



# COUNTY WICKLOW OUTDOOR RECREATION STRATEGY 2020-2025



Valuing Outdoor Recreation in County Wicklow





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# Recreation County Wicklow

## THE COUNTY WICKLOW OUTDOOR RECREATION STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

This action plan sets out our ambition for outdoor recreation in County Wicklow, and the steps to realise it.

### Vision

The consultation process highlighted the value of what we have and how it might be enhanced by respecting the underlying ecosystem, growing the culture of being outdoors, and by having more quality outdoors opportunities for people in County Wicklow.

Enriched outdoor recreation experiences, culture and ecosystem - Everyone In, Everyone Outdoors.

### Our Mission

The mission of the County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee is to bring us closer to this vision of Everyone Out. We believe that properly valuing the outdoors is central to our future actions. Valuing the experiences, valuing the outdoor recreation environment and securing the economic value required to sustain and grow outdoor recreation in our county.

#### Value the outdoors.

- Support more quality outdoor opportunities: programmes and places.
- Plan, prioritise and secure additional resources.
- Make everyone aware of the opportunity.

### OUR GOALS

- **Everyone in, Everyone outdoors:** residents and visitor participation, all abilities. Local stakeholders and neighbouring counties engaged.
- **Quality:** opportunity aware, positive places, excellent experiences, doing better.
- **Improve the assets:** of the eco-system, landowners, the host communities and the local economy. For today and many tomorrows.
- **Secure resources:** evidence the benefit, make the claim, resource the ambition.
- **Spread wonder:** nurture enjoyment and discovery, reveal the layers and encourage self-discovery through the outdoors.

## BUILDING WICKLOWS OUTDOOR RECREATION STRATEGY 2020 - 2025

1

Outdoor Recreation Strategy, 2009 - 2013; integrated management improved opportunities and facilities, supporting conservation promotion, education and awareness, stimulating to tourism and entrepreneurship.

2

National Context; health and well-being, sport policies, tourism development, rural development, arts and heritage.

3

Consultation Process; public meetings, submissions, questionnaires.

4

Participant Focus; residents, tourists.

5

ISSUES; great venue with significant use and growing demand. Pressure spots around environment, resident and participant implications.

6

Challenges; managing the growth in participation sustainably. Realizing untapped potential. More local participation. Diversify activities.

### OUTPUT

Outdoor Recreation Strategy, 2020 - 2025;

1. Plan and collaborate.
2. Increased awareness.
3. Prioritizing securing and allocating resources.
4. Animating the outdoors.

## OUR PRINCIPLES

While we align with to the principles of the Comhairle na Tuaithe and those relating to equal opportunity, fairness, openness, transparency, the overarching principles of this strategy are:

### Respect, Sustain and Quality.

#### Respecting:

- the rights of landowners and communities who host outdoor recreation on their property and in their neighbourhoods;
- the right of every member of our community and our visitors to benefit from outdoor recreation.

#### Sustainability requires that:

- the eco-system, which is at the core of the outdoor recreation experience, is actively protected. More than not doing harm, increasingly it is about improving, doing better and correcting the damage of the past;
- the history, culture and built heritage of our landscape and communities are protected and brought to life, not just to add value and depth to the outdoor recreation experience, but because they are our context and our cultural landscape;
- our residents and businesses can make a living in their communities, grow our local economy and provide the services which support local quality of life and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- we manage the many tomorrows of this outdoor resource, not just the opportunities of today.

#### Quality is about a focus on:

- meaningful outdoor recreation experiences;
- supporting infrastructure such as trails, paths, signage, slipways, quays and boardwalks which give comfort to the novice;
- un-littered wilderness which respects the host environment and provides a ‘hard-won grace’ for the participant;
- panoramas, momentary glimpses, fleeting insights which our landscape and heritage inspires.

To realise these principles, we must have ‘ground level’ initiatives such as trail and infrastructure development, we must take strategic positions and we must nurture a culture that leads tomorrow’s conversation.

## STRATEGY PURPOSE

County Wicklow is an established and well used outdoor recreation setting and this strategy provides a blueprint for further realising this potential<sup>1</sup>. At a practical level this strategic planning process has ‘checked-in’ on the status of outdoor recreation in the county while the strategy guides the future direction and actions of the County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee.

## STRATEGY TOUCHSTONES

The following are a series of reference points which have guided the development of this strategy and which provide touch points for its future realisation.

**Environmental sustainability and long-term planning.** The ecosystem of the outdoors is a finite resource. This strategy must play its part in sustaining and ideally improving it.

**It is about increasing yield. The community, social, health, wellbeing, and economic yield of outdoor recreation.** The value of outdoor recreation is broad, taking part enhances daily life, improves our physical and mental health, increases our environmental awareness and fosters our willingness to protect it. Outdoor recreation can bring life to remote communities, add to the robustness of the local economy and provide a pivot for interaction.

**This strategy is about partnership at a structural level and awareness at a practical level.** We must recognise the limitations of outdoor recreation. The desires of participants, the fragility of the eco-system, the ambitions of enterprise, the rights of landowners and the needs of the host communities must be balanced. Practical and respectful awareness of others, generosity of spirit and shared responsibility are central to this balance. This strategy is not about ‘me’ it is about ‘us’.

This strategy is about diverse participation and outcomes. Outdoor recreation is more than a walk in the park, it includes a variety of land, water and air sports across a span from beginner to the elite, the able and those with disabilities. While recognising the pre-eminence of ‘foot sports’<sup>2</sup>, this strategy encourages the potential of wheeled sports<sup>3</sup>, water/marine sports, equestrian activities, niche sports such as paragliding and it recognises the value of angling and hunting for our residents and visitors.

**High quality outdoor recreation experiences.** Quality is the golden thread. Quality infrastructure supports participation and mitigates damage and high-quality experiences are what sustains participation. Quality outdoor recreation planning and services strengthens outdoor recreation enterprises, high-quality settings sustain the host environment and comforts landowners and host communities. Quality information, well communicated, supports good decision making, safe experiences and a collaborative approach.

**Co-operating on an outdoor recreation agenda.** The outdoor recreation assets and potential of County Wicklow do not operate in isolation. Our mountains, hills, rivers, lakes and sea meander, ascend and flow across county boundaries. Our participants are local, live nearby or travel from overseas. Outdoor recreation policies, resources and research also originates at regional, national and at EU level. This strategy takes into account these, broader perspectives, issues and opportunities and our responsibility to influence and shape the outdoor recreation potential beyond our borders.

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<sup>1</sup> It is not the role of this strategy to promote County Wicklow’s outdoor recreation tourism potential, tourism organisations such as ‘Visit Wicklow’ and its ‘Wicklow Outdoors’ brand, have responsibility for raising the outdoor recreation tourism profile of the county.

<sup>2</sup> It is evident that trail walking and hillwalking and to a lesser extent trail running, represent the highest volume activities in the County Wicklow outdoors.

<sup>3</sup> There is a significant and growing volume of on-road and off-road cycling in County Wicklow for competition and increasingly for recreation.

**Illustrating and advocating the outdoor recreation agenda.** The outdoor recreation expertise of our community, enterprises, landowners and organisations has grown. We acknowledge and lay claim to this local expertise and we advocate for the resources outdoor recreation requires.

**Responsibility, Respect and Persistence.** Complex and at times contentious situations are part of the challenge for this strategy for example maintaining access to the outdoors, appropriate behaviour by participants, respecting the eco-system and the host economy and restraining over-ambition. While we must be respectful in planning and advocating for outdoor recreation we must also be clear and forthright without being brash. We may also have to act with respectful persistence.

**A five-year action-plan towards a twenty-year vision.** While this strategy is focused on the next five years, it does so with an eye to the subsequent twenty. Any short term 'quick-wins' cannot be at the expense of long-term relationships and sustainability. Some of the strategic ambition in this strategy may not be realised entirely within this five-year time frame but that is not an excuse for inaction, nor a reason for short-cuts.

**“It is all very fine making the future better, but we must also be responsible for now.” National Governing Body Respondent.** Achieving the diverse potential of outdoor recreation in County Wicklow depends on the willingness of others, the availability and pursuit of resources and the effectiveness of policy and good practice. This will not always be straightforward. We must remain true to the touchstones of sustainability, inclusion, quality and partnership. We must keep getting these four things right.

**A culture which values an outdoor life.** The Norwegian concept of Friluftsliv (free, air, life), acknowledges the outdoors as a balance or counterpoint to a life spent indoors. Increasingly Irish people seek a 'Saol Lasmuigh', a life outdoors, or the outdoors as a venue for living. We see this culture in the growth of walking and cycling and increasingly in triathlons, open water swimming, adventure races and challenges. This emerging outdoor culture must be acknowledged and nurtured.



## DEFINING OUTDOOR RECREATION

‘Outdoor Recreation includes all sports and physical activities undertaken either formally or socially in natural outdoor settings.’

The County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy is also aligned with the definition of Countryside Recreation<sup>4</sup> in the National Countryside Recreation Strategy and it includes built outdoor settings such as orienteering courses, adventure race routes or mountain-biking/cycling trails on public and forest tracks<sup>5</sup>.

## THE VALUE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

The County Wicklow outdoors are a source of natural capital, healthy lives, social interaction and quality of life. This natural capital includes physical and biological resources, air, water, food minerals, soils, fuels and all living things which deliver ecosystem goods and services and which provide beautiful places to visit.

While local farmers, foresters and others in the community make a living from harvesting this natural capital, the physical<sup>6</sup>, mental health<sup>7</sup> and social benefits associated with being active in the outdoors is significant and available for all of us.

The wide variety and accessibility of outdoor recreation activities in County Wicklow provides positive life-style benefits for a very broad audience, throughout the life-course.<sup>8</sup> Outdoor recreation, is for everyone, for life.

In addition to the personal and public good of outdoor recreation, investing in outdoor sports is also cost effective, The Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters In Ireland 2017-2021, notes the potential value of outdoor recreation in Ireland to the national economy as €1.5 billion per year. Specific outdoor recreation activity research also indicates the very positive economic return from outdoor recreation, for example visiting recreational anglers spend (excluding the cost of travel) on average €313/day<sup>9</sup> in venues such as County Wicklow.

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<sup>4</sup> The terms outdoor recreation and countryside recreation are interchangeable for the purpose of this strategy.

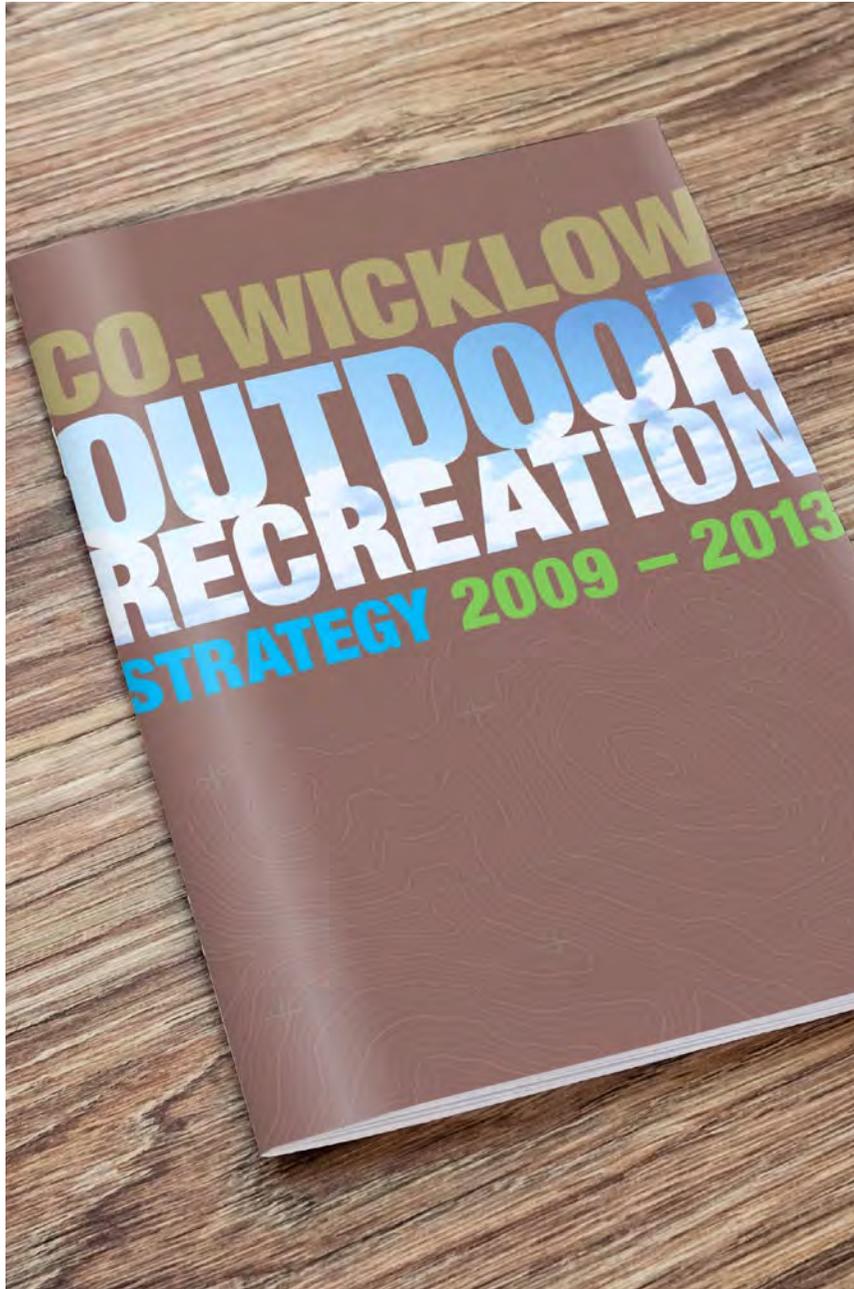
<sup>5</sup> This strategy does not include motorised vehicles such as motorbike scramblers or quads other than to mitigate their adverse impacts on the natural environment.

<sup>6</sup> Green spaces offer opportunities for the public to undertake physical activities and for the alleviation of the stress and pressures that are encountered in daily life (Tzoulas et al., 2007). Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society. The combination of physical activity and being in nature is recognized as providing a range of significant benefits, Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society. A Systematic Literature Review and Reflections on Evidence (Eigenschenk et al 2019)

<sup>7</sup> Berman et al. (2012) walking exercise for individuals with depression showed that patients' positive mood and memory capacity improved to a significantly greater extent after a nature walk compared to after an urban walk. Roe and Aspinall (2011) also found that individuals experiencing poor mental health showed greater improvements in affective and cognitive restoration after a rural walk compared with individuals with good mental health. Wilson et al. (2010) suggested such outdoor recreation programs not only improved the participants' mental well-being but also provided social networks and a stepping stone to further community engagement

<sup>8</sup> Benefits of Outdoor Sports for Society. A Systematic Literature Review and Reflections on Evidence (Eigenschenk et al 2019).

<sup>9</sup> The value of tourist angling: a travel cost method estimation of demand for two destination salmon rivers in Ireland Gianluca Grilli, Gavin Landgrafa, John Curtis and Stephen Hynes.



## COUNTY WICKLOW OUTDOOR RECREATION STRATEGY 2009 – 2013

The first County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy sought to grow and realise the benefits of outdoor recreation in County Wicklow using a framework and focus, which strengthened the relationships between the various outdoor recreation stakeholders by realising key objectives such as:

- Creating the County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee which includes a wide range of representatives who meet regularly to support outdoor recreation development.
- Supporting the provision of waymarked trails for recreational users. There are currently 500 km of these trails in place.
- 5 walking trails in the county are now on the national walks scheme.
- Tinahely has developed into a walking hub for the south of the county.
- A pilot Greenway route of 6 km is currently in place in Blessington with funding secured to extend the route to 42 km around the entire lake.
- The Wicklow Outdoors Brand was established by Wicklow Tourism and this promotes the county and its various outdoor recreation assets.

The County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee which emerged from this initial strategy acknowledge the tremendous value in our outdoor recreation resources and that continued working in partnership towards clear aims and objectives, is the most effective way to benefit from these resources. For these reasons the second County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy (2020 to 2025) has been developed.

## THE WICKLOW OUTDOOR RECREATION COMMITTEE PROFILE

Established to action and oversee implementation of the first County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2009-2013, the committee includes the following stakeholders, in alphabetical order, who represent and deliver outdoor recreation resources in the county.

### Coillte

Nationally with one million acres hosting 3,000 kilometres of trails, 260 recreation sites and 12 forest parks, Coillte provides Ireland's biggest outdoor playground and supports a range of outdoor recreation activities including walking, cycling and orienteering, with many other activities under permit including camping, angling and equestrian.

Locally Coillte in County Wicklow has 18 outdoor recreation sites including:

- Ballinastoe: one of Coillte's National Mountain-bike Trail centres, Ballinastoe includes a 16 kilometre mountain bike trail system. The trails and centre are due to be upgraded in 2020 / 21.
- Avondale Forest Park: a 505 acres estate which has a significant political and forestry history as it was the birthplace of Charles Stewart Parnell and of Irish Forestry and forestry training. The Forest Park is due to undergo a significant investment in its grounds and buildings which will position it as a significant outdoor recreation and tourism venue.

### County Wicklow Partnership

The County Wicklow Partnership is a local development company which oversees a range of development initiatives in the county including:

- Rural Development Programme/Leader. As part of the development of sustainable rural communities following the reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy, the LEADER programme is part funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and the Irish Exchequer. This programme has provided supports for a range of outdoor recreation initiatives in the county.

- Walks Scheme/Outdoor Recreation: the County Wicklow Partnership has secured the services of a Rural Recreation Officer (RRO), who works with communities, landowners, local and national agencies to support the development, maintenance and promotion of outdoor recreation based opportunities in the County of Wicklow. This programme is provided through funding from the Department Rural and Community Development, and Fáilte Ireland.

### Wicklow County Council

Wicklow County Council identifies the "Endless Opportunities for Life, Leisure and Business in beautiful County Wicklow" and in particular the quality of life, business and tourism potential of the outdoors. The cultural, heritage, leisure and scenery resources of the county are in many cases experienced via outdoors settings and accessed through outdoor activities. The County Council was central to the establishment of the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee and the Council chairs this committee.

### Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership

Working to increase participation in sports and physical activity across county Wicklow, the Partnership has a full-time staff and liaises closely with clubs, communities, commercial providers and individual participants to develop and promote gateways into sport and to sustain life-long participation. The Partnership recognises the importance and the potential of outdoor recreation as a venue for sports and physical activity participation.

### Wicklow Mountains National Park and the National Parks and Wildlife Service

The Wicklow Mountains National Park comprises over 20,000 hectares, most of which consists of wild mountain bog-land and heath as well as historic mines, the Great Military road, and monastic sites. The Park hosts over one million visits per year and provides education services, however, the primary purpose of Wicklow Mountains National Park is the conservation of biodiversity and landscape.

The Park is also an invaluable recreational space for locals and visitors and it provides the setting for a range of outdoor recreation activities. Park staff conserve this biodiversity and natural landscape while also providing resources and overseeing the use of the park for recreational activities.

## Wicklow Uplands Council

An independent voluntary organisation representing over 50 diverse member groups and individuals in the Wicklow Uplands, the Council (a) builds consensus, (b) represent uplands shared interests (c) realises innovative projects to support Uplands sustainability and (d) implements communications.

As part of its outdoor recreation work the Council

- participates on the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee representing the non-statutory interests in outdoor recreation.
- Underpins the Pure project to combat illegal dumping and fly tipping in the Wicklow/ Dublin uplands.
- coordinated the Wicklow Trails Heritage Recording Project to discover and record heritage, folklore and points of interest along the network of walking trails in the east of the county.
- undertook strategic trail development, to date the Avonmore Way and The Sugarloaf Way, to link the existing trail network to and from public transport facilities and to encourage more independent visitors to the region.

## Wicklow Way Partnership

This group manages the Wicklow Way and is comprised of representatives from Coillte, The County Wicklow Partnership, County Wicklow's Rural Recreation Officer, Mountain Meitheal, Dublin Mountains Partnership, The National Parks and Wildlife Service, Wicklow County Council.





# Contextual Analysis

## NATIONAL CONTEXT

Outdoor recreation in County Wicklow is an important part of and is reliant on a number of national policies and strategies. The following are some of the key national contexts for outdoor recreation in County Wicklow.

### National Sport Policy 2018 – 2027

*“People will be inspired, their lives enriched, their enjoyment enhanced, and their quality of life improved as a result of their own active or social participation in sport, and as a result of success by our top sports people in competition. All entities in our sporting community will be highly regarded for the quality of their staff and volunteers, their standards of governance, ethics and accountability, and their spirit of collaboration including with partners beyond the sporting sector.”*

### Healthy Ireland Framework 2013 - 2025

*“A Healthy Ireland where everyone can enjoy physical and mental health and wellbeing, to their full potential, where wellbeing is valued and supported at every level of society and is everyone’s responsibility.”*

### Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy

**Our Vision:** A world-class sports sector operating to the highest standards of governance and accountability and contributing towards the National Policy objectives for sport

**Our Mission:** Sport Ireland leads the national sports agenda through:

- Communicating the value and leading the thinking on sport.
- Promoting an inclusive and fair culture.
- Generating value from finite resources.

- Building strong sports organisations.
- Realising the concept of ‘sport for life for everyone’.
- Supporting high performance success.

In particular the strategy notes: We will create an environment where creativity and innovation in the sector is fostered, to include a focus on outdoor recreation infrastructure and systems.

### Heritage Council Strategy 2018 - 2022

Ireland’s natural heritage is a central part of the remit Heritage Council’s remit and the council is charged with:

- Promoting interest, education, knowledge, pride and care of our national heritage and supporting appreciation and enjoyment of our heritage.
- Co-operating with public authorities, education bodies and others in the promotion of its functions.
- Advancing the co-ordination of all activities related to the functions of the Council.

The Heritage Council aims to ensure that our heritage is managed and conserved to enrich the lives of people now and for the future.

*“Ireland will be internationally recognised as a centre of excellence in heritage management, conservation and community engagement.” (Abridged).*

### Action Plan for Rural Development.

*“Maximise the potential of our natural resources and our built heritage to support economic development. Support sustainable jobs through targeted tourism initiatives, promoting Activity Tourism, and developing and promoting our natural and built heritage.” (Abridged).*

Within this national context, the consultation process for this strategy has identified the key local issues relating to outdoor recreation while the combined experience of the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee has focused these national and local agendas.

## Fáilte Ireland Tourism Development

Fáilte Ireland recognise and support the role of outdoor recreation as a key experience pillar of 'Brand Ireland' which has 'the potential to set Ireland apart from its competitors'. In particular Fáilte Ireland identify the importance of outdoor recreation in:

- Awakening the Senses – stimulating and profound experiences within natural and unspoiled landscapes.
- Getting Active in Nature – revitalising and energising experiences and activities in the spectacular outdoors.

County Wicklow is an important part of the 'Ireland's Ancient East' initiative. Outdoor recreation in County Wicklow can support this initiative by attracting international visitors, encouraging overnight visits, dispersing visitor traffic to less well-known sites, supporting a balanced delivery of economic, social and environmental benefits.

## Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters in Ireland 2017-2021

*“Creating a step-change in the provision and maintenance of outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities on state lands and waters.”*

This plan sets out a strategy to revolutionise the provision of outdoor recreation facilities and services on public-owned land and waterways over the next five years by delivering world-class outdoor recreation infrastructure and services in Ireland, harnessing the latent potential of resources the State already owns, building upon an existing recreational resource.

Seven themes were identified in the strategy:

1. Maintaining and managing existing outdoor recreation infrastructure
2. Improving and expanding outdoor recreation facilities and services
3. Developing consistent outdoor recreation standards
4. Promoting outdoor recreation opportunities and providing information
5. Professional development for public body staff
6. Developing a culture of outdoor recreation and volunteering in Ireland
7. Maximising benefits to communities.

## National Adaptation Framework

Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland 2018 Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment. The NAF sets out the national strategy to reduce the vulnerability of the country to the negative effects of climate change and to avail of positive impacts.

The negative effect of climate change on recreational amenities and infrastructural services is identified in the Plan and a commitment is given to integrating climate considerations into the design, planning and construction of amenity areas and recreational trails.

## National Biodiversity Plan 2017-2021

This Plan Recognises that many of Ireland's economic sectors such as tourism and related recreation depend on high quality air, soils, water, and diverse habitats. However, these industries can only be sustainable if the natural assets on which they are based are protected from degradation.

Objective 1 of the Plan is to mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors including outdoor recreation. Objective 6: seeks to expand and improve the management of protected areas and species. Ireland's six National Parks are identified as important resources for both wildlife conservation and for Ireland's tourism and recreation industries.

## Greenway Strategy

The Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport acknowledge the benefits from the further development of Greenways in Ireland, as a tourism product with significant potential to attract overseas visitors, for local communities in terms of economic benefits, and for all users as an amenity for physical activity and a contributor to health and wellbeing.

## The Local Authority Waters Programme

Previously called the Local Authority Waters and Communities Office, this programme is a shared service working with Local Authorities and state agencies to develop and implement River Basin Management Plans in Ireland, as required under the EU Water Framework Directive.

The three strategic aims of the programme are:

- 1** Support and coordinate public bodies and other stakeholders to achieve the objectives of the RBMP.
- 2** Activate local communities to engage with river catchments in line with the integrated catchment management approach
- 3** Build a foundation and momentum for long-term improvements and inform the development and implementation of the 3rd Cycle RBMP.



## STAKEHOLDER STRATEGIES

### Wicklow County Development Plan 2016 – 2022

Wicklow County Council identifies the “Endless opportunities for life, leisure and business in beautiful County Wicklow and in particular the quality of life, business and tourism potential of the outdoors.”

The Wicklow County Development Plan 2016 – 2022 acknowledges the importance of the County’s areas of scenic beauty, which provide attractive natural bases for outdoor pursuits such as the Wicklow mountains, valleys, rivers and lakes, the coastline and the numerous woodlands. The rich heritage of archaeological and historical sites, manor homes and gardens, and attractive towns and villages are in many cases experienced via outdoors settings and accessed through outdoor activities.

### Coillte Recreation Plan and Off-Road Cycling Strategy

As the country’s largest land owner and the largest provider of outdoor recreation in Ireland, Coillte recognises that its forests provide an excellent landscape for a wide range of recreational activities. As such Coillte seeks to provide low-impact non-motorised recreation to the general public and other specialist activities under special permit.

Coillte welcomes all visitors to the forest and expects them to respect the Leave No Trace principles. While recognising it’s role in the rural community, Coillte does not have a primary or lead role in the provision of tourist facilities in it’s forests, but will facilitate such developments within partnership arrangements.

Coillte’s Off-Road Cycling Strategy acknowledges the significant growth in this activity and the strategy actively encourages the responsible use of its facilities and identifies potential locations for the development of trails of national, regional and local scale. Coillte’s Ballinastoe woods is a popular 16 kilometre mountain-bike trail system in County Wicklow.

## National Parks and Wildlife Service Interpretative Masterplan

The National Parks interpretative masterplan - Experiencing the Wild Heart of Ireland, A Tourism Interpretative Masterplan for Ireland’s National Parks and Coole Garryland Nature Reserve 2018 - is a product of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and Fáilte Ireland’s strategic partnership. It sets out a framework for the phased development of enhanced visitor centre experiences and improved visitor facilities at Ireland’s National Parks and Reserves.

### The features of the plan include:

- Capturing the special and unique stories of each National Park and Nature Reserve and bringing them to life for visitors
- Leverage the collective value of the National Parks and increasing their appeal to visitors.
- Using international best practice to improve the visitor experience in the National Parks’ Visitor Centres.

## STAKEHOLDER TREE



## LOCAL CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION

In late 2018 and early 2019 a consultation process identified the views and issues relating to outdoor recreation in County Wicklow. We thank the nearly 700 individuals and organisations who contributed generously to this consultation via individual meetings, group meetings, public forums and online questionnaires.

The consultation process bubbled up a range of challenges such as trail erosion, dog and litter disturbance, environment degradation and traffic jams.

*“We need to get out in front of the problems, anticipate, plan and prepare more.”* Consultation respondent.

These challenges were countered by the recognition that County Wicklow is a valuable and welcoming venue for a range of outdoor recreation and water and air activities.

*“We go into the Coillte forest (Avondale House), nearly every weekend. I have been walking here when that tree was a sapling and I was as young as my son is now”* Local resident.

*“Parts of the lake (ESB Poulaphouca Reservoir), are very busy on a good weekend with rowers, sailors and canoeists.”* Rowing club representative.

The consultation process also highlighted the generosity of landowners, host communities, the volunteers and organisations which provide the land, support access, generate resources, create activities and repair the places and surfaces that make outdoor recreation possible.

*“We live in Dublin city, my friends told me about the lake in Glendalough, we come here to walk and have a picnic and to get into nature.”* Dublin expatriate resident.

*“At the end of the day, without access to the land and water there is no outdoor recreation.”*

*“Volunteers work in groups on their time off to fix the trails or just make them better.”* **Online respondent comments.**

Many consultees expressed a clear and honourable position about their outdoor recreation expectations. However, there was at times a lack of awareness of the reasonable expectations, rights and limitations of others.

*“A lot of people use the outdoors and that is great, but we have to balance this use with the needs of the fragile habitats under our feet and all around us”.* **National Parks and Wildlife Service staff member.**

*“It’s great that people come here to walk or whatever, but there are traffic jams at the weekends, more litter and unleashed dogs.”* **Local resident respondent.**

*“They use our parking spaces and our toilets but a lot of them won’t even buy a cup of tea”* **Dining provider.**

The consultation also highlighted just how many outdoor recreation ‘others’ there are. Other sports, other communities, other needs such as accessibility and opportunity for those with a disability or limited incomes. The strategy must cater for all of these ‘others’, especially those with less visibility and those who have yet to realise the value of the outdoors for them.

*“It can be really hard for people with a disability to take part, just getting to and onto trails can be impossible.”* **Community resident.**

*“If you don’t have a car it is difficult to get into the mountains using public transport, by the time you arrive you might only have three hours before you have to get the bus back to the train station.”* **Rock climber.**

The consultation process also highlighted the breadth of the outdoors.

*“It is not just the mountains, the rivers and the wilderness, what about the parks and green spaces in towns and villages and the urban fringe. These doorstep resources are the outdoors as well, they are where outdoor experiences begin.”* **Sport Ireland.**

The challenge for this strategy is to find a balance for the reasonable, and sometimes conflicting outdoor recreation expectations of the various landowners, residents, participants, environment concerns and enterprises. We all think it is about us, and it is, but it is also about them, the others who provide, get their livelihood from, support or use the outdoors in County Wicklow.

The **three key messages** which emerged from this consultation process are **Wonder, Pressure and Potential.**

- 1** Wicklow is a wonderful, varied, accessible and unspoilt place to take part in the outdoors, across a range of activities and for individuals at different levels of ability.
- 2** The increased pressure of demand, and at some locations the overuse of the outdoors, is undermining the ecosystem, challenging the host communities and limiting the participant’s experience. The emphasis has moved on from promoting Wicklow as an outdoor recreation venue to how we manage it in a proactive and sustainable manner.
- 3** There is a lot of untapped potential. Participants can grow their competence and confidence and ‘step off the beaten tracks’, there are opportunities to broaden the variety of outdoor recreation activities, to enhance underused locations and to grow water based outdoor recreation on our inland waterways and along our coastline.

## KEY MESSAGES GATHERED DURING CONSULTATION

### Appreciation

- 1 We take part all around Ireland but 80% of our activity is here, it's the best location.
- 2 There is high quality rock and great bouldering at Glendalough.
- 3 There are still plenty of places you can go to and be in wilderness.
- 4 County Wicklow is probably the most regularly used mountain environment in Ireland.
- 5 County Wicklow is a fantastic resource when you live in Dublin.
- 6 It all happens on someone's land.
- 7 The vast majority of outdoor recreation participants try to do the right thing.
- 8 County Wicklow is a big, beautiful and giving place.
- 9 Access and the water quality for kayaking is very good.

### Challenges

- 1 There is a problem with over-tourism and the over use of the outdoors in some locations.
- 2 The local economy should be benefiting more from outdoor recreation.
- 3 We need a more active and creative management if we are to get ahead of the challenges.
- 4 There are local outdoor recreation responsibilities and national ones.
- 5 We need a maritime development plan. For commercial, fishing and recreation users.
- 6 Participants need to be aware and considerate of others, other road users, trail users, landowners and the host environment.
- 7 Outdoor recreation events need to liaise with the Guards and residents to minimise disruption.
- 8 There needs to be clear leadership in outdoor recreation and joined up actions.
- 9 Participants need to give back in the form of spending locally and actions such as trail repair.

## THE FACES OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

The consultation process revealed a wide range of people, organisations and motivations behind outdoor recreation in County Wicklow

**Mountain Meitheal** “We are a group of environmental volunteers who undertake conservation and restoration projects on mountain and forest tracks. We do this to counteract some of the pressures from the use of the outdoors for recreation. Established in 2002 we provide opportunities for outdoor recreationalists to give something back by volunteering to work on trails and hence protect our fragile environment.”

**Adventure.ie** “Operating since 1999 we opened an outdoor store in Laragh, selling and hiring outdoor equipment and clothing. We provide outdoor guiding, skill training and a place to call in and get advice. We are here for the long haul.”

**Wicklow Mountains National Park** “We are the largest landowners in County Wicklow with 20,000 hectares. Our main role is to protect and advocate for the natural environment and especially the habitats. We love it when people come into the Wicklow Park, and we hope they appreciate the value of what is here and the importance of maintaining a place as special as this.”

**Coillte** “Coillte provides Ireland’s biggest outdoor playground for outdoor recreation activities. Our open forest policy welcomes an estimated 18 million visits each year for walking, cycling and orienteering, with many other activities under permit including camping, angling and equestrian activities. We continue to invest in the development of walking and cycling trails in our County Wicklow forests which are some of our busiest in the country.”

**Glendalough Green** “All homemade - Delicious cakes, excellent coffee, warm soup and much more. A happy, fun, relaxed place to recharge after an energetic day in the hills, on your bike or on the water. We work here, we live here, we want to look after you, have a chat, we are invested.”

**Poulaphouca Paddlers** “Previously Lacken Kayak club we use the Poulaphouca Reservoir (Blessington Lake), as our base but we paddle our kayaks and canoes all over Ireland and also in Europe. Our members are mainly locals taking part in leisurely lake paddles, warm winter pool sessions, ICU skills awards, instructor training, adventure race training, flat and wild water racing.”

**Baltinglass Outdoor Education and Training Centre** “We are an outdoor education and training centre operating under the auspices of the Kildare Wicklow Education and Training Board. Located in Baltinglass we provide high quality Outdoor Education Programmes to Schools 7 Youth Services, through the outdoor sports such as kayaking, orienteering, archery, rock-climbing and hillwalking. We operate year-round with a full-time staff and over 300,000 people have taken part in our programmes since we started in 1987.”

**Blessington Sailing Club** “We are a community centred water sports club which is safe, family orientated with a vibrant youth scene. Set in a spectacular location with a 150-meter Blessington Lake beach-front with a backdrop of the Wicklow Mountains (Ireland’s equivalent of Lake Garda?). We provide ISA training qualifications for Dinghy and National Powerboat Certification and we are home to the Kildare Water Safety association, the Blessington Scouting Association and the Black Rock Rowing Club.”

**Wicklow Swimming Club** “We take part in training and competitions all year round, in the pool in winter and on the sea from about April. We are one of the largest swimming clubs in the country with over 500 members and we host one of the most popular and largest open water swimming events every year at Wicklow Harbour. Our members range in age from pre-teen juniors to adults comfortably in their fifties and beyond. We take part for the competition but mainly for the friendships and the fun and it is a great way to spend the summer.”

**South East Road Club, Arklow** “We are a road cycling club, with all levels of ability from beginners to elite cyclists, male and female, young and old. We meet as a club in Arklow every Sunday morning for a weekly spin at 9:30. Different abilities cycle different lengths and speeds. We have an active group of competitive cyclists as well as a large number of recreational cyclist.”

**Glendalough MTB** “We are a community based mountain biking club and we promote local mountain biking and an active lifestyle for all ages. Aside from the great facilities at Coillte’s Ballinastoe Woods, we have our own mountain-biking routes in different parts of County Wicklow and we also take part in and host races during the year.”

**Bray Rowing Club** “Based on the promenade at Bray, we have youth and adult members. We use a fixed seat traditional boat design mainly but also a one design modern hull for racing. Most of our members are from the local community and we train most nights of the week from April to September, weather permitting. We host a regatta in July and our members take part in races all along the East Coast especially with the other County Wicklow Rowing Clubs in Wicklow town, Greystones and Arklow.”



## CONTEXTUAL CONCLUSIONS

County Wicklow covers a diverse landscape accessible locations for a range of outdoor recreation activities which are highly valued. However, the context is complex and changing.



### Growth and Capacity

The significant growth in the number of people taking part in our outdoor recreation in County Wicklow is challenging the carrying capacity of the locations, services and recreation infrastructure.



### Benefit and Sustain

The benefits of outdoor recreation are many but they are not being fully realised by local economy. While the quality and sustainability of the host environment is under strain in places.



### Opportunity and Diversity

Most participation is through a small number of foot based outdoor recreation activities. There is an opportunity to diversify the range of activities, increase the participant's ability and broaden the experience of County Wicklow outdoors.



### Structures and Collaboration

Further collaboration is required between the organisations involved in the development and delivery of outdoor recreation.

## OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPANTS

The individuals and groups who take part in outdoor recreation have a variety of motivations including health, wellbeing, social interaction, enjoyment, environment protection, career development and competition. This strategy supports these and other motivations amongst the two participant groups of residents and visitors.

### Residents

The individuals, families and groups which live in County Wicklow should benefit from outdoor recreation. There is evidence of a growth in outdoor recreation participation throughout Ireland especially in activities such as walking and cycling. The outdoor recreation clubs and commercial providers noted in the consultation process that there has been a significant and steady rise in participation by local or neighbouring county residents while Coillte and the Wicklow National Parks staff note steady increases in the recreational use of their land. The consultation process identified that 55% of County Wicklow resident respondents take part most frequently within a mile of where they live. However, we know that there is a large proportion of County Wicklow residents who have little or no participation in outdoor recreation. This may be due to lack of awareness of the opportunities, a lack of nearby facilities or transport or simply not connecting outdoor recreation as being an activity for them.

This strategy will encourage additional local participation in outdoor recreation and it recognises the importance of County Wicklow based sports clubs and the Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership in this.

## Tourism

*“Recreational tourism is a growing part of Ireland’s tourism offering, and we have seen an increase in the number of Irish and overseas visitors enjoying the many greenways, blueways and walking trails which have been developed around the country in recent years. This is generating income for rural areas and helping to create more jobs in the hospitality and leisure sectors.” Michael Ring TD, Minister for Rural and Community Development.*

Domestic and international outdoor recreational tourism is most evident in hot-spots such as Glendalough. Outdoor recreation tourism is welcome, but also brings challenges with respect to parking, erosion, litter and service provision. It is important that the local environments and communities which host these tourism activities, benefits through their provision of supporting resources and a corresponding growth in their local economy.

*“Figures available from Fáilte Ireland reveal that in 2017, 26% of all overseas tourists engaged in some level of hiking or cross-country walking. This equates to 2.3 million tourists, spending an estimated €1.3 bn during their stay in Ireland. A further 451,000 overseas tourists took part in cycling activities.” Fáilte Ireland January 2019.*

This strategy will support outdoor recreation tourism which is sustainable and which contributes to local economies and we recognise the central role of the commercial tourism sector and Wicklow Tourism/Wicklow Outdoors in outdoor recreation tourism.

# Strategy 2020 - 2025



## OUR STRUCTURE AND DELIVERY

Multiple individual actions, sustained effort and a focused intent is required to deliver on our vision, mission and goals for outdoor recreation in County Wicklow. However, effort and intention is not enough, we also need an effective structure and a meaningful process.

The Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee is a gathering of representatives from the various organisations which have responsibility for outdoor recreation in the county. This committee provides the primary structure for realising this strategy.

For the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee to work through the ambitions and responsibilities of this strategy, we have parcelled our objectives and actions into four key pillars.

**PILLAR 1 PLAN AND COLLABORATE:** a structured approach to the big issues of recreation hubs, marine development, trail management, transport links, infrastructure and collaborating with our neighbours.

**PILLAR 2 INCREASED AWARENESS:** being alert and responsive to the various landowner, community, participant, enterprise and environment issues which make outdoor recreation possible and better, and which may help us to make our case for funding.

**PILLAR 3 RESOURCES:** the specific projects, priorities, actions, training and staff requirements of outdoor recreation in County Wicklow.

**PILLAR 4 ANIMATING THE OUTDOORS:** encouraging diverse outdoor recreation opportunities, for everyone and providing more depth to the outdoor recreation experience.

To deliver these pillars individual Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee representatives will take stewardship<sup>10</sup> and monitor our progress for each of the following five themes.

<sup>10</sup> This stewardship includes engaging with people and resources from outside of the WORC.

DELIVERY THEMES

Delivery of these strategic pillars requires a broad skill set which will be resourced from within the WORC agencies and externally where required. Five delivery themes have been identified and each action plan item has been allocated to a delivery theme.

 <b>PARTICIPATION</b>	<b>PARTICIPATION</b> Dispersion of participation in the county. Developing data capture and analysis. Growing inclusion.
 <b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	<b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b> Recreation infrastructure, public transport, parking facilities, retail and cafe.
 <b>OUR STORY</b>	<b>OUR STORY</b> Managing the County Wicklow outdoor recreation brand, public relations and advertising.
 <b>MARINE</b>	<b>MARINE</b> Joint representative group with agency, sports and business representation,
 <b>ECONOMICS</b>	<b>ECONOMICS</b> Outdoor recreation innovation and diversification, business supports and added value offerings.

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## PILLAR 1: PLAN AND COLLABORATE

The generosity of landowners, the support of communities and the knowledge of staff, volunteers and outdoor recreation participants will continue to sustain the quality of the outdoor recreation experience in County Wicklow. However, continued collaboration and integrated planning is required to manage the growing outdoor recreation load<sup>11</sup> on County Wicklow.

We need to make it easier for our residents to have access to the nearby outdoors and outdoor recreation participants are becoming more adventurous and curious. We must plan beyond 'more of the same' to include new activities and new places, while being respectful of landowner rights and the fragility of the host environment.

This strategy also addresses the transport challenges which can undermine resident quality of life, participant experiences, limit the local economy and undermine environmental sustainability, in particular parking, trailheads and public transport.

While it is important not to urbanise or 'theme-park' our authentic wilderness environments, through an excess of signs, trails and structures, strategic planning and infrastructure development is required to sustain the host environment, spread the outdoor recreation load and diversify the experience.

## Comments

- Circa 88% of respondent participants (residents and non-residents), take part in outdoor recreation in County Wicklow throughout the year, with North East Wicklow is the most popular destination in the county (76%) South East Wicklow (48%) North-West Wicklow (36%) with South West Wicklow as the least frequently visited region.
- 39% of respondents take part in outdoor recreation in County Wicklow because it is the best location for in their sport while 34% take part here because it is close-by.
- 55% of County Wicklow resident participants take part most frequently within a mile of where they live and 49% within 10 miles from where they live.
- Circa 36% of respondents noted that public transport to outdoor recreation sites was very poor.
- 61% access to land or water areas for outdoor recreation activity reported as 'currently ok', 'good' or 'excellent'. There was a 75% overall satisfaction with access to outdoor recreation sites.
- 26% of respondents noted that heritage education and awareness opportunities 'very poor' or 'poor' while 25% understood that the heritage education and awareness opportunities were 'ok' or 'good'.

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<sup>11</sup> The consultation process identified recreation pressures such as erosion, habitat damage, litter, parking problems, traffic management, unsecure parking, lack of toilet facilities and overloaded trail carrying capacity.

## PILLAR 1: PLAN AND COLLABORATE

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Anticipating the opportunities and the pressure of outdoor recreation.

### ACTIONS:

- five outdoor recreation hubs and clusters.
- more marine and water opportunities.
- trail development and management plan.
- parking public transport links and infrastructure.
- working with our neighboring counties.

### CONTINUE TO DO:

Link with national and local policy and strategy.

### DO MORE:

Our environment, the quality of the experience and hosts as our priorities.

Planning more, reacting less.



OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>1.1 Hubs and Clusters</b></p> <p>Five quality and sustainable Outdoor Recreation Hubs which disperse and grow the outdoor recreation opportunities in County Wicklow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outline five outdoor recreation hubs and their clusters (Glendalough, Rathdrum, Blessington/Baltinglass, Tinahely/Shillelagh, East Coast Maritime).</li> <li>• Identify the priority outdoor recreation resource opportunities and needs in each hub and cluster.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of the Glendalough masterplan approach.</li> <li>• Five hub and cluster development plans.</li> </ul>
LEAD AND PARTNERS		DELIVERY THEME
<p>Wicklow County Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wicklow Tourism</li> <li>• Wicklow Mountains National Park</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership</li> <li>• Coillte</li> </ul>	 <p><b>PARTICIPATION</b></p>

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>1.2 Water Recreation</b></p> <p>Growth in the resources, visibility and opportunity for water recreation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with a maritime recreation development group/forum including clubs, community and commercial representatives.</li> <li>Identify the maritime recreation and activity tourism development options for County Wicklow’s harbours.</li> <li>Complete a maritime and an inland waters Blueway development process.</li> <li>Engage with the ESB, club, community and commercial representatives regarding the future recreational management of the Poulaphouca reservoir.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A review of the Greystones harbour recreation development and insights.</li> <li>A maritime recreation and tourism action plan for Bray, Greystones, Wicklow and Arklow harbours and surrounding waters.</li> <li>A designated County Wicklow maritime Blueway.</li> <li>Blessington as a designated County Wicklow inland Blueway.</li> <li>A recreation management plan for the Poulaphouca reservoir.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow County Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership</li> <li>Town Teams</li> </ul>		

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>1.3 Trail Strategy</b></p> <p>Expanded choice of a well-maintained, sustainable and connected outdoor recreation trails fit for purpose. Avoiding unnessecary or inappropriate new trails or paths.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify existing land and water trails and paths.</li> <li>• Clarify trail development principles with reference to sustainability, connectivity<sup>12</sup>, management and maintenance.</li> <li>• Common trail/path management and maintenance priorities, process and criteria<sup>13</sup>.</li> <li>• Identify trail and path maintenance priorities, required new trail developments<sup>14</sup> niche trail opportunities<sup>15</sup> and multi-annual resourcing commitments.</li> <li>• Identify ‘no-trail’ development locations in the county.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit of all existing trails, paths and trailheads in the county, including the Glendalough trail network and cross-county trails.</li> <li>• Trail development and maintenance strategy (land and water) including rural community trail development.</li> <li>• Shared trail maintenance software.</li> <li>• Growth in skilled local trail construction and maintenance knowledge and skills amongst contractors and volunteers.</li> <li>• Priority annual trail maintenance action plan<sup>16</sup>.</li> </ul>
LEAD AND PARTNERS		DELIVERY THEME
<p>WORC.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coillte</li> <li>• OPW</li> <li>• Mountaineering Ireland.</li> </ul>		 <p><b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b></p>

<sup>12</sup> Connectivity between trails, to public transport, to and within rural and urban settlements.

<sup>13</sup> With reference to the Sport Ireland Outdoors and the emerging Coillte/NPWS trail maintenance system. To be undertaken as part of a monitoring and review process for managing all existing recreational infrastructure and services on and off trails.

<sup>14</sup> Especially amongst rural communities and to support the progression of walkers into mountain environments via more challenging trails and mountain access routes and off-road cycling opportunities. Particular emphasis on trails within Hubs and Clusters.

<sup>15</sup> For example dog walk/parks, buggy trails, marine, pump tracks and motorised trail areas.

<sup>16</sup> As defined by landowners, recommended by trail users and supported by Mountain Meitheal.

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>1.4 Connecting Outdoor Recreation</b></p> <p>Outdoor recreation transport options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify priority public transport corridors to and within high volume outdoor recreation sites in County Wicklow.</li> <li>Evaluate the impact of the Wicklow Local Link.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outdoor recreation transport plan<sup>17</sup>.</li> <li>Wicklow Local Link review.</li> <li>Review of current outdoor recreation car-park safety and action plan.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow County Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Link</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint Policing Committee</li> </ul>
		 <p><b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b></p>

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>1.5 Neighbouring Counties</b></p> <p>Seamless outdoor recreation approaches and experiences across borders.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with neighbouring counties on land and water outdoor recreation initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formal links, shared objectives and annual outdoor recreation with neighbouring counties.</li> <li>Neighbouring County engagement every six months.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow County Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WORC</li> <li>Kildare County Council</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dublin Mountains Partnership</li> </ul>
		 <p><b>OUR STORY</b></p>

<sup>17</sup> Including public transport and sustainable travel initiatives.

<sup>18</sup> Such as trail development, management, maintenance, outdoor recreation programming/animation, sharing best practice, littering/dumping, dog management, anti-social behaviour and environment sustainability.

## PILLAR 2: INCREASED AWARENESS

Awareness is a key element in taking part in the outdoors. Awareness of the outdoor recreation landowner's requirements, the host environments' limitations, participants expectations, opportunities and responsibilities and awareness of the outdoor recreation economy which reimburses the host communities.

The consultation process highlighted a number of complementary and at times conflicting perspectives on outdoor recreation participation in the county. Participants while valuing County Wicklow outdoor recreation potential, they may not appreciate the safety, interpersonal, economic and cultural issues which create and sustain this potential. Some landowners are concerned with the inappropriate or unthinking use of their land by some participants for example through mechanised sports or unleashed dogs. Hence, we must:

- continually engage with the landowners who provide access to the outdoors;
- ensure that host communities influence and take part in outdoor recreation;
- strengthen the environment and heritage settings for outdoor recreation;
- grow our perspective and our insight by learning from our and other country and EU data, experiences and research;
- support participant 'give back' to the host environment and community in the form of volunteering and local spend;
- support the commercial interests who encourage participation and who connect outdoor recreation with the local economy;
- communicate the value and the opportunity for outdoor recreation in County Wicklow;

## Comments

- Up to 10% of questionnaire respondents participate in groups of over 20. The passage of such large groups can exceed the carrying capacity of fragile upland areas and trails.
- The most popular information sources for participating in outdoor recreation in County Wicklow amongst non-Wicklow resident questionnaire respondents were friend's comments and recommendations (53%) followed by social media (33%) and websites (26%).
- An average of 55% of questionnaire respondents noted that they encounter the negative environmental impact of others when they take part in our sport with littering and erosion as the main complaints.
- 73% of respondents were willing to give back to the outdoor recreation environment through volunteer efforts once a year.
- Circa 72% of respondents spend between €5-€20 on food, water and snacks in the local economy

## PILLAR 2: INCREASED AWARENESS

We all need to be aware of the various physical environmental and cultural responsibilities which make the outdoors enjoyable and sustainable.

### ACTIONS:

- Develop an outdoor recreation research plan.
- Document local insight and a worldview.
- Work to protect landowner relationships.
- Improve community and enterprise engagement.
- Create a participation charter.
- Defined market positioning and communications.
- Sustaining and improving our environment.

### CONTINUE TO DO:

Respect partnership and collaboration.

### DO MORE:

More research and more data  
More informed insights and messages  
More enterprise

More participant give-back to the environment and economy



OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.1 Research and Insights.</b></p> <p>A clear perspective on who is taking part, where and at what outdoor recreation activities in County Wicklow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify the outdoor recreation research priorities and data sources for the county<sup>19</sup>.</li> <li>• Engage with research partners, secure resources and undertake the research process.</li> <li>• Enhanced European outdoor recreation perspective.</li> <li>• Monitor international outdoor recreation research findings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor recreation research action plan and review every two years.</li> <li>• A portfolio of ‘application ready’ research grant proposals for national and EU funding.</li> <li>• Annual outdoor recreation insights and trends infographic.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>County Wicklow Partnership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coillte</li> <li>• OPW</li> <li>• Celtic Routes Initiative</li> </ul>		 <p><b>PARTICIPATION</b></p>

<sup>19</sup> In areas such as economy/employment, participation volume and depth

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.2 World View</b></p> <p>Sharing experience, growing ambition.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with other outdoor recreation locations similar to County Wicklow.</li> <li>Evaluate the potential for County Wicklow to host international scale outdoor recreation events (land and water).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual other outdoor recreation location visit or presentation.</li> <li>Review of WORC membership of national and international outdoor recreation bodies<sup>20</sup>.</li> <li>Profile of potential national and international level outdoor recreation target events for County Wicklow.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow Tourism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LEO Wicklow</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NPWS</li> </ul> 

<sup>20</sup> For example Visitor Safety in the Countryside and the Outdoor Recreation Network.

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.3 Landowner relationships.</b> Continued positive relationships with landowners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing engagement with the Wicklow Uplands Council and their actions.</li> <li>• Continued engagement with state agency land owners seeking the optimum use of state land.</li> <li>• Monitor and respond to land/water access issues as they arise.</li> <li>• Advocate for and support a national indemnity scheme to further safeguard landowner's interests.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retain current historic access to state, private land and water courses.</li> <li>• Advocacy and dialogue on land access with state and private landowners<sup>21</sup>.</li> <li>• Locally relevant national indemnity scheme.</li> <li>• Three-year review of the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee's Guidelines for events.</li> </ul>
LEAD AND PARTNERS		DELIVERY THEME
<p>Wicklow Uplands Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coillte</li> <li>• OPW</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NPWS</li> <li>• County Wicklow Partnership</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="1429 639 2033 746" style="background-color: #8B4513; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;">  <p><b>OUR STORY</b></p> </div>

<sup>21</sup> In particular access agreements through the Luggala Estate to Lough Dan and the surrounding uplands. Including water access when relevant.

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.4 Community Engagement.</b></p> <p>County Wicklow communities shaping and benefiting from outdoor recreation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor community outdoor recreation related interests and expectations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual community outdoor recreation feedback opportunity.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
PPN. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County Wicklow Partnership</li> <li>• Town Teams</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County Wicklow Sports Partnership</li> <li>• Uplands Forum</li> </ul> 

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.5 Growing Enterprise.</b></p> <p>Strengthening the outdoor recreation commercial sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Profile successful other location outdoor recreation service and retail models.</li> <li>• Monitor commercial outdoor recreation service providers interests and expectations.</li> <li>• Commercial outdoor recreation representation on the WORC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual presentation from County Wicklow outdoor recreation commercial interests.</li> <li>• Annual outdoor recreation enterprise friendly development priorities.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
LEO Wicklow. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wicklow Tourism</li> </ul>		

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.6 Participant Awareness.</b></p> <p>Outdoor recreation participant awareness and give-back to the host environment, community and local economy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify a charter for the responsibilities of outdoor recreation participation towards the host environment, landowners and communities.</li> <li>Identify and promote 'give back' opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Participant good practice outdoor recreation charter.</li> <li>Annual 'Give Back' initiative and trail maintenance training opportunity including awareness raising and practical initiatives.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>County Wicklow Partnership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uplands Forum</li> <li>NPWS</li> <li>Mountain Meitheal</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coillte</li> <li>OPW</li> </ul>  <p><b>PARTICIPATION</b></p>

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.7 Positioning and Communications.</b></p> <p>Good market position and effective communications.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the Wicklow Outdoors online presence.</li> <li>Continued development of a bank of marketing collateral<sup>22</sup> available for the outdoor recreation sector.</li> <li>Continued positioning of the County Wicklow outdoors as a quality and innovative destination.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A review of the Wicklow Outdoors online platform and action plan.</li> <li>An updated online strategy to profile outdoor recreation in the county.</li> <li>A visual, data and marketing materials repository.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow Tourism.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County Wicklow Partnership</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LEO Wicklow</li> </ul>  <p><b>OUR STORY</b></p>

<sup>22</sup> Including photo, video, infographic, testimonies, visitor numbers and economic impact data.

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>2.8 Environmental</b></p> <p>Continued protection and enhancement of the County Wicklow ecosystem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An outdoor recreation environmental policy of doing better.</li> <li>• Continued application and engagement with the Leave no Trace principles and the Local Authorities Water Programme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An environmental and invasive species policy for land and water trails.</li> <li>• Continued support for the 'Pure Mile' initiative.</li> <li>• Encourage participation in Citizen-science initiatives among recreational users.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Planning Development and Environment Section.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage Office</li> <li>• Leave no Trace</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Authorities Water Programme</li> <li>• Uplands Forum</li> </ul> <div data-bbox="1370 528 1921 639" style="background-color: #8B4513; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 15px; display: flex; align-items: center;">  <p><b>INFRASTRUCTURE</b></p> </div>

## PILLAR 3: RESOURCES

Resources are required to maintain and to realise the further potential of outdoor recreation in County Wicklow. Some project specific infrastructure requirements will be identified through the hub and cluster planning and the trail network development objectives of this plan, while other resource requirements will emerge from stakeholders such as communities, clubs and the commercial sector. It is important that these resource requirements are established so to benefit from emerging funding opportunities.

The communities, organisations and individuals who facilitate, inspire and realise the outdoor recreation facilities and events in our county deserve access to excellent training and education opportunities in areas such as outdoor recreation project planning, infrastructure development, product development and participant animation.

There are a number of organisations and staff who support outdoor recreation in County Wicklow, including the Rural Recreation Officer, the Local Sports Partnership and County Wicklow Tourism. However, the growth of outdoor recreation and its increasingly diverse requirements, such as research, communications, event planning and administration, necessitates additional staff.

Given the current and growing scale of outdoor recreation in the county, a proportionate and challenging outdoor recreation resource target of €20,000,000 over the lifetime of this plan, has been identified. While primarily reliant on county and national resources, this resource pillar will also be guided by an increased awareness of European Union funding opportunities.

## Comments

- The quality of supporting outdoor recreation facilities was identified as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’ by 37%, of club questionnaire respondents.
- 20% of questionnaire respondents want better car parking facilities, and 17% want better amenities and services (toilets, café).
- 56% of County Wicklow resident respondents and 37% of club representatives noted that supporting activity facilities/infrastructure were ‘very poor’ or ‘currently poor’.
- 76% of County Wicklow resident respondents noted that the quality of land trails and paths are ‘currently ok’, ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ while 42% of non-resident respondents noted that land trails/paths quality is ‘currently ok’ and 49% of club respondents noted that land trail quality was ok or good.
- The key resource actions identified in the three online questionnaires were:
  - Improved and safer parking facilities (16%, 22.5% and 20%).
  - Improved or new mapped trails with better signage and management (20%, 19% and 12%).
  - More information boards, toilets, seating (13%,14% and 9%).
  - 10% better outdoor infrastructure (stiles, bridges, marina facilities).

## PILLAR 3: RESOURCES

Sustained quality outdoor recreation in County Wicklow requires the best use of our natural, human and financial resources. We need clear priorities to support the people, communities and organizations that row in and secure additional resources.

### ACTIONS:

- Develop a portfolio of projects.
- Define resourcing priorities and targets.
- Respond to the training needs.
- Secure additional staff in the outdoor recreation area.

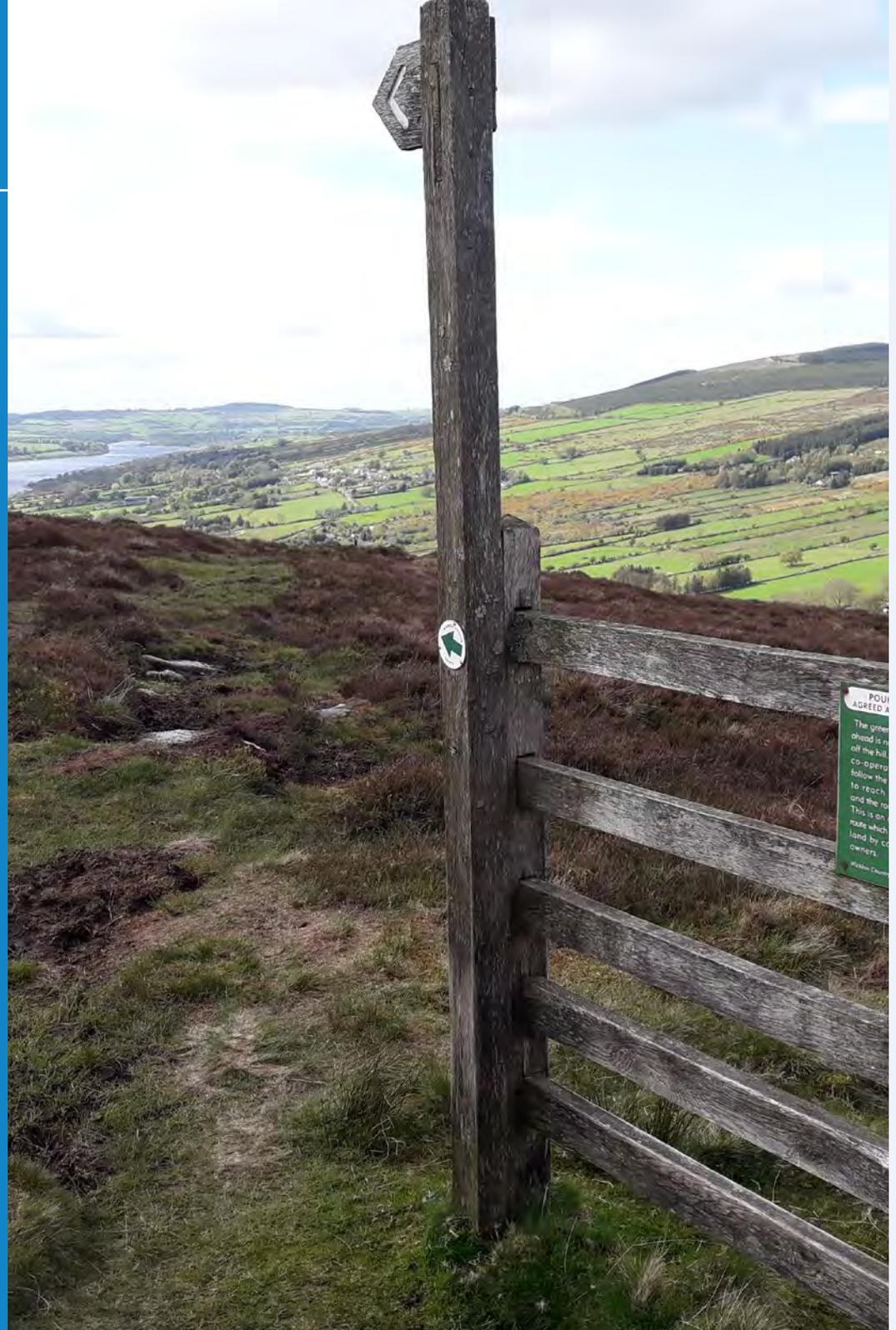
### CONTINUE TO DO:

Continue to pursue funding opportunities.

### DO MORE:

More regional, national and European development projects.

More staff to support the outdoor recreation sector.



OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>3.1 Resource Plan</b></p> <p>Profile and pursue the resources required to realise the potential of outdoor recreation in County Wicklow.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four year and annual outdoor recreation ‘ring-fenced’ funding objectives<sup>23</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outdoor recreation infrastructure monitoring procedure.</li> <li>• A Masterplan with a portfolio of small to large scale ‘shovel ready’ infrastructure projects.</li> <li>• Annual funding targets and plan.</li> <li>• €20,000,000 of external investment over the life time of this plan.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow County Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• County Wicklow Partnership</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEO Wicklow</li> </ul> 

<sup>23</sup> As identified in the Trail Strategy, Hub and Cluster development plans, Maritime Recreation and Tourism Plan, Blueway developments, Transport Plan and Neighbouring County projects.

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>3.2 Training and Education</b></p> <p>Realising outdoor recreation best practice through the increased capacity of communities, organisations and individuals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the existing outdoor recreation skills and experience within the sector.</li> <li>Identify the training and education needs of the outdoor recreation sector<sup>24</sup>.</li> <li>Identify and apply best practice models<sup>25</sup> and capacity building supports for the staff, communities, volunteers and enterprises involved in outdoor recreation in the county.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repository of accumulated trail development and maintenance knowledge<sup>26</sup>.</li> <li>A range of capacity building supports in response to the needs of the outdoor recreation sector in County Wicklow.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>County Wicklow Partnership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NPWS</li> <li>Baltinglass OETC</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coillte</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: right;">  <b>PARTICIPATION</b> </div>

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>3.3 Outdoor Recreation Staff</b></p> <p>Enhanced administration and animation supports for outdoor recreation in the county.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the remit and feasibility of an ‘Outdoors Now’ administrator for County Wicklow.</li> <li>Identify the structures and source of resources for the employment of an outdoor recreation administrator.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An ‘Outdoors Now’ recreation administrator job specification and resourcing.</li> <li>A two-year pilot and evaluation of the outdoor administrator role.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow County Council.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County Wicklow Leader</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership</li> </ul> <div style="text-align: right;">  <b>ECONOMICS</b> </div>

<sup>24</sup> Including areas such as project planning, project development and the delivery of outdoor recreation.

<sup>25</sup> May include examples from the work of the Rural Recreation Officer, Coillte, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Mountain Meitheal, Waters and Community and others.

<sup>26</sup> As acquired by the various outdoor recreation stakeholders such as Coillte, Mountain Meitheal, National Parks and Wildlife Staff, County Wicklow Partnership. Including formats of case studies, best practice actions/templates, video or audio narrative etc.

## PILLAR 4: ANIMATING THE OUTDOORS

The value of outdoor recreation is significant. Consultation respondents noted the physical health, mental wellbeing, social interaction, the authenticity and beauty of wilderness, benefits when they take part in the outdoors. However, not everyone is aware of these benefits and some people do not have the same opportunities to take part.

Animating outdoor recreation is about motivating more of our community and our visitors in the outdoors by engaging with those who have low levels of participation and through a diverse and innovative range of outdoor recreation participation hoof, wheel, water and air sports opportunities throughout the county. We must be creative by encouraging activities such as night-time stargazing trails, night orienteering, tree climbing and encountering the arts and heritage outdoors.

The high number of outdoor recreation clubs in the county highlights the importance of clubs as a means of participation and a channel for communications. The Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership is a key link with these clubs and it is also an important and effective resource in linking communities with outdoor recreation opportunities.

## Comments

- 33% of outdoor recreation clubs reported a slight increase in their sport in County Wicklow while 29% noted a significant increase in overall participation levels.
- While there was a 75% overall satisfaction with access, access to the outdoors for people with disabilities, was noted as ‘very poor’ or ‘currently poor’ by 41% of County Wicklow resident questionnaire respondents.
- Hillwalking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity in County Wicklow with 35% of non-Wicklow resident respondents and 55% of Wicklow respondents taking part in this activity between once and twice a month and forest walks 30% and 55% respectively.
- Circa 9% (non-residents) and 18% (residents), of questionnaire respondents take part in either mountain-biking or road biking between once and twice a month.
- Sailing and rowing have the lowest level of non-resident respondent participants on the County Wicklow coast.

## PILLAR 4: ANIMATING THE OUTDOORS

Everyone should have the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, especially local people. We will encourage a diverse range of activities and opportunities for participation will also support the depth of the outdoor experience to include more heritage and art in the outdoors.

### ACTIONS:

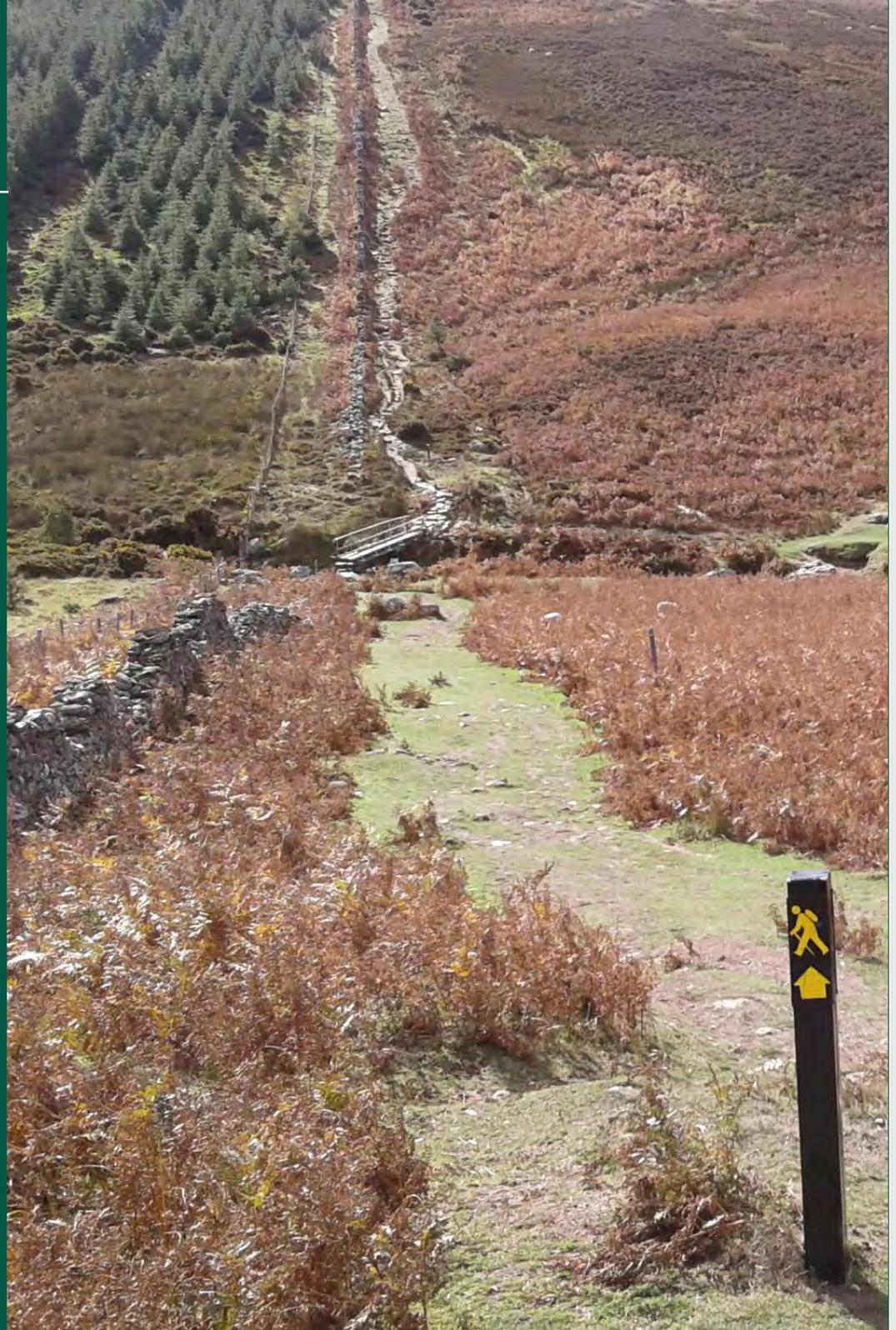
- Annual outdoor recreation timetable.
- Community based outdoor recreation participation initiatives.
- Increasing the range of outdoor recreation activities available.
- Reducing barriers to accessibility.
- More heritage and arts in the outdoors

### CONTINUE TO DO:

Facilitate outdoor recreation events and the communities and organizations who undertake them.

### DO MORE:

More depth to the outdoor recreation experience.  
Focus on growth in participant abilities.  
Diversification of outdoor activities.



OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>4.1 Community Participation</b></p> <p>More communities and residents taking part in outdoor recreation in the county.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linking outdoor recreation clubs/NGBs or commercial providers with a timetable of outdoor recreation participation events for local communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A twice-yearly timetable of outdoor recreation activities and locations targeting County Wicklow residents<sup>27</sup>.</li> <li>Partnered NGB outdoor recreation programmes in one outdoor recreation sport every two years.</li> <li>Annual outdoor recreation come and try it event in East and West Wicklow.</li> <li>An outdoor recreation community hub in the county.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>County Wicklow Partnership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NPWS</li> <li>Baltinglass OETC</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Coillte</li> </ul>
		 <b>PARTICIPATION</b>

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>4.2 Broadening the range</b></p> <p>More diverse activities and an additional focus on water based outdoor recreation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More awareness and opportunities for a broad range of outdoor recreation activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support new outdoor recreation activity club development.</li> <li>Increased local membership growth in existing clubs<sup>28</sup>.</li> <li>A timetable of come and try it events.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PPN</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NGBs</li> </ul>
		 <b>PARTICIPATION</b>

<sup>27</sup> Including themed events around occasions such as Trails Week, Biodiversity Week, Heritage Week and Tree Week.

<sup>28</sup> Especially in water-sports and in less developed outdoor recreation activities

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>4.3 Outdoors for all</b></p> <p>An accessible outdoor recreation experience for everyone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where appropriate accessibility best practice outdoor recreation infrastructure.</li> <li>• Increased awareness and application of adapted physical activity and accessibility guidelines regarding outdoor recreation activities and programmes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An outdoor recreation access audit of infrastructure at Glendalough and an accessibility evaluation and application at the proposed hubs and clusters<sup>29</sup>.</li> <li>• An analysis of the level of participation in outdoor recreation in the county by people with a disability.</li> <li>• Outdoor recreation participation targets for individuals with a disability.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CARA</li> <li>• HSE Health Promotion</li> </ul>		 <p><b>PARTICIPATION</b></p>

OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>4.4 Whole County</b></p> <p>A spread of outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the county.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively grow outdoor recreation participation opportunities in all areas of County Wicklow, especially in the South and East of the county.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An annual audit of the geographic spread of outdoor recreation opportunities for County Wicklow residents.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership.</p>		 <p><b>PARTICIPATION</b></p>

<sup>29</sup> The Irish Wheelchair Association and the Sport Ireland Great Outdoors , A Guide for accessibility, is a reference for this approach.

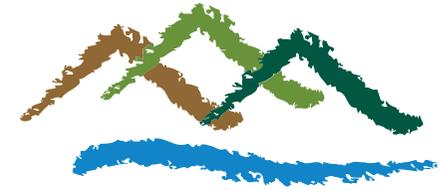
OBJECTIVE AND VISION	ACTIONS	OUTPUTS
<p><b>4.5 Layering the Experience</b></p> <p>Arts and heritage layers in the outdoors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify other county and country outdoor recreation arts and heritage models.</li> <li>• Integrate arts and heritage opportunities with outdoor recreation in creative ways<sup>30</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseline information on built, natural and cultural heritage to inform the development of high quality interpretation.</li> <li>• Arts and heritage outdoors projects through Wicklow’s Creative Ireland Programme.</li> <li>• An arts and heritage outdoors action plan.</li> </ul>
<b>LEAD AND PARTNERS</b>		<b>DELIVERY THEME</b>
<p>County Wicklow Heritage office.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Sports Partnership</li> </ul>		

<sup>30</sup> Including heritage themed trails at publicly accessible heritage sites and attractions, in co-operation with communities and landowners.









## County Wicklow Partnership

**For more information contact:**

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Bridgewater Centre,  
Arklow, Co Wicklow.



Rialtas  
na hÉireann  
Government  
of Ireland

Tionscadal Éireann  
Project Ireland  
**2040**



Páirceanna Náisiúnta  
National Parks



Rural  
Recreation  
Officer



WicklowUplands  
COUNCIL

