Making Northern Ireland’s OUTDOORS GREAT

A Strategic Plan for outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland 2015 - 2020
Dawson Stelfox MBE, Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNi) Chairman and the 1st Irish Man to Summit Everest

This strategic document sets out the overarching framework for the activities of ORNI for the period 2015 - 2020. It provides focus, setting out the strategic priorities to which ORNI will direct its effort and resources in order to achieve its vision and mission.

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

This includes those:

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

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

I recently enjoyed a paper by Dr James Brown, School of Life and Health Sciences, Aston University, who, in addressing the British Science Festival, surprised the audience by offering a magic pill that was able to prevent obesity and diabetes, lower the risk of some cancers, relieve depression and anxiety, increase mobility and reduce the chances of falling by 40 percent. It also improved the ability to think and reason, slowed the progression of Alzheimer’s disease and arthritis by 30 percent, increased strength, reduced fatigue and deaths by 20 percent lower risk of Indy. The pill was simply walking for 30 minutes a day.

Encouraging active outdoor recreation participation for health reasons should therefore not be underestimated.

In addition to supporting healthy living, it is recognised that outdoor recreation helps young people’s personal and social development, encourages communities to utilize their local outdoor space which in turn stimulates care for and commitment to its upkeep, and contributes to its resilience against the effects of Northern Ireland’s weather.

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

With this in mind, it is key as always that ORNi as a strategic leader identifies its priorities for development within the context of its mission and vision statement for the next five years 2015-2020.
KEY SUCCESSES
2012 - 2015

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

**DIVIS RIDGE TRAIL**
Belfast - 2014

- **£429,000** funding secured
- **6kms** of multi-use trails developed
- **36,000** visitors in year 1

**GIANT’S CAUSEWAY COAST SPORTIVE**
Ballycastle - Annually 2011 – 2014

- **1137** participants (annual average)

**MOURNE MTB PROJECT**
Bout and Clandeboye - 2013

- **£1.8 million** funding secured
- **75kms** of mountain biking trails developed
- **56,000** visitors in year 1

**TOBAR MHUIRE**
Crossgar – 2014

- **£146,147** funding secured
- **3kms** of multi-use trails developed
- **23,500** visitors in year 1

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

- **163** free events recruited
- **13,536** participants across the 2 years

**ADVENTURE PLAY**
Mourne Forests – 2015

- **£77,920** funding secured
- **2 high quality interactive play spaces**
- **750,000** people reached via social media

**WALKING VOLUNTEER RANGERS**
Province-wide

- **175 volunteers recruited**
- **8658 hours** valued at £259,740
- **3.2 million** people reached via social media

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

- **£259,740**
- **23,500**
- **75kms of multi-use trails developed**

- **£495,000**
- **1137**
- **6kms**

- **£1.8 million**
- **163**
- **75kms**

- **£77,920**
- **175**
- **3.2 million**

- **£259,740**
- **13,536**
- **1137**

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- **163**
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KEY HEADLINES
2012 - 2015

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland can demonstrate tangible results

£2.617 MILLION
secured for projects from external funding bodies

23,336 members of the public took part in our organised outdoor recreation events

127kms of mountain biking, walking and multi-use trails developed

23,500+ people participated in key events

90kms of mountain biking, walking and multi-use trails designed

£146,205 of activity experiences sold for outdoor activity providers

£500,000 direct economic impact generated by events

£13.85 MILLION equivalent advertising value of PR generated for outdoor recreation per se

508 dedicated Volunteers assisted us in our work

1243 people participated in studies completed and 3 strategic publications published

25

127

23,500+

90

508

1243

23,336

25

£2.617M

£146,205

£500,000

£13.85M

*Further detail is available within Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland’s Review of Operational Plan 2012-2015

Outdoor Recreation Northern Ireland can demonstrate tangible results.
Outdoor recreation in Northern Ireland generates:

£102 million
Gross Value Added

Full Time Jobs
3537 Outdoor recreation
3120 Telecommunications
950 Travel agencies and tour operators
500 Creative arts and entertainment activities

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

WHY OUTDOOR RECREATION?

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

**ECONOMY:**
- Wales - outdoor activity tourism contributes £647 million per annum to the economy
- Republic of Ireland - overseas visitors engaging in activity tourism are worth €7.2 billion per annum
- Scotland - nature based tourism is worth £1.4 billion per annum
- England - £2.4 million adults visit the natural environment generating a total visitor spend of £21 billion per annum

**HEALTH & WELL-BEING:**
- Scotland
  - For every £1 invested in Health Walks, £8 of benefits are generated for society
- Republic of Ireland
  - Physical inactivity is estimated to cost the state €150 - €300 per person
  - 10% of the population becoming physically active could deliver savings of €67.5 - €135 million per year
  - “Thirty minutes of moderate exercise a day can reduce your risk of age-related diseases. It can also reduce your risk of cognitive decline”

**SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT & LEARNING:**
- “When playing outdoors children are also more likely to meet other children and improve social skills, an opportunity which doesn’t arise at home. Being outside in nature puts children in touch with their senses and has a restorative effect, also helping them to cope with stress.”
- Liz O’Brien, Deputy Head of Social and Economic Research Group at the Forestry Commission
- 91% of the UK public believe that parks and public spaces improve people’s quality of life

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

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OutdoorRecreationNI.com contains full reference to all statistics and quotations
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

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

1. CHAMPIONING THE OUTDOORS

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

ORNi will have succeeded if:

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

2. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS AND PROMOTING BEST PRACTICE

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

ORNi will have succeeded if there are:

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

Barnett Demesne Trails, Belfast
EMPOWERING VOLUNTEERS

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

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

IMPROVING THE NATION’S HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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

ORNI will have succeeded if:
- There is increased confidence and skills in local community groups to deliver outdoor recreation opportunities within their local community.
- The number of local people participating in outdoor recreation continues to increase.
- There is a greater diversity in the people taking part in outdoor recreation activities.
- There are thriving and sustainable communities centred around outdoor recreation across Northern Ireland.
5
DELIVERING AND MANAGING QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION PRODUCTS

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

ORNI will have succeeded if there are:

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

6
INCREASING AWARENESS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

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

ORNI will have succeeded if:

- A consistently high level of accurate information on walking, mountain biking, adventure activities, cycling and canoeing across Northern Ireland is available to consumers at all times therefore leading to increased awareness of the opportunities to participate in these activities across Northern Ireland by both the local population and visitors.
- The economic value of outdoor recreation to Northern Ireland increases leading to growth and diversification in the economy and that there is improved recognition and understanding that outdoor recreation is an asset to the economy.
ORNi, formerly the Countryside Access and Activities Network, was established in 1999 by SportNI and the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) in response to the publication of Northern Ireland’s first Countryside Recreation Strategy in 1998. It has since delivered and indeed exceeded the recommendations of this Strategy through a succession of three, three year Operational Plans.

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

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

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

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

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

Key areas of focus are:
- supporting partnerships
- sharing best practice
- developing local resources: biking trails and community trail networks
- increasing opportunities to volunteer
- employing innovative approaches to provide information on outdoor recreation opportunities, particularly to disadvantaged groups

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

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

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

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

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NI ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

SPORT NI

INLAND WATERWAYS BRANCH OF DCAL

TOURISM NI

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

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

Current delivery across the Service Level Agreements includes:

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

PROJECT BY PROJECT

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

Case studies and a complete list of its successful projects are available at OutdoorRecreationNI.com