



Making Northern Ireland's  
**OUTDOORS  
GREAT**

A Strategic Plan for  
outdoor recreation in  
Northern Ireland 2015 - 2020



**OUTDOOR  
RECREATION**  
NORTHERN IRELAND

# FOREWORD

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Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI)  
Chairperson and 1st Irish Man  
to Summit Everest



Ensuring that outdoor recreation is placed at the heart of society is ORNI's number one priority moving forward.

I recently enjoyed a paper by Dr James Brown, School of Life and Health Sciences, Aston University, who, in addressing the British Science Festival, surprised the audience by offering a 'magic pill' that was able to prevent obesity and diabetes, lower the risk of some cancers, relieve depression and anxiety, increase mobility and reduce the chances of hip fracture by 40 percent. It also improved the ability to think and reason, slowed the progression of Alzheimer's disease, cut arthritic pain by 50 percent, boosted energy levels, reduced fatigue and led to a 23 percent lower risk of dying. The 'pill' was simply walking for 30 minutes a day. Encouraging active outdoor recreation participation for health reasons should not therefore be underestimated.

In addition to supporting 'healthy living', it is recognised that outdoor recreation helps young people's personal and social development, encourages communities to utilise their local outdoor space which in turn stimulates care for and commitment to its upkeep, and through activity tourism contributes to the growth of Northern Ireland's economy.

Harnessing the, as yet untapped, wealth of opportunity potential across Northern Ireland by developing new partnerships with key stakeholders and by progressing new initiatives while remaining focused on those which have been successful in the past, will further contribute to the many positive spin-offs which clearly relate to engaging in outdoor recreation.

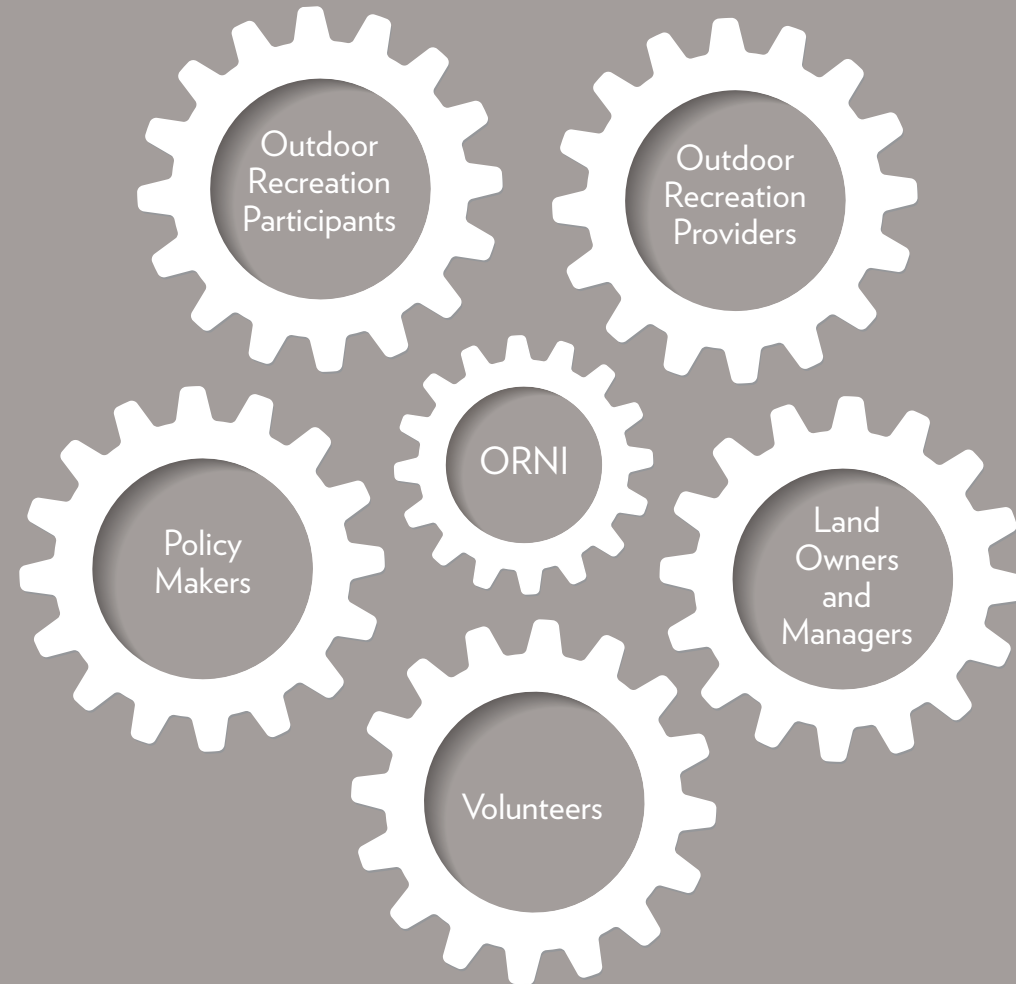
With this in mind, it is key as always that ORNI as a strategic leader identifies its priorities for development within the context of its vision and mission statement for the next five years 2015-2020.

# BACKGROUND

ORNI is a not-for-profit organisation whose role is to develop, manage and promote outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland. This is achieved through working in partnership with a wide range of organisations which have an interest in, or involvement with, outdoor recreation.

This includes those:

- participating in outdoor recreation activities
- providing outdoor recreation opportunities
- who manage or own land on which outdoor recreation takes place
- volunteering in outdoor recreation related activities
- responsible for outdoor recreation policy



CAVE HILL, BELFAST

# INTRODUCTION

This strategic document sets out the overarching framework for the activities of ORNI for the period 2015 - 2020.

It provides focus, setting out the strategic priorities to which ORNI will direct its effort and resources in order to achieve its vision and mission.

VISION

“

Placing outdoor recreation at the heart of society

”

MISSION

“

To create a vibrant outdoor recreation culture, through collaborative initiatives, that inspire action

”

# KEY SUCCESSES

## 2012 - 2015

A look back over the past few years showcases the range of work delivered and the results achieved

**DIVIS RIDGE TRAIL**  
Belfast - 2014



£429,000  
funding secured

36,000  
visitors in year 1

**6kms**  
of multi-use trails developed

**MOURNE MTB PROJECT**  
Rostrevor and Castlewellan - 2013



£1.8 million  
funding secured

75kms  
of mountain biking trails developed

56,000  
visitors in year 1

**TOBAR MHUIRE**  
Crossgar - 2014



£146,147  
funding secured

23,500  
visitors in year 1

**3kms**  
of multi-use trails developed

**ADVENTURE PLAY**  
Mourne Forests - 2015



£77,920  
funding secured

**2**  
high quality interactive play spaces to encourage families to enjoy the forests

**GIANT'S CAUSEWAY COAST SPORTIVE**  
Ballycastle - Annually 2011 - 2014



1137 participants (annual average)

£495,000  
Economic impact over 3 years


**GET OUTDOORS WEEKEND**  
Province-wide - Annually 2013 & 2014



163  
free events recruited

13,536  
participants across the 2 years

**WALKING VOLUNTEER RANGERS**  
Province-wide



175 volunteers recruited who delivered 8658 hours

valued at **£259,740**

**WEBSITES**  
WalkNI.com, OutdoorNI.com, MountainBikeNI.com etc



750,000  
unique visitors per annum

**3.2 million**  
people reached via social media

# KEY HEADLINES

## 2012 - 2015

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland  
can demonstrate tangible results



**£2.617  
MILLION**

secured for projects from  
external funding bodies



**25**

studies completed and 3  
strategic publications published



**£500,000**

direct economic impact generated by events



**23,336**

members of the public took  
part in our organised outdoor  
recreation events

**127kms**

of mountain biking, walking  
and multi-use trails developed



**23,500+**

people participated in key events



**90kms**

of mountain biking, walking  
and multi-use trails designed



**1243**

trained in a wide range of  
outdoor recreation related  
subject matter

**£146,205**

of activity experiences sold  
for outdoor activity providers



**508**

dedicated Volunteers  
assisted us in our work



**£13.85  
MILLION**

equivalent advertising value  
of PR generated for  
outdoor recreation per se

# WHY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

Research shows that outdoor recreation is a key asset to Northern Ireland

Outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland generates:



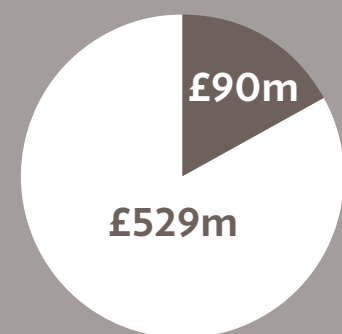
Full Time Jobs

**3537** Outdoor recreation

**3120** Telecommunications

**950** Travel agencies and tour operators

**500** Creative arts and entertainment activities



**Activity Tourism**  
= **17%**  
of total tourism spend

A quick look at our neighbours highlights the clear benefits of outdoor recreation across the UK and Ireland:

## ECONOMY:

- **Wales** - outdoor activity tourism contributes **£481 million per annum** to the economy
- **Republic of Ireland** - overseas visitors engaging in activity tourism are worth **€1.2 billion per annum**
- **Scotland** - nature based tourism is worth **£1.4 billion per annum**
- **England** - 42.4 million adults visit the natural environment generating a total visitor spend of **£21 billion per annum**



## SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING:

*“When playing outdoors children are also more likely to meet other children and improve social skills, an opportunity which doesn’t arise at home. Being outside in nature puts children in touch with their senses and has a restorative effect, also helping them to cope with stress”.*

Liz O’Brien,  
Deputy Head of Social and Economic Research Group  
at the Forestry Commission

91% of the UK public believe that parks and public spaces improve people’s quality of life



## HEALTH & WELL-BEING:

### Scotland

- For every £1 invested in Health Walks, £8 of benefits are generated for society

### Republic of Ireland

- Physical inactivity is estimated to cost the state €150 - €300 per person
- 10% of the population becoming physically active could deliver savings of €67.5 - €135 million per year

*“Thirty minutes of moderate exercise a day can reduce your risk of age-related diseases. It can also reduce your risk of cognitive decline”.*

Dr Carol Holland,  
Centre for Healthy Ageing at Aston University



## VOLUNTEERING:

Social return on investment research shows that £1 invested in environmental volunteering can lead to a return of up to £4



# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

In order to ensure a focus to ORNI's work, the following key priorities will be delivered



## 1

### CHAMPIONING THE OUTDOORS

ORNI will proactively engage with the Northern Ireland Executive, MLAs, Departmental Committees, Local Authorities, Strategic Partners and other relevant influential stakeholders to achieve recognition of the significant role that outdoor recreation plays in contributing to health and well-being, social inclusion, community cohesion, volunteering, environmental protection and access, rural regeneration and economic development and the benefits it brings to individuals, communities and Northern Ireland's society as a whole.

#### ORNI will have succeeded if:

- There is improved recognition of how outdoor recreation can deliver the key objectives of the Programme for Government and the strategies of Departmental and arm's length bodies
- Future policies, strategies and funding programmes reflect the importance of outdoor recreation

## 2

### DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS AND PROMOTING BEST PRACTICE

ORNI will facilitate the development of partnerships, exchange of information, dissemination of best practice and give support in the widest sense to all organisations that have a direct or indirect involvement in the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland.

#### ORNI will have succeeded if there are:

- Improved partnership working among all bodies that have a direct or indirect involvement in the development, management and marketing of outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland, resulting in an increase in, and improved delivery of, sustainable outdoor recreation based programmes
- Improved co-ordination and dissemination of good practice through toolkits, seminars and training programmes to a wide range of organisations including local authorities and the private sector leading to more innovative approaches in the development, management and promotion of outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland



# 3

## IMPROVING THE NATION'S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

ORNI will improve the nation's health and well-being by creating opportunities to widen, increase and sustain the number of local people actively participating in outdoor recreation activities across Northern Ireland.

### ORNI will have succeeded if:

- There is increased confidence and skills in local community groups to deliver outdoor recreation opportunities within their local community
- The number of local people participating in outdoor recreation continues to increase
- There is a greater diversity in the people taking part in outdoor recreation activities
- There are thriving and sustainable communities centred around outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland

# 4

## EMPOWERING VOLUNTEERS

ORNI will provide a wide range of opportunities to volunteer in outdoor recreation related activities across Northern Ireland.

### ORNI will have succeeded if:

- There is enhanced protection, care and management of the outdoor recreation resource across Northern Ireland
- Outdoor recreation products can be confidently marketed to the local population and visitors alike
- The number of volunteers continue to increase and those already participating in the programme are increasingly satisfied with being part of the programme



# 5

## DELIVERING AND MANAGING QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION PRODUCTS

ORNI, through partnership working, will deliver on the ground a suite of sustainable outdoor recreation products, geographically spread across Northern Ireland, which are effectively managed.

**ORNI will have succeeded if there are:**

- Increased opportunities for outdoor recreation through activities such as walking, mountain biking, cycling and canoeing across Northern Ireland and increased levels of participation and user satisfaction in these products by both the local population and visitors. Specific initiatives will include:
  - the development and implementation of a new walking strategy for Northern Ireland
  - the delivery of key objectives within the Mountain Bike Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014 – 2024
  - the delivery of community trail networks across Northern Ireland
- Increased nature/adventure play provision throughout Northern Ireland
- Increased opportunities for adventure type recreation through the development of new facilities
- Increased range of facilities available and accessible to a wider range of people
- Increased opportunities for a 'holistic outdoor recreation experience' in a number of areas e.g. Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, sites and forests throughout Northern Ireland through the development of products and visitor services etc.

# 6

## INCREASING AWARENESS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

ORNI will increase the awareness of, participation in, and the economic benefit of outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland by both the local population and visitors through the employing innovative marketing techniques.

**ORNI will have succeeded if:**

- A consistently high level of accurate information on walking, mountain biking, adventure activities, canoeing and cycling is available to consumers at all times therefore leading to increased awareness of the opportunities to participate in these activities across Northern Ireland by both the local population and visitors
- The economic value of outdoor recreation to Northern Ireland increases leading to growth and diversification in the economy and that there is improved recognition and understanding that outdoor recreation is an asset to the economy

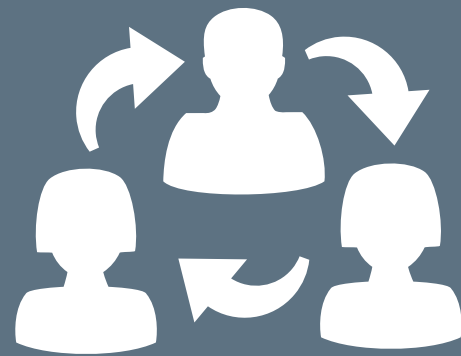


# MAKING IT HAPPEN

ORNI, formerly the Countryside Access and Activities Network, was established in 1999 by SportNI and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in response to the publication of Northern Ireland's first Countryside Recreation Strategy in 1998. It has since delivered and indeed exceeded the recommendations of this Strategy through a succession of three, three year Operational Plans.

Originally ORNI's work was largely directed by its four 'core funders' namely; SportNI, NIEA, Tourism Northern Ireland and Inland Waterways Branch of the Department of Culture Arts and Leisure (DCAL), these organisations funding its day to day running and staff costs.

With significant cuts in government funding, this is no longer the case, with ORNI now delivering its strategic not-for-profit role under a number of new arrangements including Strategic Partners, Service Level Agreements, Consortiums and on a project by project basis.



## STRATEGIC PARTNERS

ORNI has been identified by a number of government departments as a key strategic partner to help deliver their outdoor recreation related objectives.

### SPORT NI

As one of the organisations that established ORNI, Sport NI continues to recognise ORNI as a strategic partner to deliver on key objectives of Sport Matters: The Northern Ireland Strategy for Sport and Physical Recreation, 2009 - 2019 and Our Great Outdoors: The Outdoor Recreation Action Plan for Northern Ireland 2013 - 2020.

#### Key areas of focus are:

- supporting partnerships
- sharing best practice
- developing local mountain biking trails and community trail networks
- increasing opportunities to volunteer
- employing innovative approaches to provide information on outdoor recreation opportunities, particularly to disadvantaged groups

### NI ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

Although Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) no longer core funds ORNI, ORNI has received funding through NIEA's competitive Natural Environment Fund grant programme.

#### Key areas of focus are:

- supporting partnerships
- sharing best practice
- raising environmental awareness
- supporting the Ulster Way and long-distance walking trails using volunteers
- developing community trail networks
- promoting local recreation opportunities across Northern Ireland particularly for walking and cycling

### INLAND WATERWAYS BRANCH OF DCAL

The Inland Waterways Branch of DCAL has identified ORNI as a strategic partner to help it increase outdoor recreation participation particularly in disadvantaged communities.

#### Key areas of focus are:

- supporting partnerships
- sharing best practice
- developing community trail networks
- increasing opportunities to volunteer
- using innovative approaches to provide information on local outdoor recreation opportunities, particularly Northern Ireland's Canoe Trails

### TOURISM NI

Tourism NI provides funding to ORNI through its Strategic Partnership Grant Scheme to assist in delivering its Unique Outdoors Experiential Pillar.

#### Key areas of focus are:

- recruiting, curating and providing accurate and up to date information for DiscoverNorthernIreland.com
- creating engaging content for web and social media
- delivering journalist familiarisation trips
- raising awareness of its Welcome Schemes to industry stakeholders

## SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

ORNI is proactively engaging with Northern Ireland's new super councils to establish Service Level Agreements to target our dedicated resources and expertise to assist council areas in achieving their outdoor recreation potential. ORNI currently has Service Level agreements in place with:

- Mid Ulster District Council
- Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
- Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council

Current delivery across the Service Level Agreements includes:

- Assessment of the recreation and tourism potential of forests
- Development of specific products including nature / adventure play, walk, cycle, multi-use and mountain bike trails
- Development of community based outdoor recreation infrastructure e.g. community path networks
- Recreational management of specific forests

## CONSORTIUMS

ORNI will continue to identify opportunities where the establishment and facilitation of a consortium is the most viable and cost-effective delivery approach for developing, managing and marketing specific projects.

ORNI currently delivers the MountainBikeNI consortium which is a partnership between a range of local councils with the aim to increase local participation in mountain biking and to drive activity tourism, by showcasing Northern Ireland as a 'must-visit' mountain bike destination.

## PROJECT BY PROJECT

ORNI will continue to seek partnerships with the public, private and voluntary / community sector on a project by project basis, applying for work which is relevant to it delivering its key objectives.

Case studies and a complete list of its successful projects are available at [OutdoorRecreationNI.com](http://OutdoorRecreationNI.com)





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