

OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

FOR PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS IN IRELAND 2017-2021

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



MARCH 2017

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OUTDOOR RECREATION - A VALUABLE NATIONAL ASSET

The Outdoor Recreation Plan (ORP) for public lands and waters sets out a strategy to revolutionise the provision of outdoor recreation facilities and services on public-owned land and waterways over the next five years. This plan delivers world-class outdoor recreation infrastructure and services in Ireland, harnessing the latent potential of resources the State already owns, building upon an existing recreational resource, which is worth in excess of €1.5 billion per year to the national economy.

UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY BY WORKING TOGETHER

Collectively, Ireland's State bodies own 15% of total land area in the country, with more than 1,000 km of inland waterways, over 100,000 ha. of fishing rights on inland fisheries, 3,000 km of waymarked trails for walking and cycling and more than half a million hectares of open-access lands. Managed effectively, outdoor recreation on publicly owned lands and waterways has the potential to deliver significant tangible economic, social, health and wellbeing benefits to the Irish people for generations.

The ORP consolidates the needs of the partner organisations, public demand for outdoor recreation facilities and access, and key government policy goals. The result is an integrated plan to transform Ireland's publicly owned outdoor recreation infrastructure over the next 5 years and will initially add a further €142 million of economic activity per year to the State on foot of development. As public lands are at the core of Ireland's recreation resource, this direct return represents only a fraction of the overall stimulus to the economy and the public good.

INVESTMENT IN RECREATION UNDER ORP

An effective plan demands a consistent and coordinated approach across organisations whose current remit and approach to outdoor recreation vary considerably. Recreation is the core function of Waterways Ireland, a large element of the responsibilities of Inland Fisheries Ireland, but only an ancillary function of Coillte, Bord na Móna and the NPWS. While recreational infrastructure is provided freely for visitors to enjoy, it comes at a significant cost to the State landowners. Sustaining and improving this into the future requires ongoing investment in order to unlock the latent economic potential of these assets.

Under ORP, a total investment by Government of €165 million over the coming 5 years is needed in order to manage, maintain, upgrade and expand the recreation assets on public lands. This would be achieved through a coherent programme of investment in recreational infrastructure, which will yield cumulative growth over time and serve as a very valuable legacy for future generations.



WHY INVEST IN OUTDOOR RECREATION?

1. Economic stimulation: local, regional and national

The investment proposed under the ORP will increase the economic contribution of the outdoor recreation by at least €142 million per year. Indeed, there is prospect of further growth as more Irish users and international visitors become aware of the quality recreational product available in Ireland. This growth will be supported by a specific investment of over €5 million in coordinated delivery of promotion, infrastructure management and training.

In addition, construction related works associated with the investment could generate a further €300 million to the economy, once the additional spend on goods and services over the lifetime of the works are taken into account, for example, construction materials, machinery and equipment.

The combined impact of the public agencies' investment will provide the critical mass needed for the development of a recreation based industry, stimulating innovation and entrepreneurship in services such as accommodation, cafes and restaurants, bike hire, equipment sales and angling services. This will help to compensate and reverse the decline in local shops and services experienced in many rural towns and villages. The transformation of the local economy that has been achieved through the 290,000 users of the Great Western Greenway in County Mayo demonstrates what can be achieved with foresight and ambitious investment for rural communities and regional development.

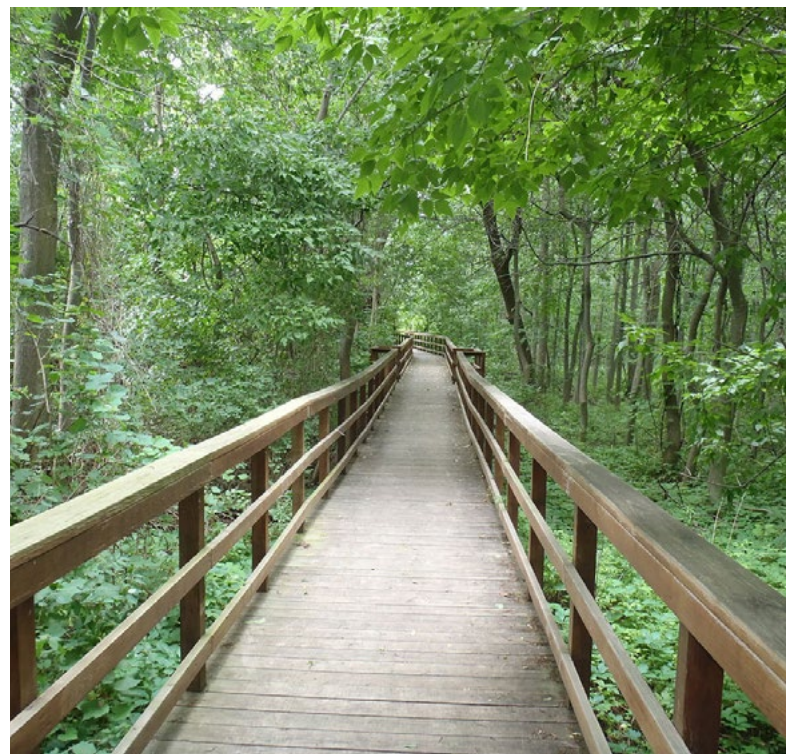
2. Job creation, skills development and labour market

Effective and sustainable management of our outdoor recreation infrastructure will create employment opportunities. Up to 2,500 jobs will be created in the tourism related-sector as a result of investment under ORP, based on Fáilte Ireland's estimate which determines that every €1 million worth of tourism expenditure supports 29 tourism jobs. A further 400 construction related jobs will be created during the construction phase, based on an estimate of 12 job years per €1 million of investment. In addition, 100 jobs will be created to manage the new trails, facilities, and centres. The investment will provide for, and develop, new skills and training.

3. The Public Good: Health and Well-being

The use of public lands, trails and facilities, is free, but outdoor recreation provides very considerable benefits in terms of health and to well-being generally. In terms of health, the ORP will provide substantial benefits to physical and mental health as well as savings on healthcare expenditure. Based on scenarios of the reduced mortality associated with insufficient physical exercise, potential benefits of €48 million per year could be achieved through the reduction of obesity and related illnesses. Benefits would also result from reductions in illnesses associated with inactivity providing potential savings on public healthcare costs of at least €84 million per year on the basis of international estimates.

In addition to the direct health benefits, user quality of life is enhanced in a variety of ways by the experience of being outdoors. The utility value or economic value of 'well-being', associated with access to the existing public landowning is estimated to be at least €500 million per year. Indeed, this amount represents just a portion of the real benefits people realise from public lands and waterways. These benefits apply particularly to places used by local people, for example forests or canals, and to familiar or iconic landscapes and destinations in Ireland. The ORP will contribute to the overall well-being of users and will strengthen the economic value attributed to it.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recreational infrastructure provided by the State landowners underpins Ireland’s tourism industry. In 2014, 1.5 million overseas visitors engaged in outdoor activities in Ireland, and this market was worth in excess of €900 million. As demand for outdoor recreation continues its rapid growth, the quality of outdoor recreation services and facilities is becoming a key driver in destination selection by overseas visitors. Development of an outdoor recreational asset which is of a national scale will attract large scale international visitors to Ireland. The proposition that Ireland can provide a ‘scalable’ product will help differentiate Ireland as a tourism destination. Such a product can only be developed by all the public land owners working in collaboration with one another. It is certainly the case that the impact of the sum of all the parts of the public sector working together will be much greater than all the relevant public sector bodies working in isolation. The tourism sector is labour intensive and tourism expenditure in retail and accommodation will support additional jobs along with the purchase of inputs and services.

5. Conservation

The increased popularity of outdoor recreation may pose a threat to some of Ireland’s most sensitive habitats, but managing that demand effectively will mitigate such risk. The ORP will bring significantly more people into contact with the natural environment, creating opportunities for environmental education, raising awareness of our unique natural heritage and the duty for its continued protection and enhancement.

6. Growing the Asset

The ORP enables a more integrated cross-agency approach to marketing and publicity, where the collective resource offers a much broader and more accessible product. The provision of facilities for walking, angling, boating and mountain biking that are of the highest international standard will inform a positive perception of public policy and increase the profile of Ireland as an activity destination.

The essence of the ORP is the development of an extensive network that will link forests, rivers, lakes, canals, Blueways, national parks and nature reserves across the entire country, creating a unique economic stimulus for rural and regional development, while simultaneously, providing major public good benefits

in terms of health, well-being, environment, heritage and conservation. It will also underpin the country’s reputation for outdoor activity, allowing Ireland to compete with other destinations and attract high-profile international outdoor recreation events.

The outlay in infrastructure is compensated by visitor spending and employment which is projected to result in taxation returns to the exchequer of up to €32 million per year. The investment of €165 million is consequently cost-neutral to the Exchequer within 6 years of the conclusion of the ORP, while significantly expanding Ireland’s recreation asset base. Importantly, as the land is owned and managed on behalf of the Irish public, the State’s investment in further developing this resource is fully protected. In terms of the relative costs and benefits, the positive economic, social, and geographic impact of investment in recreational infrastructure is one of the most astute investments in Ireland’s future.



OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN FOR PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS

EXISTING VALUE



IRELAND'S STATE BODIES OWN

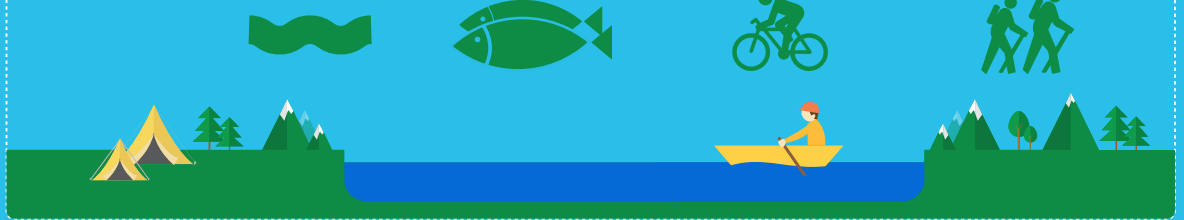


1,000km
INLAND WATERWAYS

100,000ha
FISHING RIGHTS

3,000km
WAYMARKED TRAILS FOR WALKING AND CYCLING

500,000ha
OF OPEN-ACCESS LANDS



INVESTMENT UNDER ORP

Under ORP, a total investment by Government of €165 million over the coming 5 years is needed in order to manage, maintain, upgrade and expand the recreation assets on public lands.

€165M

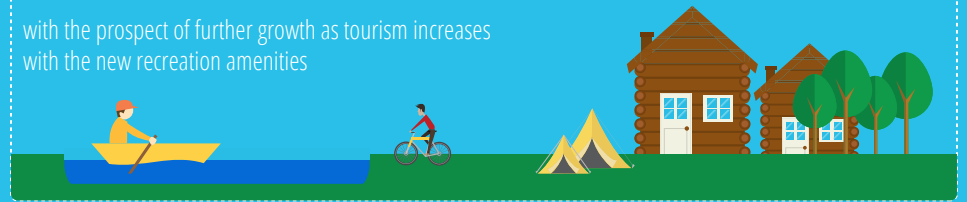


WHY INVEST IN OUTDOOR RECREATION?

The economic value of the collective recreational resource to the national economy is calculated at

€142M PER YEAR

with the prospect of further growth as tourism increases with the new recreation amenities



JOB CREATION

2,500

TOURISM JOBS CREATED

400

CONSTRUCTION JOBS



jobs will be created in the tourism related-sector as a result of investment under ORP

WELL-BEING VALUE

€500M

PER YEAR

ORP will contribute to the overall well-being of users and will strengthen the economic value attributed to it

HEALTH BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

POTENTIAL SAVING OF

€132M = €48M + €84M

PER ANNUM

PER YEAR

PER YEAR

arising from increased public participation in outdoor activities

can be achieved through the reduction of obesity and related illnesses, and reduced mortality scenarios

potential savings on public healthcare costs

TOURISM 2014

1.5M

OVERSEAS VISITORS



engaged in outdoor activities in Ireland, and this market was worth in excess of **€900 million**.

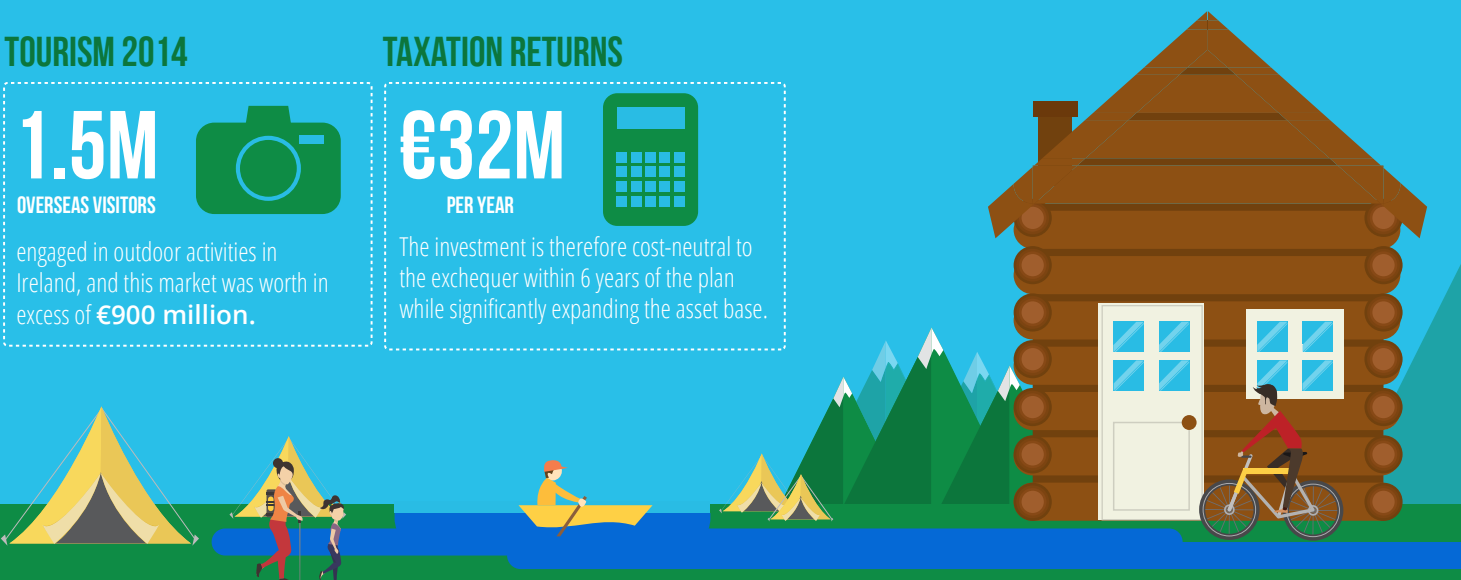
TAXATION RETURNS

€32M

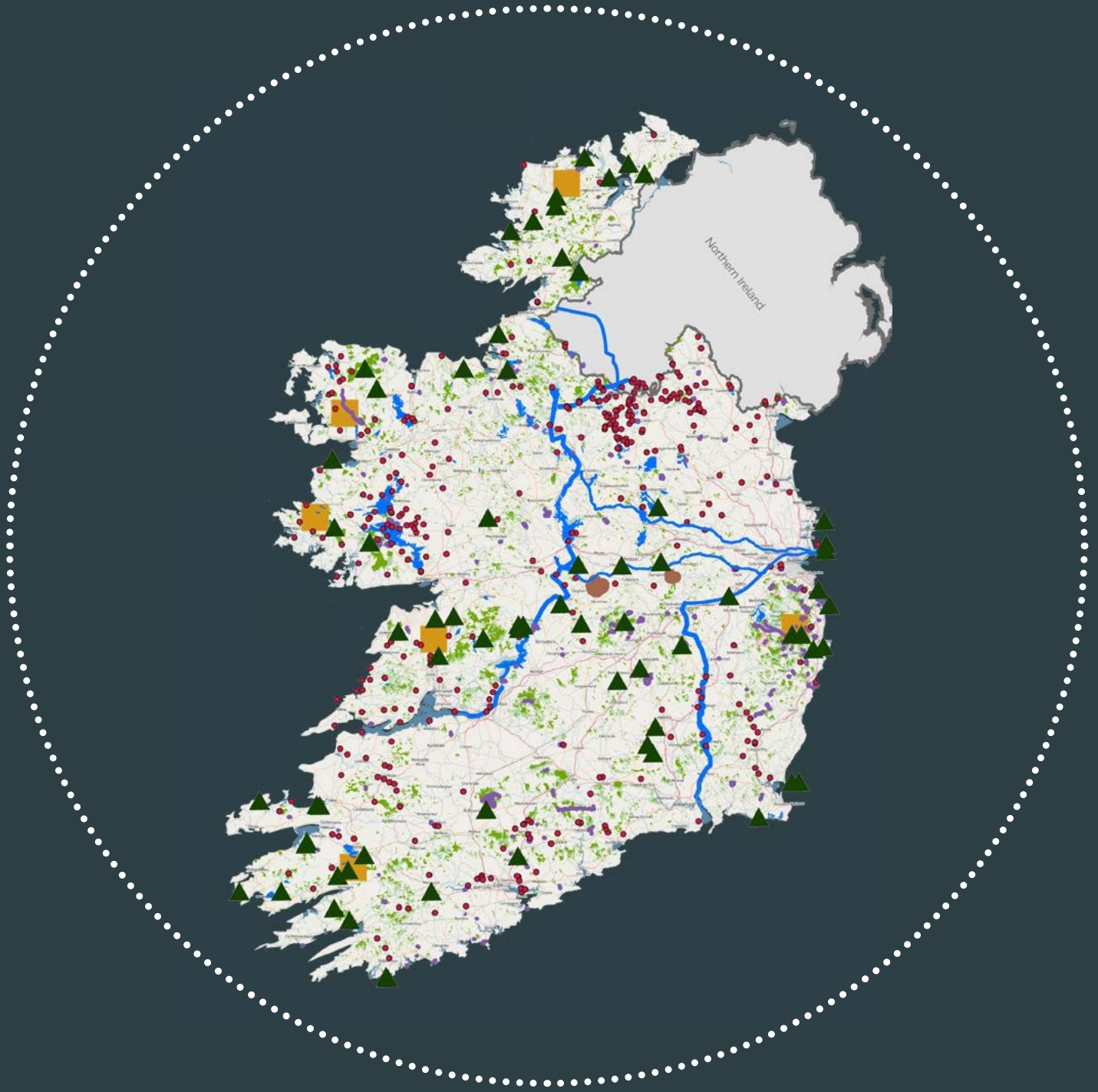
PER YEAR



The investment is therefore cost-neutral to the exchequer within 6 years of the plan while significantly expanding the asset base.



IRELAND RECREATION



LEGEND

- ▲ Nature Reserves
- Fisheries
- National Parks
- STATE LAKES
- Coillte Trails
- Bord Na Mona
- Waterways Ireland
- Coillte Owned Lands

Figure 1.1 Recreational facilities for all the ORP State bodies

1.0

BACKGROUND

Public bodies in Ireland hold an extensive land and water resource. Apart from Waterways Ireland, most of these public bodies do not have a primary remit to provide recreation, but rather their remits range from commercial forest management to conservation and energy production. These bodies increasingly recognise their role in delivering a wide range of public goods that will support a broad range of other public policies. The public bodies are also experiencing increasing demand for the facilitation or provision of recreational access or infrastructure on their lands and waters.

There is growing recognition of the value of outdoor recreation in underpinning health and wellbeing – easily accessible and well developed recreation infrastructure is important in supporting the social fabric of society. Similarly, recreation facilities are a key component in supporting the tourism sector with many such developments bringing much needed economic activity into often rural and remote areas.

The development of public lands and waters for recreation is also a source of much needed employment, while developments within the recreation sector have offered new skills and employment opportunities for an underutilised labour market.

Public bodies with land ownerships are estimated to control some 15% of lands in Ireland as well as regulating navigation on over 1,000km of inland waterways and the management of recreational fisheries on other watercourses.

These public bodies already provide a significant recreation resource including walking/hiking, cycling, multi-use and equestrian trails; permanent orienteering courses; camping and backpacking opportunities; nature watching, angling, boating and kayaking infrastructure and a wide range of other sports, events and community facilities.

This resource already plays a significant role in Ireland's tourism industry¹, and has the potential for further labour market activation, not only in the tourism sector but in the recreation provision, management and construction sectors. Currently it contributes over €1.5 billion to the local and national economy.

At present the approach to the provision of outdoor recreation on public lands and waters varies depending on the organisation concerned. In some cases bodies have a statutory remit to provide recreation which allows them to make special provision but most have a limited or no legal remit and consequently there can often be limited resources for outdoor recreation. Even for those bodies without a strong recreation remit, the attractions of public lands and waters are so strong that they need, at a minimum, resources to manage these recreation activities as part of their 'licence to operate'.

The economic and social benefits to be gained through investment in recreation are well understood across the developed world.

A coordinated approach to managing and developing recreation on Public lands and waters in Ireland can make an important contribution to a range of public policies at a national, regional and local level.



¹Research undertaken by Coillte, Inland Fisheries Ireland, Waterways Ireland, National Trails Office and Fáilte Ireland.

2.0 THE COMPELLING CASE FOR PROVIDING COUNTRYSIDE RECREATION ON PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS

There is increasing awareness of the values that public lands can deliver, beyond the marketable services such as fuel, timber, water collection, electricity generation etc. Of these ecosystem services, recreation is probably the most versatile and easily captured and can provide a wide range of benefits when delivered in a well-resourced and professional manner. The value of recreation in the context of this plan ranges from the economic activity it generates in local (often rural) communities through supporting tourism, to the health and well-being of users, to opportunities for labour activation, provision of green infrastructure and skills and education.

There is a strong case to be made that investment in outdoor recreation on the public lands can deliver many benefits across a range of government objectives and could, if implemented, represent real value for money.

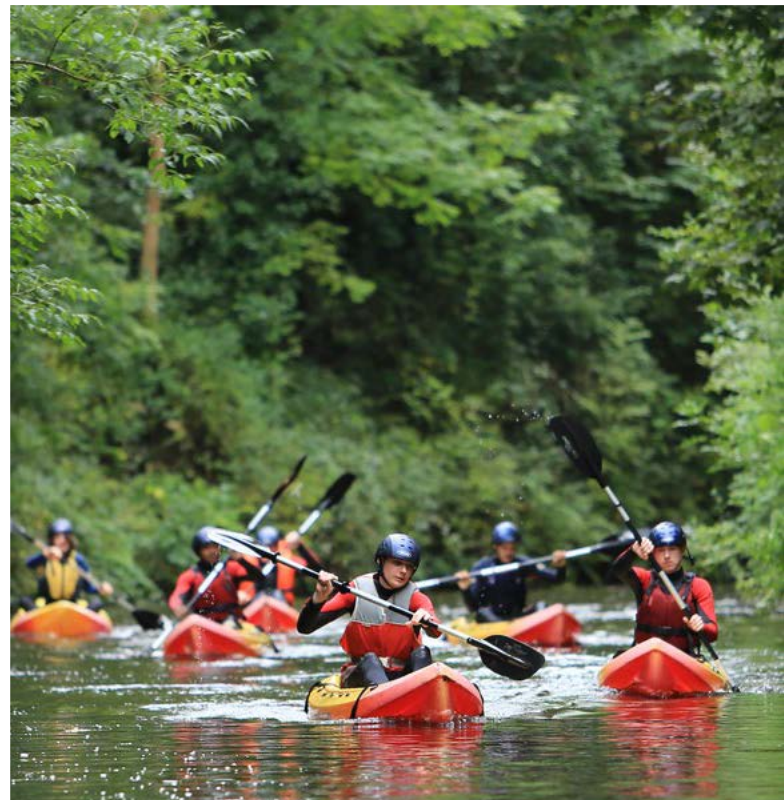
2.1. THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Countryside recreation infrastructure and services make an important contribution to the national, regional and local economy in Ireland. The economic contribution of outdoor recreation has been measured at €1.5 billion to the national economy.

In research commissioned by Waterways Ireland in November 2014, it was found that the sector contributed some €80 million² to the local and national economy. The average spend of a boater was almost €5,500 per annum, taking 15 trips per annum of approx. 3 days each with an additional 3 guests on each trip. The number of boating days per year was found to be 630,000.

In 2015, Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI) conducted an economic study which revealed that angling and angling tourism generated a dividend in the region of €836 million³ within the Irish economy in 2014. Recreational angling was also found to directly support 11,350 existing Irish jobs, many of which are located in the most peripheral and rural parts of the Irish countryside and along our coastline. The study also found that over 446,000 people participated in recreational angling in Ireland in 2014.

In 2005⁴ The Irish Sports Council and Coillte carried out a major economic assessment of the value of the use of trails and forest recreation sites. The study demonstrated that people using Irish trails spent some €307 million on food, drink, accommodation and (walking / cycling) equipment for the trail with much of this expenditure taking place within rural areas and communities. The direct economic activity generated in rural communities from recreation in state owned forests was estimated to be €268 million with a further €97 million worth of Public Goods accruing to those that used the forests for recreation. The economic benefit to the users of the national trails system was valued at €95 million, while around one third of these people surveyed indicated they walked for health reasons.



The direct economic activity generated in rural communities from recreation in state-owned land is estimated to be €1.5 billion per annum

²Waterways Ireland Economic Contribution of Private Boat Owners 2014

³Inland Fisheries Ireland, National Strategy for Angling Development, 2015

⁴The Fitzpatrick Report The economic value of trails and forest recreation in Ireland 2005

2.2. RECREATION SUPPORTING RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2014, the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) identified rural recreation and tourism as areas with significant potential to support the economic development of rural areas. CEDRA Consultations indicated that tourism in rural areas has had limited benefit from recent growth in the sector. This is largely due to rural areas being viewed as somewhat secondary 'sight-seeing territory' as tourists move between the established attractions, rather than as substantive tourism and recreation resources in their own right. Overall CEDRA concluded that there was little doubt that rural recreation initiatives have huge potential to contribute to the economic development of rural areas however in order to realise this potential research, innovation and a more integrated and cross sectoral approach to support is required. The Commission made 3 specific recommendations regarding proposed support for tourism and recreation in rural areas.

Recommendation 26:

The Commission recommends the preparation of a national plan for the development of tourism in rural areas as a distinct part of the national tourism planning process. This plan should identify a clear strategy for an innovative approach to the promotion and product development of tourism in rural areas. It should be informed by research and provide for on-going linkages between research and innovation in tourism.

Recommendation 27:

The Commission recommends that national State owned infrastructure that can support national, regional and local tourism initiatives should be prioritised for development. The Commission believes that this is essential to build on the success of initiatives such as the Great Western Greenway in Mayo, and the O'Sullivan Beara Way from West Cork to Leitrim.

Recommendation 28:

The Commission recommends that Local and Regional Tourism Destinations to complement National Destinations should be developed through a multi sectoral approach. This should be complemented by a destination management and marketing initiative.

CASE STUDY – RECREATION SUPPORTING RURAL TOURISM AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

In 2006 Coillte, Cork and Limerick County Councils and the Local Development Company developed a mountain bike trail centre in the Ballyhoura Mountains on the Cork/Limerick border with support from the National Development Plan at a capital cost of 1.2million.

This trail network now attracts over 35,000 visitors annually with an estimated average spend per visitor in the local community of €48.80. This equates to over €1.7million of tourism related economic activity generated every year for accommodation providers, pubs, shops, bike hire companies, guides and others in this rural community.

2.3. CREATING EMPLOYMENT AND DEVELOPING SKILLS THROUGH DELIVERY

The proper and sustainable management of our recreation infrastructure has by its nature the potential to create real job opportunities, the majority of which will be in rural communities. Jobs in this sector also have the capacity to offer new or increased skills in areas such as specialist trail construction techniques to those previously involved in the construction sector.

The management and improvement of the recreation infrastructure on public lands and waters as outlined in this document will require a considerable input of manpower much of which requires new skills, and which cannot be substituted by machinery. Where contractors are undertaking the work on public lands and waters there is also an increase in VAT and excise duties on fuels etc. used in the work.

The public bodies experience to date demonstrates that where specialist trail contractors have been established and trained in trail construction that these skills are being used to secure other work, sometimes abroad, for example in the UK market.

A more structured and resourced approach to providing outdoor recreation and other public goods on public lands and waters will support the achievement of many strategic objectives across a range of government policy areas.

2.4. OUTDOOR RECREATION UNDERPINS RURAL TOURISM

The provision of countryside recreation infrastructure underpins a significant proportion of expenditure by holidaymakers in Ireland. In 2014, 1.5 million overseas visitors engaged in hiking, cycling and angling during their visit and spent €900 million while here. These were high value overseas tourists generating spend levels 40% higher than the average visitor (Fáilte Ireland Tourism Facts, September 2016). The state landowners provide and manage the majority of the facilities used by these visitors – all of which are provided free-of-charge to these visitors.

In 2015, 23% of people holidaying at home visited a national/forest park with similar proportions taking part in walking, hiking and water sports.

2.5 RECREATION DELIVERING HEALTH AND WELL BEING

‘Healthy Ireland’ a Framework for improved health and wellbeing 2013-2025 is a new national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the country over the coming generation. It reflects the international experience of a new approach to public health with a considerable emphasis on prevention. Importantly, it provides for new arrangements to ensure effective co-operation between the health sector and other areas of Government and public services, inter alia recreation and sport, education and the environment.

Public bodies that manage public lands and waters and provide opportunities for outdoor recreation could enhance the delivery of opportunities and programmes under the goals of

- Increasing the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life;
- Reducing health inequalities; and
- Providing opportunities for healthy outdoor recreation, close to people and in all parts of the country.

Along with the obvious physical benefits of walking, hiking, running, orienteering, paddling etc. that accrue to outdoor recreation users there is a growing body of work that indicates that interaction with the outdoors (in whatever form people engage with the outdoors)

CASE STUDY - RECREATION DEVELOPMENTS PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT AND DEVELOPING SKILLS

The Great Western Greenway was developed by Mayo County Council in partnership with Fáilte Ireland and in its fourth year of operation attracted some 300,000 visitors. In its first year of operation and with limited marketing intervention the Greenway attracted some 80,000 visitors and more importantly supported 38 full time equivalent jobs and sustained a further 56 jobs.

contributes significantly to their psychological and general mental well-being. The Countryside Recreation Network (UK and Ireland) has produced a valuable synopsis of these benefits – *Public Health and Well Being The Transformative Power of Outdoor Recreation* - which clearly sets out the potential of public lands to play a part in the health agenda of the country.

Similarly in the US, a programme called RxOutdoors⁵ is prescribing outdoor recreation programmes to improve health outcomes for children.



⁵See <http://www.massgeneral.org/children/about/pressrelease.aspx?id=1621>

Public lands and waters have their part to play in achieving public health policy goals and in some areas represent a key resource to build on.

In Ireland, a pilot project was conducted in 2014 by Coillte and the HSE (Wicklow Mental Health Services) to evaluate the benefits of regular outdoor forest based recreation on health outcomes of prescribed patients. The results were described as the “single biggest intervention in mental health services in 20 years”. A UK study of health and well-being benefits of angling have stated that angling⁶ makes a distinctive contribution to health and well-being in three ways:

- i. It incorporates a range of physical activity levels and encourages activity amongst the inactive, those recovering from illness and older age groups who may not participate in other sports.
- ii. It incorporates therapeutic engagement and contact with ‘blue-green spaces’, and as a consequence helps maintain positive mental health, provides stress relief and can support programmes for people experiencing mental illness.
- iii. It provides a rich social world that facilitates the relationship building, connection and participation in social life essential to securing well-being and active ageing.

The Irish Sports Monitor series from 2007-2009 has identified that people who live in isolated areas have a tendency to be less active compared to those who live in urban areas. This would indicate that accessibility to well-maintained outdoor recreation facilities is a key factor. In Ireland, it is evident that the provision of well-maintained and easily accessible recreation facilities on the public lands and waters has increased the participation in outdoor recreation.

2.6. ACTIVATING THE LABOUR MARKET

Significant opportunities exist to activate labour markets in the delivery of recreation infrastructure and services on public lands and waters if a partnership approach is adopted between public landowners, waterway managers and other state agencies with a role in this area. The development of outdoor recreation infrastructure is often labour intensive, work is often in rural communities and experience shows that this can have a positive impact that lasts for many years.

For example, in 1930s America the US government put almost six million people to work in the Civilian Conservation Corps developing state and national parks, scenic trails, and delivering forest and soil erosion programmes etc. Much of the infrastructure developed during this period is still in use today and is highly valued. It forms the back bone of the US outdoor recreation infrastructure contributing to health and well-being of the public and is a major contributor to national tourism.

CASE STUDY-RECREATION DEVELOPMENTS DEVELOPING SKILLS

When Coillte began developing mountain bike trails on its land in 2006 there were no Irish firms who could deliver the specialist trail construction required. Coillte worked with several new contractors to develop their skills in this area. One such firm, a former building contractor, has used this opportunity to gain new skills and has now moved into this sector with the skills acquired. It has won contracts to build trails in the UK against specialist UK based trail construction firms.

This firm was commissioned to build a small scale Mountain Bike Trail for the Dublin Mountains Partnership which provided four months’ work for a team of four staff – real jobs delivering infrastructure – demonstrating that investment in recreation infrastructure can have a positive impact on real job creation.

The benefits from allocating people from the current live register to work on recreation infrastructure are obvious. Where employment moves from labour activation schemes to “normal” employment there is a reduction in social protection payments but importantly an increase in personal PAYE, PRSI and USC from those involved in returning to work. A programme to deliver infrastructure maintenance and development could, if properly constructed, offer real and productive work to many people in rural communities throughout Ireland and establish a foundation for world class recreation infrastructure for many years to come.

The economic study underpinning the values within this plan estimates that the plan will generate 2,500 additional tourism related jobs and 400 construction jobs during its lifetime.

⁶ From Substance 2012 (UK) report, see http://www.resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/sites/resources.anglingresearch.org.uk/files/Substance_AnglingReport_Section2_Well-Being.pdf

Much of the infrastructure developed by the US Civilian Conservation Corps in the depression era is still in use today. It continues to make a significant contribution to the economy and to outdoor recreation and tourism across the United States.

2.7. CONSERVATION - PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Developing and maintaining infrastructure and services play a part in encouraging people to value green infrastructure and protect the environment through closer contact and understanding of the natural world.

In relation to fisheries, anglers and angling clubs play a key role in the conservation and protection of river catchments throughout Ireland. Inland Fisheries Ireland actively engages with angling clubs to ensure that habitat rehabilitation and development works are carried out to the highest standards providing a benefit to the wildlife of the entire river corridor as well as the volunteer anglers involved.

The increase in the recreation use of the outdoors (and the increase in activity tourism) over the last ten years is, in places, having a significant impact on upland and other sensitive environments. This can result in habitat loss, destruction of important natural and cultural features and a general degradation of the natural environment which also impacts on the recreation experience.

With design and construction the impact of recreational users can be almost eliminated or limited to a trail corridor providing the recreation user with an enhanced recreation experience while protecting valuable features and habitats. Work undertaken by a number of State Bodies clearly demonstrates that, where used, well designed trails are a valuable tool in environmental protection while enhancing the recreation experience.

2.8. OUTDOOR RECREATION SUPPORTING EDUCATION

There is increasing evidence internationally that engagement with the outdoors at a young age can have a positive impact on educational outcomes later on in young adult life. Enhanced sociability, increased problem solving ability and an increased understanding of the value of the natural world are all thought to be valuable outcomes from activities (even the most informal) undertaken out of doors. In northern European countries forest schools programmes are an integral part of the education programme. Outdoor recreation infrastructure such as permanent orienteering courses can provide a valuable support to class based curriculum such as maths, geography and science.

CASE STUDY - ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION THROUGH RECREATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Diamond Hill in Connemara National Park is a popular route with many visitors to the park. However in the early 2000s the pressure of usage was causing damage to important habitats in the park.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service responded to both the increase in visitor demands and the need to reconcile these with conservation by the construction of a new sustainable trail involving stone pitching, bog bridges and other trail techniques. This has significantly reduced the levels of damage to an important habitat without impacting on visitor enjoyment and has in fact become a key visitor attraction in this part of Connemara.

CASE STUDY - OUTDOOR RECREATION SUPPORTING EDUCATION

Inland Fisheries Ireland actively engages with over 3000 students and over 100 schools each year by coordinating the 'Something Fishy' programme. This programme educates children in both the classroom and outdoor environments on the subjects of the water cycle, water quality, Irish river catchments, Irish fish species and freshwater macro invertebrates. Supervised field trips enable the students to have a fully interactive outdoors learning experience which has proven to be a huge success.

EXISTING INFRASTRUCTURE

There is a considerable volume of existing infrastructure for recreation already in existence in the country. This includes over 550 trails open to the public, with over 4000 km of these on public lands; over 1000 km of navigable waterways with user services; over 1,000km² of fishing rights on inland fisheries ; 12 forest parks; 6 national parks; nature reserves and other public outdoor facilities.

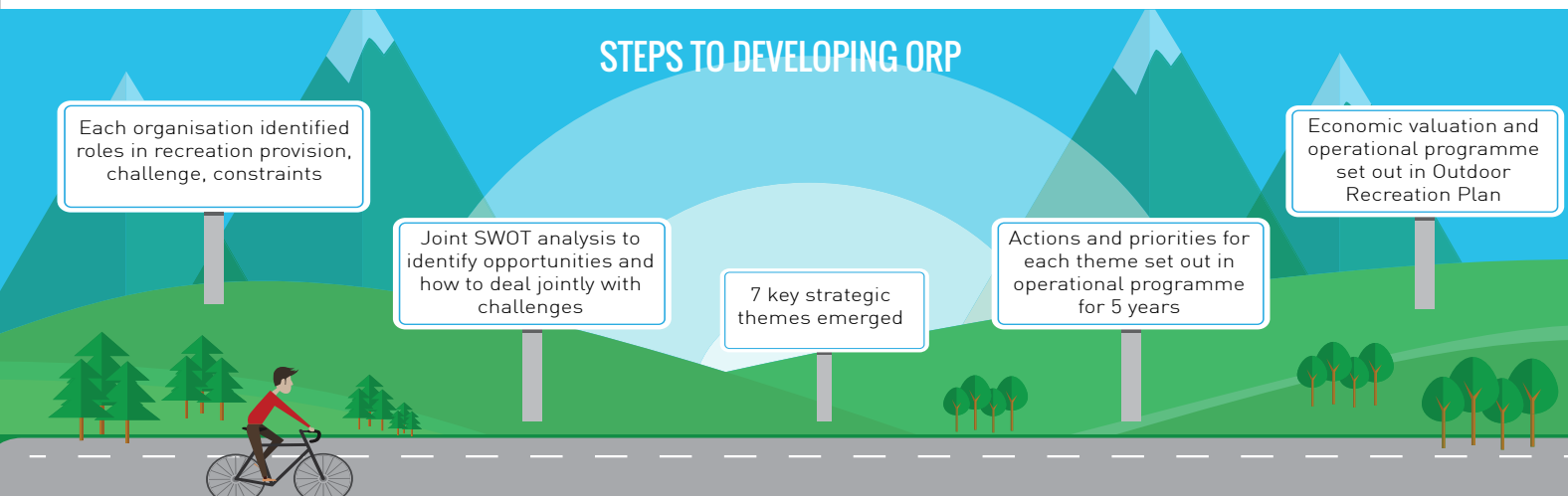
3.0

DEVELOPING A COORDINATED PLAN FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION ON PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS

The 5 public landowning organisations which came together to develop this national recreation plan are Coillte, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Inland Fisheries Ireland. There are other public landowning bodies and it is expected that they will join the programme in the future.

STATE LANDOWNERS	
Bórd na Móna	Bórd na Móna manages approximately 80,000 ha of bogland mainly in the midlands and north west. Bórd na Móna has a number of recreation sites on its estate which is primarily managed for commercial peat production, wind energy and biodiversity
Waterways Ireland	WI is an all-Ireland organisation established to manage, maintain, develop and restore over 1,000km of Ireland's Inland Waterways principally for recreational purposes
Coillte	Coillte manages the nations' forest resources primarily on a commercial basis. This estate accounts for approx. 7% of the national land area. Coillte provides a considerable array of terrestrial recreation opportunities on its estate
Inland Fisheries Ireland	Inland Fisheries Ireland is the state agency responsible for the conservation, protection, management, development and promotion of Ireland's inland fisheries and sea angling resources. Ireland has over 74,000 kilometres of rivers and streams, over 5,600 kilometres of coastline and 128,000 hectares of lakes all of which fall under the jurisdiction of IFI
National Parks and Wildlife Service (Dept. of AHRRG)	NPWS manages approximately 1% of the national land area in national parks, nature reserves with nature conservation the primary goal

HOW WAS THE PLAN DEVELOPED?



There are 7 key strategic themes and these are:

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

The actions and priorities associated with each theme were developed and these are set out as an operational programme in the next section. Detail on each of the steps outlined above are not included here but are available on request.

4.0

THE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN FOR PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS

The Outdoor Recreation Plan aims to coordinate the delivery of accessible outdoor recreation on public lands and waters to ensure that there are well-managed facilities that offer opportunities to take part in a range of sustainable countryside recreation activities while also delivering a broad range of other government objectives. The plan aims to deliver a step change in recreation provision – through a fully resourced and coordinated approach based on the valuable resource of public land holding and waterway networks - to underpin participation by both people living in Ireland and visitors thereby supporting rural and local development and a healthy and vibrant country.

The state landowners recognise that there is considerable opportunity for investment in additional infrastructure and services provided by them which will deliver significant benefits to the wider economy and society. They also recognise that there is a real need to maintain existing infrastructure given the benefits currently being delivered.

The state agencies consider that within this overall vision it will be important to deliver tangible results in terms of both new facilities and improved services along with the maintenance of existing provision.

OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME

An operational programme, which covers an initial five year period, is detailed to give effect to the strategic themes identified. The programme areas are:

1. Establishing The Partnership Framework
2. Managing Current And New Infrastructure
3. Developing And Upgrading Infrastructure
4. Developing Shared Standards
5. Shared Staff Development And Training
6. Promoting Outdoor Recreation On Public Lands And Waters
7. Volunteering And Communities

The vision for the Outdoor Recreation Plan is:

Improved recreation management and development of state lands and waters in a strategic and sustainable manner leading to increased participation in outdoor recreation, benefitting society and the national economy, and delivered through a partnership of Public Bodies, that complements the remits of the participating organisations



1. ESTABLISHING THE PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK				
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)
Enabler	Secure agreement of the Outdoor Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Waters as a shared vision and set of objectives for the period 2017–2021	Members agree and sign a Memorandum of Understanding to give effect to the Plan.	Quick Win	0
Enabler	To implement a programme of initiatives to promote best practice	To establish a network between public bodies to support, guide, inform and coordinate recreation provision on public lands. To support and promote the work of the Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group (VSCG). To Support and promote the work of Leave No Trace Ireland. To develop a volunteer programme for supporting recreation on public lands.	Quick win	€80,000
1, 2	To carry out a detailed audit of the extent, nature and location of recreational facilities on public lands and waters, to support investment decisions within the framework of the plan	Map on a GIS base the extent of public lands and waters in Ireland, together with the extent, nature and location of recreational facilities. (already commenced by DoAHRRA)	Quick Win	€200,000
1, 2	To identify gaps in provision and quick win opportunities that emerge from the audit	Audit resources applied to recreation across the organisations.	Quick Win	€200,000
4, 7	To establish a joint promotion of and information about outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands	Consider the outputs from the audit and identify gaps and opportunities and use to inform the development initiatives outlined below Develop an accessible website to promote and inform the public on outdoor recreation opportunities (updatable and linked to existing sites)	Quick Win	€120,000

2. MANAGING CURRENT AND NEW INFRASTRUCTURE				
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)
1	To maintain existing national recreation infrastructure on all public lands and waters	Monitor the condition of all public outdoor recreation infrastructure including sections of the National Trails Network, signage, trailheads, car parks etc. to best practice standards.	1	€23,725,000
		Maintain the current outdoor recreation infrastructure (trails, car parks etc.) on public lands through an annual programme of targeted work. ⁷	1	
1	To maintain new infrastructure to be developed under ORP	Monitoring and maintenance of additional new infrastructure identified under next section (3)	1	€20,624,000
4	To take action to reduce nuisance/anti-social use of existing facilities	Identify good practice	2	€10,000
		Examine and prepare national legislative action for dealing with unauthorised use of recreation lands	3	€25,000
		Mobilise a volunteer ranger service to improve the recreation experience of the general visitor	2	See costs on volunteering in sections below
		Implement the VSCG standard visitor safety approach across public outdoor recreation providers	1	€25,000
4	To agree and implement common safety approaches to recreation on public lands and provide common training approaches and guidance	Develop and implement standard training on visitor safety management across the public lands.	1	€50,000

⁷Note that Waterways Ireland and Inland Fisheries are funded through their home departments for annual maintenance and management. The figures here only refer to that element of their ongoing operational costs which are additional arising from investment in new infrastructure. - IFI reports that expenditure associated with the management, and maintenance of existing capacity of angling recreation infrastructure has been ca. €300,000 to €500,000 annually. Unfortunately this funding has been insufficient to maintain the state angling assets at an appropriate level consistent with international standards and health and safety requirements

3. DEVELOPING AND UPGRADING INFRASTRUCTURE					
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)	
2	Improve walking trails on public lands through a programme of phased upgrading and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrade 200km of National Waymarked Ways over 5 years (40km per annum) Develop access and interpretation at a range of restored/rehabilitated peatlands (incl. Lough Boora Industrial heritage trail) Develop new and upgrade existing trailheads at 12 sites including car-parking, signage and interpretation 	1	€6,000,000	
			2	€250,000	
			3	€422,000	
2	Develop the off road cycling experience on public lands	Develop and deliver off-road cycling trails based in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stieve Blooms (Laois/Offaly) (national centre) Coolaney (Sligo) (national centre) Ballyhoura (Limerick/ Cork) (national centre) Ticknock (Dublin) (regional centre) Derroura (Galway) (regional centre) Midland Cycling Destination project (Offaly) (national scale) 	2	€4,200,000	
			2	€5,500,000	
			3	€1,300,000	
			1	€430,000	
			4	€895,000	
1	€10,702,000				
2	Improve the angling experience and access to public waters	Implement Inland Fisheries Ireland's National Strategy for Angling Development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> State Fisheries Cong Hatchery Visitor Centre 	1	€5,980,000	
			1	€3,000,000	
2	Develop Ireland's National Blueway network and improve provision of water recreation opportunities on public waters	Develop a series of National Blueways on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Royal Canal Grand Canal Barrow Navigation Shannon Navigation Shannon-erne South East Development (Barrow to Waterford) 	3	€7,900,000	
			3	€14,580,000	
			1	€11,030,000	
			1	€8,750,000	
			2	€5,540,000	
3	€7,218,000				

3. DEVELOPING AND UPGRADING INFRASTRUCTURE (CONTINUED)					
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)	
2	Identify opportunities to develop major new experiences (e.g. primitive recreation) on public lands and waters particularly those that take advantage of contiguous boundaries across state landowners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop primitive recreation potential of Wild Nephin Wilderness Area Develop Wild Camping locations at 20 sites nationwide 	2 3	€150,000 €200,000	
2	To develop facilities for equestrian journeys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop 1 long distance multi-day off road equestrian trail 	3	€1,000,000	
2	Deliver a significantly improved visitor experience at the National Parks and Nature Reserves	Redevelop Ireland's National Parks and Nature Reserves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 National Parks 15 Nature Reserves 	2 3	€9,687,000 €2,713,000	
2	Develop Forest parks as active recreation destinations for residents and tourists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-develop Ireland's 12 Forest Parks 	2	€7,035,000	
2	To facilitate the development of sites for natural learning and natural play	Develop 4 sites for natural play and learning facilities within some forests and on other suitable public lands close to communities and consistent with the national play policy	2/3	€800,000	

4. DEVELOPING SHARED STANDARDS					
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)	
3/4	Develop and implement a set of agreed national standards to guide recreation provision on public lands and waters	Identify and share standards used to guide recreation infrastructure provision and agree a common set of standards for infrastructure	1/2	€10,000	
		Develop a blueprint for outdoor recreation facilities and standard designs that are appropriate to Ireland's landscapes and cultural background	1	€20,000	
		Develop common signage guideline	1	€15,000	
		Develop and publish a series of Irish good practice technical notes to respond to needs.	1	€8,000	
3/4	Develop and implement the RECREATION OPPORTUNITY SPECTRUM approach in Ireland	Develop a workable model of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum for Ireland to provide a common approach to assessment and provision of sustainable recreation of the right type in the right places amongst public landowners in Ireland.	2	€30,000	
3/7	Develop a standard approach to the use of public lands by communities and non-government organisations. Clubs, School groups, Youth organisations, Charity event organisers etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Develop a standard licensing system · Develop a standard visitor safety policy and risk assessment approach · Develop a standard planning approach 	1	€10,000	

5. SHARED STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING				
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)
5	To provide initial and ongoing professional development opportunities for those planning and managing outdoor recreational facilities on public lands	To organize regular opportunities to learn from external experts about quality recreation provision. Develop a programme of on the job professional development for practitioners	1	€50,000
5	To provide accreditation for professional training	Develop an accreditation scheme for prior learning and new accredited learning opportunities for outdoor recreation management (in conjunction with 3 rd level education providers)	2	€20,000
3	To provide links for staff to a one stop outdoor recreation professional support system	Develop an online (web based) platform as a one stop location for best practice guides, technical notes, signage guidelines, manuals, trail construction guidelines, international papers on outdoor recreation topics etc.	2	€100,000
5	To provide links for staff and public organisations to other outdoor recreation organisations	Develop links with bodies such as Countryside Recreation Network, Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group and other professional bodies.	3	€50,000

6. PROMOTING OUTDOOR RECREATION ON PUBLIC LANDS AND WATERS					
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)	
4	Provide information to the public about outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands and waters	Promote participation in outdoor recreation on state lands by developing a promotional campaign and website with links to (updateable) information on all public lands and waters with recreation facilities	2	€500,000	
4	Run NATIONAL OUTDOOR RECREATION DAY	Develop and run a YOUR OUTDOORS DAY and/or NATIONAL TRAILS DAY annually	1	€650,000	
4	Publicity and marketing of new infrastructure	Marketing and publicity of the newly developed infrastructure to grow awareness and visitor numbers	2	€2,120,000	

7. VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITIES					
THEMES	KEY OBJECTIVES	OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN ACTIONS	PRIORITY	COST (€)	
6, 7	Develop and support a vibrant and effective volunteer resource for use on public lands and waters	Develop a national Public Lands and Waters Outdoor Recreation Volunteer Programme including training, recruitment and the requirements for a national volunteer insurance programme	1	€20,000	
		Appoint an Outdoor Recreation Volunteer Coordinator	1	€220,000	
		Promote a national "adopt the outdoors" programme	1	€50,000	
		Provide joint training opportunities for volunteer managers	1	€75,000	
		Provide joint training opportunities for volunteers	1	€75,000	
6	Evaluate the impact of the volunteer resource created	Report on value of resource created versus input.	3	€25,000	
7	Develop a standard third party engagement approach for local communities and volunteer groups	This would deal with training, insurance, H & S, environmental and general management of third parties.	3	€50,000	
		Identify sites on a strategic basis that are suitable for third party engagement	4	€50,000	
		Identify recreation hubs or recreation sites where more recreational services can be delivered in partnership with communities and the private sector	4	€75,000	
7	Assist in developing capacity in communities to be able to take advantage of the potential of local public recreation assets.	Develop a standard business engagement programme to support communities and businesses to develop capacity to be able to benefit from recreation related developments and opportunities	4	€75,000	
7	Develop an outdoor recreation social inclusion programme	Develop a social inclusion programme to increase outdoor recreation participation on public lands by under-represented groups	4	€200,000	

5.0

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

In the preparatory stage for the strategy it is proposed that there is activity directed towards establishing a baseline for outdoor recreation provision – this has commenced with an estimate of the economic contribution that Ireland’s public lands and waters make.

In order to assess the success of the strategy the public bodies, working together, will monitor progress against the objectives of the strategy and against key indicators. Others provide regular monitoring reports and information that can assist the network in gaining a broader picture of success – these include Fáilte Ireland’s research on visitor participation in activities, and Sport Ireland’s Irish Sports Monitor.

These key indicators of success in relation to the strategy include:

KEY INDICATOR	PROPOSED MEASUREMENT METHOD	COST (€)	RESPONSIBILITY
Develop a National recreation-use survey to measure satisfaction amongst those using recreation facilities on public lands and waters	Carry out in year one as baseline survey and repeat in five years	€50,000	Partners
Indicators of economic value and health benefit associated with recreation on public lands and waters	Carry out omnibus survey of economic contribution from recreation related activity and the PUBLIC GOOD VALUE of programme Base line study in year one and repeat at year five	€100,000	Partners
Visitor User safety indicator	Establish Record of recreation related accidents on public lands and waters. Review annually	€10,000	Partners
Staff competence and qualifications of outdoor recreation	Establish baseline inventory of all outdoor qualifications amongst public land owner staff and review bi-annually	€10,000	Partners
Annual Report	Produce an annual report based on the operational programme outlined above with reports on achievements and outcomes.	€5,000	Partners

SUMMARY OF TOTAL COSTS FOR ORP - TIMEFRAME 2017 TO 2021:

ORP Theme	COST (€)
Establishing The Partnership Framework	€400,000
Managing Current And New Infrastructure	€44,459,000
Developing And Upgrading Infrastructure	€115,282,000
Developing shared standards	€93,000
Shared staff development and training	€270,000
Promoting Outdoor Recreation on Public Lands and Waters	€3,270,000
Volunteering and communities	€915,000
Monitoring and evaluation	€175,000
Total Investment in ORP	€164,864,000

6.0 CONCLUSION

The Outdoor Recreation Framework for Public Lands and Waters is being prepared at a time when many public sector organisations have seen reductions in their budgets both capital and operational. However those involved in managing public lands and waters that have recreational uses and those that currently provide recreational opportunities, believe major benefits to communities and the economy at local, regional and national level can accrue from an investment programme in both operational and capital aspects of this plan.

Much of the plan sets out to make the most of existing resources, identify economies of scale, and to demonstrate the contribution that public lands and waters can make to Ireland's economic recovery, rural employment opportunities and the health and well-being of its people. Part of the plan is aimed at safeguarding and improving existing infrastructure and habitats, at achieving more with the same resources and at mainstreaming the recreation services that are already part of the daily work of a public landowner.

However the public bodies concerned consider that even the current provision will deteriorate and that significant opportunities will be lost if there is not a robust and innovative approach to funding the plan. As outlined above in the case for a national outdoor recreation plan, this plan has the potential, if properly resourced, to deliver across a wide range of government objectives. These include the obvious such as promoting active participation in outdoor activities, supporting tourism programmes. However it is also clear that this plan offers opportunities to support labour activation programmes, health and well-being, community development, skills development and education opportunities.

The public bodies believe a coordinated and focused investment programme in outdoor recreation over the next 5 years⁸ can deliver a range of benefits across many government objectives and therefore this plan should be resourced from a broad spectrum of government funds.

Similarly it is the view of the public bodies that the provision of outdoor recreation in Ireland currently falls significantly below that in other European Countries and that the construction of new trails, car parks, centres etc. will provide much needed employment in rural areas, provide new skill sets for unemployed and also make a significant return to the exchequer in terms of increased income tax and VAT receipts, increased excise duties and in some cases will reduce social welfare payments.

For this reason a new annual budget is required not only to maintain existing facilities but to establish new world class recreation facilities that will provide not only benefits in terms of health and well-being but also support rural development and tourism.



⁸The New Zealand government recognising the value of outdoor recreation as a tourism / rural development driver committed \$NZ 149,000,000 over a ten year programme to improve their infrastructure. The value of this can be seen in their place as the adventure capital of the southern hemisphere.

