



**Cyfoeth
Naturiol**
Cymru
**Natural
Resources**
Wales

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Outdoor Recreation and Access Strategy 2015 - 2020



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1. Introduction

This Strategy presents our objectives for outdoor recreation and access. An accompanying action plan sets out more detailed actions. The scope of the Strategy is wide – it covers the way in which:

- we manage and facilitate use of our estate for recreation and access
- we enable and work with others to facilitate and promote recreation and access across Wales, reflecting our target markets and audience needs

We use the term ‘outdoor recreation and access’ throughout this strategy. By this we mean recreational *activities* that take place in the outdoors and the access and associated infrastructure that allows that activity to take place. Outdoor recreation and access includes:

- both formal (organised) and informal activities;
- both active and passive experiences (active recreation includes for example cycling or canoeing, whilst passive recreation includes bird-watching or picnicking)

This strategy supports delivery of the overarching Welsh Government goals set out in the forthcoming *Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill* whilst supporting delivery of existing Welsh Government goals for Child Poverty; Vibrant and Viable Places; Woodlands for Wales; Climbing Higher, Active Travel, Partnership for Growth and Next Steps. It also links closely with priorities set out in our own Communications Strategy, Interpretation Strategy, Education and Sector Skills Strategy and our Communities and Regeneration Strategy. It should be read in conjunction with these as many of the aims and actions are cross cutting, demonstrating synergies across our work.

Our move towards natural resource management will require recreation and access user needs and any provision to be considered within a wider management framework, where social, environmental and economic benefits can be considered in the round. Spatial planning will be a crucial element of this approach.

The role of NRW as an enabling organisation is key to this strategy: facilitating and encouraging others and working with our partners will be a core part of our work. Helping others to deliver where they are best placed to do so, both on and off our own managed land, will be embedded in our work.

Natural Resources Wales has statutory obligations under the Equality Act 2010. On our own land we are classed as a service provider under this Act. We are working with Diverse Cymru to develop our Equality Impact Assessment for this strategy.

1a. The benefits of outdoor recreation and access

There is a large – and growing - body of evidence that shows the multiple benefits of outdoor recreation and access to individuals, to communities, to the environment and to the economy. A key source of our evidence is the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey (WORS), which provides a comprehensive account of participation by people

living in Wales, and from 2015 will give us information about the economic value of visits. We have outlined some of these benefits below.

Environmental benefits

Through participating in outdoor recreational opportunities people learn more about the natural world, often gaining a sense of responsibility and care for the environment and their local green-space. The Cydcoed programme indicated that community engagement with a particular space not only provides individual health benefits for those involved, but often discourages crime and anti-social behaviour¹.

Walking and cycling can play a key role in serving local transport needs and helping address the issues of congestion, pollution and climate change associated with car dependency. What are sometimes classed as 'everyday journeys' to work by foot or bike also serve fitness and enjoyment demands. This type of journey is sometimes known as 'active travel'.

A consistent, strategic approach to recreation and access opportunities across Wales means that visitor impacts can be mitigated or directed away from those areas that are more environmentally vulnerable. Developing a consistent approach to recreation planning that accounts for the sensitivity of the environment and provides ways in which this can be managed through encouraging behaviour change is an important part of our natural resource management approach.

Social and health benefits

Outdoor recreation can make a significant contribution to the physical health and mental well-being of the population in Wales: increasing levels of physical activity has beneficial consequences in terms of increasing peoples' healthy lifespans and reducing the incidence of chronic disease, including cardiovascular disease, some cancers, type II diabetes and osteoporosis. Nearly a third of adults in Wales have been able to gain the health benefits associated with physical activity through participating in outdoor recreation, indicating the significant contribution it can make to the nation's health.

However, health inequalities remain within and between communities in Wales - it has been estimated that the cost of physical inactivity to Wales is around £650 million per year,² whilst healthy lifespans are often dramatically different between neighbouring Unitary Authorities e.g. 57.1 years in Blaenau Gwent to 68.2 years in Monmouthshire.

One in four adults in Wales experiences mental health problems or illness at some point during their lifetime, with an estimated annual cost of £7.2billion to Wales, yet

¹ *Cydcoed Evaluation Report* <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/cydcoed>

² *Climbing higher: creating an active Wales* by the Welsh Government 2009

passive contact with green infrastructure³ can be psychologically and physiologically restorative, reducing blood pressure and stress levels.⁴

Participation in outdoor recreational activities is often limited by income, ability and access to opportunity. But the outdoors can offer opportunities for everyone; and appropriate promotion, facilities and access opportunities can improve social inclusion. The development of path networks, urban woodlands and other green infrastructure aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility of the local environment can all play an important role in improving the health and well-being of people in Wales. Enjoyment of the outdoors is also an important part of appreciating the cultural and landscape heritage of Wales and people's place within it.

Economic benefits

Economic prosperity and employment opportunities for communities and local enterprises are often derived from recreational opportunities and are particularly important for areas that are economically reliant on tourism activity. For example, over one third of accommodation providers located on or near a National Trail in Wales described the Trail as 'very important to the profitability' of their business⁵.

Walking as an activity generates £562m of additional demand in the Welsh economy, £275m of Gross Value Added (GVA), and around 11,980 person-years of employment.⁶ This is demonstrated by the Wales Coast Path, which alone generates £32.2m of additional demand in the Welsh economy, £16.1m of GVA, and 730 FTE of employment⁷.

Some 2.8 million people in the UK participated in some form of boating activity during 2012, of which 1.2 million went canoeing⁸. In 2007 freshwater angling alone was estimated to support approximately 1,500 FTEs⁹. The Wales Visitor Survey 2013 showed that of those visitors to Wales who responded to the survey, either from the UK or abroad, 30% were motivated to take part in outdoor activities during their trip.¹⁰

In addition proximity to high quality green space increases property values by 2.6%-11.3%¹¹; and every £1 of public spend on green space projects levers in £4.20 of private sector investment, boosting regeneration¹². As referred to above, the potential

³ Green Infrastructure can be broadly defined as a strategically planned network of high quality natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features, which is designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services and protect biodiversity in both rural and urban settings, Building a Green Infrastructure for Europe, EU. Further the Town and Country Planning Institute defines green infrastructure as all green and blue spaces.

⁴ *Preference for Nature in Urbanized Societies* by Van den Berg et al, cited in *Benefits of Green Infrastructure* by Forest Research October 2010

⁵ Economic benefit to business of the Welsh National Trails, CCW, 2006

⁶ The economic impact of walking and hill walking in Wales Cardiff Business School 2011

⁷ Cardiff Business School (2012) The Economic Impact of Wales Coast Path Visitor Spending on Wales

⁸ Watersports Participation Survey 2012

⁹ The economic impact of freshwater angling in England & Wales 2007 The Environment Agency

¹⁰ [The Wales Visitor Survey 2013](#) The Welsh Government 2013

¹¹ Forest Research (2012) Economic benefits of greenspace A critical assessment of evidence of net economic benefits

¹² Forest Research (2012) Economic benefits of greenspace A critical assessment of evidence of net economic benefits

cost savings to Wales from increased contact with nature and recreation in the outdoors are also significant.

Wales' National Parks account for over half a billion pounds of Wales' GVA, representing 1.2% of the Welsh economy. Moreover, 38% of the jobs provided within the Park are linked to the environment. The tourism economies of the Parks are strong, with 12 million visitors a year spending an estimated one billion pounds on goods and services¹³

1b. Corporate priorities

The majority of our outdoor recreation and access work fits under the 'Good for People' section of our Corporate and Business Plans. However, our work is also 'Good for Business' and 'Good for the Environment' and the cross cutting nature of benefits derived from our work in this field should not be underestimated.

Our [Corporate Plan 2014 -2018](#) commits us to:

- Ensuring that we integrate the recreation opportunities on the land we offer with other providers, complementing them rather than competing with them;
- Maintaining our liabilities to help ensure public safety in our forests, National Nature Reserves and the flood defences we manage
- Building on our existing work in urban areas to ensure areas of green-space are valuable assets for our towns and cities;
- Working more closely in partnership with communities focussing our efforts on the most deprived communities;
- Working with others to identify new business and jobs opportunities, especially in disadvantaged areas, and grow our income to re-invest in our highest priorities;
- Maximising the economic benefits of our work, focussing particularly on Communities First areas.

It is essential that the opportunities that we provide, or help others to provide, are as inclusive as possible, considering people at different life-stages, of different ages, of different races or faiths, with disabilities, or with any of the other protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act, 2010. We want to cater for a wide range of people and provide opportunities for the communities we serve. However, because there are inequalities in levels and ranges of participation and subsequent benefits secured, NRW wishes to target resources to areas and people where the most benefit will be achieved.

¹³ Valuing Wales' National Parks, Arup Consulting, 2013

In order to achieve this we have three overarching principles that must be considered in our decision making. These are:

1. All outdoor recreational provision delivered, facilitated or funded by NRW will adhere to the principles of least restrictive access¹⁴ and be developed and delivered in accordance with the Equality Act 2010.
2. We will align our work to deliver the benefits of recreation and access through spatial targeting, focussing first on those areas that deliver the greatest benefit for people and communities
3. We will be an enabling organisation, working with partners and others to facilitate outdoor recreation and access activity both on and off our own land



2. Delivering Results

What do we want to achieve?

The overarching aim of this strategy is that Wales has:

More people participating in and benefitting from outdoor recreation more often

Why do we want to do this?

We want to do this in order to deliver these benefits:

- Increase people's appreciation of and care for the environment
- Improve social equity and cohesion of people and communities
- Increase the economic benefits of recreation to Wales
- Improve people's health and wellbeing

How will we achieve our aim?

We will achieve this through ensuring that:

¹⁴ In carrying out access work countryside managers make decisions as to how what they provide can be used by different visitors. The standards and the least restrictive access process are tools to help them make choices that provide better accessibility for all.

1. Access opportunities are provided and improved that best meet people's needs for recreational enjoyment of the outdoors
2. Promotional information and engagement about recreational access opportunities are widely available in appropriate formats
3. Recreational users have an increased understanding of how to act responsibly in the natural environment
4. Effective planning for the sustainable recreational use and management of natural resources is embedded in our work
5. Effective mechanisms for the delivery of the benefits of outdoor recreational are developed and embedded in our work



2a. What is the current position?

We can measure the participation of people in recreational activity through the Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey. We can also measure some of the benefits of participation.

The current position is that high proportions of the Welsh adult population visited the outdoors in 2011 with an average of 95% taking any visits in the last 12 months and 88% taking any visits in the 4 weeks prior to interview. This is based on recording participation in a very broad range of outdoor activities. These results are similar to the proportion of visits recorded in the 2008 survey.

During 2011, variations were recorded in the numbers of visits taken (in either the last 4 weeks or last 12 months) by different age groups. In the last 12 months, 76% of those aged 75 and over had taken an outdoor visit compared to 98% of those aged 74 and under. Variations were also recorded on the basis of whether respondents had a long-term illness/disability or not (87% with, 97% without), academic qualifications (97% with, 82% without) and car access (96% with, 83% without). Similar variations were recorded in the 2008 survey.

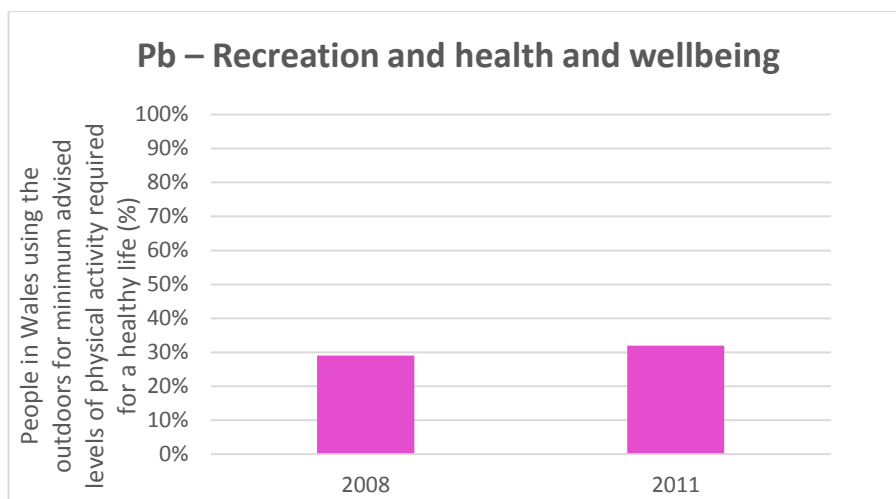
Walking was the most frequently undertaken activity in 2011, particularly in terms of visits taken in the last 4 weeks (undertaken on 84% of visits). In 2011 walking was the single main activity undertaken in 62% of visits, a lower proportion than in 2008 (66%).

Around a quarter of adults (27%) visited the outdoors 'frequently' based on an average of 21 visits or more in the last 4 weeks. The frequency of participation recorded was at a similar level in both 2008 and 2011.

Those who had not taken visits in the last 12 months in 2011 were likely to mention physical health barriers including disabilities (29%), other health issues (27%) and old

age (14%) as reasons for non-participation. However, these factors were mentioned less often in relation to reasons for not taking visits during the last 4 weeks, with a lack of time (31%) more likely to restrict visit taking in this shorter time period

Our Corporate Plan indicator for the percentage of people using the outdoors for the minimum advised levels of physical activity required for a healthy life shows the following:



Comparing the results from the 2008 and the 2011 the Wales Outdoor Recreation Survey shows that there has been a significant¹⁵ increase in the percentage of adults who have met the required level of physical activity through participation in outdoor recreation in Wales. In 2008 29% met the required target of 150 minutes of moderate to intensive physical activity per week. This increased significantly by 2011 to 32% of adults (this equates to an increase of approximately 75,000 people).

The results show that participation in outdoor recreation is helping people to ‘turn the curve’ and increase their physical activity levels and therefore improve their health. Increased physical activity has been proven to reduce obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, and certain types of cancer.

However:

- Healthy life expectancy varies hugely across Wales (57.1 years in Blaenau Gwent to 68.2 years in Monmouthshire).
- The majority of people living in Wales take part in outdoor recreation occasionally but there is a high level of demand to do so more often.
- The activities people take part in are becoming more diverse,
- People are travelling shorter distances and the use of cars, even for these short journeys, is increasing
- About 30% of visitors to Wales take part in an outdoor activity during their trip

¹⁵ The 3% figure is statistically significant as it is large enough to represent a real and quantifiable increase in physical activity at the population level and is not due to random factors



3. Our focus over the next five years

Over the next five years we need to focus our efforts on ensuring that we deliver to people and places which will benefit the most. We need to ensure that our activities help deliver our overarching aim of more people participating in outdoor recreation more often.

The activities that can help make a real difference are focused on one or more of the points below:

- Contact with nature leading to increased care for the environment and more responsible behaviour
- Provision of access and recreational opportunities that best meet people's needs (the right thing in the right place)
- Iconic, well promoted and marketed products and opportunities (e.g. Wales Coast Path; National Trails, our visitor centre sites and National Nature Reserves)
- Outdoor recreation programmes where 'enjoyment, confidence and ability' are encouraged (e.g. Actif Woods approach)
- Working with and through others to develop and promote responsible enjoyment of the outdoors
- Helping young people develop healthy, active, habits
- Information and promotion tailored to meet the needs of the audience, particularly targeted in relation to our priority markets
- Partnership and integrated working, including delivery with and through others
- Involving communities in our recreational access work (e.g. as with the Woodlands and You/Mynediad approach), targeting our most deprived communities
- Enabling sustained growth and employment from outdoor recreation, particularly focusing on our most economically deprived areas.
- Supporting the training of local leaders and others working with communities to use outdoor access opportunities in their work (e.g. the Come Outside approach)
- Strategic planning of recreational access supported by targeted resources (e.g. support for Local Authorities' Rights of Way Improvement Plans)

We have developed an Outdoor Recreation and Access Strategic Action Plan that sets out priorities that will help us plan and deliver the Strategy. Delivery Plans developed at Directorate level across the organisation will provide a more detailed programme of work aimed at delivering our outcome and the associated benefits.

4. Working with others

To continue to improve the position in relation to our Corporate Plan indicator and to deliver the associated benefits we seek, we will need to co-ordinate and integrate our work with a range of public, private and third sector organisations as well as with communities across Wales. This needs to take place on a national, regional and local level. Our role as an enabling organisation, facilitating and helping others and partners to deliver where they are best placed to do so will be key for NRW.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

We will monitor and evaluate this strategy, and the associated Action Plan, using a results based accounting (RBA) approach. This approach includes identifying data and evidence gaps and suggesting ways in which these could be filled.

Results Based Accountability is an outcomes focused performance management system to improve outcomes for service users and their community. Welsh Government have tasked NRW with using this approach across and throughout the organisation.

We recognise that if we are going to work together with partners to achieve shared outcomes then we must develop a consistent system for monitoring and managing our progress. In the long term, the high level indicators will show us if we are achieving our outcomes. More immediately however, we will monitor specific indicators to see if our work is having an impact. At its heart, RBA is about asking if anyone is better off as a result of our services and making sure that our performance management system maintains a focus on this question. If we are not making our citizens and communities better off, then we must question the impact and appropriateness of our services.

Our indicative RBA approach is detailed in an accompanying document: *Outdoor Recreation and Access Strategy 2015-2020 – Indicative Results Based Accounting Plan*.



6. Reviewing our work

In addition to monitoring and evaluating progress of actions through our Results Based Accounting Plan, we will regularly review this strategy to ensure it remains fit for purpose. This is particularly important in light of the forthcoming Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill and the Environment Bill.

We will work to integrate this strategy with our natural resource management approach, ensuring that our communications are relevant and cross cutting. Our Communications Strategy sets out how we will achieve this . Further, we will communicate with our partners and stakeholders on a regular basis through channels such as the National Access Forum, Local Access Forums, Public Service Boards, our concordat and other agreement holders, and through our website.

Draft

Appendix 1: References

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