

A Strategy to Develop the Recreational and Social Use of Our Forests



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Foreword



I am pleased to present this strategy, which sets out how we propose to promote the recreational and social use of our forests in the north of Ireland. The strategy has been produced following a period of consultation, which generated considerable interest, and I am grateful to the many individuals and organisations who responded.

It has been evident for some time that the demand for recreation provision in forests has been increasing and the expectations of visitors changing. Our forests offer great potential for recreation and leisure pursuits, and opportunities in the areas of tourism and sport. They also provide benefits to health and wellbeing and are a suitable location in which to provide outdoor learning about the forest environment. I am personally very keen that this strategy should help realise the full potential that our forests offer.

Already, our forests attract in excess of 2 million visits per year. However, I want to see greater use being made of forests right across the north and particularly in rural areas. This strategy acknowledges that Forest Service, on its own, will have neither the resource nor expertise to fully develop the opportunities that exist. For this reason, we will have to work in partnership with a range of other providers, and my officials in Forest Service have already started to explore partnership opportunities.

Good work has already been done. The Global Geopark in County Fermanagh is an example of what can be achieved through partnership agreements. Here we worked closely with Fermanagh District Council to finalise management agreements for the improvement of recreation and education facilities on Forest Service land within the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark. The Geopark, which includes large areas of Forest Service land, will help maximise the tourist potential of Fermanagh and further afield. Forest Service is also working closely with other Councils to explore possible partnership working opportunities. My hope is that the approach set out in this strategy, will result in a range of new attractions and facilities that will enhance the experience of forest visitors, both from home and from farther afield.

Our forests are there for everyone to enjoy. This strategy demonstrates my Department's commitment to work in partnership with public and private sector operators to secure a more diverse range of facilities and attractions for the enjoyment of present and future generations. Attracting more visitors to our forests will have a positive impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals and on the economy of rural areas across the north of Ireland. I commend this strategy to you.

Michelle Gildernew MP MLA
July 2009

Forewird

A am blythe settan this strategie furth, at sets out the wey we ar for forderan the recreaton an social uiss o our wuids in the north o Airlan. The strategie is a-pittan furth efter a tyme for speirin, at brocht on muckle interest, an A am thankryfe tae the monie aefauld bodies an curns, as gien a repone.

It wis open tae me for a guid bit at the caa for recreation outgie in wuids is a-biggan up, an the wants o thaim peyan a veesit chyngean. Our wuids bids a muckle abilitie for recreation an leisur follae-ups, an inlets in the airts o tourism an sport. They gies advantages for the halth an weelbein, an bean an airt pittan fore outby learnin anent the wuidlans, at ansuers fowk forby. A masel wad fain see this strategie help wi bringan on the fou abilitie o whit our wuids can bid tae fowk.

Our wuids ay brings in mair nor 2 million veesits the yeir. A am for seean mair uiss a-makkan o wuids athort the north an pairticular in laundart airts. This strategie kens at the Forest Service, its lane, will hae nor the graith nor the ken for the fou oncum o the inlets open. Sae, we will maun wirk in pairtnerie wi a reinge ither outgears, an ma officials in Forest Service is ay efter stairtan wi the explore o inlets for pairtnerie wirkin.

Guid wark is ay efter a-daeen. The Global Geopark in the Countie Fermanagh is an ensaumple o whit can be wun tae wi pairtnerie greeances. Here, we daen wark nearhaund wi the Fermanagh District Council for tae get aa by wi management greeances for the upbig o recreation an leir facilities on Forest Service laund athin the Mairble Airch Caves Global Geopark. The Geopark, at comprehends muckle airts o Forest Service laund, will help wi the upbig o the tourist abilitie o Fermanagh an ithergates forby. Forest Service is wirkan nearhaund wi ither Councils at the explore o pairtnerie inlets aible. Ma howp is at the wey at kythes in this strategie will win tae a reinge new attractions an facilities, as will big up the experience o thaim peyan a veesit tae the wuids, baith frae hame an frae ithergates.

Our wuids bes thar for aa tae enjye. In this strategie kythes ma Depairtments commitment tae the wark in pairtnerie wi public an privat sector wirkars for tae mak sicar we hae a braid reinge differ facilities an attractions for the enjoyment o generations, thenou an in the futur. Bringan in mair veesitars tae our wuids will hae a guid impact on the halth an weelbein o aefauld bodies an on the economie o laundart airts athort the north o Airlan. A commend this strategie tae ye.



Michelle Gildernew MP MLA
July 2009

Réamhrá

Is cúis áthais dom an straitéis seo a chur i láthair, straitéis a leagann amach mar is mian linn úsáid ár gcuid foraoisí i dTuaisceart na hÉireann a chur chun cinn mar chaitheamh aimsire agus ar bhonn sóisialta. Táirgeadh an straitéis i ndiaidh tréimhse chomhairliúcháin inar cuireadh suim mhór agus tá mé buíoch den iomad daoine agus eagrais a d'fhreagair.

Is léir le tamall anuas, go bhfuil an t-éileamh ar sholáthar caitheamh aimsire i bhforaoisí ag méadú agus go bhfuil athrú ag teacht ar an mhéid a bhfuil cuairteoirí ag dúil leis. Tá cumas iontach ag baint lenár gcuid foraoisí maidir le caitheamh aimsire agus fóillíocht agus deiseanna i réimse na turasóireachta agus an spóirt. Tá sochair ag baint leo ó thaobh na sláinte agus na folláine de chomh maith agus is ionaid oiriúnacha iad le foghlaim faoin aer a sholáthar ar thimpeallacht na coille. Tá mé féin go mór i bhfáth le go gcuideoidh an straitéis seo a bhfuil le tairscint ag ár gcuid foraoisí a chur ar fáil.

Meallann ár gcuid foraoisí breis agus 2 mhilliún cuairt sa bhliain cheana féin. Ba mhaith liom, áfach, go mbainfí a thuilleadh leasa as foraoisí ar fud an tuaiscirt agus i gceantair thuaithe go háirithe. Aithníonn an straitéis nach mbeidh sé d'acmhainn ná de shaineolas ag an tSeirbhís Foraoise, inti féin, na deiseanna atá ann a fhorbairt go hiomlán. Is ar an chúis seo a bheidh orainn bheith ag obair i gcomhpháirt le réimse soláthraithe eile agus tá tus curtha cheana féin ag mo chuid oifigeach sa tSeirbhís Foraoise deiseanna páirtíochta a fhiosrú.

Rinneadh an-obair cheana féin. Is sampla é an “Gheo-pháirc Dhomhanda” i gContae Fhear Manach den mhéid is féidir a dhéanamh trí chomhaontuithe páirtíochta. Sa chás seo, d'oibrigh muid i ndlúthpháirtíocht le Comhairle Cheantair Fhear Manach le comhaontuithe bainistíochta a thabhairt chun críche d'fhonn saoráidí caitheamh aimsire agus oideachais ar thalamh de chuid na Seirbhíse Foraoise a fheabhsú laistigh de “Gheo-pháirc Dhomhanda” Uaimheanna na hÁirse Marmair. Cuideoidh an “Gheo-pháirc”, a bhfuil achair mhóra tálún de chuid na Seirbhíse Foraoise mar chuid di, an cumas turasóireachta i bhFear Manach agus in áiteanna eile a uasmhéadú. Tá an tSeirbhís Foraoise ag obair go dlúth fosta le Comhairlí eile le deiseanna eile comhoibrithe a fhiosrú. Tá súil agam gurb é an toradh a bheidh ar an chur chuige a leagtar amach sa straitéis seo, réimse de shaoráidí agus d'áiseanna nua a chuirfidh leis an eispéireas a bheidh ag daoine atá ina gcónaí abhus agus thar lear agus a thiocfaidh ar cuairt chuig na foraoisí.

Tá ár gcuid foraoisí ansin le go mbainfidh gach duine sult astu. Léiríonn an straitéis seo tiomantas mo Roinne bheith ag obair i bpáirt le forais atá ag feidhmiú san earnáil phoiblí agus phríobháideach araon le réimse éagsúil áiseanna agus saoráidí a chur ar fáil le go mbainfidh an ghlúin seo agus na glúine atá le teacht taitneamh astu. Má mhealltar a thuilleadh cuairteoirí chuig ár gcuid foraoisí, beidh tionchar dearfach aige sin ar shláinte agus ar fholláine daoine aonair agus ar eacnamaíocht dúichí tuaithe ar fud Tuaisceart na hÉireann. Molaim daoibh an straitéis seo.



Michelle Gildernew MP MLA
July 2009



Introduction

The Forest Service manages 75,500 hectares of forest land - mainly comprised of conifer plantations, open space, broadleaved woodland, and recreational and amenity areas - representing almost 6% of our land area. Locations of our forests and the main forest recreation areas are shown in Appendix I. Our forests are managed in a sustainable way, and, as a result, they provide a balance of economic, environmental and social benefits.

There are more than two million visits to our forests every year, with visitors enjoying forest trails and nature walks through some of the most beautiful scenery in the north of Ireland. The physical and mental health benefits of outdoor recreation are well reported and our forests offer great scope for these benefits to be enjoyed. Some of our forests provide ecotrails, and orienteering, cycling, and horse-riding opportunities. They also regularly host a range of organised outdoor recreation and sports events including walks, athletics, cycling and car rallies.

We have a number of Forest Parks, in which there are additional facilities, such as car parking, picnic sites, toilet facilities and a range of walks and attractions. We recognise, however, that the demand for recreational use of forests is changing and that the expectations of today's visitor have changed.

The policy context for forestry in the north of Ireland is outlined in *NI Forestry - A Strategy for Sustainability and Growth*, published in March 2006. This takes forward the sustainable management of existing woods and forests, coupled with a steady expansion of forest cover to increase the many diverse benefits that forests provide. It includes a specific aim to maintain access arrangements and to realise the outdoor recreation potential of public forests.

This strategy document outlines the policy framework within which we will seek to promote and facilitate the recreational and social use of our forests right across the north.

Vision and Purpose

The vision of this Strategy is that our forests will become key venues for outdoor recreation and tourism, offering opportunities to appreciate and enjoy biodiversity, and a wide choice of activities for an increasing number of visitors. The Strategy recognises that forests offer significant opportunities to contribute to wider government objectives in tourism, rural development, sport, health and education. However, it also recognises that Forest Service cannot maximise the full range of opportunities on its own. Partnership working with others, including commercial operators and with other public bodies, will enable much more to be achieved.

This strategy commits Forest Service to a stronger focus on recreational and social use of its forests by:

- Identifying recreational and social use as an important component of Forest Plans
- Creating new opportunities for recreation and facilities through proactive partnership working with the public, private and voluntary sectors; and
- Promoting the recreational and social use of forests

Promoting and developing the recreational and social use of forests will benefit visitors in terms of personal health and wellbeing, and will provide opportunities for economic development through tourism and events.



Policy Background and Context

Access to our forests and the associated provision of recreational facilities, supports policies of the Executive in relation to access to the countryside, including equality, health, education, sport and wellbeing. We will seek support and involvement across the range of Government Departments and Agencies, and other public bodies, so that the full potential of our forests can be realised.

Implementation of the strategy will take place against a changing background of local Government in respect of the Review of Public Administration (RPA). Under the RPA, District Councils will assume new powers of community planning and wellbeing. This has the potential to influence the future role played by District Councils in the delivery of forest recreation and social use.

The overall policy framework for developing this strategy is provided by a number of important Government strategies and policies. These include:

Executive Programme for Government 2008-2011
A Sustainable Development Strategy for NI
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) Strategic Plan 2006-2011
NI Forestry - A strategy for sustainability and growth

The following key themes occur throughout these documents and provide the framework for this strategy:

- Sustainable development
- Partnership working
- Promoting access and equality
- Contributing to health and education
- Enabling economic development
- Good governance

Consultation

A stakeholder forum comprised of representatives of the NI Environment Agency, the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB), Sport NI, Local Authorities and non-government organisations was established to further inform the development of this strategy. This forum met on 4 occasions from August 2008 until June 2009 and provided feedback in relation to the draft strategy. In November 2008 a consultation document was issued to stakeholders and made available on the Forest Service's website for consultation. Responses from a wide variety of stakeholders were summarised and reported to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee of the Assembly in February 2009.

A draft Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) on this strategy was issued for consultation in January 2009. In addition, meetings were held with the NI Commissioner for Children and Young People and with representatives of key organisations, including Disability Action, Carers NI and the NI Council for Ethnic Minorities. Responses indicated that key areas of delivery should include providing relevant information in relation to accessibility, continuing to improve trail signage within forests, and implementing recommendations contained in *Barriers to Participation* (Countryside Access and Activities Network, 2008). The EqIA is included in Annex A.

Organisations and individuals who provided formal responses to the Strategy and EqIA consultation documents are listed in Appendix II.

Sustainable Development

“building a sustainable future will be a key requirement for our economic, social and environmental policies and programmes”

(Programme for Government p4)

Sustainable development in relation to forestry is defined and recognised internationally as ‘Sustainable Forest Management’. A key part of sustainable forest management is the development of forest plans, which reflect the Forest Service’s intention to achieve an appropriate balance between economic, environmental and social objectives for forests according to their proximity to towns and settlements, landscape and ecology.

We manage our forests in accordance with published forestry standards. These refer to the major contribution forests can make to local people’s quality of life by creating opportunities for recreation, health-promoting exercise, education, and local community Involvement.

Our approach to sustainable forest management is based on a planning process which balances recreational and social use, timber production and environmental functions of forests over broad geographic areas, while accommodating differences in emphasis in each of these factors between individual forests.

Therefore, forests may be managed in a variety of ways to meet different objectives. As a result, there is wide variation in terms of the potential for recreational or social use. At present, a number of forests are designated as Forest Parks, and include specific areas where the main management objective is for recreational and social use activities. Most other areas of forest are managed to realise biodiversity and timber production objectives and may only be suitable for limited recreational or social use. There are a few forests, such as Belvoir and Somerset, that are located close to towns and cities, and are therefore heavily used.

Most forest land is subject to Sporting Rights, which may be owned by the Department, by other public bodies, or by third parties. Forest Service will continue to practise careful management to balance the demands of individuals and shooting clubs wishing to exercise those rights with the need to ensure the safety of other recreational forest users.



Forest Plans and Stakeholder Engagement

Forest plans provide the mechanism for managing forests and for ensuring an appropriate balance between the various economic, environmental and social objectives. We recognise that our forest planning system must accommodate a stronger emphasis on social use and recreation opportunities if the full potential of forests is to be realised. In addition to the demand for recreational use and tourism, the planning process will take account of social factors, including the promotion of diversity and social inclusion, education and learning, public participation, volunteering, health, and wellbeing.

Effective consultation with stakeholders is an integral part of the forest planning system, both in an overarching context and within the context of developing plans for specific areas. There are statutory requirements to use appropriate participative approaches to obtain the views of stakeholders that are under-represented. In terms of recreational and social use, for example, this includes children and young people. This is an area we will develop through our forest planning process, as part of our implementation of the Strategy.

Outcomes

We will:

- Revise the Forest Service system for developing new forest plans to enable a more focused approach to the provision for recreational and social use of forests, including maximising the contribution of forests to tourism
- Produce and publish revised plans for recreation and social use provision in forests within Mourne, the Antrim Hills and Glens, and the Fermanagh Global Geopark
- Produce and publish revised plans for recreation and social use provision in forests within the Sperrins, Bann Valley, Lagan Valley, and Co Armagh
- Establish and support a Forest Recreation and Social Use Stakeholder Forum
- Improve stakeholder engagement and participation processes within the Forest Planning System to better capture stakeholders' views in relation to recreational and social use of forests
- Develop mechanisms for capturing visitor numbers and levels of satisfaction



Partnership Working

“working in partnership as an Executive, and across the public, private and voluntary sectors, to harness the ideas, energy and commitment of all the sectors”

(Programme for Government p2)

We believe that working in partnership with others to develop and manage recreational and social use facilities in our forests will be critical to the success of this Strategy. Partnership working offers benefits to users in terms of improvements in practice and delivery arising from the combined experience of the partners and the ongoing exchange of information between them, in keeping with the aims of the NI Countryside Recreation Strategy¹, which is currently under review. Our aim will be to encourage potential recreational providers to make use of Forest Service land under appropriate arrangements, which will vary depending on the type and scale of the proposal, and its likely benefits in terms of economic return or value to the local community.

We envisage that potential partners will include public bodies, private businesses and non-government organisations, working in relation to large and small scale developments, and on a scale ranging from forests across the north of Ireland to individual forest areas. Partners, at the widest scale, are likely to include public bodies, and publicly or privately owned utilities. Partnership working with City and District Councils, with businesses, and with non-government organisations will be associated with development at a more local level. For example, we are working with Fermanagh District Council to improve recreational and educational facilities in forests within the Global Geopark.

CASE STUDY

Marble Arch Caves

Global Geopark, County Fermanagh

The UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) approved expansion of the Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark in 2007 encompasses many of the forests owned by Forest Service in West Fermanagh and includes the spectacular Lough Navar Forest Drive, Florencecourt Forest Park, Castlecaulwell and Marble Arch National Nature Reserve. This joint venture demonstrates the social, economic and environmental benefits that can be achieved through local partnerships, in this case Fermanagh District Council, Forest Service and the NI Environment Agency. The expansion of the Geopark has served to enhance Fermanagh's reputation as an attractive tourist destination. This provides benefits not just to the local economy but also at a national level because it is now being marketed to visitors as one of the north of Ireland's premier natural assets. Management agreements have been drawn up between the partners to improve recreational and educational facilities within forests throughout the Geopark.



We wish to facilitate proposals from potential partners to maximise, as far as possible, the public value benefits. We will evaluate them within a framework which takes account of Forest Plans, resource requirements, the Forest Service business plan and the responsibility and competence of the proposers to facilitate or manage the resulting project. We believe, however, that this creates significant scope for new opportunities and we already have many examples of successful partnerships that operate within this broad framework.

Within local communities, potential partners could, for example, include Activity and Sports Clubs and Associations, local Outdoor Activity Providers and other local businesses, and Voluntary Organisations.

CASE STUDY

Life

In 2002/2003, the Highpoint Group proposed an expansion of their delivery of outdoor recreation in the Mourne using an operating base in Castlewellan Forest Park.

A short term Licence was signed giving temporary right of use for the old Scout Hall and part of the Grange courtyard. Following two successful summer seasons a more permanent arrangement was sought and a 25 year Lease was signed in 2005. Using both public grant aid and private finance the building was converted for its new role and this work was completed by summer 2006 in time for the July holidays. Since then, the Group who until recently were trading as Blue Lough, and now as Life, have continued to expand and offer a wide range of outdoor recreation services and adventure activities within the Forest Park and elsewhere in the Mourne. This arrangement has secured the following benefits:

- The building has been renovated and converted for its new role
- Recreation provision for day visitors to Castlewellan Forest Park has been enhanced
- Local tourism has benefitted from having a purpose designed outdoor pursuits centre within the Mourne
- Permanent and seasonal employment has been created in a sustainable way

Outcomes

We will:

- Develop and issue information and guidance in relation to partnership working arrangements including businesses, government, and voluntary sector organisations
- Operate partnership arrangements with Fermanagh District Council at a strategic level to develop improved recreation and social use facilities
- Continue to engage with Local Authorities, activity providers and activity representative bodies in relation to specific forest recreation and social use proposals
- Proactively approach all Local Authorities to discuss the potential for forests to contribute to tourism and improve the delivery of access and wellbeing to local communities
- Proactively approach Government Departments and other statutory bodies to explore how their relevant business objectives can be met through the use of forests
- Develop partnership working arrangements with the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and other environmental non-government organisations in relation to the delivery of forest recreation, outdoor education and social use opportunities
- Work in partnership with The NI Environment Agency, SportNI, and other bodies to produce a new NI Outdoor Recreation Strategy
- Proactively seek opportunities for working more closely with recreation and social use providers and events organisers to promote the use of forests

Promoting Access and Equality

“we want to address the challenge of restoring and enhancing a profitable and sustainable forest industry to provide wood, to improve biodiversity and landscape, and to provide opportunities for access to the countryside ... In the delivery of all our services and in implementing our policies, we want to promote all aspects of equality and good relations”
(DARD Strategic Plan p7)

Details of access arrangements to our forests are provided on our website, and other websites, eg WalkNI and CycleNI. We want to make the information on our website as helpful and meaningful as possible and will review and update the website as part of Strategy implementation.

Access to our forests on foot is normally unrestricted and free of charge. This is currently facilitated through permissive bye-laws. We are committed, however, to the introduction, through primary legislation, of a statutory right of pedestrian access. This will complement local government policies on recreation and access to the countryside. We have obtained Executive Committee approval to introduce a Bill, with appropriate provisions, to the Assembly.

We are committed to renewing signage of forests paths in Forest Parks and other recreation areas, in order to provide greater clarity in way marking. A number of forests include way marked horse riding routes, which generally make use of forest roads. Access on bicycle to use Sustrans and family cycle routes, where they exist, is also encouraged.

CASE STUDY

Signage Strategy

The Signage Strategy provides a framework for upgrading information and signage within Forest Service recreational areas. The main objective was to improve accessibility, particularly to those people with disabilities. Standards of way marking and information boards are based on the *BT Countryside for All Good Practice Guide to Countryside Access for Disabled People* (1st edition, 1997). Guidance for general forest signs followed the ‘*Sign Design Guide*’ (JMU Access Partnership and Sign Design Society, 2000). Implementation commenced in 2005 and will be completed by 2010.



Forest Service has worked closely with the NI Environment Agency on the revision of the Ulster Way, which includes a number of forest recreation areas, many of which are in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and are important tourist destinations

CASE STUDY

The Ulster Way

At almost 600 miles the Ulster Way is a circular walking route around the north. As the biggest landowner along the Ulster Way, Forest Service has worked closely with NI Environment Agency, Councils and many other partners to identify a route that provides walkers with an opportunity to view the scenery, biodiversity, encounter myth and legend and sample the local culture along the Way. This has enabled significant sections to meander off-road through beautiful Forest Parks such as Glengariff with its spectacular waterfalls, Lough Navar with fantastic views over Lough Erne and all of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Access in vehicles to use car parks or forest drives is normally charged. Additional charges are made for specific events and individual horse riding permits. We will continue to facilitate the development of this type of use in partnership with bodies and organisations that represent user groups and organise events. Changes in the level of provision to meet changing demand will be considered in reviews of forest plans.

Recent research has identified a need for improvements in the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities for specific groups in the north who, for a range of reasons, are less likely to make use of outdoor recreation facilities. Recommendations in Barriers to Participation will be considered in the course of our future planning work in relation to forest recreation areas. We have improved facilities for people with a disability, by reducing the gradient of paths, and providing ramps and accessible toilets, as well as clearer signage. However, there is scope for greater provision which we will consider in our development of forest plans.

Outcomes

We will:

- Include a Statutory Right of Access in the forthcoming Forestry Bill for the north of Ireland
- Complete implementation of the Signage Strategy
- Finalise and implement Ulster Way management arrangements
- Identify Forest Service forests by means of appropriate threshold signage.
- Produce guidance in relation to developing cycling and horse riding trails in forests
- Incorporate changes into the Forest Service system for developing new forest plans to take account of recommendations in *Barriers to Participation*

- Develop and implement guidance on consulting with children and young people in conjunction with revising Forest Plans
- Review and develop consultation and engagement arrangements involving other groups identified in Section 75 of the *NI Act 1998*, in addition to children.
- Explore opportunities for improving access and making mobility scooters available for use within Forest Parks
- Provide targeted information for children and young people
- Review targeting of information for Section 75 groups other than children.
- Review and publish access and activity charges and concessions annually as a short term measure, and in the longer term consider the potential for a harmonised approach to charges with local bodies



Contributing to Health and Education

“Encourage healthy outdoor activities by improving accessibility to green spaces“

(Sustainable Development Strategy for NI p76)

“Education outside the classroom brings the environment closer to children and young people by encouraging an active lifestyle whilst enriching and broadening learning experiences”

(Sustainable Development Strategy for NI p119)

Physical and mental health benefits from outdoor recreation and proximity to trees and woodland have been well reported in a number of research reports and publications from around the world. We have a number of forests that are close to towns and villages. These offer great potential to contribute to health and wellbeing through wider use for walking, jogging, cycling and other leisure pursuits, supported, where necessary, by improvement of access and provision of information.

In the north of Ireland, there has been some promotion of the recreational and social use of forests through the ‘Highways to Health’ and ‘Walking for Health’ signage initiatives, supported by the (then) Health Promotion Agency (now the Public Health Agency). The health agenda is closely linked to the promotion of sports activity. While the draft *NI Strategy for Sports and Physical Recreation 2007-2017* (Sport NI, 2007) does not specifically refer to the recreational and social use of forests, there is a strong association through the continued use of track and water facilities in forests for orienteering, athletics, fell running, long distance horse riding, cycling, canoeing, rowing and sailing.

Forests are regularly used by schools and other educational organisations, including Outdoor Education Centres. Relevant areas of learning in respect of the curriculum here include ‘The World Around Us’ for primary and ‘Environment and Society’ for post-primary students. Forests contribute to the delivery of Education for Sustainable Development through delivery of the Sustainable Forestry Programme, which provides students with examples of forest management in which they make decisions about how to balance environmental, economic and social management objectives. In addition to education programmes linked to the curriculum, forests provide many opportunities for learning in a variety of ways across all age groups.

Woodland Schools

Forests can provide a special opportunity for children to play in a woodland setting, and develop self confidence and awareness of their natural environment. Woodland schools, where a small area of woodland is used regularly by organised school groups, provide particular benefits for nursery and primary school children.

Ecotrails

Forests are ideal locations for ecotrails, which provide an opportunity for people of all ages to develop an appreciation and awareness of their local environment, through using a forest trail designed to highlight environment learning features.

CASE STUDY

Ecotrails

The new trails at Parkanaur Forest and Gosford Forest Park complement two existing trails in place at Benburb Valley and Loughgall Country Parks. Children from local schools in the Castlecaulfield area were some of the first to test the new trails with everyone agreeing that it was a very enjoyable and positive experience. DARD Minister, Michelle Gildernew, who officially opened the Parkanuar ecotrail, commented “I am particularly proud to be here today in the Blackwater region, launching a product which provides an alternative outdoor learning experience for thousands of children. The Forest Service has been able to work closely with both the Blackwater Regional Partnership and NI Orienteering to allow these developments to take place.” The aim of ecotrails is to develop the environmental and social awareness of young people, being purposely designed to provide an understanding and appreciation of the local and built environment in an enjoyable way. Forest Service has also made a number of improvements to the existing trails at Parkanaur forest. This includes improving trail information for visitors to the forest as well as increasing opportunities for a wider range of the community. A section of new path has also been expanded to provide greater access to the forest for members of the public who are less mobile.

Outdoor recreation is increasingly being seen as a method of diverting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour. Volunteering opportunities, under agreed arrangements, can also be provided for retired or unemployed people, those with mental health problems, and young people.

Outcomes

We will:

- Explore opportunities for increasing cycling and horse riding in forests
- Encourage increased use of forests close to towns and villages by local people
- Explore opportunities for children’s play and leisure facilities and provision for young people within Forest Parks
- Develop arrangements for promoting the use of forests for new outdoor learning opportunities

Enabling Economic Development

“We will strive to also ensure that all parts of our region share in sustainable economic and social development and are able to contribute to and benefit from a better future”

(Programme for Government p1)

Tourism is based on a recognition of the importance of the natural environment in attracting visitors to the region and is one of the key drivers of the economy as set out in the *Programme for Government*. Some forests and Forest Parks are located in key Tourism Areas, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty or in Signature Project areas. They therefore, have the potential to contribute to the visitor experience as specific attractions and as locations for activities and events. Existing provision includes caravan parks, campsites, walking trails, picnic sites and cycle routes.

Forest Service is keen to play its part in contributing to tourism growth through seeking opportunities for product development and enhancing the wider visitor experience of the areas in which key forest sites are located such as the Causeway Coast and Glens, the Mourne, Fermanagh and Sperrins.

Partnership working with tourism providers has the potential to create opportunities for the establishment, or development, of small and medium sized businesses within Forest Parks and in the wider community, including, for example catering, outdoor adventure provision, holiday accommodation and pony trekking. In addition to tourism, local businesses can make use of opportunities by participating in events such as agricultural shows, craft fairs, and music festivals. We will pursue these opportunities through our engagement with potential partners.

The opportunities for the recreational and social use of forests to generate economic development will, to a large extent, depend on our capacity to develop working partnerships. At the highest level it would be desirable to establish formal working arrangements with the NITB under a Memorandum of Agreement or similar mechanism. In relation to operational partnerships, for example, Gun Clubs and Forest Service have successfully worked together under licensing arrangements to enable the exercise of sporting rights associated with forest land for many years.

The NITB has identified sports tourism, activities and waterways as one of its key product areas to attract visitors. Forest Service is already working to explore how opportunities can be taken forward within practical working arrangements. Effective promotion and joint marketing, using a variety of means including the Forest Service website and links to websites managed by other bodies, will be an important element in enabling success through raising awareness and providing relevant and up to date information on the offerings of our forests.

Outcomes

We will:

- Establish formal arrangements for regular engagement with the NITB at both strategic and operational level to drive delivery of agreed collaborative projects, in line with the Tourism Strategy NI
- Secure arrangements to deliver high ropes attractions in specific locations
- Develop new operating arrangements for camping and caravanning and forest leisure facilities
- Reflect the goals and aspirations of the strategy through regular review of the Forest Service website



Good Governance

“Our vision is of a NI where good governance enjoys a strong relationship with its social partners and supports a thriving, innovative and sustainable business community”

(Sustainable Development Strategy for NI p125)

The creation and management of forests is governed by the Forestry (NI) Act 1953. We have brought proposals to the Assembly for a new Forestry Act which will create a more modern statutory framework. It is intended that the new Forestry Act will give us greater legislative authority to build partnerships with public bodies, non-government organisations and private businesses to develop forest land for tourist facilities and other economic uses. This forms part of an overall requirement to practise responsible management of public forests, and maintain a balance between economic, environmental and social benefits.

Development proposals for recreation, social or other uses will be considered in respect of sustainable development criteria. These include taking account of assessments of environmental and equality impacts, economic appraisal, and affordability in terms of Forest Service resources. Partnership working to deliver recreational and social use of forests is likely to have even greater relevance in respect of the Review of Public Administration, which will make powers of community planning and wellbeing the responsibility of District Councils.

In developing and implementing the strategy, we will conform with revised guidance on the statutory duties in respect of section 75 of the *NI Act 1998*. A separate Equality Impact Assessment of the strategy in relation to Groups identified in section 75 of the *NI Act* has been carried out (Annex A). Statutory duties in respect of disability legislation will also be addressed as part of Strategy implementation.

In some areas we recognise that recreational and social use of forests is constrained by European environmental designation. For example, 19% of forest land is designated as part of the Natura 2000 network, most of which is in two Special Protected Areas. This requires us to make an assessment of the impacts of recreation and social use on the environment.

Implementation

We will seek to deliver outcomes mainly through our forest planning process and the Forest Service Business Plan. Our annual Business Plans will outline available resources, priorities and will include appropriate targets relating to Strategy implementation.

Planned outcomes are listed in the Implementation Plan in Annex B.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation will include:

- An annual report to the Minister on achievements against Implementation Plan targets
- An annual review of achievements against business plan targets, through our Annual Report
- Visitor satisfaction surveys
- A three year review of achievement against outcomes



Annex A

Equality Impact Assessment

Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategy to Develop the Recreational and Social Use of Our Forests

1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Forest Service is responsible for 124 forests which receive about two million visits each year. A number of our forests are managed as Forest Parks and they provide additional facilities including car parking, picnic sites and toilets. The Strategy to Develop the Recreational and Social Use of Our Forests has been developed in recognition of the changing demand and expectations for recreational use within forests.
- 1.2 Section 75 of the *NI Act 1998* requires DARD to have due regard to the promotion of equality of opportunity –
- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
 - between men and women generally;
 - between persons with a disability and persons without; and
 - between persons with dependants and persons without
- 1.3 In addition, without prejudice to the above obligation, public authorities must also, in carrying out their functions, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group. Specifically Forest Service are required to:
- assess whether there are differences in the way a policy impacts upon statutory equality categories described above; and
 - identify where there are means to better promote the equality of opportunity and good relations.

2 Information Sources

- 2.1 The sources of information used for this Equality Impact Assessment: include 1) existing documentation, 2) interviews with appropriate Forest Service staff, 3) face to face meetings with umbrella organisations representing Section 75 groups, and 4) responses to consultation.
- 2.2 The main sources of documentary information for this assessment are the *Public Opinion of Forestry 2007: NI*, carried out jointly by the Forest Service and the GB Forestry Commission in 2007, and *Barriers to Participation*, published in 2008 by the NI Countryside Access and Activities Network. These sources indicate that disabled visitors and those from minority racial groups are under represented in countryside recreation.

2.3 In December 2008 meetings were held with the following groups, whose comments have been incorporated into this Equality Impact Assessment.

- Disability Action NI (Access Manager)
- NI Commissioner for Children and Young People (Policy Officer)
- Carers NI (Chief Executive)
- NI Council for Ethnic Minorities (Project Officer)
- Sport NI (Countryside Recreation Development Officer)

2.4 A total of 13 consultation responses were received, including 6 from public bodies, 5 from users, and 2 from voluntary organisations. Respondents are listed in Appendix 2 of the Strategy.

3. Assessment of Recreational and Social Use of Forests by User Group

3.1 It is reported in the *Public Opinion of Forestry* that 62% of respondents had visited woodlands for recreation in the last few years. Of those respondents who had visited forests in the last few years, 64% rated their visit as generally more enjoyable compared with visits to other similar outdoor recreation destinations and 5% rated visits as generally less enjoyable. People visiting our forests take part in activities including; walking, horse riding, athletics, exercising dogs, water sports, school visits, picnics, camping, painting and feeding ducks. Many forest users visit frequently and we believe that most of these visitors live close to the forest. Reasons for decreased visitor enjoyment included dog fouling, and activities of other specific user groups including motor cyclists, cyclists and horse riders.

3.2 In terms of religious belief, the *Public Opinion of Forestry* reports that there is only a very small difference in the proportion of people from different religious backgrounds visiting forests. 62% of Protestants had visited forests in the last few years and 60% of Catholics had visited forests in the last few years. Recently published information on Forest Service education visits shows an equal balance of maintained and controlled schools taking part.

3.3 Political opinion is thought to be closely linked to religion, which we are aware does not result in a significant difference in participation in forest recreation.

3.4 In terms of racial origin or ethnic group, of 62% of respondents to the *Public Opinion of Forestry* survey who said that they had visited forests in the last few years, 99% described themselves as white. In *Barriers to Participation* it is reported that, in 2008, there were at least 30,000 Polish people living in the north of Ireland. It is also reported in *Barriers to Participation* that there is a strong culture of participating in outdoor activities in Poland and other eastern European countries, and people from these minority groups participate in these activities in the north of Ireland. This may account for observations by Forest Service staff that visitors from minority racial or ethnic groups are well represented in some forests that located close to specific population centres, for example Gosford Forest Park. Minority

racial or ethnic groups from Poland, Romania, Peoples Republic of China, Japan, India and Russia took part in 'International Picnics' organised by voluntary groups in Portglenone Forest in Co. Antrim and Gortin Glen Forest Park in Co. Tyrone. However, *Barriers to Participation* supports a view that generally people from ethnic minorities are under represented participants in countryside recreation.

- 3.5 In terms of age, the *Public Opinion of Forestry* showed that about two thirds of the population aged between 16 and 64 had visited forests in the last few years but that less than half of those aged 65 and over had visited forests in the last few years. We know that young people aged between 13 and 18 years are well represented as forest users through school and other groups taking part in activities organised with outdoor activity centres.

Interviews with front line Forest Service staff identified that the age profile of visitors varies during the week. From Monday to Friday most visitors are older people who may be retired. They visit as individuals, couples and in groups. The most frequent activity is walking and on some occasions walks are formally organised, for example 'Walking for Health' groups walk in Castlewellan, Randalstown and Tardree forests.

At weekends and holiday periods more visitors aged 18 – 65 years are present, they bring children and young people with them and although walking is still the most common activity, more physically demanding activities such as athletics and cycling are evident.

The analysis shows that forests are used by people of all ages. However, the *Public Opinion of Forestry* shows that as people become older, a smaller proportion of those surveyed visit forests for recreation.

- 3.6 In terms of marital status, the *Public Opinion of Forestry* reports that those who are single, married, living with partner or divorced visit forests almost equally and between 61% and 66% had visited forests in the last few years. This figure corresponds to the proportion of the general population who visit forests for recreation. Just over 40% of people who are widowed had visited forests in the last few years and we believe that this links to people visiting forests less as they become older.

- 3.7 No specific data is available for the sexual orientation of forest users. However, the *Rural Development Programme Equality Impact Assessment* reports that 10% is generally accepted as the proportion of people in the north of Ireland who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. We do not think that this Recreation Strategy has a different impact on an individual or group based on their sexual orientation.

- 3.8 Most regular forest user groups are balanced in terms of gender. The *Public Opinion of Forestry* reports that 64% of females surveyed had visited forests in the last few years, proportionately 4% fewer men had visited. Interviews with our staff showed that some

activities tended to be gender specific, for example those who lease shooting rights are predominantly male and those who ride horses are predominantly female.

The proportion of men and women who visit forests is similar to the proportion of the general population who visits forests and there is no significant difference in participation. We do not think that the current balance will be changed by the Recreation Strategy.

- 3.9 A NISRA survey found that 21% of adults and 6% of children in the north has a disability and over one quarter of all families are affected (*The NI Survey of Activity Limitation and Disability*, 2007). We recognise that many disabilities are not immediately apparent through informal observation, that many people have more than one form of disability and that they might not identify themselves as such.

The *Public Opinion of Forestry* reported that just less than 10% of respondents have a disability and that just under half of this group had visited forests in the last few years. This supports findings reported in *Barriers to Participation* that this group is underrepresented as a group of forest users.

Disabled people that do visit forests are able to take part in a range of activities. In some forests we have installed signs that describe trail conditions to better inform visitors of what to expect, accessible trails and paths including the Lake Path at Castlewellan Forest Park, the 'Millennium Mile' and 'Sensory Trail' at Somerset Forest are used and at Castlewellan special access arrangements are in place for fishing. A 'Green Gym' at Portglenone meets regularly for physically and mentally disabled people and those with learning difficulties. The gym is organised by Portglenone Enterprise Group and they aim to tackle inequalities in health and social wellbeing by creating an environment to improve general health and support improved social wellbeing by increasing levels of physical activity for participants.

- 3.10 Carers NI told us that approximately 10% of the population are carers. Unfortunately, we do not have any data to support whether or not carers visit our forests. Carers NI told us that this group would be interested in visiting forests for health benefits, however they would need to know about provision of facilities such as accessible toilets prior to the visit.

Adults with children and young people make up a significant proportion of forest visitors at the weekends and during holiday periods. Between Monday and Friday our staff reported that women, often with prams, visit the forest. Access by women with young children tends to be on foot and repeat visits are common suggesting that they live locally to the forest.

We are not aware of the total number of forest visitors from this group. Some of our Forest Parks have the facilities that we have been told are important, for example accessible toilets. Awareness of the facilities that exist in Forest Parks appears to be low in this group.

3.11 The above analysis of existing users has shown that four Section 75 groups are under represented as forest users:

- Minority racial or ethnic groups
- People over 65 years of age
- People with a disability
- People with dependants

3.12 The consultation highlighted that there is a need to consider links between Section 75 groups, for example young people with disabilities. Unfortunately no information was available in relation to people within two or more section 75 groups.

4. Assessment of likely impacts of specific aims of the Strategy

Five key areas of the draft Strategy were assessed in terms of their likely impact on under represented groups of people:

- Improving signage on walking routes
- Development of operational guidelines for cycling and horse riding
- Taking forward recommendations in *Barriers to Participation* in the course of our planning in relation to forest recreation areas
- Promoting the use of forests for health and wellbeing
- Promoting the use of forests for organised sporting events

4.1 Improving signage on walking routes

The aim of the Forest Service Signage Strategy is to provide information in the most popular forests describing the distance, surface, slope, physical barriers and provision of rest stops on forest trails. Standardised colours and the use of symbols and numbers helps overcome language barriers. The information lets visitors make an informed decision before beginning any walk.

Meetings with umbrella organisations and responses to the consultation exercise supported the continued implementation of the signage strategy. Some groups asked about the process of designing the strategy. They were encouraged to know that it had been prepared with reference to good practice guidance published by the Fieldfare Trust who work with people with disabilities and countryside managers to improve access to the countryside for everyone.

The implementation of our signage strategy has been positive across all Section 75 groups. Based on their experience our staff think the most significant positive impact has been for people with disabilities, those with reduced mobility and people from minority racial or ethnic groups. Consultation responses and our own staff reported that visitors have told them that the signage strategy could be further enhanced by developing a system to signpost points of interest in forests.

4.2 Development of operational guidelines for cycling and horse riding

The Recreation and Social Use Strategy recognises the need to develop guidelines for cycling and horse riding in response to increased interest in these activities. Responses to the consultation told us that people with disabilities and reduced mobility could be adversely affected by these activities. They also said that it is possible to accommodate a range of recreational users within the same forest through good route design and planning. This would be strengthened by the development of operational guidelines for cycling and horse riding in our forests.

4.3 Taking forward recommendations in *Barriers to Participation* in the course of our planning in relation to forest recreation areas.

Barriers to Participation reported that specific communities, for example people with a disability and people from minority racial or ethnic communities experience barriers that limit their participation in countryside recreation.

Some recommendations are met by arrangements already in place. For example the Recreation and Social use Strategy links to the recommendation 'to develop policies for meeting the needs of under represented communities' and we already 'liaise with local schools' through our Forest Guides. We plan to consider all relevant recommendations through our planning process and will engage with stakeholders to decide priorities for groups of forests.

All consultation groups and responses to the consultation supported taking forward *Barriers to Participation* recommendations. We will take forward the recommendations as part of a management planning system which will engage with people to develop forest plans.

During consultation meetings Disability Action and Carers NI told us that people with disabilities and carers usually prefer to plan activities based on information which tells them what facilities to expect at a site. The consultation responses added that elderly people would also benefit from the provision of pre visit information. The information must be widely available in a variety of formats and include details on accessibility of forests and the facilities available.

4.4 Promoting the use of forests for health and wellbeing

The physical and mental health benefits from outdoor recreation and proximity to trees and woodlands are well reported and accessible woodlands close to towns and villages have significant potential to contribute. UK research by the Woodland Trust has found that visits to woodland occur more frequently when woodland is located close to where people live and that more than half of the users arrive on foot. We are committed to providing continued pedestrian access to forests.

Already we have arrangements in place with the Health Promotion Agency (now the Public Health Agency) and a 'Highway to Health' route includes sections through Belvoir Park Forest in south Belfast. 'Walking for health' has active walking groups which use forests on a regular basis for walking. These forests are generally close to towns and villages, for example Castlewellan Forest Park and Randalstown Forest. Most users are pensioners but evidence exists that a group including young dependents has not visited forests due to limited access to transport.

Consultation meetings with umbrella groups highlighted that although they acknowledged the potential that accessible forests have to improve health and wellbeing their awareness of the access and services Forest Service provide is low. Responses to the consultation confirmed this and said we need to more actively promote our existing facilities. Recommendations on how to promote the use of Forest Service forests are included within the list of recommendations in *Barriers to Participation*.

4.5 Promoting the use of forests for organised sporting events

Forest Service staff reported that a large number of activity providers are aware of the opportunity for sporting events that forests can offer. Many different providers already use forests for activities and events such as cycling, pony trekking, long distance horse riding, athletics, triathlon, orienteering, water sports and abseiling. While it is known that some of the participants are disabled, it is apparent that people with disabilities are under represented.

Consultation responses indicated that organised events can attract people from the under represented groups identified in the draft equality impact assessment.

Annex B

Implementation Plan

Implementation Area and Target(s)	Timescale
1. Forest Management Planning and Stakeholder engagement and participation	
1.1 Revise the Forest Service system for developing new forest plans to enable a more focused approach to the provision for recreational and social use of forests, including maximising the contribution of forests to tourism	2009-2010
1.2 Produce and publish revised plans for recreation and social use provision in forests within Mourne, the Antrim Hills and Glens, and the Fermanagh Global Geopark	2009-2011
1.3 Produce and publish revised plans for recreation and social use provision in forests within the Sperrins, Bann Valley, Lagan Valley, and Co Armagh	2011-2013
1.4 Establish and support a Forest Recreation and Social Use Stakeholder Forum	2009-2013
1.5 Improve stakeholder engagement and participation processes within the Forest Planning System to capture stakeholders' views in relation to recreational and social use of forests	2009-2011
2. Partnership working	
2.1 Develop and issue information and guidance in relation to partnership working arrangements including businesses, government, and voluntary sector organisations	2009-2010
2.2 Operate partnership arrangements with Fermanagh District Council at a strategic level to develop improved recreation and social use facilities	2009-2013
2.3 Continue to engage with Local Authorities, activity providers and activity representative bodies in relation to specific forest recreation and social use proposals	2009-2010
2.4 Proactively approach all Local Authorities to discuss the potential for forests to contribute to tourism and improve the delivery of access and wellbeing to local communities	2009-2010
2.5 Develop partnership working arrangements with the National Trust, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, and other environmental non-government organisations in relation to the delivery of forest recreation, outdoor education and social use opportunities	2009-2013
2.6 Proactively approach Government Departments and other statutory bodies to explore how their relevant business objectives can be met through the use of forests	2009-2010
2.7 Work in partnership with The NI Environment Agency, SportNI, and other bodies to produce a new NI Outdoor Recreation Strategy	2010-2013
2.8 Proactively seek opportunities for working more closely with recreation and social use providers and events organisers to promote the use of forests	2009-2013
2.9 Develop mechanisms for capturing visitor numbers and levels of satisfaction	2010-2011

3. Promoting access and equality

3.1	Include a Statutory Right of Access in the forthcoming Forestry Bill for the north of Ireland	2009-2010
3.2	Complete implementation of the Signage Strategy	2009-2010
3.3	Finalise and implement Ulster Way management arrangements	2009-2010
3.4	Identify Forest Service forests by means of appropriate threshold signage	2009-2011
3.5	Produce guidance in relation to developing cycling and horse riding trails in forests	2010-2011
3.6	Incorporate changes into the Forest Service system for developing new forest plans to take account of recommendations in <i>Barriers to Participation</i>	2009-2013
3.7	Develop and implement guidance on consulting with children and young people in conjunction with revising Forest Plans	2009-2010
3.8	Review and develop consultation and engagement arrangements involving other groups identified in Section 75 of the <i>NI Act 1998</i> , in addition to children.	2009-2013
3.9	Explore opportunities for improving access and making mobility scooters available for use within Forest Parks	2009-2013
3.10	Provide targeted information for children and young people	2010-2013
3.11	Review targeting of information for Section 75 groups other than children	2009-2013
3.12	Review and publish access and activity charges and concessions annually as a short term measure, and in the longer term consider the potential for a harmonised approach to charges with local bodies	2009-2013

4. Contributing to Health and Education

4.1	Explore opportunities for increasing cycling and horse riding in forests	2009-2013
4.2	Encourage increased use of forests close to towns and villages by local people	2009-2013
4.3	Explore opportunities for children's play and leisure facilities and provision for young people within Forest Parks	2009-2013
4.4	Develop arrangements for promoting the use of forests for new outdoor learning opportunities	2009-2013

5. Enabling Economic Development

5.1	Establish formal arrangements for regular engagement with the NI Tourist Board	2009-2010
5.2	Secure arrangements to deliver high ropes attractions in specific locations	2009-2010
5.3	Develop new operating arrangements for camping and caravanning and forest leisure facilities	2009-2013
5.4	Reflect the goals and aspirations of the strategy through regular review of the Forest Service website	2009-2013

Locations of the main forest recreation areas



Appendix II

Strategy Consultation Respondents

Countryside Access Bodies

NI Environment Agency
Sport NI
Countryside Access and Activities Network
Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside

Wider Government Departments, Agencies and NDPBs

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute
Department for Regional Development
Department of Education
Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment

Local Government

Antrim Borough Council
Ards Borough Council
Ballymena Borough Council
Ballymoney Borough Council
Banbridge District Council
Carrickfergus Borough Council
Coleraine Borough Council
Cookstown District Council
Craigavon Borough Council
Down District Council
Fermanagh District Council
Limavady Borough Council
Lisburn City Council
Newtownabbey Borough Council
Newry and Mourne District Council
Omagh District Council
Strabane District Council

Recreational Hunting and Welfare of Wild Deer

British Association for Shooting and Conservation
British Deer Society
Countryside Alliance
BC Deer Management Co
David Mulligan
Gerard Murdock
John Cunningham
Newtownards Wildfowlers Association
North West Gun Club
Spring Grove Gun Club
Strabane Sporting Club
Darkley Gun Club

Forest Recreation Users

Association of NI Car Clubs
Foyle District Motor Cycle Club
NI Orienteering
Cyclists Touring Club
David Glasgow
Rowan McMahon
Marty Maguire
Edward Archer
Erne Lakeland Riding Club
British Horse Society
Ulster Rural Riders Association

Section 75

Shopmobility
Disability Action
Ballymena Access Group
Stephanie McFarland
Women's Forum NI

Tourism, Outdoor Education and Non Government Countryside Access Bodies

NITB
NI Education & Library Boards Inter-Board
Outdoor Education/Duke of Edinburgh's Award Panel
Lough Neagh and Lower Bann Advisory Committee
Mourne Heritage Trust
The National Trust
Lagan Valley Regional Park
Regeneration of South Armagh

Voluntary Organisations including Environmental Non Government Organisations

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Ulster Wildlife Trust
NI Environment Link
Woodland Trust
Forest of Belfast
Volunteer Development Agency
International Tree Foundation

Trade Union

NIPSA

Equality Impact Assessment Consultation Respondents

Government

Cookstown District Council

Craigavon Borough Council

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute

Department of Education

NI Environment Agency

Department for Regional Development

Forest Recreation Users

Erne Lakeland Riding Club

British Horse Society

Contryside Access and Activities Network

Newtownards Wildfowlers Association

North West Gun Club

Voluntary Organisations

Disability Action

Forest of Belfast

Should accessible formats such as large type, audio cassette or a language other than English be required, please contact the Customer Services Manager at Forest Service Headquarters and appropriate arrangements will be made as soon as possible.

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Credits: Photographs on pages 6, 22, 36 Stephen McCartney
 Photograph on page 12 Marble Arch Caves Global Geopark
 Photograph on page 20 'Runner' Paul Mawhirt

