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ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

SEA Screening Report

**Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-
2030**

Document Details

Client: Monaghan County Council

Project Title: Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030

Document Title: SEA Screening Report

Prepared by: Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants Ltd.

Rev	Status	Date	Author(s)	Approved by
01	Draft	01/12/2025	MC	DMCC
02	Issue	28/11/2025	MC	BF

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1 Introduction

Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants have been commissioned by Monaghan County Council, to carry out a screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) in respect of the proposed Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030.

The present report contains the screening exercise for SEA in respect of the above for the purposes of public consultation and notification of the competent authorities for SEA, in accordance with Article 9(7) of S.I. 435 of 2004 (The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. 200 of 2011.

2 Background to Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

2.1 Introduction

Directive 2001/42/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the assessment of certain plans and programmes on the environment (informally known as the “SEA Directive” requires EU Member States to assess the *likely significant environmental effects* of plans or programmes prior to their adoption. This provides for the assessment of strategic environmental considerations at an early stage in the decision-making process. See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32001L0042> for the full text of the Directive.

Article 1 of the SEA Directive states that:

The objective of this directive is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development by ensuring that, in accordance with this Directive, an environmental assessment is carried out of certain plans and programmes which are likely to have significant effects on the environment.

Directive 2001/42/EC was transposed into Irish law through the following instruments:

- Statutory Instrument (S.I.) No. 435 of 2004 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011 (the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).
- S.I. No. 436 of 2004 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2004), as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011 (the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011).

S.I. No. 435 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 200 of 2011, relates to SEA as it applies to plans or programmes prepared for “agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism and town and country planning or land use. S.I. No. 436 of 2004, as amended by S.I. No. 201 of 2011, relates to SEA as it applies to plans or programmes where the context requires, “a development plan, a variation of a development plan, a local area plan (or an amendment thereto), regional planning guidelines or a planning scheme.

2.2 SEA Screening

In the Directive, Article 3(4) requires that *Member States shall determine whether plans and programmes, other than those referred to in Paragraph 2, which set the framework for future development consent of projects, are likely to have significant environmental effects.*

The process for deciding whether a particular plan, other than those for which SEA is mandatory, would be likely to have significant environmental effects and, therefore, would require SEA, is known as “screening”.

Criteria for screening are set out in Annex II of the SEA Directive. These criteria are further set out in an Irish context in Schedule 1 of S.I. no. 435 of 2004 (as amended by S.I. no. 200 of 2011) and are considered under two main headings, each of which have a number of sub-criteria. The two main considerations during screening are a) the characteristics of the plan or programme and b) the characteristics of the likely effects, and the characteristics of the receiving environment.

Article 9(1) of the above Instrument states that:

Subject to sub-article (2), an environmental assessment shall be carried out for all plans and programmes:

- (a) which are prepared for agriculture, forestry, fisheries, energy, industry, transport, waste management, water management, telecommunications, tourism and town and country planning or land use, and which set the framework for future development consent of projects listed in Annexes I and II to the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive, or*
- (b) which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site but, either individually or in combination with other plans, are likely to have a significant effect on any such site*

Article 9(2) further states that:

A plan or programme referred to in sub-article (1) which determines the use of a small area at local level or a minor modification to a plan or programme referred to in sub-article (1) shall require an environmental assessment only where the competent authority determines that it is likely to have significant effects on the environment and, for this purpose, the competent authority shall make any necessary determination.

2.3 Requirements for SEA Screening

The Monaghan County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 is a non-statutory land use plan, and is being screened for the requirement for SEA in accordance with the requirements of:

- The SEA Directive, particularly Articles 3(3), 3(4) and 3(5) in relation to “screening”; and
- The European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004, as amended, particularly Schedule 1, which sets out the criteria for whether a plan or programme is likely to have significant effects on the environment

3 Policy and Strategy Context

The Irish National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and the "Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027 recognise **the role of outdoor recreation** in increasing participation in physical activity, particularly in our natural landscapes and facilities. Outdoor recreation connects people with people and with nature. It contributes to physical and mental health, supports an inclusive society, fosters community cohesion, promotes environmental protection, and enhances rural and economic development. This Monaghan County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 supports collaboration at the community, organisation, and agency levels to achieve these benefits. This strategy also informs and integrates our local aspirations and actions with national agendas, as outlined in the following section.

3.1 Relevant National and Local Policy

3.1.1 National Strategies

Several other national strategies have also informed the above Plan, including:

- National Landscape Strategy 2015-2025
- National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
- Tourism Policy Framework 2025–2030
- Child and Youth Participation Strategy 2019–2023
- National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland (2016, reviewed 2020)
- Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors (2020)
- Sport Ireland Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities 2017
- Coillte Strategic Vision 2022

3.2 Regional and local strategies

The development of this Plan has also been shaped by regional and local strategies including:

3.2.1 Monaghan County Development Plan 2025 - 2031

“The importance of outdoor recreation spaces and facilities are recognised by the County Council as being essential for the health and wellbeing of our population. The wealth of natural amenities such as lakes, rivers, forest and trails make the County an ideal location for outdoor sport and recreation, both active and passive”

3.3 Other Plans and Strategies

These strategies address themes of rural and economic development, sports participation and environmental issues, as well as detailing existing masterplans and development proposals:

- Monaghan County Council Tourism Strategy 2023-2028
- Monaghan Corporate Plan 2024–2029
- Ireland’s Ancient East Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023 – 2027
- Monaghan Biodiversity and Heritage Action Plan 2020 – 2025
- Monaghan County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 – 2029
- Monaghan Destination and Experience Development Plan
- Coillte Midlands Five-Year Forest Plan 2021 – 2025
- Waterways Ireland Corporate Plan 2023 – 2025 (Draft)
- Inland Fisheries Ireland Corporate Plan 2021 – 2025
- National Swimming Strategy 2024 – 2027

3.4 Key Trends

A number of national and global trends have also informed the development of this Plan and include:

Increase in demand: A growth in interest and participation in outdoor recreation in Ireland and globally.

Activities: Soft activities, such as walking and cycling, represent the most significant segment of outdoor recreation and consumer demand for soft activities is set to continue. Rise in new activities such as open water swimming and Stand Up Paddle-boarding (SUP).

Ageing population: The population in Ireland is getting older and the number of older people taking part in outdoor recreation is expected to increase, along with a growth in multi-generational participation in outdoor recreation.

Closer to home: People are seeking opportunities to participate in outdoor recreation ‘closer to home.’

Sustainability: People are increasingly concerned about the environment and behaving more sustainably.

Wellbeing: The global trend to improve our physical and mental wellbeing is driving a desire to integrate health and wellbeing into leisure and tourism choices.

4 Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030

The Action Plan for Outdoor Recreation in County Monaghan was informed by and mandated under the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, *Embracing Ireland’s Outdoors 2023-2027*. The priority for outdoor recreation in County Monaghan over the next five years is to develop sustainable, local and inclusive experiences through community involvement and stakeholder collaboration. The goals of the Plan will be realised through 42 actions set out in six strategic pillars:

- Leadership and Collaboration
- Environment and Heritage
- Access and Infrastructure
- Awareness
- Opportunities
- Expertise

4.1.1 Pillar One: Leadership and Collaboration

Our ambition is to ensure that those involved directly or indirectly in outdoor recreation work together in a supportive and collaborative way to provide a seamless approach across the county to outdoor recreation.

Table 1. Actions under Pillar One: Leadership and Collaboration

No.	Action
1.1	Secure the funding to appoint a County Outdoor Recreation Officer (CORO) to lead and coordinate the County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) and Stakeholder Forum and drive forward the implementation of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP). In the absence of a dedicated post in the short term, this responsibility will of necessity be spread among relevant council staff, with oversight from the Tourism Unit.
1.2	Expand the membership of the current CORP's Steering Group i.e. sub-group of the Council's Tourism and Recreation Forum, to deliver the role of the County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) and ensure a coordinated approach to the management and development of outdoor recreation going forward.
1.3	Establish a Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum to allow wider stakeholder

	representation in decision-making
1.4	Appoint a full time Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) to manage the Walks Scheme and develop future walking opportunities.
1.5	Develop a facilities database which feeds the proposed digital interactive map resource and includes detailed information on all outdoor recreation sites across the county including; land ownership, infrastructure, visitor services, organisation responsible for the on-going management and maintenance etc. Review and update annually as a minimum to ensure information is complete and accurate.
1.6	Maximise knowledge of and access to all possible funding opportunities.
1.7	Undertake a mid-term review of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan to assess whether actions require modification, given the dynamic nature of outdoor recreation.

4.1.2 Pillar Two: Environment

To ensure the integrity of Monaghan’s natural environment and built heritage is not compromised moving forward, environment and biodiversity considerations will be woven into the fabric of all future recreation development.

Table 2. Actions under Pillar Two: Environment and Heritage

No.	Action
2.1	Deliver on the environmental recommendations within the Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024) which included upgrades to existing trails to manage erosion as well as biodiversity enhancements on new and existing trails such as restoration of upland blanket bog through peat dams, red squirrel boxes etc.
2.2	Incorporate sustainability, environmental education and biodiversity enhancements into all future recreation projects where possible e.g.. planting native trees, interpretation on flora and fauna, installation of bird boxes etc.
2.3	Identify gaps in the public transport provision to enhance connectivity and accessibility to key outdoor recreation sites and ensure public transport information is provided when new sites are being developed and promoted.
2.4	Continue to carry out water quality testing of ‘non-designated bathing waters’ and disseminate the results along with education and responsible use messaging through the appropriate channels. Scope the potential to develop one key site as a ‘designated bathing water’.

4.1.3 Pillar Three: Access and Infrastructure

Our ambition is to deliver high quality, accessible, enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences across the county, supported by visitor servicing facilities where appropriate, for both local people and visitors.

Table 3. Actions under Pillar Three: Access and Infrastructure

No.	Action
3.1	Establish Sliabh Beagh as an eco-tourism destination by delivering the outdoor recreation recommendations included within the Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024).
3.2	Continue to support the development of the visitor experience at Rossmore Forest Park.
3.3	Implement the relevant outdoor recreation recommendations within the Lough Muckno Masterplan currently under preparation (2025-2026).
3.4	Develop the Convent Lands in Monaghan town as a recreational hub.
3.5	Review existing outdoor recreation provision and carry out an Analysis and Opportunities Study for Hollywood Park, looking at the site holistically with a focus on delivering quality recreational facilities, accessibility and connections into local communities and settlements.
3.6	Support the on-going development of the Ulster Canal navigation and towpath between Clones and Castle Saunderson to provide water recreation opportunities and a safe and accessible offroad path suitable for walkers, cyclists and those with limited mobility, visual impairment etc.
3.7	Support the on-going development of the Ulster Canal Greenway from Clones to the county Armagh border and through this process identify the potential to develop links between communities and green or blue spaces.
3.8	Pilot the Rothar Road or ‘quiet road’ between Ballinode and Scotstown to provide safe walking and cycling provision and if deemed successful, replicate the concept across the county to connect communities to green or blues spaces where appropriate.
3.9	Encourage and support communities to identify, develop, manage and maintain outdoor recreation facilities in their locality, focusing on those with poor access to off-road walking opportunities.
3.10	Agree land transfer and deliver on the recommendations within the Annaghmakerrig Masterplan to develop parking, trail around lake perimeter and angling stands
3.11	Complete the development of Gallows Hill Greenspace Masterplan, Creevy Lough Recreational Masterplan, and the Convent Lands Landscape Concept Masterplan and subsequently, subject to securing necessary funding, implement the interventions identified in these Plans.
3.12	Identify opportunities for developing a ‘family cycling trail’ within Dartrey Forest which utilises the existing forest roads and complements the existing recreation provision.

3.13	Develop an Analysis and Opportunities Plan for Castleshane Forest which considers parking, trails, signage, interpretation, waymarking and trail animation and implement the recommendations of this Plan.
3.14	Develop a concept design for a 'blue grade flow mountain bike trail and pump track' within Mullaghmatt Forest outside Monaghan town which supports off-road skill progression and introduces people of all ages and abilities to mountain biking.
3.15	Carry out a Scoping Study to explore taking the Monaghan Way from Castleblayney to Mullash offroad and developing local looped walks.
3.16	Secure planning permission for the development/enhancement of the necessary access/egress points required to develop the Dromore River Blueway. Once established, promote and activate through MSP programmes, activity providers, equipment hire etc. and consider linkages with existing and newly developed trails in the vicinity.
3.17	Develop an Analysis and Opportunities Plan for key water recreation sites including 'nondesigned bathing waters', rivers and lakes used for outdoor swimming paddlesports, and 'species specific' premier coarse fisheries. Deliver on the recommendations within this Plan to maximise the potential for water recreation across the county for both locals and visitors.
3.18	Ensure future outdoor recreation projects, where possible, meet accessibility standards for all, giving due consideration to national guidance documents.

4.1.4 Pillar Four: Awareness

Our ambition is to create a coordinated and consistent approach to marketing and promoting all the recreation opportunities that Monaghan has to offer to both locals and visitors and to ensure all who participate in outdoor recreation across the county do so in a responsible way.

Table 4. Actions under Pillar Four: Awareness

No.	Action
4.1	Develop an interactive digital map detailing all recreation sites and trails across the county and embed within the Monaghan Tourism website to make it easier for locals and visitors to orientate themselves and support the continued development of the Get Ireland Active national digital database as an action in the National Sports Policy.
4.2	Increase the promotion and marketing of all outdoor recreation opportunities to both locals and visitors on appropriate platforms including targeted social media campaigns.
4.3	Seek Sport Ireland accreditation for all walking, cycling and water trails to allow inclusion and promotion on the Sport Ireland National Trails Register and Get Ireland Active Database.

4.4	Support the roll out of the national ‘Responsible Use of the Outdoors’ campaign at a local level and integrate national messaging into all relevant communication.
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4.1.5 Pillar Five: Opportunities

Our ambition is to ensure that as many local people as possible across Monaghan have the opportunity to enjoy its outdoor spaces and avail of the many benefits from doing so. We want to encourage and increase participation from those local groups that are currently under-represented.

Table 5. Actions under Pillar Five: Opportunities

No.	Action
5.1	Through leadership and skills-based education and training in walking, cycling, outdoor swimming and orienteering etc. increase the capacity within communities to deliver and participate in outdoor recreation.
5.2	Facilitate community participation in outdoor recreation for all including under-represented groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older adults, unemployed, women and girls and young people through the delivery of local programming and national initiatives such as ‘HER Outdoors’ etc.
5.3	Engage young children in nature through natural play and adventure and support national initiatives such ‘National Play Day’.
5.4	Support 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 and, subject to funding, give due consideration to the recruitment of Activation / Development Officers associated with these strategies.
5.5	Subject to funding for cross-border “Walking for All” project, recruit a WFA officer and roll out the 3-year programme.
5.6	Support and facilitate initiatives that focus on improved mental health and wellbeing as a result of physical activity in 'green' spaces and outdoor areas e.g. Woodlands for Health and other nature based programmes.
5.7	Support town teams, businesses and the community to develop outdoor recreation opportunities and supporting visitor services e.g. community trails, equipment hire, accommodation, motorhome/camping facilities etc.

4.1.6 Pillar Six: Expertise

The development of this Plan presents an opportunity to improve skills and knowledge in planning, developing and maintaining trails and outdoor recreation facilities, so that poor practice can be improved and avoided in the future

Table 6. Actions under Pillar Six: Expertise

No.	Action
6.1	Include visitor monitoring as part of all future outdoor recreation development to understand usage, help target promotion and support funding of development and maintenance costs and share this information with the County Outdoor Recreation Committee.
6.2	Follow national guidelines and best practice in relation to sustainable outdoor recreation development and management, implementing Sustainable Development Goals and availing of training led by Sport Ireland and other experts in the field.

5 Receiving Environment

5.1 Natura 2000 Sites

There are two designated Natura 2000 sites across Monaghan, which are protected under EU Law. The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) lists certain habitats and species that must be protected within these sites. EU designated sites include Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs). These are shown below in Figure 1 and detailed in Table 7.

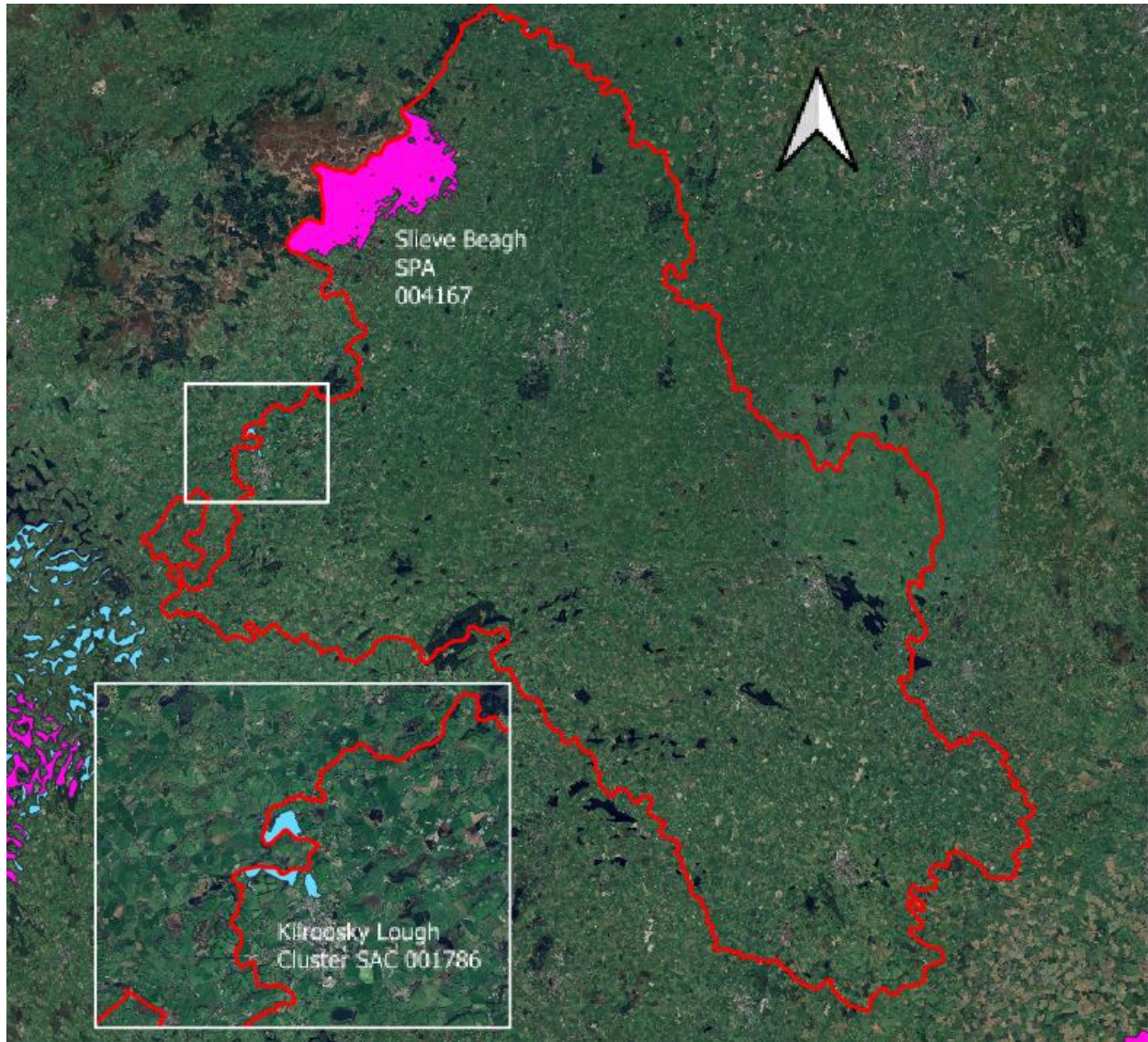


Figure 1. European Sites in Monaghan

Any development in or near a SAC should avoid any significant adverse impact on the features for which the site has been designated or proposed for designation. There are two European sites in County Monaghan, detailed in Table 7 below.

Table 7. Natura 2000 sites in County Monaghan and their qualifying interests

Site	Qualifying Interests
Slieve Beagh SPA 004167	Hen Harrier (<i>Circus cyaneus</i>) [A082]
Kilroosky Lough Cluster SAC 001786	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. [3140] Calcareous fens with <i>Cladium mariscus</i> and species of the <i>Caricion davallianae</i> [7210] Alkaline fens [7230] <i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i> (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]

5.2 Natural Heritage Areas

The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 substantially strengthened the protection for wildlife previously available under the Wildlife Act 1976. In particular, it provides for the designation and conservation of National Heritage Areas (NHAs). This is an area considered nationally important for the habitats present or that holds species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection. Any development in or near a NHA should avoid significant adverse impact on the features for which the site has been designated. Sites that have been identified as being of national importance for habitats, species, and geological interest, but are not yet designated as NHAs, are known as proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs). Proposed NHAs are subject to limited protection in contrast to fully designated NHAs. There are eight such sites in County Monaghan, listed below in Table 8 and shown in Figure 2.

Table 8. NHAs and pNHAs in County Monaghan

Site	Status	Code
Eshbrack Bog	NHA	001603
Dromore Lakes	pNHA	000001
Emy Lough	pNHA	000558
Glaslough Lake	pNHA	000559
Lough Fea Demesne	pNHA	000560
Lough Naglack	pNHA	000561
Monmurray Grassland	pNHA	000562
Muckno Lake	pNHA	000563
Cordoo Lough	pNHA	001268
Lough Ross	pNHA	001495
Ballyhoe Lough	pNHA	001594
Loughbawn House Loughs	pNHA	001595
Black and Derrygoony Loughs	pNHA	001596
Creevy Lough	pNHA	001599
Drumakill Lough	pNHA	001600
Drumgole Lough	pNHA	001601
Drumreaske Lough	pNHA	001602

Gibson's Lough	pNHA	001604
Lough Egish	pNHA	001605
Rafinny Lough	pNHA	001606
Lough Smiley	pNHA	001607
Monalty Lough	pNHA	001608
Ulster Canal (Aghalisk)	pNHA	001611
Wright's Wood	pNHA	001612
Tassan Lough	pNHA	001666
Spring and Corcrin Loughs	pNHA	001671
Lisarilly Bog	pNHA	001781
Killyhoman Marsh	pNHA	001782
Corcreeghy Lake and Woodland	pNHA	001783
Rosefield Lake and Woodland	pNHA	001784
Mullaghmore Lake (South)	pNHA	001785
Lisabuck Lough	pNHA	001835
Annagheane Lough	pNHA	001836
Mullaglassan Lough	pNHA	001837
Kilcorran Lough	pNHA	001838
Killyvilly Lough	pNHA	001839
Drumcor Lough	pNHA	001841
Nafarty Fen	pNHA	002077



Figure 2. Natural Heritage Area (NHA) and Proposed National Heritage Areas (pNHAs) in County Monaghan

5.3 County Monaghan’s Natural Heritage

NATURAL HERITAGE

County Monaghan has a rich natural heritage, particularly in relation to its wide range of natural and semi-natural habitats including wetland, woodland, hedgerow, lake, river and upland habitats that support a wide range of plant and animal species. These areas are in the main extremely sensitive and are susceptible to any change that affects the ecological balance.

As well as its intrinsic value, Monaghan’s natural heritage or biodiversity provides services to the people of Monaghan, by providing water filtration (through wetlands), buffering of floods (floodplains along

•
rivers, and wetlands acting as sponges and stores), soil fertility, and resources for angling and tourism. It also contributes to our landscape character.

In Co Monaghan there are 38 proposed Natural Heritage Areas comprising mainly of wetland habitats, lakes, rivers, marshes, fens, bogs and woodland. These are recognised by Monaghan County Council as important conservation areas, and are included in the County Development Plan.

The largest site in Monaghan is Eshbrack bog on Slieve Beagh, and known to many as Bragan, and the main habitat there is blanket bog. This site has recently been designated as a Natural Heritage Area, which provides it with full legal protection, against any adverse impacts. It is also been considered as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds because of the population of Hen Harriers that occur there. It is also important for the Greenland White-fronted goose which use it as a wintering ground, and for the Red Grouse, one of our native game species. Curlew, snipe, golden plover and the buzzard is a common sighthunting over the moor.

Kilrooskey Lough, just north of Clones is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive solely for the protection of the White-clawed Crayfish, an invertebrate species, whose survival relies on unpolluted water. The quality of the water in Co Monaghan does pose a challenge to all concerned. It should be recognised that water is a habitat in its own right for a lot of species.

Monaghan is one of Ireland's premier angling locations and this is reflected in its reputation for coarse and pike fishing, its fine game angling river stretches and its wild brown trout populations. The fisheries of County Monaghan comprise of many major river systems and their associated lakes.

The Erne catchment, comprising the Dromore River, the Finn River and the Bunnoe River systems dominate the north of the county. To the east lies the Blackwater system and to the south, the Fane and Glyde system can be found. The Ulster Blackwater and its tributaries the Monaghan Blackwater and Mountain Water Rivers contain good stocks of Brown Trout. It is also worth noting that these rivers also contain native white clawed crayfish, an internationally protected species. The Rivers Fane and Glyde contain Brown Trout and Salmon in County Monaghan. Both rivers also have good numbers of Sea Trout in their lower reaches in County Louth. The Bragan Mountain lakes, Lough More and Lough Emy contain good numbers of Brown Trout. The lamprey, a species dating back to our glacial past, is also present in many lakes and rivers. This is also an internationally important and protected species. Most lakes and rivers have good stocks of Bream, Roach, Rudd, Perch and Pike. Eels are present in all waters in the county.

Like all freshwater surface water in Ireland, Monaghan's lakes and rivers are under threat from multiple sources – agricultural and industrial pollution continues to play a huge part in the continuing deterioration of water quality in the county. Loss of vital wetland habitat and increased pressure from construction developments are also critical factors. Monaghan has a rich network of natural heritage sites including rivers, wetlands, woodlands, lakes, and bogs which support a diversity of habitat types and provide homes and niches for many wildlife species. It is important to consider natural heritage as all around us and not

confined to a few protected sites. In order to remain healthy, nature needs to be treated sensitively and considered in land use decisions both within and outside “nature sites.” This is because nature operates within a connected system. Lakes can be connected to each other or to wetlands via groundwater or surface streams. Woodland sites may depend on connections and corridors linked through hedgerows.

WETLANDS

County Monaghan contains a wide range of wetlands and their associated species, of high international and national importance. Due to the varying topography, hydrology, climate and soils present Monaghan has wetland habitats ranging from degraded cutover raised bogs, blanket bogs, fens, marshes, large riverine systems, an abundance and variety of lakes, springs, wet woodlands and many more. Monaghan contains some of the finest examples of transition mire fens and mesotrophic inter drumlin lakes that occur in Ireland.

6 SEA Screening Assessment

This screening assessment for the requirements of SEA follows the criteria set out in Schedule 1 of S.I. 435 of 2004 as amended, which are as follows:

- The characteristics of the Plan or Programme.
- The characteristics of the likely effects and the of the area likely to be affected.

Each of the two main criteria have a number of sub-criteria which are set out in the above instrument and are considered in more detail below.

6.1 Characteristics of the Plan or Programme

6.1.1 The degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions, or by allocating resources.

The Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 is non-statutory and does not provide consent, establish a framework for granting consent or contribute towards a framework for granting consent. The need for the Outdoor Recreation Plan arises from several higher-level Plans, including The Irish National Sports Policy 2018-2027 and the Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027.

Through the establishment of a working group, the Plan establishes a framework for the promotion and development of outdoor recreation within the administrative area of Monaghan County Council. The Plan consists of a series of 42 actions, organised under six pillars:

- Leadership and Collaboration

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- Environment and Heritage
- Access and Infrastructure
- Awareness
- Opportunities
- Expertise

No developments are proposed under the scope of the Plan that would entail major construction or civil works. The Plan allocates resources insofar as it identifies priority actions for delivery within the timeframe of the Draft Plan, and others proposed to be carried out as more resources are made available. Pillar Two's actions involve the exploration of a number of areas of infrastructural development, the framework for which is not laid out in this Plan, are not allocated resources by this Plan and will be covered by their own statutory assessments. The Plan, once adopted, will be a non-statutory Plan to be implemented by Monaghan County Council.

6.1.2 The degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy

In the context of global, European, national, regional, county and local plans; the Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan is at a relatively low level in the hierarchy of plans. The key related plans and policy documents are highlighted in Section 3, above. The Draft Plan may result in the drafting of a number of lower-level plans. The actions set out in the Plan call for the implementation of / preparation of / input to various plans.

6.1.3 The relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations, in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development

The Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 is of relevance to the integration of environmental considerations and sustainable development within one of its Action Pillars, with the following actions contained under Pillar Two:

Action 2.1 Deliver on the environmental recommendations within the Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024) which included upgrades to existing trails to manage erosion as well as biodiversity enhancements on new and existing trails such as restoration of upland blanket bog through peat dams, red squirrel boxes etc.

Action 2.2 Incorporate sustainability, environmental education and biodiversity enhancements into all future recreation projects where possible e.g.. planting native trees, interpretation on flora and fauna, installation of bird boxes etc.

Action 2.3 Identify gaps in the public transport provision to enhance connectivity and accessibility to key outdoor recreation sites and ensure public transport information is provided when new sites are being developed and promoted.

Action 2.4 Continue to carry out water quality testing of ‘non-designated bathing waters’ and disseminate the results along with education and responsible use messaging through the appropriate channels. Scope the potential to develop one key site as a ‘designated bathing water’.

Many of the actions relate to information gathering / developing and supporting projects that can help to inform evidence-based decision making and sustainable development efforts in Monaghan County and elsewhere.

6.1.4 Environmental problems relevant to the plan or programme

Environmental problems of greatest relevance to the Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 are set out below:

- Biodiversity and habitat loss / deterioration
- Climate change
- Water quality (lakes and river systems)
- Deterioration of soil quality

By incorporating sustainability and environmental concerns into future outdoor recreational development in County Monaghan, the Plan hopes to address some of the drivers of the above-listed environmental problems, particularly through the following actions:

Action 2.1 Deliver on the environmental recommendations within the Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024) which included upgrades to existing trails to manage erosion as well as biodiversity enhancements on new and existing trails such as restoration of upland blanket bog through peat dams, red squirrel boxes etc.

Action 2.2 Incorporate sustainability, environmental education and biodiversity enhancements into all future recreation projects where possible e.g.. planting native trees, interpretation on flora and fauna, installation of bird boxes etc.

Action 2.3 Identify gaps in the public transport provision to enhance connectivity and accessibility to key outdoor recreation sites and ensure public transport information is provided when new sites are being developed and promoted.

Action 2.4 Continue to carry out water quality testing of ‘non-designated bathing waters’ and disseminate the results along with education and responsible use messaging through the appropriate channels. Scope the potential to develop one key site as a ‘designated bathing water’.

6.1.5 The relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste management or water protection)

The Plan is of relevance to the implementation of European Union legislation, particularly the following:

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- Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds ('the Birds Directive')
- Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ('the Habitats Directive')
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477/2011), as amended
- Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy ('the Water Framework Directive')
- European Communities (Water Policy) Regulations 2003 (S.I. No. 722/2003), as amended

6.2 Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected

6.2.1 The probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects

The majority of the actions contained within the Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 can be considered to be neutral with regard to the environment. Promotion of the use of the outdoors may intensify use of some areas particularly in the case of water-based activities over the long-term which may be balanced by mainstreaming environmental concerns into the development of recreation across the county, resulting in more sensitive development and use.

Rather than mandating a framework for infrastructural development, the Plan contains a range of actions exploring the potential for development of outdoor recreation hubs and connecting trails. Given the nature and scale of such developments, it is not considered that there is a high likelihood of significant environmental effects, and such projects will be subject to their own statutory assessments to ensure that this is not the case.

The duration, frequency and reversibility of effects will vary between the different actions proposed and the aspects of the receiving environment affected.

6.2.2 The cumulative nature of the effects

The implementation of the adopted Plan will result in the implementation of 42 actions (refer to Section 4 of this Report), the majority of which are likely to result in neutral or slightly positive environmental effects. The increase in the number of people partaking in outdoor activity is not expected to result in a cumulative increase in environmental impact, given the constraints of such activity within already-developed recreational areas and along established trail routes.

6.2.3 The trans-boundary nature of the effects

Due to the location of County Monaghan on the Northern Ireland border, transboundary effects are a possibility. However, due to impacts of this plan being considered negligible within County Monaghan, trans-boundary impacts should also be considered negligible.

6.2.4 The risk to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)

There are no actions set out in the Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 whose implementation would significantly increase the risk to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents) relative to the baseline. An increase in the amount of people partaking in outdoor recreation may result in a slight increase in minor incidents and accidents associated with such activity; this will be balanced by the overall positive effect on human health of outdoor exercise and engagement with the natural environment. The measures set out in the Plan to centre environmental concerns into the development of outdoor recreation will act to reduce the risk to the environment of such activity.

6.2.5 The magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)

The adoption and implementation of the Draft Plan is expected to contribute to the promotion and sustainable development of outdoor recreation across the County Monaghan administrative area.

6.2.6 The value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected

6.2.6.1 Special natural characteristics or cultural heritage

As outlined in the Report, there are many natural and cultural heritage assets in the Monaghan County Council administrative area. These include 2 Natura2000 sites, 1 National Heritage Area (NHA) and 38 no. proposed Natural Heritage Areas (pNHAs). The plan calls for the promotion and exploration of opportunities and activities in the *Sliabh Beagh SAC*. Given the nature and scale of the activities and the nature of the qualifying interests for which the European Site is designated, there is not expected to be any significant interaction between elements of the Plan and any areas with special natural characteristics or designated sites.

There is not expected to be major interaction between the implementation of the Plan and the cultural heritage resource (i.e. archaeology and built heritage). No infrastructural developments are proposed under the scope of the Plan that would entail major construction or civil works.

6.2.6.2 Exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values

No elements of the Plan contain actions that will result in a degradation of water quality or result in an increase in emissions to air, soil or water. The implementation of the Plan is likely to result in positive

climate and air quality impacts by promoting more low-impact non-motorised activity throughout the county.

No likely significant negative effects are predicted to occur in relation to any aspects of the environment where standards or limit values are exceeded.

6.2.6.3 Intensive land use

The Plan will not cause an impact on intensive land use. Outdoor recreational activities will be dispersed throughout the county and by their nature, will not intensify land use and are not likely to give rise to any significant negative impacts in this regard.

6.2.7 The effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, EU or international protection status

The actions set out within the Outdoor Recreation Plan are not expected to interact negatively with any areas with particular natural heritage characteristics or are designated under National or European legislation for their conservation value. No significant negative effects are likely to occur as a result of the Draft Plan.

An AA Screening Report has been prepared in respect of the Outdoor Recreation Plan, and has been submitted to the competent authority, with the recommendation at this stage of the Plan that it is not necessary to proceed to Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment.

7 Recommendation on the Requirements for SEA

The Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 has been screened for the requirement for SEA under the requirements of S.I. 435 of 2004, as amended; the proposals contained within have been considered in respect of the SEA Screening Criteria set out in Schedule 1 of the above.

The screening exercise has concluded that the implementation of the Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 has no real likelihood of having significant negative effects on the environment and may in fact have a positive impact through promotion of more sustainable development of outdoor recreation.

Therefore, it is recommended that the competent authority (Monaghan County Council) reach a determination that the Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030 is not likely to have significant negative effects on the environment and, therefore, that Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.

In accordance with Article 9(7) of S.I. 435 of 2004, as amended, Monaghan County Council will notify the SEA environmental authorities of its determination that SEA is not required and place a copy of said

determination on public display together with the present report and associated documentation relating to the Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030

References

Climate Action Plan 2024

Council Directive Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (October 2021): Strategic Environmental Assessment Guidelines for Regional Assemblies and Planning Authorities (Draft for Public Consultation)

Department Circular Letter SEA 1/08 and NPWS 1/08 (link to relevant circular below):

<https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/circular-sea-01-08.pdf>

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EC Guidance: European Commission's Guidance on implementing the SEA Directive.

Environment Director General of the European Commission (2003). Implementation of Directive 2001/42 on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment.

EPA (2023). SEA of Local Authority Land-Use Plans – EPA Recommendations and Resources (Jan 09, 2023).

EPA (2022). SEA Pack.

EPA (2015). Strategic Environmental Assessment Resource Manual for Planning Authorities – Integration of SEA Legislation with Procedures for Land Use Plans.

EPA (2013). SEA Process Checklist.

EPA (2003). Development of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Methodologies for Plans and Programmes in Ireland – Synthesis Report.

EPA (2023) Guidance on SEA Statements and Monitoring

EPA (2022): Irelands Environment

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European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 200/2011).

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Government of Ireland (2018). Project Ireland 2040 – National Planning Framework.

Government of Ireland (2004). Implementation of SEA Directive (2001/42/EC): Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment – Guidelines for Regional Authorities and Planning Authorities.

Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended.

Planning and Development Regulations 2001, as amended.

Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 201/2011).

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NPWS (2021) Conservation Objectives: Kilroosky Lough Cluster SAC 001786. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Slieve Beagh SPA 004167. Version 1. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.