

Wicklow County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025 - 2030



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Blessington eGreenway, courtesy Fáilte Ireland
Front cover - Walking, Djouce Mountain, courtesy Fáilte Ireland

Introduction

The need for a Wicklow County Outdoor Recreation Plan

In 2022, a national outdoor recreation strategy 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027' was launched by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD). The strategy specifically called for the development of County Outdoor Recreation Plans across Ireland:

“At County level, our ambition is to achieve a more planned and co-ordinated 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 is the third consecutive Outdoor Recreation Plan for County Wicklow. Aside from the national ambition, there continues to be collective agreement amongst key stakeholders in County Wicklow that having a Plan ensures accountability, shared responsibility and a continued collaborative approach towards the enhancement and management of outdoor recreation in the County.

What is outdoor recreation?

Outdoor recreation means activities that take place in the natural environment such as walking, canoeing, mountain biking, orienteering and wild swimming. It also includes passive enjoyment of the outdoors, e.g. stargazing and bird watching. 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) except for motorised mobility

aids. A full definition and activities list can be found in 'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027'.

Benefits of outdoor recreation

The development of the national strategy and significant financial investment is an acknowledgement of the many benefits outdoor recreation brings to communities in Ireland, including mental and physical health benefits, as well as economic and social benefits.

'Embracing Ireland's Outdoors' outlines evidence of the increased demand for outdoor recreation and the substantial benefits it brings.

- Overseas visitors who participated in outdoor recreation spent €1.7billion in 2019.
- Visitors to Coillte forests have nearly doubled between 2018 and 2021.
- 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.
- Recreational walking is by far the most participated in sport or physical activity in Ireland.

Development of the Plan

The development of this Plan was led by outdoor recreation consultants, Outscape, between October 2024 and May 2025 on behalf of a Steering Group of outdoor recreation stakeholders. The process and structure of this Plan complies with the 'Guidelines for Development - County Outdoor Recreation Plans' developed by DRCD (2024). The Steering Group,

most of which are executive members of Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC), included:

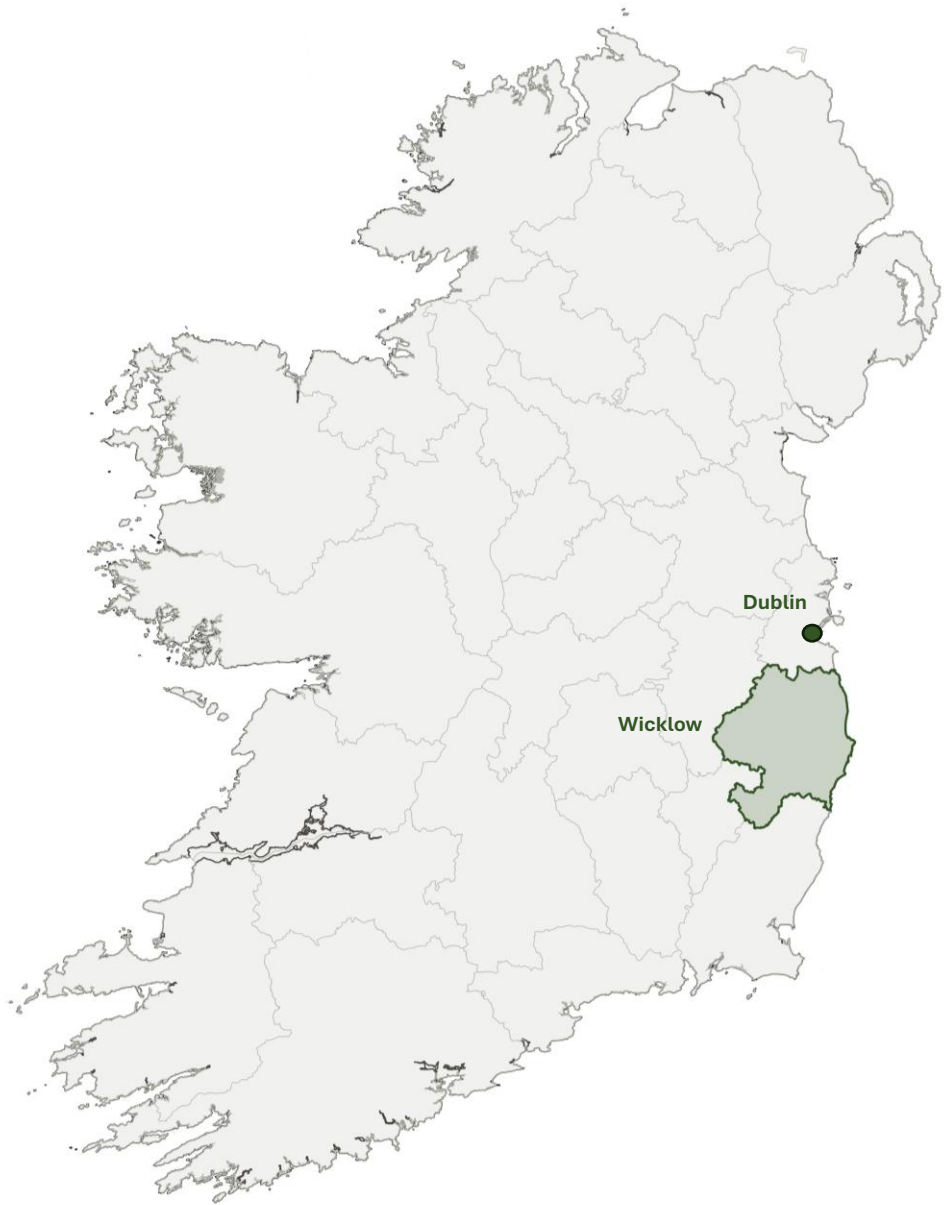
- Wicklow County Council (WCC)
- Wicklow Sport and Recreation Partnership (WSRP)
- County Wicklow Partnership (CWP)
- National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- Coillte
- Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum representative

Complying with the national guidelines, the Steering Group guided the direction of the Plan's development, reaching consensus on strategic priorities and actions following a period of:

- Desk research, GIS mapping, and site visits
- Key stakeholder consultations
- In-person public consultation workshops
- A public online survey

This document represents a summary of the outputs of the development process and sets out the strategic priorities and actions for the next five years in County Wicklow.

This Plan was supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development.



Strategic context

Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors

‘Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors 2023-2025’, Ireland’s national outdoor recreation strategy, aims to strengthen the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector and drive economic and health benefits to communities, while protecting landscapes, habitats and built heritage. The implementation of the strategy is a key deliverable under ‘Our Rural Future’ rural development policy 2021-2025.

This Wicklow Plan aligns with the national ambitions and several actions have been adopted as a direct response to the national strategy, including the appointment of an Outdoor Recreation Officer (ORO), development of a Community Trail Plan for West Wicklow and rolling out at a local level, national guidance relating to responsible use.

Other national strategies

Several other national strategies have also informed the Wicklow Plan, including:

- National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025
- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
- Tourism Policy Framework 2025–2030
- Child and Youth Participation Strategy 2019–2023
- National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland (2016, reviewed 2020)
- Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020)
- Sport Ireland Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities (2017)
- Coillte Strategic Vision 2022

Regional and local strategies

The development of this Plan has also been shaped by regional and local strategies including;

- Wicklow Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) 2024-2029
- Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028
- County Wicklow Sports & Recreation Partnership, Strategic Plan 2020-2023
- Draft County Wicklow Heritage Plan 2025-2029
- County Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan (pending 2025)
- Wicklow Climate Action Plan
- Wicklow Tourism Strategy & Marketing Plan 2018-2023
- CYPSC 2024-2026 Children and Young People’s Plan
- Culture & Creativity Ireland Strategy, 2023-2027
- Wicklow Disability and Inclusion Strategy 2023
- County Wicklow Partnership Strategic Plan 2025-2028
- Glendalough and Wicklow Mountains Visitor Experience and Management Masterplan 2023
- Ireland’s Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023-2027
- Dublin Mountains Partnership Strategic Plan 2022-2026

Key trends

A number of national and global trends have informed the development of the Wicklow Plan and include:

Increase in demand: A growth in interest and participation in outdoor recreation in Ireland and globally.

Activities: Soft activities, such as walking and cycling, represent the most significant segment of outdoor recreation and consumer demand for soft activities is set to continue. There is growth in participation in activities such as open water swimming and stand up paddleboarding.

Ageing population: The population in Ireland is getting older and the number of older people taking part in outdoor recreation is expected to increase, along with a growth in multi-generational participation in outdoor recreation.

Closer to home: People are seeking opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation ‘closer to home’.

Sustainability: People are increasingly concerned about the environment and behaving more sustainably.

Wellbeing: The global trend to improve our physical and mental wellbeing is driving a desire to integrate health and wellbeing into leisure and tourism choices.

Consultation summary

Consultation with national stakeholders, and Wicklow stakeholders including the public, has been critical to informing the development of this Plan.

National stakeholder consultation

National organisations and strategic governing bodies were informed of the Plan development and invited to engage in the process. These included:

- Active Disability Ireland
- Angling Council of Ireland
- Dept. of Rural and Community Development Canoeing Ireland
- Coillte
- Cycling Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland
- Heritage Ireland
- Horse Sport Ireland
- Inland Fisheries
- Ireland’s Association for Adventure Tourism
- Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmer’s Association
- Irish Creamery Milk Supplier’s Association
- Irish Farmer’s Association (IFA)
- Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)
- Irish Natura and Hill Farmer’s Association
- Leave No Trace (LNT)
- Office of Public Works (OPW)
- Sport Ireland Outdoors
- Swim Ireland
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII)
- Mountaineering Ireland
- National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)
- National Built Heritage Service
- National Monuments Service
- Uisce Éireann
- Water Safety Ireland

Wicklow stakeholder consultation

Local and regional organisations: over 30 hours of one-to-one consultation took place with the following organisations that operate at a county and local level to discuss challenges and opportunities particular to Wicklow.

- Activity provider representatives – Stride, Adventure.ie and She Summits
- Coillte Recreation Manager and Estates Manager
- County Wicklow Partnership including the Rural Recreation Officer, CEO and Strategy and Activation Officer
- Dublin Mountains Partnership
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Uisce Éireann
- Mountaineering Ireland
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Social and disability inclusion representatives – CYPSC and Ballyfermot Youth Service
- Wicklow County Council officers, including Biodiversity, Heritage Tourism, Disability
- Wicklow County Council Directors of Services – Climate, Environment, Recreation and Amenity Directorate and Planning, Economic and Rural Development
- Wicklow County Council municipal district representatives
- Wicklow Local Community Development Committee (LCDC)
- Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC)
- Wicklow Sport and Recreation Partnership staff
- Wicklow Uplands Council

Public workshops:

Two public events were held in February 2025, inviting participation and input from local people, activity providers, educators, outdoor recreation clubs, the land-owning community, and visitors to the County. Events were held in:

- Blessington (38 attendees)
- Newtownmountkenedy (106 attendees)

Feedback from the public events extensively influenced the development of actions within this Plan.

Public online survey:

Across a three-week period in February 2025, 1,221 responses were captured in a public survey. The survey presented a series of questions that were designed to understand the extent to which the public agreed with emerging opportunities and emerging priorities developed by Outscape in consultation with the Steering Group.

Just over half of the survey respondents (58%) reside in County Wicklow with 26% residing in County Dublin. There was representation from every defined age category.

Stakeholder insights (in brief):

While all qualifying forms of outdoor recreation take place in Wicklow, walking, hiking and off-road leisure cycling are by far Wicklow’s most popular activities. Road cycling, mountain biking, wild swimming and passive enjoyment (foraging, photography, art and nature observation) of the outdoors are next in line with equal popularity.

In general, the provision and quality of outdoor recreation opportunities in Wicklow is good. The focus should be on better use and enhancement of existing resources and experiences rather than new development and more outdoor recreation products.

The priorities for recreation users, landowners and local communities align with the priorities of key stakeholders – protection of the environment, more resources, better visitor management and tackling irresponsible use of the outdoors.

County Wicklow and the mountains in particular shoulder much of the recreation load of Dublin. Better visitor management and trail maintenance are high priorities for the next 5 years to preserve the experience and the environment.

People in Wicklow are proud and passionate about their natural environment and the outdoor recreation it provides – one should not be at the expense of the other.

Current situation



Wicklow Harbour, courtesy creator Dylan Vaughan

Environment and heritage

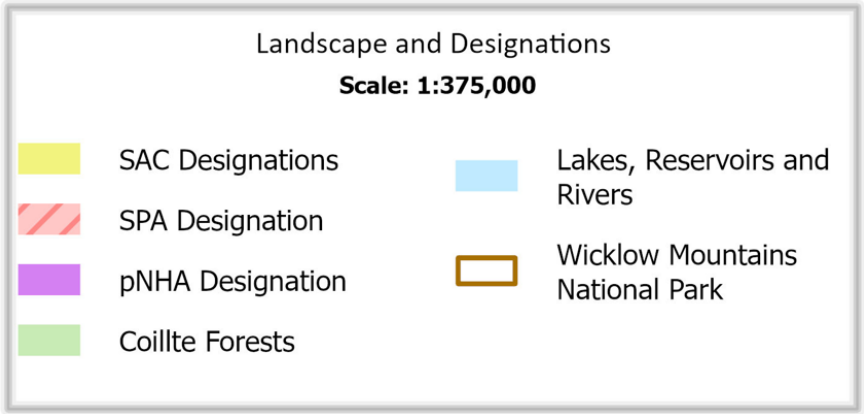
Known as the ‘Garden County’ of Ireland, Wicklow’s natural environment is rich and diverse offering a complete package of landscapes - dramatic mountains and sheer coastal cliffs, sweeping glens and winding river valleys, vast loughs, peat bogs, woodlands and beaches not to mention the designed gardens and landscapes of historic estate houses.

The importance of Wicklow’s natural environment is reflected in its statutory designations, the most notable being Wicklow Mountains National Park which is a hub for both conservation and outdoor recreation. Wicklow also has 19 Natura 2000 sites, 35 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHA’s) and 6 nature reserves all of which are protected for their special characteristics or qualifying interests. Notable sites amongst these include Wicklow Mountains SPA and Wicklow Mountains SAC, Bray Head, Buckroney-Brittas Bay, Murrough Wetlands, Vale of Clara, Poulaphouca Reservoir and Tomnafinnoge Wood.

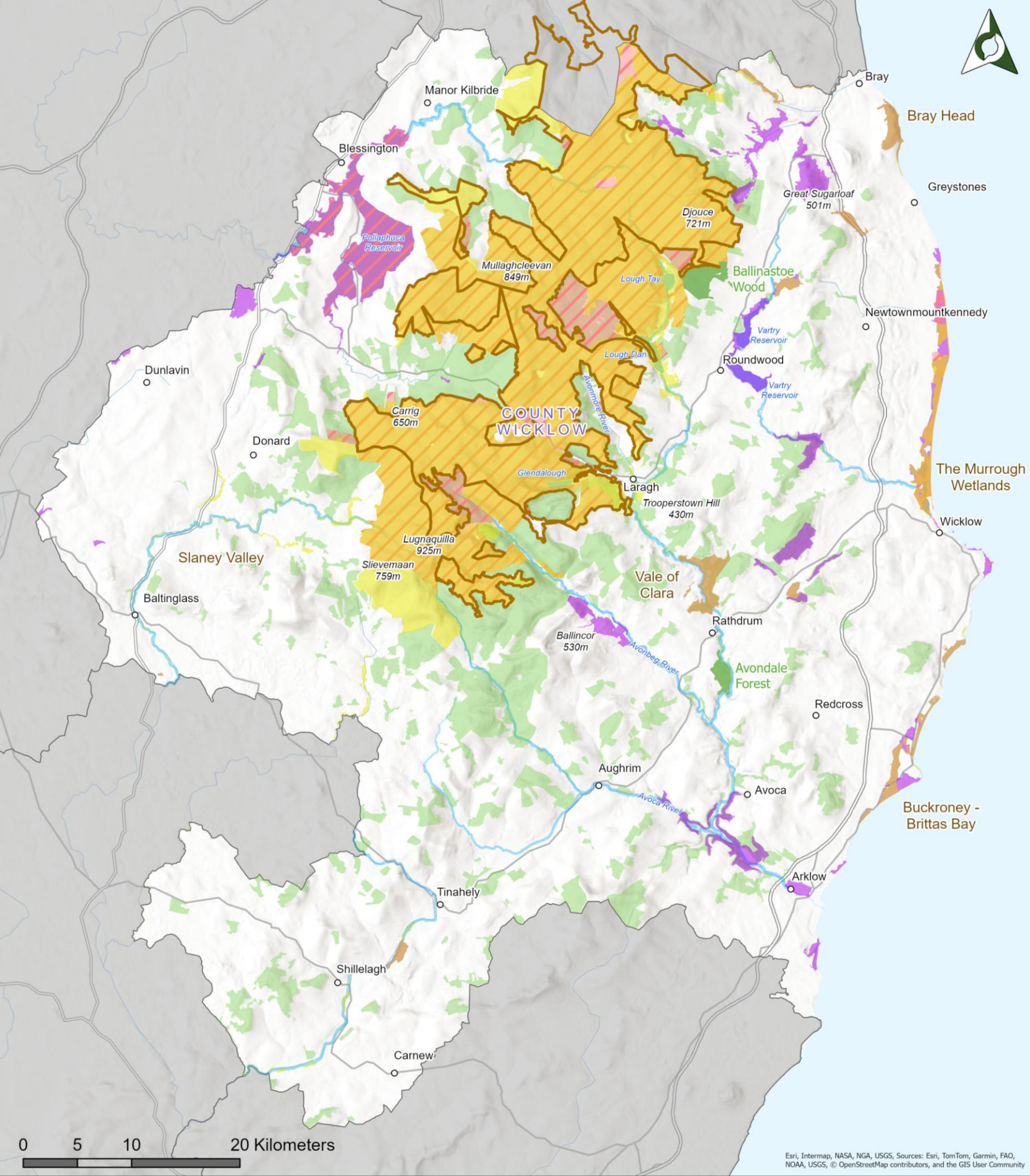
Wicklow’s built heritage is equally important with the iconic internationally renowned sites like Glendalough Monastic Settlement and Baltinglass Hillfort complex, amongst the 782 protected structures and 2704 recorded monuments spread across the County.

Outdoor recreation is more than just physical activity, it is about connecting with a place, its landscapes, its history and stories through outdoor activities. Wicklow’s natural environment combined with its built and cultural heritage create a unique sense of place that enriches the outdoor recreation experience.

The outdoor recreation experience is made better when our environment and nature is high quality and thriving. This Plan recognises that outdoor recreation is reliant on the natural landscape and enhanced by it – central to Wicklow’s outdoor recreation experience is the preservation and protection of the very landscapes, biodiversity and historic places we derive enjoyment from when participating in outdoor recreation.



Glendalough monastic site, courtesy Fáilte Ireland



Environmental designations in Wicklow, courtesy Outscape

Access

Access refers to the infrastructure and arrangements that facilitate people to enjoy their natural spaces for outdoor recreation. Infrastructure and access arrangements in Wicklow are such that every form of outdoor recreation, including passive enjoyment, can be found occurring in the mountains, forests, lakes, rivers and coast.

Access to the outdoors in Wicklow is equally reliant on the goodwill of private landowners, as it is on land owned by public bodies like Coillte, NPWS and Wicklow County Council. For example, the Wicklow Way falls mostly on private land, there are 78 landowners on the Walks Scheme and there are many more who facilitate passive enjoyment of the outdoors for individuals and clubs.

Wicklow aligns with the national trends with the most popular, and therefore best served activities being walking and cycling/biking.

Walking and hiking occurs in both the uplands, (above 300m) on an extensive network of paths and trails*, and in the lowlands where there are an abundance of waymarked routes, including woodland walks, river trails, cliff walks, beach walks, short and long-distance walks and local community trails to choose from.

Provision of trails in the County may be good but the condition of some upland paths are poor and suffering from varying levels of erosion.

Accessibility in general at sites and trails across the County is also poor. There is only one designated multi-access route, at Avondale Forest Park. Despite this, disabled groups continue to access the outdoors, reporting in many cases that the physical

barriers are often small, for example a single gate or unnecessary step.

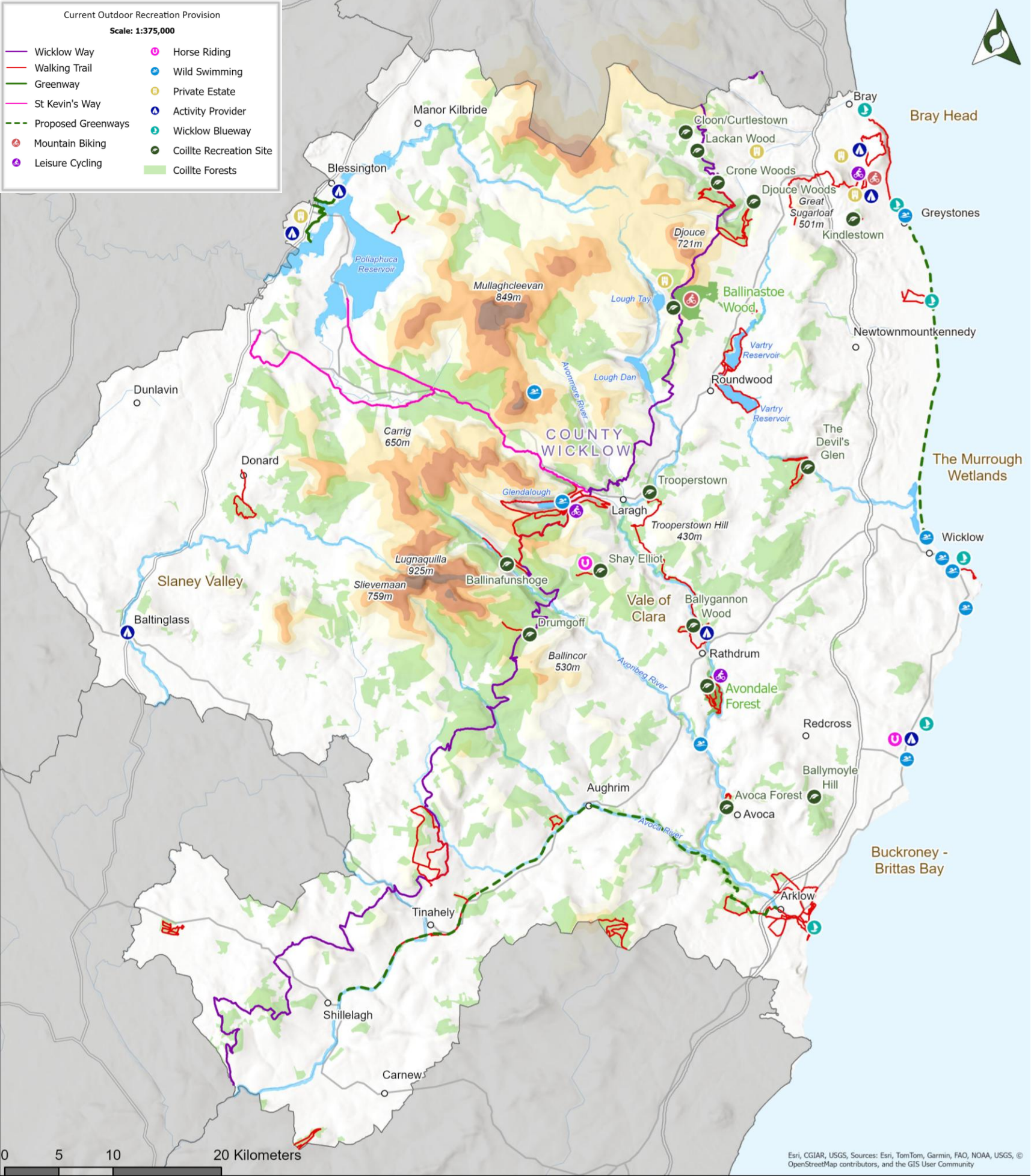
Wicklow is hugely popular for road cycling with the mountain passes providing ideal routes for training and touring especially on weekends. In terms of mountain biking, Coillte operate a National Mountain Bike Trail Centre at Ballinastoe and Belmont Estate (private) has a pump track and purpose-built fat bike trails. Informal, de-facto mountain biking also takes place in the mountains. With the exceptions of Blessington eGreenway, Glendalough and Avondale Forest there is limited provision of purpose built off-road, leisure cycling.

Permitted equestrian sites are Brittas Bay (beach) and Shay Elliot Forest (dedicated equestrian site managed by Coillte). This provision is not matching the demand which was strongly communicated at the public consultation workshops.

The rivers, lakes and coastline provide for every type of water-based recreation – sailing, canoeing, diving, angling, stand up paddleboarding and surfing, etc. These are regularly enjoyed by individuals but more often are club-based activities and experiences offered by activity providers.

Wicklow is also home to famous sea swimming venues, e.g. Arklow Cove and The Cove, Greystones. Sea swimming is going from strength to strength in Ireland and Wicklow is in a prime position to embrace this trend.

** There is a distinction between the term ‘trail’ and ‘path’. A trail refers to a formal, built, waymarked and managed route for walking/hiking. A path is a visible route or line on the ground that has developed over time by trampling and repeated use.*



A flavour of current, formal outdoor recreation provision in Wicklow, courtesy Outscope. Please note this map does not include the informal access and recreation that takes place on private land. Reliable GIS data for this type of access does not currently exist.

Standout recreation assets

There are several standout assets that combine iconic landscapes and high-quality recreation to create unforgettable, signature outdoor experiences for both local communities and visitors to the County.

Wicklow Mountains National Park and Glendalough: the 'jewel in Wicklow’s crown', the National Park is a showcase of Wicklow’s cultural, natural and built heritage. It covers 23,000 hectares in the centre of the county. Combining easily accessible international attractions like Glendalough with remote wilderness, it is a mecca for walking and cycling.

Wicklow Way: Ireland’s first waymarked way, the Wicklow Way spans 81 miles (130kms) from one end of the County to the other. It traverses quiet, rolling countryside in the south to dramatic mountains and valleys of the National Park. It showcases the best trail experience Wicklow has to offer and is popular amongst walkers, trail runners, charity and challenge events.

Ballinastoe National Mountain Bike Trail Centre: one of five national trail centres in Ireland operated by Coillte. Riders have a choice of trails against the backdrop of the iconic Guinness Lake (Lough Tay). Visitors come to race here including national events such as Biking Blitz and National Downhill Championship.

The Coast: the county has over 60kms of coastline comprised of beaches, cliffs, harbours and coves that provide for all types of water-based activities including surfing when the conditions are just right.



Wicklow Mountains National Park & Glendalough, courtesy Fáilte Ireland



Wicklow Way, courtesy EcoTrail Wicklow



Ballinastoe National Mountain Bike Trail Centre, courtesy Tom Scott



The Coast, Brittas Bay, courtesy Celtic Routes

Opportunity and awareness

Opportunity

Walking is the most popular outdoor recreation activity in County Wicklow, closely followed by hiking (and trail running) and cycling in all its forms. Sea swimming follows next.

This is reflective of a relative abundance of access, clubs and participation programmes that engage people with these activities. It is also reflective of national trends in outdoor recreation participation (*Irish Sports Monitor, 2023*).

Opportunities also exist for participating in other activities such as rowing, surfing, climbing and orienteering reflecting the diversity of recreation appetites in Wicklow.

Various stakeholders provide these opportunities, including:

- **Wicklow Sport and Recreation Partnership (WSRP):** co-ordinates and delivers local and national programmes and initiatives aimed at getting people active in the outdoors. A few examples are: Get Ireland Walking, Woodlands for Health, National Bike week, Watersports and sea swimming initiatives and HER Outdoors week which aims to celebrate and encourage more females to get out and enjoy the benefits of being in the outdoors. WSRP also provides support to maintain and develop clubs and maintains a directory so it can link people to opportunities within those clubs.
- **Outdoor recreation clubs:** Wicklow has at least 50 clubs with members that engage in both land, water and air-based activities on a regular basis.

In Wicklow, some clubs have become important facilitators for new communities and under-represented groups, introducing people to their local outdoors and fellow enthusiasts. For example, She Summits is a trail running community that aims to increase participation and inclusion of women and people from different backgrounds into trail running.

- **Activity providers:** offer a diversity of participation opportunities that include climbing, kayaking/canoeing, swimming, SUP, surfing, mountaineering and angling.
- **Events:** Wicklow plays host to a range of local and national events across most activities and is well-known for its challenge and adventure events in particular, e.g. EcoTrail, Quest, etc. Events serve as opportunities for people to try something new and/or to discover new places.
- **Parkrun:** weekly Parkruns take place at Russborough House, Bray, Rathwood, Avondale and Arklow (junior). These events are free, weekly, timed event open to everyone, irrespective of ability.

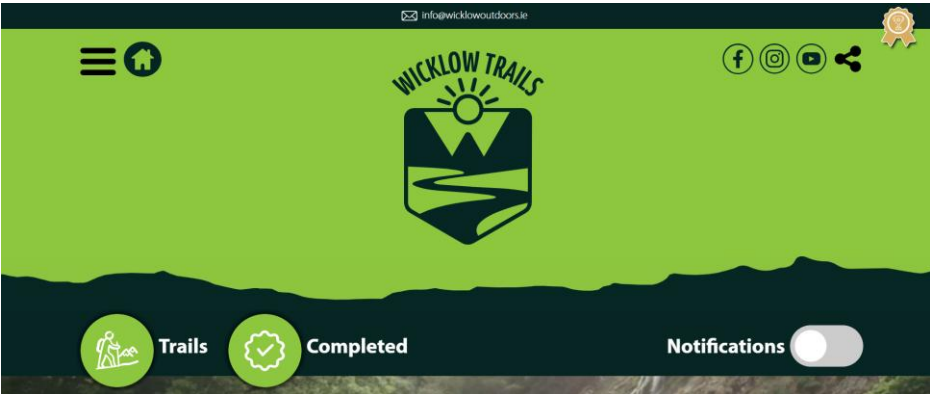
Awareness

Awareness is about linking people to their outdoor recreation opportunities by providing them with the right information with which to encourage and enable responsible participation.

Platforms that promote outdoor recreation in Wicklow include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- **VisitWicklow.ie:** managed by the Council’s Tourism Team, outdoor recreation is promoted under the ‘Wicklow Outdoors’ brand

- **‘Wicklow Trails’ on Facebook and Instagram:** managed by County Wicklow Partnership, this platform contains visually attractive, accurate and authoritative information for predominantly walking in the County.
- **WicklowTrails.ie:** recently launched, mobile friendly website promoting walk trails and rewarding individual progress. Managed by County Wicklow Partnership.
- **NGB’s, clubs and national bodies, e.g. Mountaineering Ireland:** promote activities, events, participation and training opportunities directly to members primarily via digital communications.
- **Wicklow Sport and Recreation Partnership website and social media:** promotes participation opportunities, with approximately 6000 followers on social media platforms. There is excellent collaboration and cross-posting between Wicklow Trails and WSRP.
- **Wicklow Mountains National Park website and social media:** managed by NPWS the website contains information about what you can see and do in the National Park, including real-time updates on Facebook.
- **Activity provider websites:** includes details of multi-activity adventure tours and activity-specific opportunities.
- **Coillte website:** recreation map and permitted activities per forest in Wicklow.
- **Getirelandactive.ie:** A Sport Ireland database with information on participation opportunities including clubs, events, and access locations.
- **Discoverireland.ie:** the Garden of Ireland promoted as part of Ireland’s Ancient East.



Examples of awareness platforms linking people to outdoor recreation opportunities in Wicklow

Outdoor recreation stakeholders in Wicklow

People’s ability to enjoy Wicklow’s great outdoors is largely attributable to the motivated organisations and individuals who have been actively developing, managing and promoting outdoor recreation for number of years.

We already work successfully together in the planning and delivery of projects through structures such as the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC) and partnerships, for example, Wicklow County Council (WCC) and County Wicklow Partnership (CWP)

There is a strong and healthy culture of collaboration and partnership working amongst stakeholders for the greater, collective good. Examples include the development of Vartry/Roundwood trails and nature play, Devil’s Glen biodiversity and recreation scheme and the introduction of Wicklow’s first dedicated trail maintenance team.

While collaboration and partnership working is effective, in most cases the capacity of staff working in outdoor recreation is already stretched. To successfully deliver this Plan, it is recommended that the staff resource and structures are reviewed with a view to increasing and securing the staff resource within the organisations responsible for delivering and managing outdoor recreation for the County.

This stakeholder map gives a flavour of the array of stakeholders involved in various roles in outdoor recreation.

Users	
General public	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wicklow residentsNeighbouring counties incl. Dublin
Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Domestic and international visitors
Clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Variety of outdoor recreation club participants
Main tourism/promotion organisations	
WCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">VisitWicklow.ieWicklow Outdoors brand
CWP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">WicklowTrails.ieWicklow Trails on social media
Fáilte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Discoverireland.ie
Sport Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">getirelandactive.ie
Participation organisations	
CWP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Wicklow Trails Passport
WSRP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Work with NGBs and other partners to deliver participation programmes
Activity providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Multiple, e.g. Biking.ie
Activity centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Funds programmes for children and young people
NGB’s and clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Training and participation opportunities from entry to elite performance level
Baltinglass OETC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Water and land-based activities, skills and training for adult, youth and school groups

Landowners	
Coillte	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Largest state landowner and provider of outdoor recreation and access
NPWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">1 National Park and 6 nature reserves
OPW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Glendalough monastic site, 2701 recorded monuments and 782 protected structures
WCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Multiple urban and rural sites, e.g. Bray Head
ESB	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Blessington Lakes
Uisce Éireann	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Vartry Lakes
Private landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none">78 participants across 5 routes on the Walks SchemePrivate estates, e.g. Belmont and Russborough HouseMany Natura 2000 sites
Environment & Heritage organisations	
NPWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Statutory responsibility for consenting to listed activities in Natura 2000 sites and an enforcement role in wildlife and habitat protection
WCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Biodiversity Officer, Heritage Officer, Climate Action Officer and associated strategies/action plans
Coillte	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Nature restoration, regeneration and rehabilitation projects on forested and un-forested land to tackle climate and biodiversity crises
Bird Watch Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">East Coast and Kilcoole Nature Reserves

Development, management and maintenance organisations	
WCC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Various ORIS projectsMunicipal district projects, e.g. greenways and Bray to Greystones Cliff Walk
CWP	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rural Recreation OfficerWalks SchemeLEADER programmeWCC delivery agent for ORIS projects
Coillte	<ul style="list-style-type: none">18 recreation sites incl. Ballinastoe and Avondale
NPWS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Dual conservation and recreation in Wicklow Mountains National Park and numerous designated sites, e.g. Knocksink Wood
Wicklow Uplands Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Upland access development and management, e.g. The Sugarloaf Way
Inland Fisheries Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Angling and access infrastructure projects and maintenance of catchments, e.g. Slaney
Community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Multiple, e.g. Ballincor and Tinahely
Mountain Meitheal Dublin/Wicklow	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Volunteer trail maintenance branch of Mountain Meitheal Ireland
Fáilte Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Glendalough Visitor Experience and Management Plan (VEMP)Wicklow Experience Destination Development Plan (DEDP)
OPW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Kilmacurragh National Botanic Garden

Wicklow’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges

This presents an at-a-glance summary of the current situation of outdoor recreation in Wicklow. It has helped to inform the Plan's strategic priorities and action plan.

Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diverse, highly attractive landscapes catering for all types of outdoor recreation• Established structures in place delivering and managing outdoor recreation, e.g. WCC, CWP, WSRP, WORC• Healthy, collaborative partnerships between stakeholders• Dedicated trail maintenance team• Wicklow Outdoors brand and proactive approach to promoting the outdoors, e.g. WicklowTrails.ie• Proximity to Dublin – wide catchment area• Existing studies and plans/feasibility studies to inform decision making• Outdoor recreation culture	Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proximity to Dublin – environment shouldering recreation load of Dublin’s visitors and residents• Lack of outdoor recreation facilities in West Wicklow• Maintenance cannot keep pace with development• Visitor management issues, e.g. trail erosion, environmental destruction, disturbance, litter, congestion• Access to outdoors for those with disabilities• Low awareness of opportunities even amongst local communities• Staff resourcing – stretched capacity and permanency of roles involved in outdoor recreation• Event management and co-ordination
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educate and raise awareness of responsible use of the outdoors• Diversify outdoor recreation offering• Enhance accessibility of the outdoors• Increase and regularise staff resource delivering, managing and maintaining outdoor recreation• National guidance and support being developed will help address key challenges in Wicklow• Increase awareness and participation opportunities particularly amongst local communities• Reviewing the efficacy of WORC to be more action focussed• Gather evidence and data to inform future decision making	Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Irresponsible use threatening upland access especially on private land, e.g. dog control• Changing attitudes and behaviours towards responsible use• Managing visitors sustainably, particularly to nature- and heritage-sensitive sites• Regular funding for ongoing maintenance after development• Social media - driving visits to ‘secret’, high-sensitive sites not purposely developed or managed for recreation• Availability of supporting visitor services – accommodation, toilets and public transport

Strategic objectives and action plan



Bike Week, courtesy Wicklow Sports & Recreation Partnership

Wicklow, a world of activities for all

Strategic priorities statement:

The priority for outdoor recreation in County Wicklow over the next five years is to adequately resource the management and maintenance of existing infrastructure, sustainably enhance and diversify opportunities and heighten awareness to facilitate life-long benefits to all, while protecting the natural environment



Strategic objectives

Leadership

To maintain a co-ordinated, cohesive approach across Wicklow to ensure best use of our resources

Environment and heritage

To protect Wicklow's environment and heritage through better planning, development and management of outdoor recreation

Awareness

To increase awareness of Wicklow's outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly

Opportunities

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

Access

To protect, diversify and enhance access to Wicklow's outdoors, for the benefit of all

Expertise

To improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of Wicklow's stakeholders and partners

Leadership

Why is this important?

Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors, Ireland’s National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, calls out the need for a joined-up and cohesive approach to outdoor recreation at a County level through the introduction of:

- A County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC)
- A County Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum, feeding into the decisions of the CORC

Leading the way, Wicklow has already established these governance structures and collaborative partnerships. In 2013, we published the first County outdoor recreation strategy in Ireland and established the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC). In 2023, we set up our Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum.

Governance is working well in Wicklow as demonstrated by the rate of outdoor recreation development in recent years. On average, €1million per year has been granted to projects in Wicklow between 2021 and 2023 by DRCD’s Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS) .

Our success is attributable to the multi-agency collaboration and individual relationships built up over many years. In particular, the County Wicklow Partnership (CWP) stands out as a key driver and delivery agent of outdoor recreation working at all levels with state bodies, NGO’s, landowners, clubs and local communities. The County Wicklow

Partnership is well positioned as an independent and neutral broker for outdoor recreation and should retain this role going forward.

To continue this success, the stakeholders developing and managing outdoor recreation (Wicklow County Council, Wicklow Sports & Recreation Partnership, NPWS, Coillte and CWP) need more capacity and financial support.

Our landscapes, particularly the Wicklow Mountains, shoulder the majority of the outdoor recreation demand from Dublin (residents and tourists) and other neighbouring counties.

Our organisations, teams and partnerships that develop, manage and promote outdoor recreation need greater recognition, capacity and resourcing to not just maintain the current position, but to sustainably improve the outdoor recreation services we deliver primarily for the benefit of our environment and local communities and secondly for out-of-County visitors and recreation users.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition for the next 5 years is that the governance and delivery mechanisms for outdoor recreation thrive and continue to be successful and effective. To do this requires:

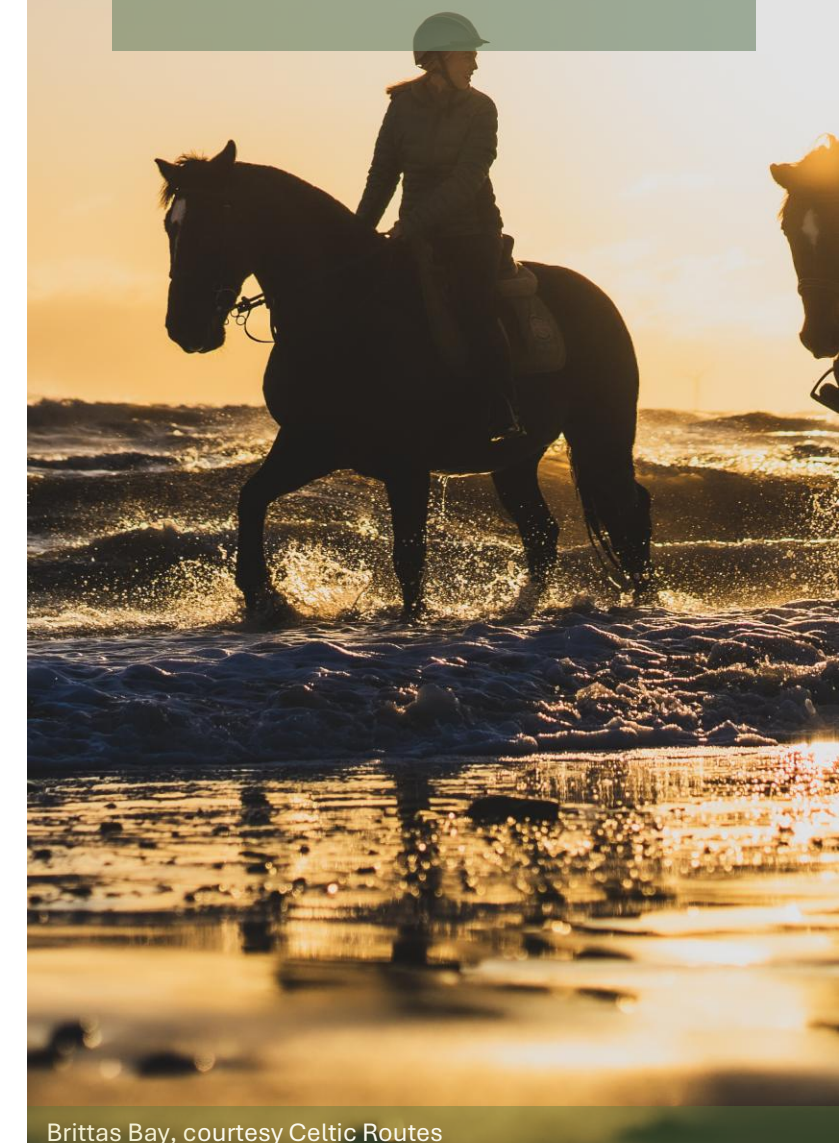
- Greater recognition of the people and partnerships that deliver and manage outdoor recreation.
- An increase in the capacity and resources dedicated to outdoor recreation.

Key to delivering this Plan will be regularising and increasing the capacity of the existing roles and teams who deliver, manage and maintain outdoor recreation day-to-day, such as the County Wicklow Partnership and the Wicklow Trail Maintenance Team.

We will advocate for more administrative support for outdoor recreation within Wicklow County Council and a County Outdoor Recreation Officer in Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership to ‘activate the capital’ infrastructure and co-ordinate and drive the implementation of this Plan.

It is also our ambition to improve the efficacy of Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee with the aim of being more action-focused and to grow and strengthen our Stakeholder Forum to ensure as wide a range of interests are represented as possible.

**To maintain a
co-ordinated,
cohesive
approach
across
Wicklow to
ensure best
use of our
resources**



Brittas Bay, courtesy Celtic Routes

Leadership actions

	Action	Lead delivery organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
1.1	Put in place an appropriate resourcing structure within County Wicklow Partnership (e.g. regularisation of posts and increasing staff) to sustain and secure the enhancement and management of outdoor recreation over the next 5 years	CWP, WCC	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DRCD• WORC
1.2	Secure funding to appoint a County Outdoor Recreation Officer (ORO) to lead and co-ordinate the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC) and Stakeholder Forum and drive forward the implementation of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP)	WSRP	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DRCD• Sport Ireland
1.3	Review the staffing structure within Wicklow County Council with a view to enhancing the admin support provided to outdoor recreation	WCC	2025	
1.4	Review the structure of WORC with the intention of improving its efficacy and to be more action-focused	WORC	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder Forum
1.5	Grow the Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum to ensure as wide a range of interests are represented as possible	WORC	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder Forum
1.6	Increase the capacity and support the work of the Wicklow Trail Maintenance Team	CWP	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WCC• Coillte• NPWS
1.7	Advocate for an increase in NPWS’s recreation maintenance resource	NPWS	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC
1.8	Advocate for the creation of a Parks Dept in Wicklow County Council	WCC	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC
1.9	Prepare a plan and undertake a review every 2 years to evaluate progress and impact of this Plan’s delivery	WORC	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder Forum



Environment and heritage

Why is this important?

Wicklow’s rich environment features nationally important landscapes and diverse habitats comprising mountain peaks and valleys, forests, woodlands, rivers, lakes and coastline, all of which provide popular destinations for a wide range of outdoor recreation activities for residents and out-of-County visitors.

Enjoying time in these natural landscapes and connecting with nature is a core motivator for outdoor recreation participation. Therefore, quality outdoor recreation relies on a healthy and sustainable natural environment.

However, many habitats are finite assets and are vulnerable to disturbance and destruction caused by outdoor recreation, for example as a result of poor planning, irresponsible use, social media, low awareness and/or inappropriate/ineffective visitor management.

The Upland Path Condition Survey (2022) and the Glendalough & Wicklow Mountains Visitor Experience & Management Plan (2023) both demonstrate the negative impact that intense recreation has had on our environment and local communities. Both recommend interventions relating to visitor management and improving the experience with the goal of protecting and preventing further damage to our unique natural and built heritage. Examples include decommissioning some uplands paths in favour of habitat restoration, and the Wicklow Mountains Trails Dispersal Strategy.

Now is the time for Wicklow to be proactive in visitor

management and implement sustainable approaches in the planning, design and development of infrastructure that:

- Protects and enhances our natural and built heritage environment.
- Benefits local communities, and
- Caters for the needs and preferences of visitors/recreation users.

A proactive approach will require better understanding of user behaviour and recreation impact, generated through research and surveys, empowering decision makers with evidence, knowledge and confidence (see Expertise).

All stakeholders in the County have a shared responsibility to protect the natural environment, including those habitats and species designated and protected by legislation, which include Wicklow Mountains National Park, many Natura 2000 sites, six Nature Reserves and 35 proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs).

It is imperative that the environment is the central consideration of all outdoor recreation planning and development in the future and delivering the actions of this Plan.

It is also important that people are aware of and appreciate the value and fragility of our environment and biodiversity and understand the impact they can have on it (intentionally and unintentionally) through outdoor recreation. By educating and raising awareness of responsible use, we are creating the opportunity to influence people’s choices and behaviour (see Awareness section).

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to protect the County’s special environment and heritage through better planning, development and management of outdoor recreation.

Decisions will be taken to ensure the integrity of Wicklow’s environment and heritage will be complemented - not compromised – by outdoor recreation.

We will do this by:

- Utilising, or contributing to the delivery of, existing plans such as the Upland Path Condition Survey and Wicklow Mountains Trails Dispersal Strategy.
- Prioritising the maintenance and enhancement of existing access and infrastructure before developing new, including upland path and trail maintenance.
- Leading by example in responsible recreation and implementing ‘environment first’ visitor management approaches at key sites suffering from ‘over-recreation’.
- Awareness-raising and education on responsible use of the outdoors.

Key to achieving this ambition will be:

- Continued collaboration with NPWS, the County Biodiversity Officer and Heritage Officer.
- Increasing the number of outdoor recreation staff in County Wicklow Partnership and Wicklow County Council.
- Securing additional financial resource which may involve self-funding initiatives, for example through event participation fees.

**To protect
Wicklow’s
environment
and heritage
through better
planning,
development
and
management
of outdoor
recreation**

Environment and heritage actions

	Action	Lead delivery organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
2.1	Review existing baseline studies (e.g. 2022 Upland Path Condition Survey) and feasibility studies to inform the work plans and prioritisation of upland path and trail repairs and interventions	WORC	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Stakeholder Forum• Landowners and managers• Recreation users
2.2	Support or implement, as required and relevant, the delivery of the outdoor recreation recommendations arising from the Glendalough Visitor Experience and Management Plan, in particular the Wicklow Mountains National Park Dispersal Strategy	WORC, Glendalough Partnership	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• VEMP Delivery Team• WCC• Fáilte Ireland• Stakeholder Forum
2.3	At key recreation sites, commission recreation plans/feasibility studies to inform decision making relating to the environment, recreation and visitor management	WCC	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Biodiversity and Heritage Officers• Landowners• Local communities
2.4	Set up a central event calendar for the Wicklow Mountains and explore the viability of a ‘participant pay back’ system with event organisers	CWP	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Stakeholder Forum• NGB’s
2.5	Promote responsible recreation through biodiversity focussed and Wicklow specific ‘Sharing Natures Space’ code and awareness campaign	WCC	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NPWS education staff• Biodiversity Officer• Heritage Officer

Awareness

Why is this important?

Wicklow is rich with opportunities for people to enjoy outdoor recreation. One of the barriers to people visiting and enjoying the outdoors is a lack of awareness of the opportunities available to them, at the local community level and among visitors to the County.

This lack of awareness contributes to people repeatedly returning to the same venues and trails for lack of knowledge of similar authentic but alternative experiences.

The recently launched Wicklow Trails.ie is an example of how we are beginning to address this awareness gap.

At a national and local level, another key awareness gap in Wicklow relates to how people can safely, responsibly and sustainably enjoy the outdoors – an aggravating factor in relations between recreational users, landowners/managers and local communities.

To protect our current access and to improve it in the future, responsible use needs to be prioritised in our communications, framed and supported by national guidance and policy. It also needs to be introduced to people at a young age through education centres and schools.

Awareness and knowledge is fundamental to empowering people to take responsibility for their own safety and feeling confident to step into Wicklow's outdoors.

What is our ambition?

Lack of awareness should not be a barrier to safe, responsible, and sustainable engagement with the outdoors for residents or visitors in Wicklow.

Our ambition is to increase awareness of Wicklow's outdoor recreation opportunities and influence people, through education, promotion and information to behave responsibly when enjoying the outdoors.

We will work to achieve this by:

- Developing and strengthening the Wicklow Outdoors brand as the main voice for outdoor recreation in Wicklow.
- Creating a one-stop-shop for all outdoor recreation opportunities provided in an intuitive, engaging and user-friendly way.
- Promote alternative places to enjoy, e.g. the coast.
- Working in partnership and combining resources with relevant stakeholders who share the same challenges – many voices, one message will have a stronger impact.
- Working with schools, activity centres and providers to educate young people to the impact we can have on our landscape and mitigating that impact through responsible use and enjoyment.

Active support from government departments, agencies and other stakeholders will be critical to this ambition, to ensure clear, consistent messaging on responsible enjoyment in the outdoors.

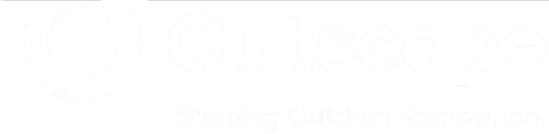
To increase awareness of Wicklow's outdoor recreation opportunities and how to enjoy them responsibly



Trail running in Wicklow Mountains, courtesy Trail Criú

Awareness actions

	Action	Lead delivery organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
3.1	Strengthen the ‘Wicklow Outdoors’ brand and use this as a central point of information for all outdoor recreation in the County	WCC, CWP	2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• WCC Tourism Team
3.2	In line with the national plan, prepare and deliver a ‘Promotions and Communications Plan’ to identify and fill gaps in awareness relating to outdoor recreation opportunities (places and programmes) and responsible enjoyment	WCC	2026 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Stakeholder Forum• LNT• Sport Ireland
3.3	Pilot and review the success of an opportunistic engagement scheme aimed at educating and raising awareness of safe, responsible and sustainable enjoyment of the outdoors	WORC	2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Biodiversity Officer• Heritage Officer• Stakeholder Forum• Landowners• General public and recreation users
3.4	Following the publication of national ‘responsible use of the outdoors’ guidelines and in conjunction with the Leave No Trace principles, roll out a local campaign targeting the key issues and challenges specific to Wicklow	WCC, LNT	2026 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NPWS education staff and rangers• WORC• Stakeholder Forum
3.5	Profile and promote information relating to outdoor recreation grants, funding and other support mechanisms for activity providers, clubs and local communities	WSRP, WCC	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• DRCD• Sport Ireland• Stakeholder Forum• PPN• NGB’s• Clubs• Activity providers
3.6	Support and utilise Getirelandactive.ie and Wicklowtrails.ie to raise awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities in Wicklow	WCC, WSRP	2025 onwards	



Opportunities

Why is this important?

Spending time in the outdoors and participating in outdoor activities brings a range of benefits to individuals and society. By providing opportunities for people to get active outdoors:

- Physical health improves as people become more physically active.
- Mental health improves as time spent outdoors, increases the levels of happiness and life satisfaction.
- Social well-being improves as people gain opportunities for social interaction reducing feelings of loneliness, isolation and improving overall quality of life.

As with many communities across Ireland, Wicklow's population is a diverse community including those from deprived communities, socially and rurally isolated communities, new communities including refugees and asylum seekers, an ageing population, young people and disabled people, all of whom for a variety of reasons can experience difficulties accessing outdoor recreation opportunities.

In Wicklow, we want to remove the barriers and provide the infrastructure and opportunities, so that everyone has equity of access to the outdoors and reap the benefits of outdoor recreation.

We are already working towards this, with a range of participation programmes and initiatives (national and local) aimed at these groups that focus on cycling, walking and sea swimming. This includes – HER Outdoors, Woodlands for Health, Bike Week

and the Wicklow Travellers Urban Outdoor Programme which was awarded 'Most Inclusive Project' at the LAMA National Awards*.

But there is still more to be done.

We recognise that there are still many opportunities to work with our partners to provide the infrastructure, programmes and equipment that initiates, facilitates and sustains a life-long habit of enjoying outdoor recreation and its benefits from a young age, regardless of circumstance and background.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to increase and support the number of people active in the outdoors across Wicklow, especially young people and people with disabilities.

It is also our ambition to create the environment and opportunities that facilitate from a young age, the life-long habit of enjoying outdoor recreation and reaping the benefits, especially for Wicklow residents.

This will be achieved through:

- Developing accessible infrastructure and places (see Access action 5.2).
- Designing and running a greater number and variety of outdoor recreation participation programmes targeted at minority groups.
- Increasing awareness of accessible opportunities to everyone (see Awareness section).

- Providing equipment to sustain independent participation.
- Supporting clubs, groups and activity providers to sustain and grow their activities and membership.

The success of this will depend on two things:

1. Employing a County Outdoor Recreation Officer to 'activate the capital' and champion outdoor recreation within the local authority (see Leadership section).
2. Collaborating with other stakeholders, such as our Disability Officer, CYPSC Youth Rep and Age Friendly Officer, to ensure more outdoor places are more accessible to more people and that we are collectively working towards having an equitable array of fully inclusive experiences, where nobody is left behind.

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

*Local Authority Members Associations, All Ireland Community and Council Awards, February 2025

Opportunities actions

	Action	Lead Delivery Organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
4.1	Increase the overall number and diversify the choice of outdoor recreation activities within existing local participation programmes	WSRP	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• PPN• NGB's• Clubs and providers
4.2	Deliver more outdoor recreation programmes to under-represented groups in both urban and rural settings	WSRP	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Disability Officer• Age Friendly Officer• CYPSC Youth Rep• PPN• NGB's• Clubs
4.3	Deliver one public engagement large scale outdoor-recreation event/festival with taster sessions targeting under-represented groups	WSRP	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• WCC• WCC Tourism Team• Clubs and providers
4.4	Assess the need and viability for equipment hubs across the County, e.g. adaptive bikes, beach wheelchairs, all terrain trampers	WCC, CWP	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WSRP• Active Disability Ireland• Disability Officer• NGB's• Swim Ireland• Cycling Ireland• Clubs and providers
4.5	Support the growth and development of local clubs and recreation groups to expand their services and reach	WSRP	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• NGB's• Clubs
4.6	Collaborate with stakeholders and partners to incorporate outdoor recreation events into national themed weeks, e.g. National Heritage Week, National Biodiversity Week, Social Inclusion Week?	WCC	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Biodiversity, Heritage and Disability Officers• NPWS• WSRP

Access

Why is this important?

Wicklow's natural landscapes play host to a diverse array of land, water and air-based activities, on both private and state-owned land. Sustainable and responsible access for outdoor recreation requires landowner agreements and typically some level of physical infrastructure to sustain that access. In Wicklow this access is potentially at risk if irresponsible use and unsustainable pressure on the environment, local communities and landowners is not actively addressed and managed.

Local communities and visitors are well served with access to trails and outdoor recreation sites, in the uplands, lowlands and along the coastline, but awareness of these opportunities, in particular alternatives to the high-profile sites and trails, and local knowledge of access to local greenspace is low. This applies to both online information and signage on the ground.

Whilst our priority will continue to be the maintenance of existing trails and infrastructure there is a strong appetite to develop better provision for horse riding, off-road cycling and coastal and water activities, in particular sea swimming.

There is also a gap in provision for families and children which is a missed opportunity to encourage healthy lifestyles and initiate lifelong participation in outdoor recreation from a young age, by offering more multi-use sites and trails (like Vartry/Roundwood), animation and nature-based learning through play and outdoor education infrastructure.

The needs of Wicklow reflect national trends over the last ten years:

- Walking is the dominant outdoor recreation activity.
- Participation has increased: this includes participation among older people, and a growth in multi-generational participation.
- Diversification of activity: while walking dominates, people are seeking greater adventure through activities such as upland hiking, open water swimming, stand-up-paddleboarding and off-road cycling.
- People are seeking opportunities 'closer to home' to participate with friends and family.
- People are seeking 'Instagram' moments by participating in experiences that will portray a sense of adventure.

Understanding the current needs and trends in consumer behaviour is key to ensuring that future outdoor recreation development and visitor servicing across the County is targeted appropriately and sustainably.

Overall, we recognise that there are missed opportunities to make our outdoor recreation infrastructure accessible and there is a reliance on clubs, charitable organisations and activity providers to facilitate access to the outdoors amongst people with disabilities.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to protect and improve access to Wicklow's outdoors, for the benefit of all.

We will achieve this by continuing to work in partnership and through existing delivery mechanisms but with more financial support and staff resource to guarantee the quality of our outdoor recreation experiences.

We aim to:

- Prioritise maintenance and enhancement of existing assets and resources to meet needs and preferences of recreation users, e.g. Wicklow Way.
- Improve the accessibility of Wicklow's outdoor infrastructure for all to enjoy and aspire to develop one accessible woodland, upland and coastal site in the County.
- Diversify our outdoor recreation offering beyond walking, mountain biking and road cycling.
- Improve access and infrastructure for horse riding, off-road cycling and water-based activities.
- Provide more family focused experiences, including play and nature-based learning.

Where opportunities arise in West Wicklow we will endeavour to prioritise these to ensure that there is an equity of access across the County, and at all times we will work in partnership with relevant departments and officers to remove the barriers to Wicklow achieving/maximising its full outdoor recreation potential, for example, toilet provision, public transport and parking provision, accommodation and planning (process and policy).

To protect,
diversify and
enhance
access to
Wicklow's
outdoors, for
the benefit of
all



Access actions

	Action	Lead delivery organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
5.1	Undertake a ‘Rejuvenating the Wicklow Way’ masterplan to identify opportunities to enhance and modernise the trail experience	CWP	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wicklow Way Partnership• WORC• Stakeholder Forum
5.2	Undertake an accessibility audit of outdoor recreation sites and trails with the aim of developing at least one flagship accessible woodland, mountain and coastal site/experience in the County	WCC, CWP	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Stakeholder Forum• Disability Officer and Age-Friendly Officer• Active Disability Ireland
5.3	Undertake a Community Trail Plan for West Wicklow	WCC	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• PPN• Local communities
5.4	Undertake an audit to identify off-road family cycling venues and routes	CWP, WCC	2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WCC• Coillte and other landowners
5.5	Improve equestrian provision across the County	CWP	2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Coillte• Horse Sport Ireland• Equestrian clubs and providers• Landowners
5.6	Enhance the provision and quality of coastal and water-based recreation, including designated sea swimming venues	WCC, CWP	2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Stakeholder Forum• NGB’s• Clubs and providers• Local communities



Access actions continued

	Action	Lead delivery organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
5.7	Develop more family-friendly, multi-use sites like Vartry/Roundwood that offer outdoor recreation, nature connectedness and outdoor learning/education through multi-use trails, play and animation (i.e. interpretation) in one location	CWP, WCC	2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Stakeholder Forum• Private and public landowners
5.8	Improve the provision, quality and consistency of outdoor recreation signage across the County (road signage to sites/trails and within sites/on trails, for navigation and visitor information purposes)	WCC	2028	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC• Stakeholder Forum
5.9	Enhance the overall quality of outdoor recreation infrastructure, implementing the national guidance and standards at a local level	CWP, WCC	2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC
5.10	Pilot a scheme for outdoor toilets	CWP, WCC	2030	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC
5.11	Support and implement the delivery of the outdoor recreation recommendations arising from the Glendalough Visitor Experience and Management Plan, in particular the Wicklow Mountains National Park Dispersal Strategy	WORC, Glendalough Partnership	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WCC• Fáilte Ireland• Stakeholder Forum

Expertise

Why is this important?

Over the last decade, there has been significant growth in the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland, both in the numbers of people visiting the outdoors and the level of funding from central government.

The national outdoor recreation strategy recognises that support for practitioners has not kept pace with this growth and there is a clear need to improve the knowledge, skills and expertise of stakeholders and partners across the sector.

By providing this support the aim is to achieve and maintain consistently high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities and infrastructure, and to fulfil all legal obligations. In Wicklow, this is particularly important for sites designated for nature conservation to ensure these are protected, preserved and managed sustainably for recreation.

In Wicklow, there are many experienced and engaged stakeholders involved in programme delivery and planning, development, management and maintenance of outdoor recreation. However, at some key sites in the uplands, maintenance and visitor management is struggling to keep pace with demand and trends, which can sometimes be driven by social media.

More and better understanding of the patterns and impacts of recreation is needed to inform decisions relating to visitor management and ensure future outdoor recreation development is driven by data, evidence and established, proven good practice.

In line with the national ambition for a skilled sector, there is an appetite amongst stakeholders in Wicklow for more information, research and insights to empower decision-makers with the knowledge and understanding to make informed, evidence-based decisions relating to future development and management.

There is also a desire for more expertise working in specialised areas such as upland trail building to ensure the protection of recreation routes and natural assets in the Wicklow Mountains for many years to come.

What is our ambition?

Our ambition is to equip those working in the outdoor recreation sector in Wicklow with the knowledge, skills and information to improve the delivery and management of outdoor recreation over the next five years.

We will:

- Seek funding for more research and insights.
- Gather quantitative and qualitative data to inform future development and management.
- Undertake environmental monitoring to assess the impact of outdoor recreation on sensitive sites.
- Grow and strengthen our local upland trail building and trail maintenance.

To achieve this, we will embrace and deliver opportunities for learning and development aligned with guidance, standards, and consistent approaches set out at the national level (for example, upland access guidance). We will also explore local opportunities for learning and development that may arise out of local plans and strategies (for example, Biodiversity Action Plan).

Critical to achieving our ambition will be continued collaboration with others, the provision of training events at a national level, undertaking fieldwork to witness best practice in action and networking with other practitioners internal and external to the County.

To improve the knowledge, skills, and expertise of Wicklow’s stakeholders and partners



Fad Saoil Sauna, Greystones, courtesy Fad Saoil Saunas

Expertise actions

	Action	Lead delivery organisation	Timescale	Stakeholders
6.1	Co-ordinate collection and analysis of data from the various visitor counters monitoring usage at outdoor recreation sites across the County	WORC	2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WCC• NPWS• Coillte• WUC• OPW
6.2	Carry out a research and knowledge gap analysis exercise and based on the outcome, undertake research to inform future decision making relating to development and visitor management in Wicklow	WORC	2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder Forum
6.3	Introduce ongoing environmental monitoring approaches at selected sites to build up an evidence base that informs sustainable visitor management approaches	CWP, NPWS	2025 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• WORC
6.4	Roll out at a local level, relevant national training programmes and guidance to stakeholders to strengthen the skills and knowledge base of the local outdoor recreation sector	WSRP, WORC	2026 onwards	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stakeholder Forum• Activity providers• NGB's• Trail Management Organisations (TMO's)• Environmental NGO's• Clubs and communities

Abbreviations

CORC	County Outdoor Recreation Committee
CORP	County Outdoor Recreation Plan
CWP	County Wicklow Partnership
CYPSC	Children and Young People’s Services Committee
DRCD	Department for Rural and Community Development
GIS	Geographic Information System
IFI	Inland Fisheries Ireland
LNT	Leave No Trace
NGBs	National Governing Bodies
NGO	National Government Organisation
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
OPW	Office of Public Works
ORIS	Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme
ORO	Outdoor Recreation Officer
PPN	Public Participation Network
RRO	Rural Recreation Officer
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessment
VEMP	Visitor Experience and Management Plan
WCC	Wicklow County Council
WORC	Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee
WSRP	Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership



Hillwalking in Wicklow Mountains, courtesy Mountaineering Ireland

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