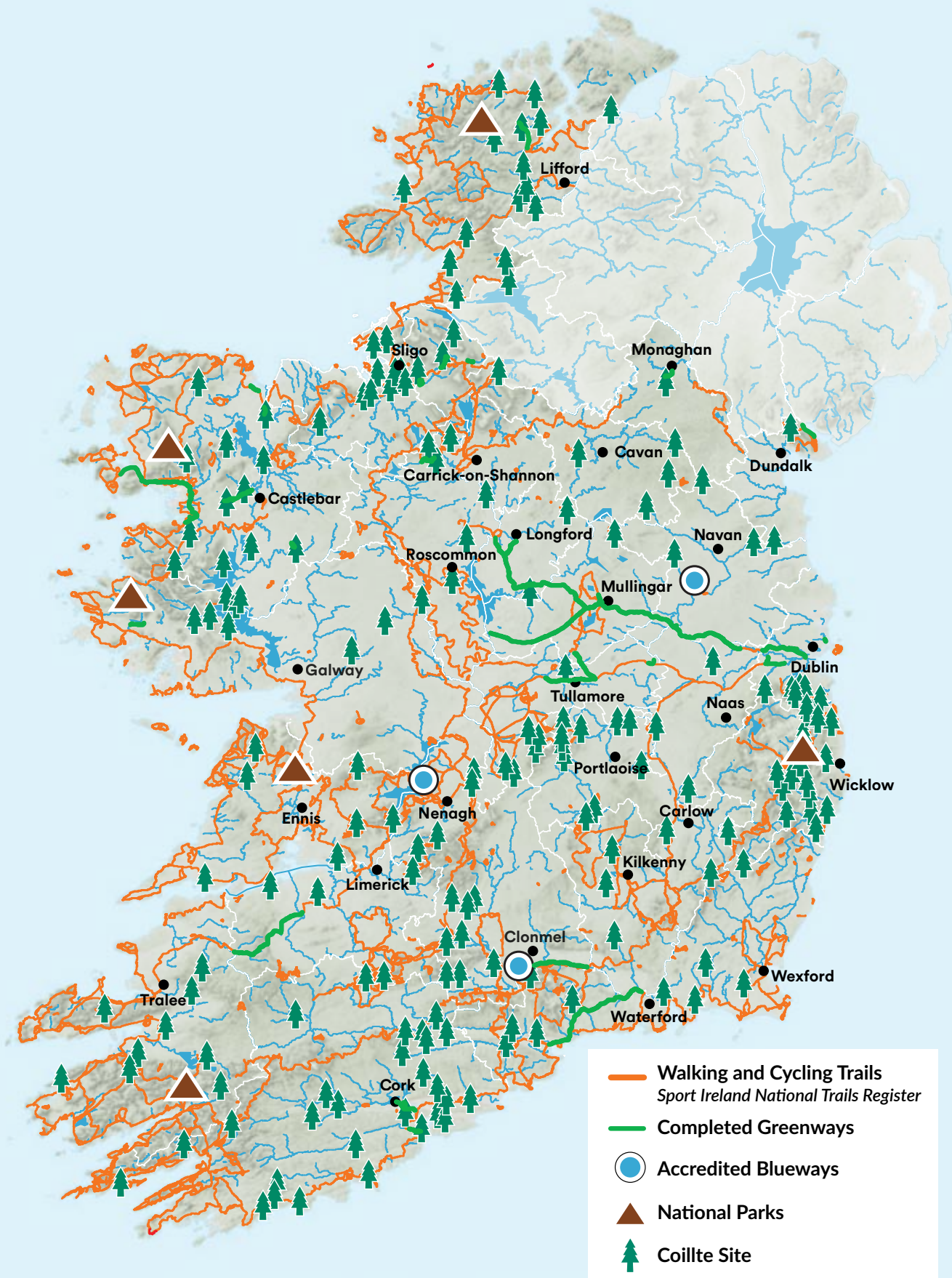
The development of outdoor recreation infrastructure contributes to opportunities for healthy active lifestyles, while also building on the economic and tourism potential of an area, and so is to the benefit of both local communities and tourist visitors alike. The resulting increase in tourism will provide opportunities for employment and the development of new businesses such as those in adventure tourism. The challenge now is to ensure that future investment in outdoor recreation is done in a way that delivers the greatest benefits for Ireland as a whole, in balance with our responsibility to protect the environment that supports these opportunities.



Acres Lake, Drumshanbo, County Leitrim

Outdoor Recreation in Ireland

The following map highlights some of the outdoor recreation opportunities available around the country.



Case Study



Limerick Greenway, County Limerick

Limerick Greenway project

The Limerick Greenway project was approved for funding of over €2.7 million under the Department of Rural and Community Development's Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

The project was led by Limerick City and County Council in collaboration with West Limerick Tourism, West Limerick Resource CLG, Limerick Sports Partnership, Great Southern Trail Ltd and Iarnród Éireann. It involved work to incorporate the Barnagh Tunnel into Limerick Greenway, resurfacing along the full 40km of the greenway from Rathkeale to the Kerry Border 3km west of Abbeyfeale, signage, interpretation and an associated marketing and advertising campaign. These works were completed in July 2021.

Limerick Greenway is the largest outdoor strategic tourism project in Limerick and a key driver of rural regeneration and development in the region, impacting in particular on the market towns of Abbeyfeale, Rathkeale and Newcastle West and the villages of Ardagh and Templeglantine.

As well as tourism and economic development, the greenway has improved the amenities and quality of life for residents and improved mobility options across towns and villages with a positive impact on the environment. This combination of improved amenities, alternative travel modes and new economic opportunities is expected to impact positively on the attractiveness of West Limerick towns and villages as places to live. In line with the priorities of Project Ireland 2040, this project aims to rebalance growth in rural areas through investment and placemaking.

“We have two hotels along the route, which have seen huge numbers of visitors stay just to experience the Limerick Greenway”

Olive Sheehan, Barnagh Greenway Hub (Platform 22 Café) & hotel owner

“The greenway is already a catalyst for the revitalisation of these towns and villages and is a major attraction, improving the tourism offering of Limerick and the Mid-West region. At a societal and wellbeing level, the greenway is of great benefit to locals by improving access to a safe off-road route. Our initial indicator of success has been the 500,000 visits to the greenway in the first 10 months of re-opening.”

Eileen Coleman, Senior Executive Officer, Tourism, Limerick City and County Council

Future opportunities and challenges

Outdoor recreation is in a period of significant growth in Ireland, with many current and future opportunities to embrace, but also some challenges to face.

Sector opportunities

- Outstanding natural landscapes and heritage
- Increased consumer demand for outdoor recreation experiences
- Increase in investment by government departments, agencies and other stakeholders
- Economic impact in local communities driven by an increase in outdoor recreation participation
- Upcoming changes in land use (e.g. forestry and peatlands) could bring opportunities for outdoor recreation
- Growing wealth of trails, greenways and outdoor recreation infrastructure
- Physical and mental health benefits from participating in outdoor recreation
- Cultural shift towards greater connectedness with nature

Sector challenges

- Protecting the natural environment, whilst meeting the rapid growth in demand for outdoor experiences
- Insufficient specialist expertise across the outdoor recreation sector
- Crosses a significant number of policy areas, government departments and agencies
- Access to land for recreational use presents issues for landowners and participants
- Capacity issues at many of the most popular places for outdoor recreation
- Inconsistent practices by stakeholders to planning, developing, maintaining and promoting outdoor recreation
- Outdoor activities are not equally enjoyed by all sections of our community
- Responsible enjoyment of the outdoors not always practised by recreational users
- Recreational users are unsure of where to find out information on outdoor recreation
- Lack of data to measure and evaluate the benefits and impacts of outdoor recreation
- How we adapt to climate change

Action plans and implementation

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors reflects a whole-of-government approach to supporting outdoor recreation in Ireland and to the protection of its environment.

Taking account of the opportunities and challenges as well as feedback from consultation and good practice review, an action plan has been developed for each of the six strategic objectives.

These will be implemented progressively over the lifetime of the strategy. Each action will be led by a nominated government department, state agency or other body. The delivery of the actions will require a partnership approach, working collaboratively with stakeholders across the sector at both national and county level.

Available funding and resources will be better aligned with national and county priorities in order to successfully implement the strategy.

Implementation of the policy will be co-ordinated on behalf of the government by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Progress on its implementation will be overseen by Comhairle na Tuaithe with progress updates being published every six months. A mid-term review will also be built into the implementation review process.

Each action is linked with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to align with Ireland's SDG commitments and to facilitate complementarity in reporting.

The following chapters detail the actions to deliver on each of the objectives.

Case Study



Inga Bock on the Bluestack Way,
County Donegal

The Walks Scheme on the Bluestack Way, County Donegal

The Walks Scheme is funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development. Participating landholders receive a payment for the maintenance of National Waymarked Ways and priority trails that pass through their land.

Maintenance payments to landholders generated an income stream for rural communities of almost €9.5 million over a 5-year period (2017 to 2021) with nearly 2,200 landowners involved in the scheme. Rural Recreation Officers (RROs), employed by local development companies, are responsible for the rollout of the scheme, and often work closely with the Rural Social Scheme in the maintenance and enhancement of the trails.

The Bluestack Way in Donegal has been on the Walks Scheme since its inception in 2008. RRO, Inga Bock, who is employed by Donegal Local Development Company, rolled out the scheme on the Bluestack Way and continues to manage and administer it today.

The RRO provides a central contact point for the trail, and works closely with participating landowners, the Bluestack Way Committee, and other stakeholders.

The scheme, and its collaborative approach, provides a small income to the participating landholders, gives local and visiting walkers a quality trail and showcases the natural environment. It also brings economic benefits to the local communities as it links the towns of Donegal, Glenties and Ardra.

“The role of ‘honest broker’ is a really important part of my job, acting as a conduit between the different interests and stakeholders.”

Inga Bock, Rural Recreation Officer, Donegal Local Development Company

“The land was first owned by my grandfather, then my father before me. We used to walk our sheep to the fair in Glenties, so to see the trail being used and enjoyed again by walkers is very special to me. The help provided to us by our RRO, Inga, is invaluable and the Walks Scheme funding is money well spent.”

Patrick G. Doherty, Landowner, Bluestack Way

“Today the combination of the community volunteers, the maintenance work done by the landowners under the Walks Scheme and the countless hours of work put in by the RRO, have all served to make the Bluestack Way one of the most popular trails in the northwest of Ireland.”

John McGroary, Bluestack Way Committee

5 | Leadership



Trim Castle, County Meath

Leadership

To create a more coordinated, cohesive approach at national and county level to ensure best use of our resources



Sliabh Beagh, County Monaghan

Why is this important?

A greater recognition of the importance and benefits of outdoor recreation by government departments and agencies, as well as greater recreational use of the outdoors has led to the significant growth of the sector over the last decade which has been accompanied by a substantial increase in capital investment.

From consultation we understand that the rapid evolution of the sector has meant that many organisations are operating in this space in an unplanned and unstructured way, although this varies considerably between organisations and from county to county. There is a need for stronger leadership, greater coordination and clarity around roles and responsibilities, at both a national and county level.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to establish a clear leadership structure at national level which drives and champions outdoor recreation in Ireland. The Department of Rural and Community Development will be the lead government department. Sport Ireland will assume a co-leadership role, with the Department of Rural and Community Development, for the implementation of the strategy. Comhairle na Tuaithe will maintain oversight of the strategy delivery.

At county level, our ambition is to achieve a more planned and coordinated approach between the many stakeholders, with the introduction of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee and the development of an Outdoor Recreation Plan for each county. This will ensure that county needs are prioritised, as well as being aligned with the national strategy. This new structure will be best placed to ensure that value for money is achieved from the significant levels of public investment in outdoor recreation. In addition, it is our ambition to ensure that available funding and resources are better aligned with national and county priorities.

Taking account of the opportunities and challenges as well as feedback from consultation and good practice, the action plans set out in this chapter will deliver on our vision for 'Leadership'.



Case Study

Wicklow Mountains National Park,
County Wicklow

Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee

For many decades, Wicklow has been a favourite destination for participants in outdoor activities. Like most other counties, Wicklow has many stakeholders involved in the development, delivery and management of outdoor recreation.

The benefit of adopting a strategic and collaborative approach to outdoor recreation was recognised by Wicklow County Council, County Wicklow Partnership and other stakeholders, as the means to address challenges and achieve real progress in outdoor recreation. Through the development of an outdoor recreation strategy for Wicklow, the partners agreed to establish the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC).

WORC was set up in 2009 and its primary role was to coordinate outdoor recreation across the county. The backbone of the WORC is a strong partnership between Wicklow County Council and County Wicklow Partnership (local development company).

Members of the WORC include Wicklow County Council; County Wicklow Partnership; Coillte; NPWS; Wicklow Uplands Council; Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Mountaineering Ireland.

WORC is a model of collaboration and cooperation which sustains high levels of recreation activity and captures local economic benefit, while respecting the spectacular natural environment which is the source of these opportunities. This strategy seeks to replicate the good practice model of WORC in all counties of Ireland and build upon their learnings to refine the model.

“The Council has hugely benefited from working closely with our partner organisations in WORC. Working in collaboration has enabled us to embrace the potential of outdoor recreation in Wicklow to contribute economically, and in terms of people’s health and wellbeing.”

Michael Nicholson, Director of Service, Wicklow County Council (WORC Chairperson)

“Prior to WORC’s development, much of our effort regarding outdoor recreation was ad hoc. Now we have a clear, agreed plan with the key partners across the county and we are all genuinely enthused to achieve our vision for Wicklow.”

Brian Carty, CEO, County Wicklow Partnership

“Wicklow has experienced a massive growth in the number of people visiting the outdoors. This has presented challenges in managing the impact on sensitive conservation habitats and species right across the county. Working together with our partners at WORC is the best way to tackle this challenge. There is still a way to go, but collaboration is certainly working for the better of the environment in Wicklow.”

Wesley Atkinson, NPWS

Leadership



To create a more coordinated, cohesive approach at national and county level to ensure best use of our resources

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
In 5 years' time we will see: <i>A coordinated national approach to outdoor recreation</i>				
1.1	DRCD to act as lead for national outdoor recreation policy and strategy implementation with a dedicated unit.	Ongoing	DRCD	Sport Ireland
1.2	Sport Ireland to assume a co-leadership role, with DRCD, in outdoor recreation, with increased responsibilities and resources.	Q1 2023	Sport Ireland	DTCAGSM
1.3	Review current and potential arrangements for key partnerships to deliver on this strategy, eg. Coillte, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland and Bord na Móna.	Q2 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, Coillte, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna
1.4	Create and publish a reporting and responsibility structure to clarify national stakeholders' roles and responsibilities.	Q3 2023	DRCD	Relevant government departments, Sport Ireland
1.5	Host regular cross-stakeholder meetings and fora including the Inter-Departmental Group and Comhairle na Tuaithe.	Ongoing	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe, relevant government departments
1.6	Review the membership of Comhairle na Tuaithe to ensure it best reflects the sector and supports the delivery of this strategy.	Q2 2023	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe
1.7	Comhairle na Tuaithe to have an active role in the guidance, delivery and monitoring of the strategy through the establishment of a Strategy Implementation and Oversight Group and other groups as appropriate.	Ongoing	Comhairle na Tuaithe	
In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Effective monitoring of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy outcomes</i>				
1.8	Create a mechanism to measure and track targets and indicators and progress of the strategy.	Q1 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, relevant government departments and agencies
1.9	Monitor delivery of the strategy, including a mid-term review, through ongoing engagement with relevant government departments and delivery organisations, and review progress with Comhairle na Tuaithe.	Ongoing	DRCD	Sport Ireland, relevant government departments and agencies, Comhairle na Tuaithe

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>A planned approach to outdoor recreation at county level</i></p>				
1.10	Communicate, to county stakeholders, the endorsed approach of shared responsibility for outdoor recreation including the establishment of a County (or counties) Outdoor Recreation Committee and Stakeholder Forum.	Q1 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, CCMA
1.11	Identify stakeholders within the county and develop roles and responsibilities criteria to determine membership of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee and Stakeholder Forum.	Q4 2023	Local Sports Partnerships	Sport Ireland, LDCs, LAs, National Governing Bodies, key county stakeholders
1.12	Provide guidance and resource the development of a County Outdoor Recreation Plan in each county (may cover 2 counties, where appropriate) to reflect the priorities of the national strategy and the relevant strengths, needs and aspirations of the county and including those identified in the Local and Economic Community Plan, supported by additional posts on a phased basis.	Q4 2023	DRCD	County Outdoor Recreation Committee, Sport Ireland, LDCs, LAs, Local Sports Partnerships, key county stakeholders
1.13	In partnership with relevant government departments and other stakeholders, develop a funding model to resource the new county outdoor recreation position which will be hosted in Local Sports Partnerships and will be tasked with the coordination of the delivery of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan.	Q1 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, relevant government departments, CCMA, Local Sports Partnerships, key county stakeholders
1.14	Secure funding and commence an initial roll-out phase of the new county outdoor recreation positions in selected counties. Review the learnings and refine model before wider roll-out.	Commencing Q1 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, relevant government departments, CCMA, Local Sports Partnerships, key county stakeholders
1.15	Implement a phased roll-out of County Outdoor Recreation positions across all counties, in some areas one post may cover two counties.	Q2 2024	DRCD	Sport Ireland, relevant government departments, CCMA, Local Sports Partnerships, key county stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Funding and resources aligned with national and county priorities</i></p>				
1.16	Identify the sources of funding from government departments and agencies that can contribute to the delivery of the strategy.	Q1 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, relevant government departments
1.17	Analyse the capacity and role of outdoor National Governing Bodies and develop an approach to support them in responding to the opportunities that <i>Embracing Ireland's Outdoors</i> presents.	Q3 2024	Sport Ireland	National Governing Bodies

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
1.18	Adjust the criteria, as required, for funding outdoor recreation schemes to ensure appropriate balance on/between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ local infrastructure and national infrastructure ▶ asset renewal and maintenance of existing infrastructure and the development of new infrastructure ▶ supporting facilities, services and information provision 	Q3 2023	DRCD, DoT, other relevant government departments	TII, Fáilte Ireland
1.19	Agree an effective mechanism to allocate funding for the maintenance of outdoor recreation infrastructure through existing funding streams.	Q1 2024	DRCD, DoT, other relevant government departments	TII, Fáilte Ireland
1.20	Review funding schemes in response to emerging content of County Outdoor Recreation Plans.	Q1 2025	DRCD	DoT, TII, Fáilte Ireland, relevant government departments
1.21	Explore and agree greater focus and resources for public land management organisations (eg Coillte, Bord na Móna, Waterways Ireland) on outdoor recreation, at both national and county level, including the creation of dedicated outdoor recreation units, if needed.	Q4 2024	Bord na Móna, Coillte, DHLGH (NPWS), Waterways Ireland	DRCD, DAFM, DECC
1.22	Continue to provide assistance to outdoor recreation businesses/enterprises through DRCD (LEADER), local development companies and other channels including the Local Enterprise Offices, who can offer a broad suite of business development programmes.	Ongoing	DETE, Relevant government departments and agencies	

In 5 years' time we will see:

An all-Island approach on key areas

1.23	Explore cross-border cooperation on key initiatives (eg. Ulster Canal Greenway) through programmes such as the PEACE Plus Programme and the Shared Island Initiative.	Q3 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, relevant government departments
1.24	Host an annual meeting of strategic stakeholders from across the island of Ireland.	Q1 2024	DRCD	Sport Ireland, Fáilte Ireland, relevant government departments,

The actions in 'Leadership' will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the following Sustainable Development Goals:



Case Study



Lough Derg, Killaloe, County Clare

Lough Derg Blueway

Blueways are a new outdoor recreation offering, which encourage local people and visitors to engage with the waterscapes through activities such as canoeing on the lakes and cycling by the canals.

The Lough Derg Blueway was one of the first blueways to be developed and was accredited in 2022. Initial funding for the development of the infrastructure came from the Lough Derg Stimulus Fund, and a further €200k was then made available through Rural Economic Development Zones fund, for the development and promotion of the Lough Derg Blueway.

Lough Derg links counties Clare, Galway and Tipperary and forms part of the 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' regional experience brand. The 160 km shoreline of the lake includes a number of lakeside communities including Portumna, Mountshannon, Terryglass, Dromineer and Killaloe. There are opportunities to take part in canoeing, have fun on the aquapark, or cycle close to the Lough, without being on the water. The Lough Derg Blueway also provides waymarked walking routes for people to enjoy being close to the water.

The Lough Derg Blueway is an integral part of the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon. The Masterplan seeks to reposition the Shannon and Shannon Erne waterways as a key tourism destination within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. The Masterplan sets out a bold and integrated framework for sustainable tourism development along the Shannon.

The impact on local tourism and trade can already be seen, with the addition of new waterparks and existing activity providers expanding their offering to meet the increasing demand. Fáilte Ireland's Platform for Growth will see visitor services transformed at Ballycuggeran and Dromineer, with new watersports' facilities being developed at these busy locations.

“Blueways positively change the relationship between local communities and their waterscape by creating active engagement and participation, as well as business opportunities which local communities and tourists can all enjoy.”

John McDonagh CEO of Waterways Ireland

“Opening up the outdoors is a key strategic priority for Fáilte Ireland. Blueways will tap into domestic and international activity and leisure tourism markets, reaping economic benefits for the local communities”

Paul Kelly, CEO, Fáilte Ireland

6 Environment

Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park,
County Kildare

Environment

To protect the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation, in keeping with best practice management of landscape and habitats

Why is this important?

Ireland's natural environment provides an outstanding setting and resource where people can enjoy outdoor recreation. However, our natural environment is a precious and finite asset, much of which is designated under European or national legislation, for conservation of habitats and/or species. This strategy recognises the shared responsibility to fulfil our legal obligations to protect Ireland's natural environment and built heritage.

We understand that stakeholders employ varying practices and standards when planning, developing, managing and maintaining trails and other outdoor recreation infrastructure in the natural environment. Consultation also indicates that there is a clear need for a comprehensive approach to managing outdoor recreation in sensitive areas, and to visitor management, particularly in our most crowded outdoor recreation sites.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to protect our landscapes, habitats and built heritage by better planning where and how we develop outdoor recreation infrastructure. Through the creation of guidance on the process and practices for developing outdoor recreation infrastructure sustainably and in accordance with our legal obligations, we will ensure a consistent, environment-centred approach.

Given the increase in visitor numbers to many of our most popular outdoor recreation sites, our ambition is to develop visitor management approaches for Ireland, which can be tailored for the needs of each site in order to prevent adverse impacts to the surrounding environment.

In addition, our ambition is to improve how recreation and access is managed in upland areas and address the impact on some of our most iconic mountain ranges.

Taking account of the opportunities and challenges as well as feedback from consultation and good practice, the action plans set out in this chapter will deliver on our vision for 'Environment'.



Case Study



Erosion on Croagh Patrick, County Mayo



Hand-built path on Croagh Patrick, County Mayo

Croagh Patrick Path Project

Croagh Patrick is arguably Ireland's best-known and most iconic mountain. Many centuries of footfall on the route from Murrisk to the summit led to the development of an erosion scar that was visible across a wide area. In 2015, the Croagh Patrick Stakeholders' Group was formed as a community response to concerns over the condition of the mountain.

The group instigated the Sustainable Access and Habitat Restoration Project to address the erosion on the mountain. Funding of €480,000 from the Department of Rural and Community Development has been agreed to enable the works with support from Mayo County Council.

The first priority was to identify all shareholders on Croagh Patrick and secure their agreement to repairing the pilgrim path on the mountain. The stakeholders group then sought expert advice on upland path repair, using a collaborative process to arrive at a path construction solution.

As Mayo County Council has a key role in the stakeholders' group, a planning application for the work was submitted under the Part 8 process. Archaeological and environmental reports were required and public engagement with the application was encouraged.

In keeping with the stakeholders' group's commitment to long-term stewardship of Croagh Patrick and recognising the need to build capacity in upland path work in Ireland, it was decided to adopt a training and development approach to the restoration work. An experienced upland path manager and a team of four trainees were recruited on a two-year contract. In addition to mitigating the impact of the path on the landscape and habitats of Croagh Patrick, the path team has also been able to share their skill and experience with people from other areas.

“Securing the buy-in of the shareholders on Croagh Patrick took time but was vitally important. Many issues arose along the way, which we have been able to tease out through the stakeholders' group. The approach is improving the quality of people's experiences on Croagh Patrick, as well as respecting the cultural value of the mountain.”

Martin Keating, Chairperson, Croagh Patrick Stakeholders' Group

“The core purpose of the work is to protect the environment by creating a path that looks natural in the landscape, yet can sustain a high level of footfall. All of the work has been carried out by hand. We are fortunate to have a fantastic team of trainees and as their skills have grown, we have been able to involve some local volunteers.”

Matt McConway, Path Manager

Environment



To protect the environment through better planning and development of outdoor recreation, in keeping with best practice management of landscape and habitats

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>An improved approach to planning and development to achieve more sustainable and higher quality outdoor recreation infrastructure</i></p>				
2.1	Establish a working group with key stakeholders to oversee and create clear guidance procedures on the process and practices for the development of outdoor recreation infrastructure.	Q3 2023	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe, Fáilte Ireland, DAFM, NPWS, LAs, LDCs, Sport Ireland
2.2	Develop guidance for stakeholders on the procedures, roles and responsibilities in the development and maintenance of trails, outdoor infrastructure and related facilities.	Q3 2023	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe, DAFM, NPWS, LAs, LDCs, National Governing Bodies
2.3	Develop a series of practical case studies and host best practice site visits to improve project management skills and approaches to outdoor recreation development, in order to deliver consistently higher quality and more sustainable outdoor recreation infrastructure, including where appropriate, restoration of the surrounding environment.	Ongoing	Sport Ireland	Coillte, Fáilte Ireland, Comhairle na Tuaithe, DAFM, NPWS, LDCs, LAs, National Governing Bodies
2.4	Implement a communication, advice and training programme for outdoor recreation planning, development, maintenance and management, guided by the working group, so that good practice is embraced and applied consistently by all stakeholders.	Q3 2023	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe, DAFM, NPWS, LAs, LDCs, National Governing Bodies
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Improved visitor management at key sites</i></p>				
2.5	Establish a Working Group with key stakeholders to guide the development of a common approach to visitor management in Ireland's most crowded outdoor recreation sites.	Q3 2023	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe, DAFM, NPWS, Coillte, Fáilte Ireland, LDCs, LAs, Mountaineering Ireland, Farming bodies, Waterways Ireland
2.6	Identify good practice in visitor management through the working group and the Visitor Safety Group network.	Q2 2024	Coillte	Fáilte Ireland Comhairle na Tuaithe, NPWS, DRCD, Waterways Ireland, National Governing Bodies, Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
2.7	Devise new visitor management approaches and carry out a pilot, or pilots, to test and monitor its effectiveness at key sites, and disseminate best practice approaches.	Q1 2025	Fáilte Ireland	DRCD, Sport Ireland, Comhairle na Tuaithe, NPWS, Waterways Ireland
2.8	Promote, implement and monitor the Comhairle na Tuaithe Outdoor Events guidance.	Q3 2023	Fáilte Ireland	DRCD, Sport Ireland, Comhairle na Tuaithe

In 5 years' time we will see:

An agreed model for the sustainable management of recreation in upland areas

2.9	Develop guidance for the 'Mountain Access Project' to aid local groups in the management of key upland areas, using good practice models and following the 'Helping the Hills' guiding principles.	Q3 2023	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe (Sustainable Upland Recreation Subgroup)
2.10	Expand the Mountain Access Project by adopting an integrated approach to management of access in upland areas.	Q4 2023	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe (Sustainable Upland Recreation Subgroup)
2.11	Develop and pilot an Upland Recreation Scheme (eg. path maintenance payments to landowners) to be rolled out through the Mountain Access Project.	Q3 2024	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe (Sustainable Upland Recreation Subgroup), DAFM, LDCs, farming bodies
2.12	Explore the possibilities of developing capacity to deliver quality upland pathwork through the Helping the Hills Network.	Q2 2024	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe (Sustainable Upland Recreation Subgroup)
2.13	Address the emerging recommendations of the Comhairle na Tuaithe Sustainable Upland Recreation Subgroup	Q4 2024	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe

The actions in 'Environment' will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the following Sustainable Development Goals



7 Awareness



Lough Key Forest & Activity Park,
Boyle, County Roscommon

Awareness

To create awareness of our outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly

Why is this important?

Ireland has a wealth of green spaces and trails where people can enjoy the outdoors. A key barrier to people visiting and enjoying the outdoors, is a lack of awareness of the opportunities that are available to them. It is also important that when people enjoy the outdoors, that they take responsibility for their own safety, that they minimise their impact on the environment, and that they show consideration to landowners and other people who generously allow access to their land.

Consultation has clearly indicated that people want more information on where to go and what to do in the outdoors, from a source which is easily accessible for all and up to date. We also received significant feedback, from both landowners and recreational users, that some people do not behave in a responsible manner when visiting the outdoors. This causes issues for landowners, the environment and the outdoor experience of other users. These issues include littering, irresponsible car parking, overcrowding, livestock worrying by dogs and people being poorly prepared for their activities.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to significantly raise the awareness of where to go and what to do in the outdoors, so that a lack of awareness is no longer a barrier to engagement with the outdoors for residents or visitors in Ireland.

Our ambition is also to change user behaviour in the outdoors. There is a clear need for a significant programme of communication, promotion and education to achieve this behaviour change. Active support from government departments, agencies and other stakeholders will be critical to this ambition, in order to ensure clear, consistent messaging on responsible enjoyment in the outdoors.

Taking account of the opportunities and challenges as well as feedback from consultation and good practice, the action plans set out in this chapter will deliver on our vision for 'Awareness'.



Shannon's Lane, Blackstairs Mountain, County Carlow

Case Study



Volunteer rangers, Ticknock, County Wicklow

Dublin Mountains Partnership Volunteer Rangers

The Dublin Mountains are a popular destination for many visitors, from Dublin and beyond, to come and enjoy outdoor recreation. As in many other outdoor spaces, there are several challenges to sustainable recreation in the mountains. These challenges include disturbance of wildlife, issues around dog control, irresponsible car parking and littering including dog fouling.

The Dublin Mountains Partnership (DMP), was formed in 2008 as a joint initiative to work on sustainable access and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities in the Dublin Mountains. The DMP partners are Coillte, Dublin City Council, South Dublin County Council, Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, NPWS and the Dublin Mountains Initiative.

Through its Volunteer Ranger Programme, established in 2009, the DMP has attempted to address the challenges facing sustainable outdoor recreation through a combination of 'Meet & Greet' days, guided walks and educational events. On 'Meet & Greet' days, the rangers engage with visitors in a friendly and welcoming way, providing information and guidance about how they can be responsible during their visit.

During the guided walks and educational events, the rangers talk with visitors on specific aspects of the mountains and share their passion, which leads to a greater appreciation and respect for the landscape, wildlife and livestock. Over the first 10 years of the Volunteer Ranger Programme up to 50 people volunteered more than 20,000 hours of their time in the Dublin Mountains.

The DMP and its partner organisations believe that the Volunteer Ranger Programme has had a positive impact on several of the challenges facing sustainable recreation. Going forward, the DMP plans to significantly expand the Programme which will also include monitoring the impact of volunteer rangers on the behaviour of recreational users.

“This is an area of the Mountains where there is livestock grazing and red grouse nesting, so visitors can only bring dogs if they are on the lead. On the ‘Meet & Greet’ day, fortunately most people we met had their dogs on leads. Those who did not, complied with our suggestion to do so.”

Ken & Michael, Volunteer Rangers, Dublin Mountains Partnership

“The operation of the Volunteer Ranger Programme has been very positive. The public are generally happy to engage with the rangers and to see them out and about on the hills. The next phase of DMP volunteering will see more volunteering opportunities, along with greater monitoring of its impact on behaviour change in relation to the challenges faced in sustainable outdoor recreation.”

Clodagh Duffy, Recreation Manager, Dublin Mountains Partnership

Awareness



To create awareness of our outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Better access to information on outdoor recreation</i></p>				
3.1	Collate detailed information on where and how people can access the outdoors and outdoor activities, as part of the National Digital Database project.	Q4 2023	Sport Ireland	County stakeholders, National Governing Bodies, local authorities
3.2	Utilising the information from the National Digital Database, develop a website and app with a dedicated section on all outdoor recreation opportunities across Ireland, encouraging responsible behaviour and with content that is inclusive to all audiences.	Q4 2023	Sport Ireland	County stakeholders, Comhairle na Tuaithe
3.3	Through the National Digital Database, create a mechanism to facilitate and encourage all stakeholders to provide accurate, accessible and open data.	Q3 2024	Sport Ireland	LAs, LDCs, County stakeholders, Fáilte Ireland, Coillte, NPWS, OPW, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, National Governing Bodies
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>A common message on responsible behaviour</i></p>				
3.4	Develop an agreed position on responsible behaviour in the outdoors, including dog control, by all Comhairle na Tuaithe stakeholders.	Q3 2023	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe, DAFM
3.5	Develop a universal set of guidelines and messaging for stakeholders to implement and strengthen responsible behaviour in the outdoors.	Q3 2024	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe, Leave No Trace Ireland, National Governing Bodies
3.6	Advocate responsible behaviour messaging with government departments, agencies, National Governing Bodies and other funded bodies to ensure it is communicated consistently.	Ongoing	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe, relevant government Departments, National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships, Leave No Trace Ireland, key county stakeholders

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>A planned approach to communications</i></p>				
3.7	<p>Develop and implement a communications plan for all users of the outdoors, including a public awareness campaign: to increase the awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities for all; to increase the awareness and care for the fragile and precious environment where we take part in outdoor recreation; to encourage responsible enjoyment of the outdoors. Secure resources and buy-in from relevant agencies and delivery partners, and measure the impact of the plan implementation.</p>	Q4 2025	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe, DAFM
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>More inclusive communication</i></p>				
3.8	<p>Collate a suite of communication resources (such as photos, templates etc.) and guidelines to enable all stakeholders to be more inclusive and effective when communicating with under-represented groups.</p>	Q3 2024	Sport Ireland	Cara, DCEDIY, Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, Fáilte Ireland
3.9	<p>Manage a database of digital content (photos/videos) of outdoor recreation on Ireland's Content Pool for use in the promotion of responsible and inclusive outdoor recreation.</p>	Q1 2024	Fáilte Ireland	Sport Ireland
<div> </div> <p>The actions in 'Awareness' will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the following Sustainable Development Goals</p>				

Case Study

HER Outdoors Initiative,
Castlecomer Discovery Park,
County Kilkenny



HER Outdoors Programme, Kilkenny

The Irish Sports Monitor shows that women, and particularly girls, are underrepresented in participation in physical activity.

To address this, the Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership developed a series of programmes and events for women and girls as part of the national HER Outdoors Week. The purpose of the programme was to encourage females to get active, be adventurous and experience the outdoors while trying a new activity.

The programme consisted of three initiatives including 'Yoga & Dip' in partnership with Swim Ireland, an introduction to hillwalking in partnership with Mountaineering Ireland and an outdoor adventure programme for teenage girls in partnership with Castlecomer Discovery Park.

The programme has been important in increasing awareness, confidence, and ability for participants to access amenities and become active in the outdoors in their local area. The women have continued the engagement with the outdoors and a WhatsApp group has been created in order to plan future activities together.

Given the success of the programme, Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership ran a follow-on programme of HER Outdoors Kilkenny, with ambitious plans for additional programmes. Other activities will be considered to build on the initiative and to encourage more active participation in the outdoors by women and girls.



Brandon Hill, County Kilkenny

The women realised that they could be active in the outdoors even if they were not 'sporty'.

8 Opportunities



Watersports Inclusion Games,
County Cork

Opportunities

To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups



Climbing in County Wicklow

Why is this important?

Given that recreational walking is the number one physical activity undertaken by people in Ireland, walking and other outdoor activities have a very significant role to play in getting people active and tackling the public health issue of physical inactivity.

As outdoor recreation takes place in the natural environment, it also provides many additional benefits, such as mental health benefits including 'greater feelings of revitalisation and positive engagement, decreases in tension, confusion, anger, and depression, and increased energy'^{xvi}.

However, research informs us, that while outdoor recreation is clearly beneficial, the levels of participation are not equal across the population. One area of concern is young people's participation levels, with research showing that 'adventure activities' were poorly taken up in primary and post primary school^{xvii}.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to increase the number of people active in the outdoors and to support a rise in physical activity, in balance with our shared responsibility to protect the environment. Key to achieving this is an increased focus on programmes for inactive people and those with the lowest participation levels in outdoor recreation, including ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older adults, unemployed, disadvantaged areas, Travellers, women and girls and young people. Greater support will also be given to those currently engaged in outdoor recreation.

Our ambition is also to expand the role of outdoor recreation in formal education and early learning so that children and young people have increased opportunities to be regularly active, and learn, in an outdoor setting.

Taking account of the opportunities and challenges as well as feedback from consultation and good practice, the action plans set out in this chapter will deliver on our vision for 'Opportunities'.

Case Study

Wheely Boat, Inclusion Games, Kinsale, County Cork



The Watersports Inclusion Games

Approximately 6.7% of people under the age of 20 have a disability^{xviii} and they face many barriers to participating in outdoor recreation, such as accessibility issues, communication and confidence. Several organisations including Local Sports Partnerships and Cara have been focused on removing these barriers in order to enable greater access to the outdoors for people of all abilities.

Irish Sailing has embraced the challenge to make watersports more inclusive through hosting 'The Watersports Inclusion Games'. The annual event is free and aimed at young people of all abilities and disabilities from the physical, sensory, intellectual and learning spectrums and those experiencing barriers accessing mainstream watersports.

The most recent Games took place in Kinsale in 2019 (pre COVID-19 restrictions), funded by the Dormant Account Sports Inclusion Funding scheme and supported by a team of 285 volunteers. 500 participants took part in a range of activities including sailing, canoeing, stand-up paddleboarding, surfing and waterskiing. The event received overwhelmingly positive feedback with many participants describing it as a life-changing experience. It also encourages watersports training centres and clubs nationwide to embrace inclusion and equal access to watersports and training.

“Sailing on Sunday evening was unreal and I hope to join the Saturday morning Sailability. I really hope this is the start of a whole new chapter in my life which I would never have thought of except for the Games.”

Participant, Watersports Inclusion Games, 2019

“Our daughter is ten years old and has autism. She suffers greatly with anxiety but was determined to try today at things she had never done before. It was beautiful and emotional to watch her. The atmosphere was beyond inclusive; it restored our faith in humanity.”

Participant, Watersports Inclusion Games, 2019

“Irish Sailing have run the Watersports Inclusion Games since 2017 and each year has increased the types of watersports, end user groups, National Governing Bodies and passionate advocates for watersports, being inclusive and accessible to all.”

Ciarán Murphy, Inclusion Officer, Irish Sailing




Opportunities

To increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors, especially young people and under-represented groups

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Increase in participation in the outdoors for all, with a focus on under-represented groups</i></p>				
4.1	Continue to expand and support increased participation through the delivery of existing outdoor recreation opportunities by National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships.	Ongoing	Sport Ireland	National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships
4.2	Increase the number of programmes and participants engaged in outdoor recreation for all: including ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older adults, unemployed, disadvantaged areas, Travellers, women and girls and young people (with a particular focus on Get Ireland Walking, Get Ireland Cycling, Get Ireland Swimming and Get Ireland Running).	Q2 2025	Sport Ireland	Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies, Physical activity delivery partners
4.3	Further develop alignments between DoH, DRCD, Sport Ireland, HSE, local authorities, LDCs and Local Sports Partnerships to strengthen and develop outdoor recreation initiatives with the potential to improve people's health and wellbeing.	Q1 2025	DoH	DRCD, Sport Ireland, HSE, local authorities, LDCs and Local Sports Partnerships
4.4	Increase the mental health and wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation, through the support and expansion of Woodlands for Health and other nature based physical activity programmes.	Q1 2024	Mental Health Ireland, Mountaineering Ireland, Coillte	National Governing Bodies and Local Sports Partnerships
4.5	Develop stakeholder guidance and deliver training, on key inclusivity themes including development of accessible infrastructure and encouraging people of all abilities into the outdoors.	Q4 2025	Sport Ireland	Cara, DCEDIY, Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies
4.6	Use the National Digital Database to identify potential opportunities for people to be more active in the outdoors.	Q1 2024	Sport Ireland	LA's, Cara, DCEDIY, Local Sports Partnerships, National Governing Bodies
4.7	Explore and pilot a model for volunteering in outdoor recreation with Volunteering Ireland and other organisations in the sector.	Q2 2026	DRCD, Volunteer Ireland	Sport Ireland, LDCs, Dublin Mountains Partnership, National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Better connection for all to recreation opportunities</i></p>				
4.8	Develop a coherent and connected cycling network, through the National Cycle Network Plan and CycleConnects, which would provide a connection into other sustainable transport modes, enabling further onward travel using bus, train and by walking to enable access to outdoor recreation opportunities.	Q1 2026	DoT	TII, NTA
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Playing and learning outdoors is an everyday experience for all children</i></p>				
4.9	Build the capacity of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare providers, including childminders, to deliver outdoor play and learning through providing practical advice and support, and the development of 'Communities of Practice'.	Q3 2024	DCEDIY	
4.10	Consult on and set appropriate regulatory standards for use of outdoor spaces by Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services, including childminders.	Q3 2025	DCEDIY	
4.11	Promote more use of the outdoors through existing campaigns and an increased focus on high-quality outdoor spaces in DCEDIY capital grant schemes for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare.	Q3 2025	DCEDIY	
4.12	In line with the strategic objectives of the First 5 Strategy, outdoor provision, under the First 5 Trials Programme, will be included as a pilot project for capital investment under Project Ireland 2040. This programme will focus on innovative practice.	Q3 2025	DCEDIY	
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Every child in primary and post-primary education has multiple opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation</i></p>				
4.13	Incorporate into CPD design and support visits to schools, where appropriate, outdoor learning/nature-based learning as an approach to teaching and learning thus creating attitudes, dispositions and a belief in the relevance and benefits of the great outdoors to teaching and learning.	Q3 2025	Department of Education	
4.14	Encourage schools to provide opportunities for students, on a voluntary basis, to take part in at least one full day of outdoor recreation every year.	Q3 2025	Department of Education	
4.15	Explore incorporation of outdoor and nature-based learning into the formal curriculum at both primary and post-primary level, where relevant and appropriate.	Q3 2025	Department of Education	

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
In 5 years' time we will see: Greater participation from youth				
4.16	Engage with youth organisations and the Education and Training Boards nationally to explore the role they can play in the delivery of the strategy, especially in relation to encouraging responsible participation in the outdoors by young people.	Q3 2025	DRCD	ETBIs, youth organisations
In 5 years' time we will see: An updated curriculum and courses in Further and Higher Education				
4.17	Develop and seek accreditation for additional outdoor recreation related modules including topics such as responsible behaviour, sustainability, inclusivity.	Q3 2025	ETBI	DFHERIS
4.18	Explore the opportunity for additional courses and modules to meet the needs of the sector, for example, outdoor recreation management.	Q1 2024	DRCD	Third-level institutions
4.19	Develop and administer new training schemes and education in relation to safe, sustainable and responsible participation, trail development and maintenance etc.	Q3 2025	ETBI	SOLAS
4.20	Explore the strengthening of outdoor and adventure play and learning in initial training for early years educators and teachers.	Q3 2027	DCEDIY, DE	QQI
The actions in 'Opportunities' will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the following Sustainable Development Goals				
				

Case Study



Kayak4Dads participants,
Ennis, County Clare

Kayak4Dads

Research indicates that certain population groups have fewer opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation. This includes those who are considered to be socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged. The Kayak4Dads programme shows the impact of how targeted programmes can engage these groups and reap the benefits associated with being active outdoors.

Traveller and settled Dads from Scoil Chríost Rí, Ennis, participated in Kayak4Dads, having been inspired by their children who had taken part in a similar programme. The Burren Outdoor Education and Training Centre and the Further Education and Training Centre, Ennis campus's Core Skills Team delivered the 8-week kayaking programme. Many participants chose to complete the more advanced Canoe Ireland Level 1 programme and also progressed on to other courses such as a mixed group of settled and Travellers outdoor pursuits course. A Kayak4Mums course has now also been established.

The programme had a huge impact on the participants' self-esteem, sense of belonging, self-value and wellbeing. It also provided positive role models for the children who showed great pride in their Dads' achievements.

"I would like to have more time at it. Would love to become a kayaking instructor and help out at the school with my kids."

"I enjoyed being challenged, getting out on the water – overcoming my fear of a past experience, almost drowning when I was 4 down at the school."

"We felt privileged to get the opportunity in these weird (Covid) times to be out. It helped our mental wellbeing. It gave us something to look forward to on a weekly basis."

Traveller Dads

"The Kayak4Dads initiative showcased best practice in community education provision by being learner-led, collaborative and promoting lifelong learning, which was further enhanced through outdoor engagement."

Fergus Craddock, Inclusion Manager, Education and Training Boards Ireland

"Kayak4Dads has also opened up a whole new world of educational opportunities to men who otherwise would not have engaged with any educational provider."

Paul Patton, Director, Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board

9 Access



Glenmalure, County Wicklow

Access

To protect and improve access to the outdoors, for the benefit of all

Why is this important?

To participate in outdoor recreation, users require access to the land and waterways of Ireland, all of which are either in state or private ownership. Currently, many private landowners allow access on their land for outdoor recreation.

As there is no legal right of access for users to private land, access depends on the goodwill of landowners. While access is widely available, the lack of clarity around access and land ownership is an issue for recreational users, particularly for people from outside the local area. Based on consultation feedback, it is evident that landowners have concerns around liability and issues caused by a minority of users such as livestock worrying, littering, dog waste and irresponsible car parking. It is imperative for the sector to overcome these issues so that future generations can continue to enjoy access to the outdoors.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to work with landowners to protect and enhance the access that is currently facilitated and seek to improve access to the outdoors in other locations. Ways to achieve this will be explored such as through the expansion of the Department of Rural and Community Development funded Walks Scheme, the development of new access in less sensitive environments, and changes in legislation, such as the strengthening of the Occupiers' Liability Act.

The benefit of having space for recreation close to home was reinforced by the COVID-19 travel restrictions. Our ambition is to grow the community-led development of trails and recreation spaces in, or close to, towns and villages, so that people have doorstep opportunities for walking and getting outdoors.

Critical to achieving our ambition is a proactive approach to ensuring the concerns of private landowners are addressed. In addition, our ambition is to change user behaviour so that all users embrace and enjoy access in a respectful manner and are fully aware of their personal responsibilities.

Taking account of the opportunities and challenges as well as feedback from consultation and good practice, the action plans set out in this chapter will deliver on our vision for 'Access'.

Carlingford Greenway, County Louth



Case Study



Lady's Abbey, Ardfinnan, County Tipperary

St Declan's Way

The goodwill of private landowners allows the people of Ireland to enjoy access to many areas for outdoor recreation. New opportunities for access to trails and green spaces are being developed through the efforts of many community groups working in partnership with local farmers.

St Declan's Way is a pilgrim walking route linking Cashel in County Tipperary and Ardmore in County Waterford. Knockmealdown Active is a multi-community group located in the Tipperary and Waterford boundary area. Together with the St Declan's Way committee and the Waterford LEADER Partnership, the group has successfully worked with over 45 local farmers to agree permissive access to allow the St Declan's Way to follow the ancient pilgrim's route across farm and rural lands.

The secret to success has been the respectful partnership between all stakeholders and the recognition that St Declan's Way is for the benefit for everyone in the local community.

St Declan's Way brings tourism and day-visitor spend to west Waterford and south Tipperary. It has the potential to become the "Irish Camino" pilgrim route as it follows the journey taken by St Declan from Ardmore to meet St Patrick in Cashel. Research shows that pilgrim walkers spend 2.3 times more than the average tourist, illustrating the potential economic benefit as these walkers progress along St Declan's Way, through Cashel, Cahir, Ardfinnan, Melleray, Lismore, Cappoquin and Ardmore.

In anticipation of the estimated 20,000 walkers who will enjoy St Declan's Way each year, a new hostel in the historic Mount Melleray Abbey was developed to accommodate walkers. The development was part funded by LEADER.

"Giving access to our land to allow people to walk on St Declan's Way was an easy decision for Noeleen and I. We wanted local people and visitors to be able to enjoy this part of rural Ireland. We also wanted to leave a legacy for generations to come and make sure that this historical walk is not forgotten. The community we live in is very important to us, so if the walk could help create any economic opportunities for the local community then this was definitely something we would facilitate."

Sean Osborne, Farmer, County Waterford

"The goodwill of landowners and their willingness to see the bigger picture laid the groundwork for the reopening of St Declan's Way in June 2021. Without their support the project would never have gotten off the ground."

Conor Ryan, St Declan's Way Steering Committee

Access



To protect and improve access to the outdoors, for the benefit of all

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>A clearer position and pathway on access to the outdoors</i></p>				
5.1	Develop guidance on the current options for recreational access (for example, permissive access) to publicly-owned and privately-owned land and water.	Q4 2025	DRCD	DoT, Comhairle na Tuaithe, Sport Ireland
5.2	Develop an agreed approach to land and water access for the development of new national and community/local trails.	Q1 2024	DRCD	Sport Ireland, LAs, LDCs, farming bodies, community organisations, Comhairle na Tuaithe
5.3	Encourage innovative solutions to improve access for recreation in cooperation with landowners, with a particular focus on activities that are not typically based on trails or built infrastructure, such as kayaking, rock climbing, paragliding and caving.	Q3 2026	DRCD	Sport Ireland, LAs, LDCs, community organisations, National Governing Bodies
5.4	Clarify the roles of trail management organisations, private landowners and local development companies in the development, management and maintenance of trails under the Walks Scheme.	Q2 2023	DRCD	Sport Ireland, LDCs, Fáilte Ireland, Coillte
5.5	Expand the Walks Scheme to 150 trails by end 2024, following which further expansion will be considered.	Q4 2024	DRCD	LDCs, Fáilte Ireland, Sport Ireland
5.6	Review the payment structure under the Walks Scheme to address any unintended financial disincentive in relation to agricultural schemes.	Q4 2023	DRCD	DAFM, Comhairle na Tuaithe
5.7	Review approaches and models for physical access used in other countries, based on principles of respect for land ownership and responsible conduct.	Q3 2024	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe
5.8	Explore a partnership with Bord na Móna to develop recreational facilities across their lands under their new brown to green agenda.	Q3 2024	DRCD	DECC, Bord na Móna

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: More responsible enjoyment of the outdoors</p>				
5.9	Collate relevant evidence and carry out a review of legislation, by-laws and practices relating to outdoor recreation behaviour (enforcement and sanctions).	Q4 2024	DRCD	Comhairle na Tuaithe
5.10	Develop and implement a Responsible Behaviour in the Outdoors Plan to bring about more responsible enjoyment of the outdoors, including securing resources for interventions such as onsite wardens, education, enforcement and signage.	Q1 2026	DRCD	Relevant government departments, Comhairle na Tuaithe
5.11	As part of the communications plan (action 3.7), develop and deliver a campaign to promote a culture of responsible dog ownership in outdoor recreation.	Q4 2025	DRCD	Sport Ireland, Comhairle na Tuaithe, CCMA Subgroup
5.12	Explore potential amendments to the Control of Dogs Act including a new provision to allow for the introduction of Dog Control Notices (DCNs).	Q3 2024	DRCD	Local authorities, Comhairle na Tuaithe
5.13	Explore the potential for new regulations specifically to deal with the offence of livestock worrying, with associated fines.	Q3 2024	DRCD	Local authorities, Comhairle na Tuaithe, LDCs
5.14	Collate examples and investigate approaches to deal with damage to property and livestock due to outdoor recreation activities.	Q4 2025	DRCD	DAFM, Comhairle na Tuaithe
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: A clearer position and better understanding of liability</p>				
5.15	Ensure that the needs of landowners and the outdoor recreation sector are reflected in proposed changes to the Occupiers' Liability Act which aims to rebalance the duty of care between occupiers and entrants, and introduce a Voluntary Assumption of Risk.	Q4 2023	DoJ	DRCD, Comhairle na Tuaithe
5.16	Develop clear communications that enables better understanding of the landowner's position around access and liability, and the personal responsibility of recreational users for their own safety.	Q4 2025	Sport Ireland	DRCD, Comhairle na Tuaithe, Mountaineering Ireland
<p>The actions in 'Access' will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the following Sustainable Development Goals</p>				

10 | Expertise



An Sabin Equestrian Centre,
Derroran, County Clare

Expertise

To improve the knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners

Why is this important?

Over the last decade, the outdoor recreation sector has grown significantly. There has been an increase in the number of people and organisations involved in the planning, development, management and maintenance of outdoor recreation, as well as programme development and delivery. Such has been the speed of this growth, many outdoor recreation practitioners are operating with insufficient knowledge, skills, and expertise in outdoor recreation.

Concerns were highlighted regarding the varying levels of proficiency within the sector, and stakeholders expressed a desire to standardise and improve outdoor recreation practices in Ireland.

There is a clear requirement to provide support to the sector in order to achieve and maintain consistently high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities and infrastructure, and to fulfil all legal obligations, particularly with regard to sites designated for nature conservation.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to equip those working and volunteering in the sector with the skills, knowledge and expertise that they need to thrive in their roles. Guidance will be developed to instill good practices, agreed standards and a consistent approach. Critical to embedding this good practice across the outdoor recreation sector, will be the availability of numerous opportunities to attend training events and seminars, experience best practice in action and network with other practitioners.

In addition, it is our ambition to equip decision-makers in outdoor recreation with information and evidence, including research, to enable them to better develop and monitor projects and programmes.

Taking account of the opportunities and challenges as well as feedback from consultation and good practice, the action plans set out in this chapter will deliver on our vision for 'Expertise'.



Rural Recreation Officer Training
Woodstock Gardens and Arboretum, Inistioge, County Kilkenny

Case Study



Mannin Bay Beach, Connemara, County Galway

Cara's Access Great Outdoors

Cara is a national pan-disability sport organisation providing a collaborative and partnership platform to increase sport and physical activity opportunities for people with disabilities across Ireland.

Following the publication of the 'Great Outdoors - a guide for accessibility' guidelines in 2019, Cara developed a workshop to share the good practice with stakeholders. The workshop was developed to provide practical information, advice and guidance to organisations and individuals responsible for outdoor recreation, with a view to greatly improving the accessibility of Ireland's outdoor spaces for everyone.

The workshop is aimed at developers, managers, planners and designers of publicly accessible outdoor facilities and amenities in Ireland including those responsible for site and landscape management, planning, development and upgrade. The workshop provides expert guidance for all those involved in the provision of outdoor recreation amenities and facilities in Ireland, on how to provide for the participation of people with disabilities. The workshop also promotes the principle of universal design in the planning and development of outdoor recreation areas.

By following the guidelines outlined in the workshop, it is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in the opportunities for people with disabilities who wish to become involved and active in outdoor locations and activities of their choice. This in turn will see more people with any disability visiting and being active in the outdoors.

“Increasing awareness, access and opportunity makes the outdoors open to all. Cara's Access Great Outdoors training (Inclusive Design for Outdoor Recreation) aims to increase awareness and build capacity amongst planners and designers to ensure a universal approach is adopted across all outdoor infrastructure developments. Everyone has a right to access and enjoy the beauty our country has to offer.”

Niamh Daffy, CEO, Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland

“The Cara workshop was very insightful in giving the background to outdoor inclusion and giving practical demonstrations on using trails with a disability and assessing a trail for accessibility.”

Eoin Hogan, Rural Recreation Officer, County Clare

Expertise



To improve the knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>A more skilled, knowledgeable sector, evidenced by good practice throughout Ireland</i></p>				
6.1	In partnership with key stakeholders and experts, identify, agree and develop guidance for the sector. Act as point of contact and deliver the associated training to all relevant stakeholders, in order to embed consistent practices.	Ongoing	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe
6.2	Provide guidance and training to the outdoor recreation sector in environmental awareness and compliance.	Q3 2026	NPWS, DoHLGH	Sport Ireland
6.3	Host and promote an annual conference, training programmes, practitioner workshops, seminars and site visits to share best practice and facilitate networking.	Q3 2024	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe
6.4	Develop a suitable online platform that houses information, guidance and resources, such as funding opportunities, research reports, stakeholder events, training opportunities, good-practice guidance documents.	Q3 2025	Sport Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe
6.5	Share key learnings on suitable online platform from industry networks such as Visitor Safety Group and Outdoor Recreation Network with stakeholders.	Q3 2025	Sport Ireland	Coillte, NPWS, Fáilte Ireland, Mountaineering Ireland
<p>In 5 years' time we will see: <i>Better information and evidence on outdoor recreation</i></p>				
6.6	Lead on the development and collation of outdoor recreation research and the identification of emerging trends in outdoor recreation.	Q3 2026	Sport Ireland	Fáilte Ireland, Third level institutions
6.7	Undertake a study to measure the benefits (mental health, physical health, economic and social) of outdoor recreation in Ireland.	Q4 2023	Sport Ireland	Relevant government departments, Comhairle na Tuaithe, Fáilte Ireland, Coillte

No.	Action	Timescale	Lead Delivery Organisations	Stakeholders
6.8	Review the existing population-level data collected on outdoor recreation in Ireland to identify knowledge gaps and identify the information priorities required to inform policy and decision-making.	Q3 2023	Sport Ireland	Relevant government departments, Comhairle na Tuaithe
6.9	Establish regular population-level tracking on outdoor recreation activity. Communicate key insights, such as changes in participation levels and inequalities between population groups, to policy-makers and decision-makers.	Q3 2024	Sport Ireland	Relevant government departments, Comhairle na Tuaithe
6.10	Establish a system and methodology to track visitor numbers and measure impact on identified sites where over-crowding is a current or potential issue.	Q3 2026	Fáilte Ireland	Comhairle na Tuaithe, Coillte, NPWS, Fáilte Ireland
6.11	Develop standard methodologies to measure the benefits and return of outdoor recreation capital projects and participation programmes. Develop toolkits and training to guide stakeholders to apply these tools.	Q3 2024	Sport Ireland	Relevant government departments, Comhairle na Tuaithe Fáilte Ireland

In 5 years' time we will see:

Activity providers delivering safe, quality experiences for all

6.12	Carry out a review of the potential to improve the safety and quality of commercial provision of outdoor activities, including options on accreditation and insurance implications, and follow up on emerging actions.	Q3 2026	DRCD	Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism, National Governing Bodies, Fáilte Ireland, relevant government departments
6.13	Training to be provided for leaders and guides on access, environment, and sustainable recreation.	Q3 2025	Sport Ireland	National Governing Bodies, Local Sports Partnerships, Leave No Trace Ireland, Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism

The actions in 'Expertise' will contribute to the delivery of one or more of the following Sustainable Development Goals



11 | How will we get there?



Dursey Island, County Cork

How will we get there?

Implementation

The implementation of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, and realisation of our vision for outdoor recreation, will require a partnership approach, working collaboratively with stakeholders across the sector at both national and county level.

National level

The Department of Rural and Community Development will be the lead government department in the delivery of many of the actions. The Department will develop a detailed Action Plan to progress each of the actions under the six strategic objectives in partnership with the relevant named delivery organisations. Sport Ireland will assume a co-leadership role, with the Department, with increased responsibilities and resources.

A Strategy Implementation and Oversight Group, chaired by the Department of Rural and Community Development, will be formed and will be made up of members from Comhairle na Tuaithe.

This structure will ensure collaboration with stakeholders and Comhairle na Tuaithe's active involvement in the guidance and delivery of the strategy actions.

In addition, the Department of Rural and Community Development will hold regular Inter-Departmental Group meetings to ensure cross-Departmental collaboration and delivery.

County level

We will achieve a more planned and coordinated approach between the many county stakeholders, through the introduction of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee, a Stakeholder Forum and the development of an Outdoor Recreation Plan for each county.

Each County Outdoor Recreation Committee will be made up of the primary decision-makers and stakeholders in the county, which will vary from county to county. The County Outdoor Recreation Committee will include representatives from the Stakeholder Forum to ensure that the wider stakeholders' views are heard and acted upon.

All stakeholders and participants in outdoor recreation will have the opportunity to attend the county Stakeholder Forum, which will take place two or more times per annum.

The County Outdoor Recreation Committee and Stakeholder Forum will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say, county needs are prioritised, as well as being aligned with the national strategy.

This new structure will be best placed to ensure that value for money is achieved from the significant levels of public investment in outdoor recreation.

The Department will provide guidance and resource the development of a County Outdoor Recreation Plan in each county to reflect the priorities of the national strategy and the relevant strengths, needs and aspirations of the county and including those identified in the Local and Economic Community Plan. The County Outdoor Recreation Plan may cover two counties, where appropriate.

In order to support the new structure and coordinate the delivery of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan, a new position will be created. In partnership with relevant government departments and other stakeholders, the Department will develop a funding model to resource the new county outdoor recreation position which will be hosted in Local Sports Partnerships. Once funding is secured, an initial phase of the new role will be rolled out in a number of selected counties. Following a review of the learnings and refinement of the model, further roll-out of the county outdoor recreation positions will take place across all counties in Ireland. The position may cover two counties, where appropriate.



Rossbeigh, County Kerry

Funding

We will ensure that available funding and resources are better aligned with national and county priorities.

There will be more strategic coordination of funding streams at a national level through the Inter-Departmental Group to ensure investment is more coordinated and impactful.

Greater emphasis will be placed on the management and maintenance of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure and assistance will continue to be provided to outdoor recreation businesses and enterprises through the local development companies and other channels including the Local Enterprise Offices, who can offer a broad suite of business development programmes.



Mulranny, County Mayo

Outcomes and indicators

The key outcomes of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* are:

Leadership

- A coordinated national approach to outdoor recreation
- Effective monitoring of the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy outcomes
- A planned approach to outdoor recreation at county level
- Funding and resources aligned with national and county priorities
- An all-Island approach on key areas

Environment

- An improved approach to planning and development to achieve more sustainable and higher quality outdoor recreation infrastructure
- Improved visitor management at key sites
- An agreed model for the sustainable management of recreation in upland areas

Awareness

- Better access to information on outdoor recreation
- A common message on responsible behaviour
- A planned approach to communications
- More inclusive communication

Opportunities

- Increase in participation in the outdoors for all, with a focus on under-represented groups
- Improved support and guidance for participants in outdoor activities
- Better connection for all to recreation opportunities
- Playing and learning outdoors is an everyday experience for all children
- Every child in early years, primary and post-primary education has multiple opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation
- Greater participation from youth
- An updated curriculum and courses in Further and Higher Education

Access

- A clearer position and pathway on access to the outdoors
- More responsible enjoyment of the outdoors
- A clearer position and better understanding of liability

Expertise

- A more skilled, knowledgeable sector, evidenced by good practice throughout Ireland
- Better information and evidence on outdoor recreation
- Activity providers delivering safe, quality experiences for all

A key action in this strategy is create a mechanism to identify, measure and track targets and indicators relating to these outcomes. It is envisaged that these targets and indicators will include key measures such as an increase in the number of people participating in outdoor recreation, number of visitors to key amenities and quality of outdoor recreation spaces. It is recognised that there is currently a lack of data to measure these. This will be addressed, and appropriate mechanisms put in place.

Evaluation and Oversight

The Strategy Implementation and Oversight Group will monitor the delivery of the strategy, including a mid-term review, through ongoing engagement with relevant government departments, delivery organisations and Comhairle na Tuaithe.

The group will also identify and review the targets and indicators which will allow us to determine the impact of the implementation of the strategy actions.

Case Study

Phase 1 Restoration: New Navigation Arch at Derrykerrib Bridge, County Cavan/Fermanagh

Ulster Canal Restoration Programme

The Ulster Canal Restoration Programme aims to reinstate a historic canal transport corridor that closed in 1931. It is a flagship legacy project that transcends north south jurisdictional and county boundaries and underpins shared heritage on the island.

Phase 1 of the restoration works was completed by Waterways Ireland in 2019 and resulted in the reopening of a 2.5km of navigable waterways from Upper Lough Erne in Co. Fermanagh to Castle Saunderson near Belturbet in Co. Cavan. Phase 1 was made possible by an investment of circa €3m by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Phase 2, due to be completed in 2023, will enable the reopening of a 1km canal section between Clonfad and Clones in Co. Monaghan, the provision of a 1.5-hectare recreational basin at Clones and development of a walking and cycling trail. A capital budget of circa €22m to deliver this phase is being co-funded through the Shared Island Fund, the Department of Rural and Community Development's RRDF, and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Phase 3 of the project will aim to restore a 10km canal section from Clonfad, Co. Monaghan to Castle Saunderson, Co. Cavan, and develop an adjoining walking and cycling trail. A commitment of €40m from the Shared Island Fund was announced in July 2022 by the Department of the Taoiseach to support the capital delivery.

The completion of all three restoration phases will see a 14.5km navigation channel from Upper Lough Erne, Co. Fermanagh to Clones, Co. Monaghan. The restoration programme will:

- stimulate visitors to the area and associated economic impact to local businesses
- boost the attractiveness of Clones as a place to live and reverse population decline
- connect communities on both sides of the border, unlocking opportunities for collaborative development.

Appendices

Dromineer, Co Tipperary

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Appendix 1

Glossary of abbreviations

CCMA	County and City Management Association
Comhairle	Comhairle na Tuaithe (The Countryside Council)
CORC	County Outdoor Recreation Committee
CORP	County Outdoor Recreation Plan
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DAFM	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
DCEDIY	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
DECC	Department of Environment, Climate and Communications
DFHERIS	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DoE	Department of Education
DoH	Department of Health
DoT	Department of Transport
DRCD	Department of Rural and Community Development
DTCAGSM	Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
ETBI	Education & Training Boards Ireland
LDC	Local Development Company
LNTI	Leave No Trace Ireland
LSP	Local Sports Partnership
MI	Mountaineering Ireland
NDP	National Development Plan
NPF	National Planning Framework
NORS	National Outdoor Recreation Strategy
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OPW	Office of Public Works
ORIS	Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme
ORS	Outdoor Recreation Strategy
OETC	Outdoor Education and Training Centre
RRDF	Rural Regeneration and Development Fund
RRO	Rural Recreation Officer
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals (UN)
SF	Stakeholder Forum
SOLAS	Further Education and Skills Service

Appendix 2

Definition of outdoor recreation

Physical activities that take place in the natural environment

Providing a definition of outdoor recreation that is not open to challenge is difficult considering the wide range of activities involved, the diverse groups and individuals who participate and the varying motivations for participation.

By 'outdoor recreation' we mean activities that take place in the natural environment, such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It does not include activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches (such as golf, football, show jumping) or motorised activities (such as quads/scramblers) with the exception of motorised mobility aids.

For the purposes of the strategy, outdoor recreation is defined as those activities that:

- are undertaken by people in their leisure time - however this can include organised activity through clubs /groups (eg coastal rowing club, guided walking group)
- involve physical human power/effort – however this can sometimes involve equipment (eg surf board, canoe, bike, boat, ropes), or passive enjoyment of the natural environment
- require access to green and/or blue spaces in rural or urban environments
- are not primarily focused on competitive outcomes
- sometimes use purpose-built facilities in the natural environment to facilitate participation (eg construction of walking, mountain biking and horse-riding trails, development of canoe steps)
- include play in the natural environment

For the purposes of the strategy, outdoor recreation does not include:

- motorised activities except for ability assistance, due to the damage to the natural environment and built heritage and, in particular, in protected areas
- activities that take place outdoors on confined courses or pitches specifically designed and constructed for those sports (eg golf, football, show jumping) hunting and shooting as they do not fall within the remit of Comhairle na Tuaithe

Appendix 3

Funding

Funding of over €1.63 billion has been invested directly and indirectly through various central government funding programmes from 2019 to 2022. The following list includes a number of key examples of government departments' investment and funding streams that have supported outdoor recreation during this period.

- Dept of Agriculture, Food and the Marine: Coillte Recreation sites: €24 million
- Dept of Children, Disability, Equality and Integration: Capital grants for Play and recreation; Youth services: €17 million
- Dept of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Solas Outdoor Education Centres: €9 million
- Dept of Health: Healthy Ireland Funding: €10 million
- Dept of Housing, Planning and Local Government: Urban Regeneration Development Fund for Urban Recreation Facilities eg. Pedestrian and Cycleways, Town Parks: €278 million
- Dept of Rural and Community Development: Parks, Walks, Outdoor Recreation infrastructure supported through ORIS, RRDF and TVRS: €115 million
- Dept of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media: Sport Ireland programmes, Sports Capital and Fáilte Ireland Investments: €56 million
- Dept of Transport: Greenways, Active Travel: €1.066billion. Note: The Active Travel Investment Programme does not specifically focus on outdoor recreation, however the walking and cycling facilities developed through this programme provides a valuable and accessible resource for recreational users, as well as commuters.
- Waterways Ireland: Maintenance and development of the various navigations, towpaths, greenways, etc to keep them continually open to public use: €55 million.

Appendix 4

Membership of stakeholder groups

Membership of National Outdoor Recreation Strategy Working Group

Ciara Munnely, Sport Ireland Outdoors

Daithi De Forge, Coillte (Chair)

Declan Rice, Irish Local Development Network

Deirdre Maloney, Department of Rural and Community Development

Denis Griffin, Irish Farming Association

Derek O'Neill, Department of Transport (RIP)

Helen Lawless, Mountaineering Ireland (Vice Chair)

Inga Bock, RRO, Donegal Local Development Company

Lèon Fox, Department of Rural and Community Development (Secretariat)

Louise Burke, Sport Ireland

Mark Rowlette, Fáilte Ireland

Sonya Kavanagh, County and City Management Association

Wesley Atkinson, National Parks and Wildlife Service

Membership of Interdepartmental Group

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Department of Environment, Climate and Communications

Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Department of Health

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

Department of Rural and Community Development

Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media

Department of Transport

Membership of Comhairle na Tuaithe

Beara Breifne Committee

Canoeing Ireland (Rotating member)

Cara (Rotating member)

Coillte

Cycling Ireland

Department of Rural and Community Development

Department Of Transport

Fáilte Ireland

Horse Sport Ireland (Rotating member)

Ireland's Association for Adventure Tourism

Irish Local Development Network

Keep Ireland Open

Leave no Trace Ireland

Mountaineering Ireland

Sport Ireland

The County & City Management Association

The Heritage Council

The Irish Cattle & Sheep Farmers' Association

The Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association

The Irish Farmers' Association

The Irish Uplands Forum

The National Parks And Wildlife Service

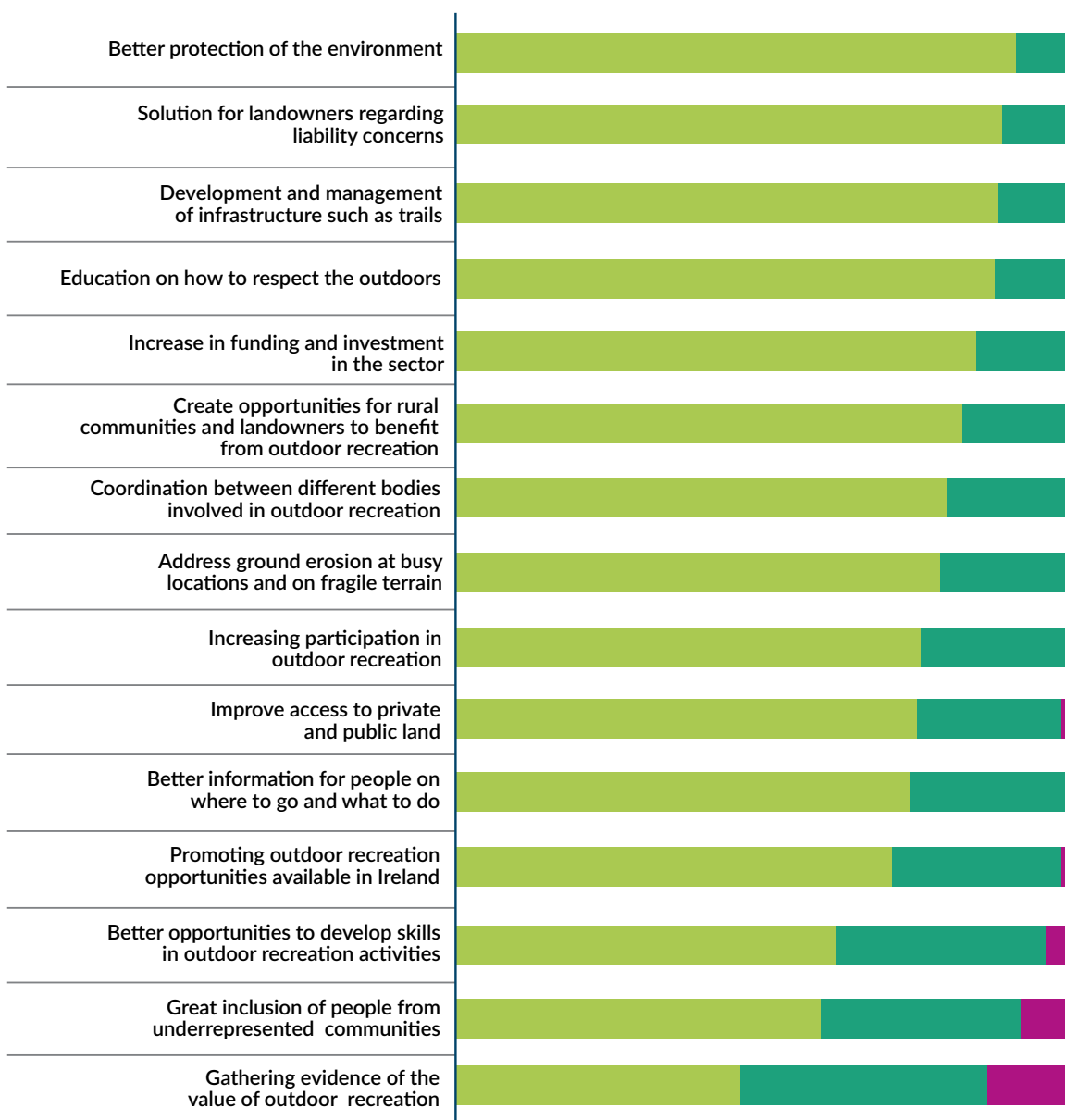
Waterways Ireland (WI)

Appendix 5

Summary data from public consultation

Phase 1 Public Consultation

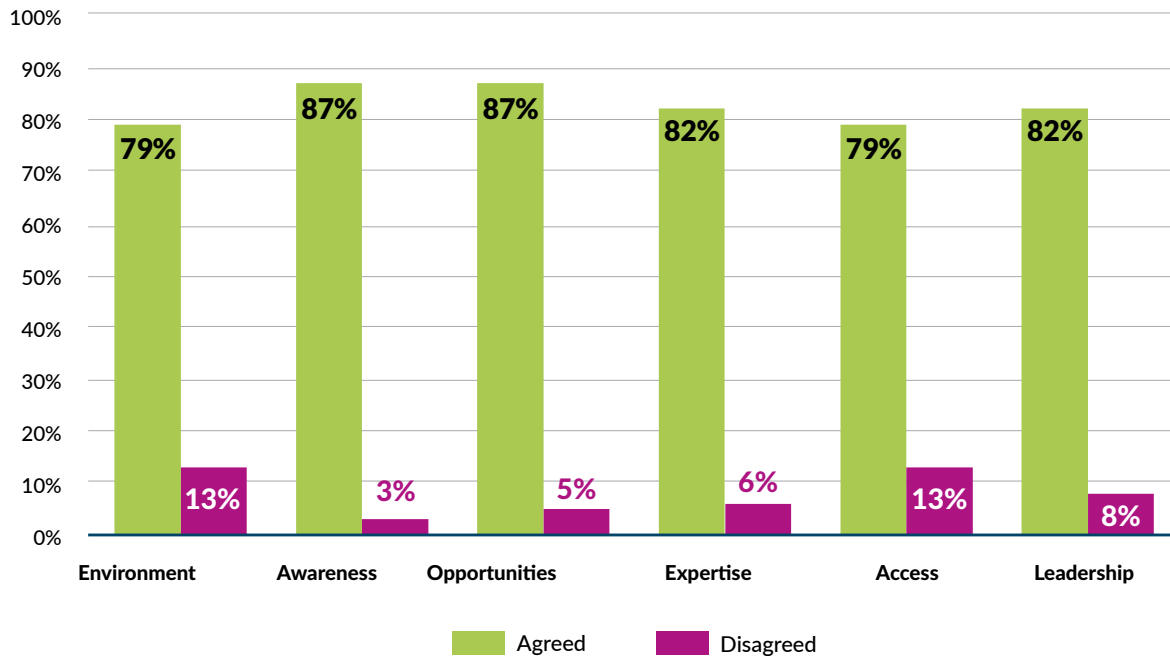
In June 2021, over 2000 people expressed their views on outdoor recreation via an online survey. As part of the survey, respondents indicated what aspects of an outdoor recreation strategy would be important to them.



■ Very important
 ■ Somewhat important
 ■ Not very important
 ■ Not important

Phase 2 Public Consultation

In May 2022, over 600 people expressed their views on the draft strategy proposals via an online survey. As part of the survey, respondents indicated to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the proposed objectives and actions.



Appendix 6 Policy map



Appendix 7

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Appendix 8

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Page	Image Caption	Photo courtesy of
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Front Cover	Stand Up Paddle Boarding, Derg Isle, Scarriff, County Clare	Nomos Productions
Front Cover	Western Way, near Leenane, County Galway	Mountaineering Ireland
Inside Front Cover	Portumna Castle and Gardens, County Galway	Valerie O'Sullivan
6	Garrettstown Beach, County Cork	Brian Morrison; Tourism Ireland
7	Geokaun Mountain, Valentia Island, County Kerry	Brian Morrison; Fáilte Ireland/Tourism Ireland
10	Royal Canal Greenway, County Westmeath	Westmeath County Council
11	Sandycove, Kinsale, County Cork	Tourism Ireland; Joshua McMichael
12	Mountain bike trails, Slieve Blooms, County Offaly	Adrian van der Lee and Bloomeriders
13	Achill Island, County Mayo	ActionPhotography.ie
18	Roscommon Woodlands for Health Programme	Roscommon Sports Partnership
18	Lough Key Forest Park, Boyle, County Roscommon	Chris Hill; Fáilte Ireland
19	Wells House & Gardens, County Wexford	Wells House & Garden; Fáilte Ireland
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29	Limerick Greenway, County Limerick	Limerick County Council
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32	Trim Castle, County Meath	Tony Pleavin; Tourism Ireland
33	Sliabh Beagh, County Monaghan	Monaghan Tourism, Monaghan County Council; Fáilte Ireland
34	Wicklow Mountains National Park, County Wicklow	Chris Spierin; Tourism Ireland; Fáilte Ireland
38	Lough Derg, Killaloe, County Clare	Patrick Bolger; Clare County Council
39	Lullymore Heritage and Discovery Park, County Kildare	Michael Anderton; Fáilte Ireland
40	Cavan Way, County Cavan	Tony Pleavin/Fáilte Ireland
41	Erosion on Croagh Patrick, County Mayo	Mountaineering Ireland
41	Hand-built path on Croagh Patrick, County Mayo	Croagh Patrick Path Team

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44	Lough Key Forest & Activity Park, Boyle, County Roscommon	Chris Hill; Fáilte Ireland/ Tourism Ireland
45	Shannon's Lane, Blackstairs Mountain, County Carlow	Mountaineering Ireland
46	Volunteer rangers, Ticknock, County Wicklow	Dublin Mountains Partnership
49	HER Outdoors Initiative, Castlecomer Discovery Park, County Kilkenny	Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership
49	Brandon Hill, County Kilkenny	Kilkenny Recreation & Sports Partnership
50	Watersports Inclusion Games, County Cork	David Branigan, OceanSport
51	Climbing in County Wicklow	Damien O'Sullivan
52	Wheely Boat, Inclusion Games, Kinsale, County Cork	David Branigan, OceanSport
56	Kayak4Dads participants, Ennis, County Clare	Limerick and Clare Education and Training Board
57	Glenmalure, County Wicklow	Mountaineering Ireland
58	Carlingford Greenway, County Louth	Tony Pleavin; Tourism Ireland
59	Lady's Abbey, Ardfinnan, County Tipperary	Munster Vales
62	An Sibin Equestrian Centre, Derroran, County Clare	Brian Morrison; Fáilte Ireland/Tourism Ireland
63	Rural Recreation Officer Training. Woodstock Gardens and Arboretum, Inistioge. County Kilkenny	Department of Rural and Community Development
64	Mannin Bay Beach, Connemara, County Galway	Cara Sport Inclusion Ireland; Jack Kavanagh
67	Dursey Island, County Cork	Gareth McCormack/ garethmccormack.com; Fáilte Ireland
69	Rossbeigh, County Kerry	Dara Hogan
69	Mulranny, County Mayo	Michael Quinn Photography
71	Phase 1 Restoration: New Navigation Arch at Derrykerrib Bridge, County Cavan/Fermanagh	Waterways Ireland
72	Dromineer, Co Tipperary	Fennell Photography; Fáilte Ireland

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