



An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaithe agus Pobail
Department of Rural and
Community Development

Guidance for Establishment of County Outdoor Recreation Committees and County Outdoor Stakeholder Forums



1 Background

In November 2022, *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*, the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 - 2027 was launched. The Strategy was developed in collaboration with Comhairle na Tuaithe and is a collaborative cross-Government, stakeholder-led strategy. It reflects the views of stakeholders, the public and the whole of Government and it sets the stage to strengthen and support the sustainable development of the outdoor recreation sector in Ireland for years to come.



Geokaun Mountain, Valentia Island, County Kerry

Our Vision

Ireland's outdoors, a world of activities for all

Our Mission

To lead, guide and facilitate the sustainable development and management of outdoor recreation and increased participation, in order to realise social, health and economic benefits. We will do this whilst respecting the custodians of land and water, caring for the environment and promoting responsible recreation.

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors reflects a whole of government approach to supporting outdoor recreation in Ireland and to the protection of our natural environment. The delivery of *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* requires a joined-up and cohesive approach to the development of outdoor

recreation infrastructure and the management of outdoor recreation activity at both a national and county level.

Among the agreed actions in *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors* is the establishment of a County Outdoor Recreation Committee and a Stakeholder Forum to provide opportunities for all communities to contribute, engage and participate in decision-making for the development of outdoor recreation:

“At county level, our ambition is to achieve a more planned and coordinated 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 will ensure that county needs are prioritised, as well as being aligned with the national strategy. This new structure will be best placed to ensure that value for money is achieved from the significant levels of public investment in outdoor recreation. In addition, it is our ambition to ensure that available funding and resources are better aligned with national and county priorities.”

The establishment of the County Outdoor Recreation Committee and Stakeholder Forum will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to have their say, that local needs are prioritised and that the approach in the county is aligned with the national strategy.

County Outdoor Recreation Plans:

One of the primary aims of the County Outdoor Recreation Committee is to support the development and the implementation of a County Outdoor Recreation Plan. Guidelines for the development of the plan have been produced which aim to minimise the burden on individual counties and to ensure that the plans are aligned to the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy. Funding of up to €30,000 will be made available to each county by the Department of Rural and Community Development to support the development of a short, focused plan to underpin the sustainable development and management of their outdoor recreation amenities.

The plan should take into account the current outdoor recreation amenities in an area and outline where outdoor recreation infrastructure and services should be located over a five-year period. Future investment decisions in each county will then be informed by these plans, including funding decisions taken under schemes such as the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS). More

information on County Outdoor Recreation Plans, including a copy of the Guidelines and application form for funding can be found [here](#).

Project Team to develop Outdoor Recreation Plan

Ideally, the establishment of the County Outdoor Recreation Committees (CORA) and Stakeholder Forums should precede the development of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan.

If the establishment of County Outdoor Recreation Committee is delayed, or is taking longer than anticipated to establish, a project team of the key outdoor recreation stakeholders in the county should be formed to lead the development of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan. The funding above will be available to the project team to support the development of the plan.

2. Membership of County Outdoor Recreation Committees

Each County Outdoor Recreation Committee will be made up of the primary decision-makers and stakeholders in the county, which will vary from county to county. The committee should include representatives with a background or involvement in outdoor recreation; this would be as participants or as stakeholders in the development and management of outdoor recreation activities.

The County Outdoor Recreation Committee must include representatives from the Stakeholder Forum to ensure that the wider stakeholders' views are heard and acted upon.

The membership of the County Outdoor Recreation Committees is a matter for agreement locally but it is recommended that they should be comprised of members of the following organisations, where relevant:

- Local Authority
- Local Development Company
- County Outdoor Recreation Officer / Local Sports Partnership Coordinator
- Transport Infrastructure Ireland
- Fáilte Ireland Regional Team
- Coillte (Recreation Division)
- NPWS
- Waterways Ireland

- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- Bord na Móna
- Office of Public Works (OPW)
- Built Heritage Service
- National Monuments Service
- The Heritage Council
 - Local Authority Heritage Officers
 - Local Authority Biodiversity Officers
- ICSA (Irish Cattle and Sheep Farmers Association)
- IFA (Irish Farmers' Association)
- INFHA (Irish Natura and Hill Farmers Association)
- ICMSA (Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers Association)
- Leave No Trace
- Ireland's Association of Adventure Tourism
- National Governing Body recognised by Sport Ireland (eg. Mountaineering Ireland)

3. Membership of County Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum

Each County Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum will be made up of stakeholders involved in, or associated with, outdoor recreation in the county. All stakeholders and participants in outdoor recreation will have the opportunity to attend the county Stakeholder Forum, which will take place two or more times per annum.

As the purpose of the Stakeholder Forum is to provide opportunities for all those with an interest to contribute to, and participate in, decision-making for the development of outdoor recreation in the country it is recommended that meetings of the Stakeholder Forum include updates and consultation so that all voices may be heard. Collaboration between stakeholders should also be encouraged. Stakeholder Forum representatives on the County Outdoor Recreation Committee are expected to bring the wider views of Forum participants to the CORC, rather than the views of their own organisation or interest group.

This membership is not exhaustive. Participants in outdoor recreation activities frequently travel from outside the county to avail of natural amenities such as mountains, coastline or caves, and

efforts should be made to include these communities of interest in consultation and in the Stakeholder Forum.

Examples of County and local stakeholders

- Residents of the county
- Community groups
- Public Participation Network (PPN)
- Recreational users (inside and outside the county)
- Local outdoor recreation clubs and groups
- Local Authority (relevant sections including planning, community, tourism, active travel, heritage, health, climate, biodiversity)
- Heritage Officers
- Biodiversity Officers
- Climate Action Regional Officers
- Healthy Ireland and Sláintecare Healthy Communities
- Local Development Company
- Local Sports Partnership
- Commercial activity providers
- Local Tourism Networks
- Outdoor education centres
- Third level educators with relevant outdoor recreation course
- Private landowners
- Trail Management Organisations
- Rescue services (eg coastguard, mountain rescue)
- Other partnership groups eg Wicklow Uplands Council, Mountain Access Projects etc
- Other schemes eg. Rural Social Scheme (RSS), Tus

4. Chair and Secretariat

County Outdoor Recreation Committee

Once the County Outdoor Recreation Committee has been convened the chair and secretariat should be decided locally, based on the capacity of the members.

Stakeholder Forum

The chair and secretariat of the County Outdoor Recreation Committee should convene the Stakeholder Forum, although other arrangements may be agreed locally.

5. Terms of Reference/Purpose of the Committee

The primary outdoor recreation stakeholders in the county should be represented on the County Outdoor Recreation Committee. Once convened the committee should agree its Terms of Reference which will define the purpose and structure of the committee. It is expected that the committee will operate in accordance with the values in *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors*.

The Terms of Reference for the group should include specifically co-ordinating and driving the delivery of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan and engagement on cross-cutting outdoor recreation matters as they arise.

The committee should agree the focus for outdoor recreation in the county for the next 5 years. This agreed focus will be reflected in the County Outdoor Recreation Plan which they are responsible for the development and delivery of. This County Outdoor Recreation Plan will ensure that county needs are prioritised as well as being aligned with the vision, mission and objectives of the national strategy.

The Committee should ensure that the County Outdoor Recreation Plan and all related activities in the county are carried out with due care for the local built, natural and cultural heritage, ensuring that all recreational plans and developments are fully assessed for their impacts on the environment, and that no developments take place which may cause damage to or degradation of the natural or built environment

The Committee should provide ongoing contact and practical support for communities to develop outdoor recreation within the county.

The Committee will be the key forum in the county for driving the development of the outdoor recreation sector in each county and providing a forum for stakeholders in each county to share information and engage with each other on matters arising. The Committee may also wish to engage with their counterparts in neighbouring counties to explore synergies and shared opportunities.

6. Case Study: Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee



Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee

For many decades, Wicklow has been a favourite destination for participants in outdoor activities. Like most other counties, Wicklow has many stakeholders involved in the development, delivery and management of outdoor recreation

The benefit of adopting a strategic and collaborative approach to outdoor recreation was recognised by Wicklow County Council, County Wicklow Partnership and other stakeholders, as the means to address challenges and achieve real progress in outdoor recreation. Through the development of an outdoor recreation strategy for Wicklow, the partners agreed to establish the Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC).

WORC was set up in 2009 and its primary role was to coordinate outdoor recreation across the county. The backbone of the WORC is a strong partnership between Wicklow County Council and County Wicklow Partnership (local development company).

Members of the WORC include Wicklow County Council; County Wicklow Partnership; Coillte; NPWS; Wicklow Uplands Council; Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Mountaineering Ireland. WORC is a model of collaboration and cooperation which sustains high levels of recreation activity and captures local economic benefit, while respecting the spectacular natural environment which is the source of these opportunities. This strategy seeks to replicate the good practice model of WORC in all counties of Ireland and build upon their learnings to refine the model.

“The Council has hugely benefited from working closely with our partner organisations in WORC. Working in collaboration has enabled us to embrace the potential of outdoor recreation in Wicklow to contribute economically, and in terms of people’s health and wellbeing.”

Michael Nicholson, Director of Service, Wicklow County Council (WORC Chairperson)

“Prior to WORC’s development, much of our effort regarding outdoor recreation was ad hoc. Now we have a clear, agreed plan with the key partners across the county and we are all genuinely enthused to achieve our vision for Wicklow.”

Brian Carty, CEO, County Wicklow Partnership

“Wicklow has experienced a massive growth in the number of people visiting the outdoors. This has presented challenges in managing the impact on sensitive conservation habitats and species right across the county. Working together with our partners at WORC is the best way to tackle this challenge. There is still a way to go, but collaboration is certainly working for the better of the environment in Wicklow.”

Wesley Atkinson, NPWS