

OUTDOOR
RECREATION
NORTHERN IRELAND

STRATEGIC PLAN

2020-2025

FOREWORD



Developing a strategy in 2020/21 amidst a global pandemic is certainly fraught with challenges, however, the COVID-19 crisis has clearly demonstrated that there has never been a greater need for what we do. The actions we take across the next five years and beyond will be critical in creating a more active and healthy society who appreciate the outdoors.

We have framed our Strategy in response to recent and timely research ‘Outdoor Recreation – People, Nature and Health (2021)’ which in many ways confirms and quantifies many things we already knew – engaging responsibly with the outdoors is good for you, the environment and the economy.

However, it is also clear, we have more to do as the benefits of the outdoors are not being realised equally across society. Nearly 1 in 3 state they do not have greenspace within easy walking distance of their home and there are longstanding issues which cause certain demographic groups to visit the outdoors less regularly than the national average. Inequalities exist for the unemployed, people with no car, those from the least affluent socio-economic groups and those with a disability.

This Strategy sets out our ambition and focus to achieve success. Whilst our directors, staff and volunteers will not be found wanting, ultimate success can only be achieved through partnership working, so I hope you will join us in meeting our challenge.

Dawson Stelfox MBE,
Outdoor Recreation NI Chairperson
1st Irish Man to Summit Everest



WHO WE ARE

We are a not-for-profit organisation who make it easier for people to responsibly enjoy the outdoors.

We combine our skills, experience and passion to engage in all aspects of outdoor recreation.



OUR VISION

‘A more active and healthy society
appreciating the outdoors.’



WHY A NEW STRATEGY?



Source: *Outdoor Recreation: People, Nature and Health (2021)*, *Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland* part funded by DAERA to support the work of the cross-government Strategic Outdoor Recreation Group.

Outdoor recreation plays a vital role in Northern Ireland, bringing wide ranging benefits to society:

Recent research has demonstrated:

- **73%** of outdoor visits were for exercise and health
- **56%** took visits to relax and unwind
- **22 million** outdoor visits in November / December 2020 generated £95 million
- **32%** felt closer to nature
- **32%** stated their children had learnt something new about the natural world

But more work is needed to address barriers and inequalities:

29% do not have greenspace within easy walking distance of their home

Only **50%** of residents of the 10% most deprived areas typically visit the outdoors once a week

The unemployed, people with no car, those with a disability and people in the least affluent socio-economic groups visit the outdoors less regularly than the national average

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

Outdoor recreation can bring many benefits to Northern Ireland, its society and economy – and most importantly, the health and wellbeing of its people. We need to take steps to ensure we increase people’s access to, participation in, and connection with nature.

The following top line targets are required:

- **90%** of the population are within a 5-minute walk of quality green/blue space
- **90%** of the population visit the outdoors at least once a week
- There is an **annual increase** in the % of journeys made by walking/cycling





BUILDING BLOCKS TO SUCCESS

To achieve success, we will focus on delivering the following strategic priorities:

01:

Championing the Outdoors

Aim: There is increased awareness of the benefits that outdoor recreation brings to individuals, communities and Northern Ireland as a whole and an increased focus on the importance of outdoor recreation within policy and practice at both national and local levels.

We will:

- proactively communicate our vision and objectives to key stakeholders to increase awareness of our role, the support we offer and the benefits of outdoor recreation
- champion the need for strategic outdoor recreation research which accurately measures the value and benefits of outdoor recreation
- champion the need for the prominence of outdoor recreation within the Programme for Government and key national and regional strategies, policies and funding programmes
- champion the need for a cross-departmental Walking Strategy / Action Plan which will establish a culture of walking in Northern Ireland
- champion the need for an 'Outdoor Recreation Bill' which will provide opportunities to meet the growing demand for outdoor recreation
- champion the need for all Councils to be mandated and resourced to implement a Community Trail Plan



02:

Delivering Training & Sharing Best Practice

Aim: The outdoor recreation sector is better equipped to plan, deliver, manage and promote outdoor recreation initiatives to a high standard. There is an increasing focus on innovative, sustainable and participant-led approaches to outdoor recreation.

We will:

- deliver an annual training programme which meets the needs of the outdoor recreation sector in Northern Ireland
- develop and update resources and guidelines to inform good practice approaches to the planning, development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation
- communicate key industry insights and learnings via our online 'Outdoor Recreation Hub'
- act as a conduit for key learnings from the industry networks such as Visitor Safety Group and Outdoor Recreation Network
- maximise the learning benefits of engaging with industry counterparts in Great Britain and Ireland.
- invest in staff training to ensure we continue to stay ahead of industry trends



03:

Planning & Developing Quality Experiences

Aim: A wide range of high quality, sustainable and participant-focused outdoor recreation experiences allowing people to connect and engage with nature are in place across Northern Ireland.

We will:

- inform the development of outdoor recreation experiences through the delivery of strategies, masterplans, feasibility studies, scoping studies and trail designs
- ensure innovation and quality is at the fore front of the outdoor recreation experiences we deliver on the ground. As a minimum these will include:
 - community trail networks
 - recreation trails – walking, off-road cycling, mountain biking and water
 - nature / adventure play
 - iconic activity tourism focused visitor experiences
 - holistic outdoor recreation experiences combining products with visitor services in relevant forests and sites



04:

Increasing Awareness

Aim: A consistently high level of accurate information on outdoor recreation is widely available, leading to an increased awareness of outdoor recreation opportunities by both the local population and visitors to Northern Ireland

We will:

- deliver our own high quality innovative websites and marketing initiatives
- work in partnership with others to plan and deliver high quality innovative outdoor recreation focused marketing initiatives

05:

Widening, Increasing and Sustaining Participation

Aim: The number of people participating in outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland continues to rise.

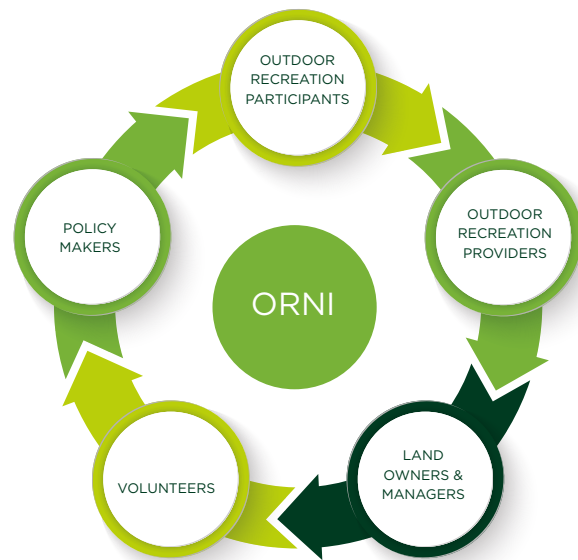
We will:

- champion the need for a new led-walking scheme for Northern Ireland which will encourage insufficiently active people to walk in their local community
- engage with others to develop and support programmes which increase sustained participation in outdoor recreation



MAKING IT HAPPEN

Partnership working is fundamental to ensure the successful delivery of ORNI's strategy. Success will be achieved through working in partnership with a wide range of organisations which have an interest in, or involvement with outdoor recreation, including those:



In recent years, we have transformed from an entirely core funded position to now deliver our strategic not-for-profit role under a number of new arrangements including delivering for Strategic Partners, Consortia, Service Level Agreements, funded programmes and on a project-by-project basis.



MAKING IT HAPPEN

Although our focus will remain in Northern Ireland, we will continue to deliver projects and initiatives for stakeholders across Great Britain and Ireland. We will continue to apply the benefits of the insights and experience gained in these projects to deliver our role in Northern Ireland.

Our dedicated Board will continue to guide our strategic development and provide governance oversight. As Northern Ireland's outdoor recreation specialists our staff team is passionate about collaborating with partners to provide a high-quality service with tailored solutions.

As required, we can draw on the support of a range of multi-disciplinary partners such as trail designers, architects, engineers, ecologists, economists, educators, creatives, graphic / web designers etc.

Our work is underpinned by the support of our committed volunteers who currently conduct audits of outdoor recreation products so they can be confidently promoted to the local population and visitors alike. We will constantly engage with our volunteers to review and increase their role within the organisation.





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Photo courtesy of Ben Wicks, Janko Ferlic and Annie Spratt on Unsplash