



SPORT
IRELAND
OUTDOORS

SPORT IRELAND POLICY ON

SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE OUTDOORS







Sport Ireland is the State Agency responsible for the sustainable development of sport in Ireland. This includes all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, including play/active recreation, organised/competitive sport, and informal sports/games.¹

Sport Ireland is pleased to present this ambitious policy, which expresses Sport Ireland's vision for sport and physical activity in the outdoors. The policy builds on our work in this sector over the years and sets out priorities for the coming years. It represents an important element of Sport Ireland's Statement of Strategy, primarily supporting our participation and performance pillars. It also supports the implementation of our policies on participation in sport by people with disabilities and women in sport.

Ultimately, the policy seeks to create new opportunities for more Irish people to participate in all forms of sport and physical activity in a sustainable and responsible way.

Sport Ireland recognises and acknowledges that there are many partner agencies and organisations, both at a national and local level, that have an important role to play in achieving the outcomes of this policy. Sport Ireland will work creatively with all stakeholders and play a strong leadership role in this sector over the coming years.

POLICY SCOPE

This policy recognises and encourages all forms of sport and physical activity in the outdoors undertaken for social, recreational or competitive purposes. For the purpose of this policy sport and physical activity in the outdoors is defined as sport and recreation activities that:

Are carried out in a natural or semi-natural environment and involve dealing with natural elements

Have their roots in a natural environment but are carried out in a purpose built setting designed to replicate the natural environment - e.g. a climbing wall, a constructed canoeing/kayaking facility.

Include sport and recreation activities that take place on infrastructure such as trails, greenways, cycle tracks, canal banks, roads, etc.

Do not include sports and active recreation carried out on constructed pitches (e.g. football, golf, rugby)

Can be in an urban or rural landscape

Are perceived as having some level of physical demand

Require human and/or natural element power

May use some form of equipment e.g. surf board, bicycle, skis, etc.



Within the Irish sport context there are a significant number of recognised outdoor sports² including:

- Archery
- Angling
- Climbing
- Mountaineering
- Canoeing/Kayaking
- Rowing
- Sailing
- Windsurfing
- Caving
- Clay Pigeon Shooting
- Cycling (All Disciplines)
- Horse Riding
- Orienteering
- Recreational/Trail/Mountain Running
- Surfing
- Underwater Sports
- Swimming (in a natural element)
- Triathlon
- Water-skiing & Wakeboarding
- Walking & Hiking

This list is not exhaustive and there may be other sports that may be recognised and included in our work in the future.

OUR VISION

Sport Ireland's vision for outdoor sport is:

Opportunities for everyone to participate in and enjoy sport and physical activity in the outdoors.



POLICY CONTEXT

We are fortunate in Ireland in having generally accessible and high quality environments in both urban and rural locations suitable for sport and physical activity.

We have a growing network of walking and cycling trails, forest parks and recreation sites, national and local parks, upland areas, inland waterways, beaches and coastal areas all affording opportunities for people to be active in the outdoors.

The Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) indicates growing interest and participation rates in many outdoor sports and Sport Ireland believes there is scope to increase participation further over the coming years in all forms of sport and physical activity in the outdoors.





This view is supported by the National Sports Policy (2018-2027)³ which also identifies the importance of outdoor recreation from a health and well-being perspective, and targets the development of opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity in the outdoors including running, walking, cycling and outdoor adventure pursuits.

This policy supports a number of other national strategies and policies including Project Ireland 2040⁴, National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland⁵, the National Marine Planning Framework⁶, the National Countryside Recreation Plan⁷, the Outdoors Recreation Plan for Public Lands and Water in Ireland⁸ and the government's focus on sustainable mobility and active travel⁹. The policy also supports the work of Fáilte Ireland in the development of Ireland as an activity tourism destination.

WHY SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN THE OUTDOORS?

Participating in sport and physical activity in the outdoors leads to positive outcomes from both the physical activity and being in nature¹⁰.

The social, physical and health benefits associated with participating in sport and physical activity in the outdoors are well documented and understood.

Accumulating evidence¹¹ has recently highlighted the significant additional benefits associated with sport and physical activity undertaken in natural outdoor settings, particularly in the area of mental health and well-being.

It concludes that sport and physical activity in the outdoors is shown to:



Sport and physical activities in the outdoors generally tend to be accessible and usually free at the point of use. Urban based outdoor sports can take place in parks, green spaces, rivers, canals, and other settings in urban areas. Outdoor sports can therefore be viewed as a low-cost opportunity for all to participate in and reasonably accessible to those from socio-economically deprived communities.

Research also suggests that those who participate in outdoor recreational sports and do so often enough and at sufficient intensity to benefit their health are more inclined to carry out the activity regularly and for the entire life-course.¹²

It is also important to highlight the significant economic, community and rural development benefits that derive from people participating in sport and physical activity in the outdoors in Ireland.



CURRENT STATE OF PLAY

1. Sport Ireland's Current Work

Sport Ireland currently invests in a number of programmes and initiatives across different units within the organisation supporting the development of sport and physical activity in the outdoors.

This includes:

- supporting over 60 National Governing Bodies (NGBs), including 19 outdoor sport NGBs through annual funding and other capacity building initiatives (NGB Unit)
- supporting 29 Local Sports Partnerships to lead the strategic planning of sport at county level and support increased participation in sport and physical activity by coordinating programmes and initiatives in all counties (Participation/LSP Unit)





- supporting the development of Ireland’s recreational trails (walking & cycling trails, greenways and blueways) by promoting quality standards, maintaining a National Trails Register and promoting trails via the Sport Ireland website (Participation/Outdoors Unit)
- providing a range of organisational development and training supports to partners (OC&D Unit)
- working in partnership with government Departments and State Agencies to develop policies and infrastructure to support outdoor recreation (Outdoors Unit)
- supporting the development of leadership and coaching standards in outdoor sports through the administration and management of the Adventure Sports Qualification Framework with all outdoor NGBs (Coaching Unit)

- supporting disability inclusion in sport by supporting disability NGBs, CARA and the Sport Inclusion Disability Programme with a specific emphasis on outdoor sport (Participation Unit)
- undertaking research into participation trends in sport and to inform investment (Research Unit)
- supporting a number of national participation programmes and initiatives such as the Women in Sport programme, Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiative and the Get Ireland Walking, Get Ireland Cycling, Get Ireland Running and Get Ireland Swimming Initiatives (Participation/Outdoors Unit)
- active membership of Comhairle na Tuaithe (Countryside Advisory Council), Visitor Safety Group and other outdoor sport networks (Outdoors Unit)



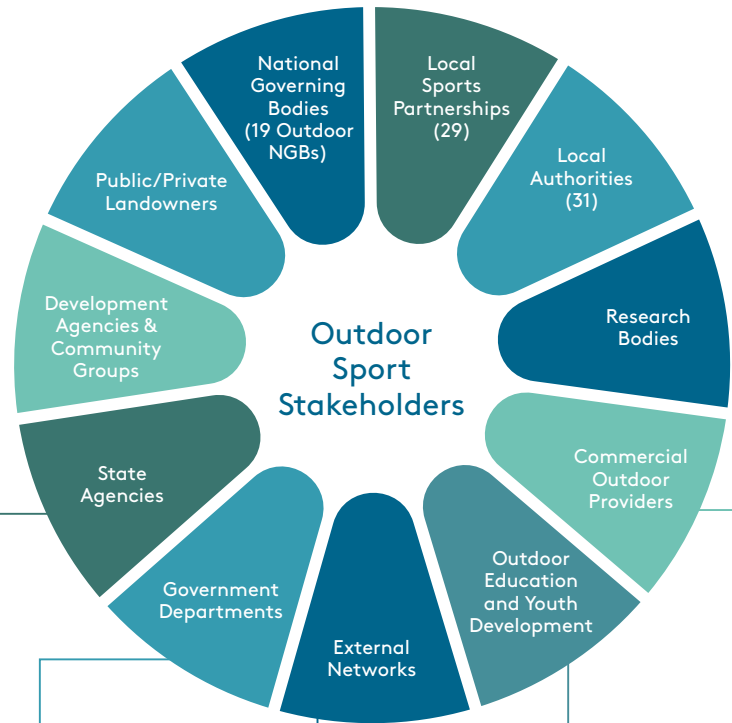


There was clear evidence that participating in outdoor sports has distinct positive effects on general mental health, quality of life experiences, happiness and a sense of life satisfaction – The BOSS Project 2019.¹³

2. Stakeholders

Many agencies have a role to play in facilitating the development of sport and physical activity in the outdoors in Ireland. Improved coordination, collaboration and partnership working between all organisations within this sector is necessary for this sector to realise its full potential.





- Coillte
- Fáilte Ireland
- Waterways Ireland
- National Parks & Wildlife Services
- Bord na Mona
- Others

- Dept of Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sports and the Gaeltacht
- Dept of Rural and Community Development
- Dept of Education and Skills
- Dept of Health
- Dept of Climate Action, Communication Networks and Transport
- Dept of Agriculture and the Marine

- European Network of Outdoor Sports (ENOS)
- Outdoor Recreation Network (ORN)
- Visitor Safety Groups (VSG)
- Others

- ETBI/OETC
- Youth Services
- Scouting Ireland
- Guides Associations
- Others

- Irish Association for Adventure Tourism
- Others

POLICY POSITION

The following is a summary of Sport Ireland's policy position on a number of topics relating to sport and physical activity in the outdoors.





Participation:

Sport Ireland will lead on increasing participation, foster social participation and reduce inequality in sport and physical activity in the outdoors.

Performance:

Sport Ireland seeks to build the performance pillar of Irish sport by supporting the development of National Governing Bodies of Sport, increasing social participation in sport and supporting coaching and development programmes in all types of sport.

Priority Sports:

Sport Ireland will prioritise sports towards which adults are increasingly gravitating including swimming, cycling, running, outdoor adventure pursuits and recreational walking.¹⁴

Strategic Planning:

Sport Ireland supports the strategic planning of sport and physical activity in the outdoors at city/county, regional and national levels and will work to ensure that plans for outdoor sport and physical activity are considered and included in Local Sport and County Development Plans.

Outdoor Recreation on State Lands and Water:

Sport Ireland works strategically with many State Agencies to encourage and promote sport and physical activity in the outdoors on State land and water.

Access to the Outdoors:

Sport Ireland supports the permissive access approach endorsed by Comhairle na Tuaithe¹⁵ in Ireland. Sport Ireland respects the support of landowners (public and private) in permitting sport and recreation activities to happen on their lands.

A large, abstract teal graphic consisting of two overlapping, curved shapes that resemble stylized mountain peaks or abstract letterforms, positioned in the upper right quadrant of the page.

Research and Innovation:

Sport Ireland recognises the importance of undertaking targeted research to inform and guide our work and investment. We will keep up to date with international best practice and establishments doing work in this area. We will also continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of our investments and encourage innovation in sport.

Recreational Trail Development in Ireland:

Sport Ireland recognises the opportunities that are created for sport and physical activity in the outdoors through the development of recreational trails and has supported the development of a national trails system in Ireland over the past 15 years. Sport Ireland will continue to support the development of recreational trails in Ireland over the coming years by maintaining a National Trails Register and insurance scheme for trails while promoting quality standards and good practice.

National Governing Bodies:

Sport Ireland recognises and supports 60 National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sport in Ireland. We respect the right of each NGB to organise and lead the development of their respective sport. Sport Ireland will continue to support all NGBs, including those responsible for outdoor sports, to help grow and develop their sports in Ireland over the coming years.

Local Sports Partnership Network:

Sport Ireland supports a national network of Local Sports Partnerships (29) charged with increasing participation rates in sport and physical activity in their respective counties. The LSP network coordinates and implements a broad mix of participation programmes and initiatives annually, based on the needs of local communities. Sport Ireland will support the development and implementation of outdoor recreation programmes and initiatives through the LSPs over the coming years and will also support close collaboration between LSPs and other stakeholders.

Disability Inclusion in Sport:

Sport Ireland is committed to the equal treatment of people with disabilities when it comes to sport and physical activity in the outdoors. Our principles and policy relating to disability inclusion in sport is articulated in Sport Ireland Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities

Physical Education and Outdoor Sport:

Sport Ireland will support the Dept of Education and Skills and other education partners in the delivery of the Outdoor Sport and Adventure Strand of the PE Curriculum.

Environment:

Sport Ireland recognises that all outdoor sports are undertaken in natural outdoor environments that must be respected and protected. Sport Ireland recognises that there are many outdoor locations that carry important environmental designations that must be protected. Sport Ireland is a core funding partner of Leave No Trace Ireland and encourages all sporting bodies and outdoor enthusiasts to adhere to and promote the Leave No Trace ethic.

Activity Tourism:

Sport Ireland recognises the importance of activity tourism to Ireland's tourism offering and we will identify opportunities to collaborate and work strategically with Fáilte Ireland to help develop both the activity tourism and outdoor sport sectors.

Commercial Outdoor Providers:

Sport Ireland will explore new ways of working in partnership with commercial outdoor providers.

TARGET AREAS

Sport Ireland recognises that increased participation in sport and physical activity in the outdoors will come from a combination of actions including improved and effective leadership and coordination between organisations as well as increased visibility of opportunities for sport and physical activity in the outdoors, developing capacity across the sector to support participation, continued development of quality outdoor infrastructure and widespread opportunities for people to participate in outdoor sports.

Sport Ireland has developed its policy goals around four target areas.



TARGET AREA	POLICY GOAL
<p>Provide Leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Adopt a systems-mapping approach¹⁶ to support the planning, development and promotion of sport and physical activity in the outdoors with all stakeholders. 1.2 Support Government Departments and State Agencies in the development of national strategies and policies to support sport and physical activity in urban and rural outdoor settings. 1.3 Lead and promote cross collaboration and partnership working between all stakeholders leading to new participation opportunities. 1.4 Collaborate, contribute and disseminate research to guide investment and support the overall development of the sector. 1.5 Lead on innovation in sport and physical activity in the outdoors by supporting new ideas and approaches through investment streams. 1.6 Increase the visibility and profile of the outdoor sports sector and opportunities for participation in outdoor sports in Ireland
<p>Build Capacity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Continue to support the development of NGBs as they develop, promote and deliver their sports. 2.2 Support and empower Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) to be key advocates in the strategic planning, development and promotion of outdoor sport at a local level. 2.3 Support the development and promotion of quality experiences and best practice for safe and sustainable outdoor sport participation. 2.4 Support NGBs and providers to deliver training and qualifications accessible to all instructors, leaders and coaches facilitating participation and development in all outdoor sports and active recreation¹⁷.

TARGET AREA	POLICY GOAL
<p>Support Infrastructure Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Support the strategic development of quality outdoor infrastructure in rural and urban settings to enable increased participation in sport and physical activity. 3.2 Continue to support the development of recreational trails in Ireland by promoting quality criteria and best practice and maintain a National Trails Register. 3.3 Promote and encourage improved facilities and services in outdoor settings for people with disabilities. 3.4 Continue to support the development of Community Sport Hubs (Outdoor).
<p>Creating Opportunities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Work with all partners to expand and develop new opportunities for people to engage with and participate in sport and active recreation in the outdoors 4.2 Target new opportunities for people coming from disadvantaged communities and people with disabilities to participate in sport and active recreation in the outdoors 4.3 Support Women in Outdoor Sports Initiatives 4.4 Activate and promote existing and new outdoor recreation infrastructure in the State including Trails, Greenways, Parks, Forest Recreation Sites, Mountain Bike Trails and Blueways

NEXT STEPS

Sport Ireland will assign appropriate resources to deliver the goals outlined in this Policy. There are three core areas of resources – People, Programmes and Investment.

People

This policy will be implemented by Sport Ireland in partnership with stakeholder organisations through a number of operational units within the organisation including the NGB, Coaching, Participation, Research, Communications and OD&C.

The Sport Ireland Outdoors unit will be tasked with coordinating its implementation and reporting progress to the Board of Sport Ireland.

Programmes

Ireland recognises the capacity of NGBs and LSPs to deliver initiatives but also recognises the potential for new partners and agencies to develop and deliver programmes and initiatives in sport and physical activity in the outdoors. To this end Sport Ireland will explore and support the development and implementation of new programmes and initiatives with existing and new partners in a strategic and collaborative way.

Investment

Sport Ireland will continue to invest in the strategic development of outdoor sport over the coming years and the implementation of this policy.



Footnotes:

- 1 Sport Ireland Act 2015
- 2 Sports that have a National Governing Body in place and are recognised by Sport Ireland.
- 3 Action 13, National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027
- 4 <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/09022006-project-ireland-2040/>
- 5 Department of Health
- 6 Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government
- 7 Department of Social Protection, Community & Rural Development and the Islands
- 8 https://www.coillte.ie/media/2017/06/ORP_Screen.pdf
- 9 Department of Media, Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sports and the Gaeltacht
- 10 <https://outdoorsportsbenefits.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BOSS-Stage1-Summary-Report.pdf>
- 11 Donnelly A. A. & MacIntyre, T. E. (2019). Physical Activity in Natural Settings: Green and Blue Exercise (Eds.). London: Routledge. MacIntyre TE, Walkin AM, Beckmann J, Calogiuri G, Gritzka S, Oliver G, Donnelly AA and Warrington G (2019) An Exploratory Study of Extreme Sport Athletes' Nature Interactions: From Well-Being to Pro-environmental Behavior.
- 12 Irish Sports Monitor Review 2007 - 2017
- 13 <https://outdoorsportsbenefits.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/BOSS-Stage1-Summary-Report.pdf>
- 14 Action 5 and Action 13, National Sports Policy 2018 - 2027
- 15 <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/a66a3f-comhairle-na-tuaithe/>
- 16 <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/97/2/18-220533.pdf>
- 17 <https://www.sportireland.ie/coaching/ngbs-lsps/cdpi>

Photo credits:

David Branigan, Oceansport
Gareth McCormack Photography
John Shiels Action Photography
Failte Ireland Content Pool









www.sportireland.ie
@sportireland