



EUROPARC Toolkit

Health & Well-being benefits from Parks & Protected Areas



EUROPARC
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**About
EUROPARC**



The EUROPARC Federation is the largest and most representative Protected Area network in Europe, comprising almost 40% of the Natura 2000 network. Nature and Regional Parks alone cover 8% of Europe's land.

Our members manage Europe's Protected Areas, covering almost every regional, national, European and international designation, such as National Parks, Nature and Regional Parks, Natura 2000 Sites, Biosphere Reserves, Ramsar Sites, Geoparks, World Heritage Sites.

Our membership reaches a constituency of about 25% of the European population touched by Protected Areas. With our Periurban Parks having 25 million visitors annually.

www.europarc.org

EUROPARC Toolkit

Practical advice on the delivery of Health & Well-being benefits from Parks & Protected Areas

What is this toolkit for?

This toolkit is intended to provide simple and practical advice on how parks and protected areas can support health outcomes for people.

Who should read this?

This toolkit is aimed at those responsible for the management of parks and other protected areas. It is intended to provide simple and practical advice to a range of park and protected areas staff, including planners, site managers, wardens and rangers.

Authors

This advice has been prepared by the following EUROPARC members

Pete Rawcliffe, Scottish Natural Heritage
Joel Erkkonen, Parks and Wildlife Finland
Nele Söber, Estonia Environmental Board
Carles Castell, Diputació de Barcelona
Tony Gates, Northumberland National Park Authority
Melissa Desbois, Parc National des Calanques
Bridget Finton, Scottish Natural Heritage
Carol Ritchie, EUROPARC Federation Directorate

*Comments on the advice and suggestions for further contents should be sent to Bridget Finton
bridget.finton@nature.scot.*



For more information about Health and Green Exercise visit

[www.europarc.org/toolbox/
health-green-exercise/](http://www.europarc.org/toolbox/health-green-exercise/)

Why should parks and Protected Areas be involved in supporting health outcomes?

The following Guiding Principles have been adopted by the EUROPARC Federation.

Positive contact with nature is important for human health. It can create well-being, **prevent public health problems and promote an active lifestyle.**

Parks & protected areas **connect people with nature** and represent a valuable natural asset that can provide specific contributions to the delivery of positive health outcomes.

Parks & protected areas contribute to **individual and community health and well-being**, and to wider aspects of **economic health and growth.**

Planning and delivery of site management to achieve health objectives should be informed by and delivered through:

Policy

A policy framework at national, regional and / or local level that establishes the connection between the natural environment and health benefits supports management objectives

Partnerships

Community engagement and cross-sector partnerships in implementation reflect joined-up working and provide wider benefits

Best practice & innovation

A strong evidence-base is supported by many examples of good practice, with innovative projects being shared throughout the parks & protected areas network.

The delivery of health objectives by parks and protected areas is a natural extension of their traditional role in providing for access and recreation – it illustrates the environment sector responding to social needs and should be embedded as part of park management bodies' core business.

The importance of parks and protected areas for health promotion and improvement adds to the case for investment in these natural assets.

These principles have been developed from the *Healthy Parks Healthy People* philosophy as set out in the Melbourne Communiqué of 2010 which has been endorsed by the EUROPARC Federation.

Policy and the contribution of Protected Areas

Policy Briefing

Key-messages

Europe's nature is a health promoting asset. There is increasing evidence that access to the natural environment can help guard against, treat and manage key health issues such as: depression, coronary heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, obesity and dementia.

Europe's national parks and other protected areas are well placed to support health outcomes for people who live in or near them or who visit them.

There is a range of good practice in Europe's national parks and other protected areas in increasing physical activity, improving mental health and addressing health inequalities using green exercise and contact with nature through: outdoor recreation, volunteering, learning, gardening and active travel.

We believe that the contribution of Europe's national parks and other protected areas to health outcomes can be strengthened through recognition in relevant policy, practice and funding at the European, national and regional level.

Future revisions to the EU strategies on biodiversity and green infrastructure should make more direct reference to health benefits.

A new LIFE Fund on health and nature could help stimulate and mainstream good practice.



Lapland in autumn © Téa Karvinen, Metsähallitus Parks and Wildlife Finland

Europe's 'natural health service'

2

the contribution of nature to human health

Contact with nature contributes to good physical and mental health

A brisk 30 minute walk on five days of the week can reduce the risk of: Heart attack and stroke by 20-30%; Diabetes by 30-40%; Hip fractures by 36-68%; Bowel cancer by 30%; Breast cancer by 20% and Depression/dementia by 30% [\[Download 1\]](#).

One in four adults will experience mental health problems at some point in their lives. Outdoor activity and contact with nature can help sleep patterns, reduce stress, improve mood and self-esteem, and provide meaningful social contact [\[Download 2\]](#).

There is a growing body of evidence on the links between health inequalities and access to nature in urban, suburban and rural settings. Contact with nature can help reduce health inequalities at all stages of life: pre-birth, childhood, adult life and old age [\[Download 3\]](#).

Experience of the natural environment by young people can be life changing in terms of confidence and skills that can enhance job opportunities [\[Download 4\]](#).

Physical and mental health are inter-related, and in many ways, inter-dependent. With an ageing population and more people with multiple health issues, the breadth of benefits offered from green exercise make it a useful tool for the health sector.



Europe's 'natural health centres'

2

the contribution of National Parks and other Protected Areas



Parks and Wildlife Finland

METSÄHALLITUS

See: www.metsa.fi/web/en/healthbenefitsfromnationalparks

- The estimated total value of health benefits of all national park visits in Finland was **226 million euros in 2013**
- National parks are significant exercise environments for Finns. For example, in Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, **visitors moved a total of about 10.2 million kilometers in 2017 by their own power**. This equates to roughly the same distance as 255 laps around the world.

Visitors estimated the value of their health and well-being benefits to be around 100 euros per visit.

100 euros is the median value of the answers. The self-defined worth of health benefits experienced by all Finnish national park visitors in 2017 has been calculated by Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland reports at approximately 310 million euros in total.



Mountain Biking in Finland © Matti Möttönen- Metsähallitus Parks and Wildlife Finland



**Diputació
Barcelona**

**Provincial Council
of Barcelona**

[Download the summary
of the study](#)

A study carried out in 2015/16 looked at Natural Parks as a source of health and well-being. 500 visitors to sites in Barcelona province's Natural Parks Network were asked about how they perceive natural parks contributing to various aspects of health and well-being.

- **68% recognised a perceived improvement in their health and well-being as a result of their visit**

- 76% indicated that their motivation to visit related to the key dimensions of health and well-being
- Of the sites' attributes that contributed to an improved sense of well-being: **forests** were mentioned by 71% of respondents; **general landscape** was mentioned by 69% of respondents; **silence** was mentioned by 63% of respondents.



Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park, Scotland © NP Archive



**Scottish Natural Heritage
Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba**

All of nature for all of Scotland
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

[Download the report "Health Walks
on Scotland's National Nature Reserves"](#)

In a review of health walks on Scotland's National Nature Reserves (NNRs), **research found that the walk experience was much more positive than the expectations of many walkers who had not previously been to a NNR.**

All enjoyed their NNR experience. Many of the groups mentioned the positive effects their walks had on their mental and spiritual health.

The review also makes a number of recommendations concerning information, promotion, co-ordination and provision of visitor infrastructure to promote use of NNRs for health walks.

Regional & National Frameworks

The importance of relevant

Policy Frameworks

Protected areas operate within the framework of national and regional policy on health and the environment.

Experience suggests that these frameworks can be very helpful in supporting the delivery of health outcomes by individual protected areas, especially when they include:

- Reference to contact with nature in health policy
- Structures and partnerships between relevant health and environment departments and organisations
- Sources of funding for delivery of health outcomes.

Scotland - National Overview

The Scottish Parliament is responsible for health and environment issues within Scotland, and the key mechanism to steer and monitor delivery of the Scottish Government's outcomes-based approach is its **National Performance Framework**.

This has established five Strategic Objectives eg a Healthier Scotland; a Greener Scotland, and a set of National Outcomes which guide central and local government planning. National Performance Indicators are used to monitor performance and include:

Delivering a Healthier Scotland:

- Increase people's use of Scotland's outdoors
- Increase physical activity
- Improve mental well-being
- Increase the proportion of journeys to work made by public or active transport

Delivering a Greener Scotland:

- Improve the condition of protected nature sites
- Improve access to local greenspace

A **robust policy framework** recognises the positive links between the environment and human health as presented in a range of national and local government, government agency and NGO policies and strategies which support the government's top-level objectives. The physical, mental and social health benefits of being active in the outdoors and connecting with nature are identified across sectoral interests and greater integration within the public sector is encouraged by Scottish Government.

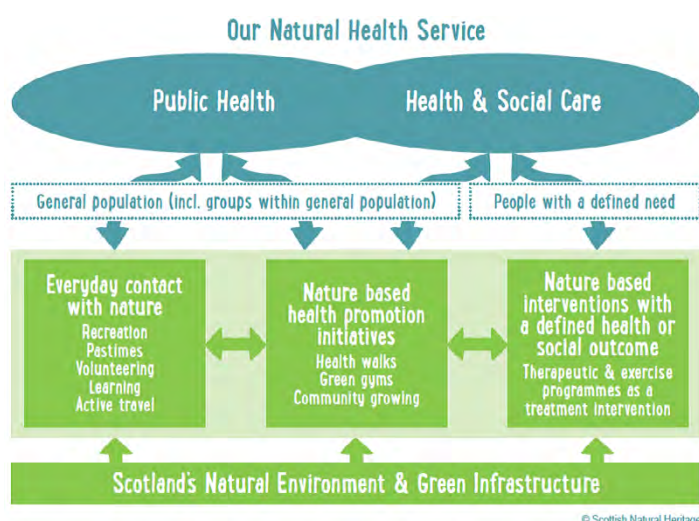
Ownership and management of protected areas is spread across public, voluntary and private sectors. National parks, national and local nature reserves, biosphere reserves, forest parks and other areas designated for landscape or nature conservation interest are largely managed by partnerships involving national and local government bodies, voluntary sector organisations, land owners and community interests. Access to the outdoors including protected areas, the urban fringe and urban greenspace is enabled through Scotland's **progressive access legislation** which links rights with responsible behaviour.

Scotland - National Overview

“Our Natural Health Service”

The **Green Exercise Partnership** (GEP) in Scotland was founded in 2007 and brought environmental organisations Scottish Natural Heritage and Forestry Commission Scotland together with the national health promotion organisation NHS Health Scotland. A key workstream for the GEP has been working with the National Health Service (NHS) to make use of environmental assets surrounding health-care settings as a health-promoting resource.

The **NHS Greenspace Demonstration Project**, started in 2010, has enabled the green space around a number of hospital sites to be developed for therapeutic purposes for patients, and for physical activity and relaxation for staff, visitors and neighbouring community. Landscape and access improvements have brought a range of health benefits, as well as enhancing biodiversity and delivering more cost-effective estate management systems.



Building on the success of the GEP, the **Our Natural Health Service initiative is a cross-sector partnership involving planning, transport, education, sport, health and environment.**

Scottish Natural Heritage is leading the development of an action programme to mainstream the use of nature-based solutions into health policy and practice and contribute to prevention, treatment and care. Natural assets such as **urban parks and green corridors; woodlands and greenspace around settlements; path networks; national parks and other protected areas can all contribute to key health challenges as well as improve quality of life.**

Key drivers of **health policy** include the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, a recognition of the need for more focus on prevention and healthy lifestyles, and widening health inequalities. Actions to encourage more use of Scotland’s outdoors as Our Natural Health Service are being strongly linked to the public health and physical activity agendas within Scottish Government and the health sector, and to the evidence base that shows how green exercise can contribute to **tackling physical inactivity, mental ill-health and health inequalities.**

A strong focus of Our Natural Health Service will be on the areas of urban and rural Scotland that have low levels of physical activity and suffer from health inequalities and other aspects of disadvantage. **Local ‘Green Health Partnerships’** which bring together health and environment sectors are being used to up-scale and mainstream greater use of Scotland’s outdoors to deliver public health outcomes. Drawing on public and voluntary sector stakeholders’ collective knowledge of community needs, existing green health activity, local resources and delivery organisations, the partnerships will co-ordinate activity and co-produce outputs that contribute directly to **local health and social care priorities.**

Scotland is making significant progress in the green health agenda and is seen as a front-runner within the UK and Europe in this topic. The experience Scottish Natural Heritage has developed in championing this work is being fed into the EUROPARC Federation Commission on Health & Protected Areas, and an IUCN / WCPA Health and Wellbeing Specialist Group set up to promote the links between nature and human health and further adoption of the Healthy Parks Healthy People approach.

Finland - National Overview

The perspective of nature and health is divided under several ministries in Finland. However, there is no clear guiding body responsible for combining nature and human health.

- The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health aims to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to lead a healthy and socially secure life.
- The Ministry of the Environment is responsible for matters concerning communities, the built environment, housing, biodiversity, sustainable use of natural resources and environmental protection.
- The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry secure domestic food production and sustainable use of renewable natural resources and create the preconditions for economic activities and well-being derived from these.
- The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for the development of education, science, cultural, sport and youth policies, and for international cooperation in these fields.

In the years to come, Finnish society faces major challenges such as aging population, growing prevalence of mental health problems, obesity and type 2 diabetes. These problems will increase health care expenses significantly in the future. All means and actions to make a positive effect to these challenges are very welcome.

Nowadays, benefits of nature for human health and wellbeing are seen as an increasingly important topic in Finnish society.

Cross-governmental cooperation and development between various sectors of the state administration and specialists from sports, outdoor and nature sectors has increased substantially over the last few years.

Evidence

The Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE) is a primary scientific institution conducting research on the health impacts of nature. The effects of nature on well-being are also studied in relation to the societal significance of recreational use of nature, multiple use of forests, and the development of nature-based business operations.

In addition to LUKE, the University of Tampere and the National Institute of Health and Welfare are the main institutions involved with research on green space, health and wellbeing.



Delivery

Parks & Wildlife Finland (P&WF), a unit of Metsähallitus, manages all national parks (a total of 40) and other state owned protected areas in Finland as well as historic sites throughout the country. In addition, P&WF promotes nature conservation more widely through collaboration with neighbouring countries of Finland and several international organisations. P&WF use public funds to provide facilities for outdoor recreation such as trails, nature centres and websites. Several partners of P&WF within nature tourism provide services that enable people to enjoy Finland's protected areas sustainably. **Safe and marked trails (a total of 6,000 km) through Finland's landscapes encourage everyone to get out into nature.**

In cooperation with its partners, P&WF is responding to future challenges through the [Healthy Parks, Healthy People Finland 2025 programme](#).

The goal of the programme is to improve social, physical and mental well-being of the Finnish population through green space and contact with nature. The aim is to inspire people to become physically active and to spend time in the natural environment more often and for longer periods in their everyday life as well as their leisure time.

Case studies from Finland

The Healthy Parks Healthy People Finland programme has been implemented through several projects funded by the European Social Fund, the European Regional Development Fund and the Ministry of Education and Culture.

- **Moved by Nature project** (2013-2015) aimed at developing nature-based health promotion interventions for groups classified as being high-risk groups (e.g. unemployed, overweight and obese, new immigrants, youth at risk of social exclusion).
- **Open Air** (2012-2014) project focused on embedding nature in rehabilitation and integration services as well as improving access to urban and rural green space.
- **Everyone Outdoors** project aimed at improving access to nature in collaboration with the Finnish Federation of Adapted Physical Activity (2015-2016).
- **Moved by Nature II** project (2017-2019) continues to develop nature-based health interventions, however children's and adolescent's increased physical activity levels as a target. As part of the project the first outdoor activity centre designed for children and youth in Finland will be developed.
- Equal opportunities to reach nature are being developed further in the **Trail to Nature** project (2017-2019).

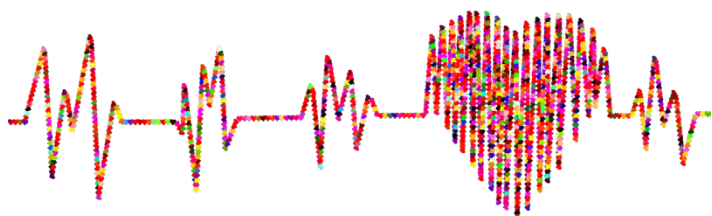


Other Case Studies

- **Promoting Green Health In Scotland** The Green Exercise Partnership brings together a range of actors so that a Natural Health Service can complement the National Health Service
- **Walkability Project** The Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (UK) hosted the Walkability Project, a “health asset” securing benefits for the community, bringing together interested bodies including the Local Health Board, Leisure Services and the County Council.
- **The Health Challenge and a Label for the Gîtes de France** The project “Parks, Nature, Sports and Health” aimed at counter sedentary lifestyles and enable people to discover nature and biodiversity through physical activity.

Evidence

4



Key benefits include:

better physical and mental health and guarding against future illness; therapeutic and restorative qualities which enhance recovery; reduced social isolation and greater community cohesion; and opportunities to establish lifelong healthy behaviours.

There is a significant evidence base for the range of individual and wider social health and well-being benefits that can be achieved through outdoor activity and contact with nature.

- The evidence suggests that **people are more likely to maintain regular physical activity in the outdoors** – the attractive and changing surroundings aid motivation and it provides opportunities for social contact.
- One in four adults will experience mental health problems at some point in their lives. **Outdoor activity and contact with nature can help sleep patterns, reduce stress, improve mood and self-esteem, provide meaningful social contact.**
- The number of people with dementia is growing rapidly. Spending time in the outdoors can bring a range of benefits to people living with dementia and their carers.
- A range of health benefits for young people, including better motor skills for children who play in green spaces; reduced symptoms of ADHD with contact with green spaces; more likelihood of physically active young people in greener and more walkable neighbourhoods.
- **Experience of the natural environment by young people can be life changing in terms of confidence**, and skills that can enhance job opportunities. Encouraging interest in the natural world and outdoor activity early in life instils confidence in using natural settings and has a positive role in supporting more active, healthier lifestyles in adult life.
- The natural environment is associated with opportunities to make social contact, increase inter-generational connections, avoid isolation and enhance community cohesion. Experience of the outdoors and involvement in its care can lead to stronger more inclusive and sustainable communities.

References

- [NHS Forest – evidence summary](#) of health, social, environmental and financial benefits
- [Evidence statement on the links between natural environments and human health 2017](#) DEFRA and University of Exeter
- [A Dose of Nature: addressing chronic health conditions by using the environment](#). 2014 University of Exeter
- [The Great Outdoors: how a green exercise environment can benefit all](#). 2013 Gladwell et al
- [Benefits of connecting children with greenspace](#) – range of evidence
- [Nature-based integration Nordic experiences and examples](#). 2017 Pitkänen et al
- [Natural outdoor environments and mental and physical health: Relationships and mechanisms](#). 2015 Triguero et al

Physical and mental health are inter-related, and in many ways, inter-dependent. With an ageing population and more people with multiple health issues, the breadth of benefits offered from green exercise make it a useful tool for the health sector.

Re-connecting with the environment through green exercise can help patients, their carers, and the general population in terms of healthy lifestyles and prevention of poor health / illness.

Visiting the outdoors

4

can help address issues of poor health and health inequalities

Visiting the outdoors, whether it's urban greenspace close to home, countryside around towns or remote and wild areas of land and water, can help deliver a range of health benefits and can contribute to the attainment of national targets for physical activity.

A brisk 30 minute walk on five days of the week can reduce the risk of:

Heart attack and stroke by 20-30%;

Diabetes by 30-40%;

Hip fractures by 36-68%;

Bowel cancer by 30%;

Breast cancer by 20%;

Depression/dementia by 30%

(from the [Annual Report of the Chief Medical Officer 2011](#) 'transforming Scotland's Health, NHS Scotland')



Encouraging more people to visit the outdoors more frequently would help spread the benefits as widely as possible.

- There is a **significant relationship between self-reported stress and the proportion of greenspace** in the local area (*Ward Thompson et al, 2012*)
- **Health disparities between high income and low income groups are much narrower in areas with ample greenspace** (*2012 Scottish Health Survey*)
- People living near green space experience less health complaints and better mental and physical health than those living in an urban environment. **For every 10% increase in green space there was a reduction in health complaints equivalent to a reduction of 5 years of age** (*de Vries S, Verheij R A and Groenewegen P P, 2001*)
- People living close to greenspace are more likely to meet physical activity guidelines and less likely to be overweight or obese. (*The relationship of physical activity and overweight to objectively measured greenspace accessibility and use, Coombes, 2011*)
- Nature provides an added value to the known benefits of physical activity. **Repeated exercise in nature is connected to better emotional well-being.** (*The Relationship between Perceived Health and Physical Activity Indoors, Outdoors in Built Environments, and Outdoors in Nature Pasanen, Tyrväinen & Korpela, 2014*)

Case studies

- **Wandering in the woods - enabling people living with dementia to benefit from visiting woodlands**
The evidence gathered throughout the project implementation has shown that there are significant potential physical, social and emotional benefits for people living with dementia in case settings when they can go out into woodlands.
- **Active Senior Tourism** The project began in Extremadura (Spain) and Alentejo (Portugal) and it aims at training the tourism sector in the creation of services and products for tourists over 55.
- **Natural training with tourism and healthcare professionals.** In 2017, ENRx published the brochure "Forme, nature, Bien-être" with his partners in support of a specific Natural Training and trained 20 professionals.

Health Check-list

5

Are you delivering

a health-promoting park / Protected Area?

The Health Check-list below and in the following pages is designed to help you think about:

- how best to plan, manage and promote your sites to a wider range of people to improve their general health and well-being; and
- how to link your sites to the health sector so that people at risk of or experiencing specific illness / health conditions can be supported to make use of your sites.



Strategic planning - is there:

- > A link between the management objectives of your site, and the national / regional / local health and well-being policy framework
- > A site management plan that engages with local health stakeholders and responds to health issues and priorities / target groups

Outreach – does your site have:

- > Engagement with health sector, intermediary bodies and target groups to ensure activity programmes and volunteering opportunities cater for their needs
- > Outreach programmes aimed at key target groups or communities

Monitoring & evaluation – does your site have:

- > A visitor monitoring system that gathers feedback on health benefits
- > Monitoring systems for the health benefits delivered through specific activity programmes / health interventions

Communications – is there:

- > Active engagement with local health professionals, providing information and opportunities to experience the ways your site can support health outcomes
- > A communications plan for your site that specifies appropriate messages for health professionals and for the public / target health groups
- > Easily accessed information about the site and what it offers to a range of visitors

Site management – does your site have:

- > Easily accessible information on the facilities provided at the site
- > A sense of welcome for visitors
- > Visitor facilities such as parking for people with disabilities; toilets
- > A range of access provision, from easy-going paths for people with health issues / disabilities, to specific equipment / furniture to promote physical activity
- > A range activity programmes delivered directly, or through green exercise providers
- > Staff who are well trained to support visitors with health issues

Staff training

- > Do site staff have appropriate skills and confidence to work with health groups
- > Can you build wider awareness and capacity in your organisation on health

Other opportunities – are you able to:

- > Identify local health sector partnerships and provide a place / activity programme / visual identity for green exercise referrals / sign-posting
- > Make access to information easier for health professionals and target groups to find by inputting into / establishing a central information service for a wide range of parks / protected areas

1) Strategic planning

The positive links between health and environment are well established, and are becoming more evident in many policy areas such as planning, transport, sport, education and tourism. This provides an opportunity for protected area site managers to show that they are responding to these policies, and that their sites can contribute to an overall policy framework that seeks public health benefits from a well managed suite of nature sites.

Goal	Actions
<p>A clear link between the strategic objectives of protected area site management and health policies and priorities at national / regional / corporate level.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Obtain an understanding of relevant wider health policies so that the principles of site management can be shown to fit within this strategic framework ➤ Prior to management planning, assess the site in terms of its potential to deliver health objectives – include aspects such as: accessibility (including by public transport and active travel) and facilities for public use; current uses related to physical activity and well-being
<p>A site management plan that responds to local health issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assess the potential for site improvements that will enhance the health-promoting potential of the site – including additional tree cover for shade; short, circular easy-going routes for people with mobility issues ➤ Ensure that local health stakeholders – health sector, providers of supportive outdoor health programmes, and local communities – are engaged in the management planning process ➤ Identify specific health objectives to be achieved, and methods to evaluate delivery ➤ Consider a zoning approach to site planning that aims to cater for a range of visitor experiences and health outcomes – these could include: areas for group activities; areas for quiet contemplation etc – and establish compatible and non-compatible uses and activities
<p>To establish strategic partnerships and connections to local communities / target groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage with local authorities and other relevant stakeholders including intermediary groups ➤ Use protected areas' governance bodies (steering and advisory boards, management groups, etc.) as health forums to promote and foster local partnerships

2) Site management

A range of good and well-managed provision for visitors is essential if national parks and protected areas are to deliver health outcomes for everyone.

Goal	Actions
<p>a range of accessible destinations and opportunities for green exercise that meet diverse needs.</p> <p>Versatile, high quality destinations and people that provide opportunities for physical activity and contact with nature.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Audit the accessibility of key paths and places to ensure that the range of provision provides opportunities for all to experience and enjoy nature ➤ Provide information online and on-site to the public on the facilities they can expect at key sites and on the accessibility of paths and trails ➤ Consider and provide for the needs of specific health programme groups – this may include all-ability paths, regular seating, and provision of areas for meeting, undertaking activity and rest ➤ Engage target groups in assessing the suitability of sites / services for their needs, and make reasonable adjustments ➤ Provide activity programmes – directly, or through green exercise providers (voluntary sector / outdoor recreation businesses etc) - that address identified barriers and represent nature-based solutions to health and social needs ➤ Review the provision and roles of rangers, wardens or other staff involved in visitor management and outreach to maximise support for health outcomes
<p>identify and protect the qualities of the national park and other protected areas which are important for health outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that places important for wildlife, landscape and scenery and quiet enjoyment are managed and protected effectively alongside other uses of the area ➤ Identify and develop the potential of areas important for health outcomes – viewpoints, places to relax and eat, trails near water or native woodland etc. ➤ Promote opportunities to discover wildlife first-hand without disturbance etc viewing hides; interpretation points; hands-on displays etc

Site management work links to **Strategic planning**, **Outreach work**, and **Staff training**.

3) Outreach

A key aspect of parks and protected areas' role in contributing to health and well-being is to encourage people to use natural assets by reaching out to local communities and communities of interest. To deliver health outcomes to those who would benefit the most, outreach programmes need to be targeted at priority groups such as:

- Physically inactive
- People with long term health issues or disabilities
- People experiencing mental health problems
- BME groups
- Refugees / immigrants
- Older people
- Teenage girls and young women

These segments of the population are often found within communities / groups experiencing inequalities because of deprivation, disadvantage or social exclusion.

Outreach work is about connecting with, and making natural assets relevant and accessible to, target groups.

Goal	Actions
<p>parks & protected area staff understand how health and well-being can be enhanced through connection with nature, and have the skills to connect to and communicate with target groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage target groups in assessing the suitability of sites / services for their needs, and make reasonable adjustments ➤ Carry out an audit of local healthcare centres and community-based health promotion groups and invite them to help co-produce outreach programmes to suit their needs ➤ Work with health & care partners and green exercise providers to deliver learning exchange
<p>outreach programmes that influence healthy behaviours by inspiring and enabling people to connect to parks and protected areas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify and work with local stakeholders / intermediary bodies connected with target groups ➤ Take information about the parks and protected areas to the people eg Ranger Services can provide motivational talks and activities to target groups within community settings - including clinical rehabilitation groups, migrant re-settlement programmes - to promote parks and protected areas and their health benefits ➤ Help the people get to the parks and protected areas eg work with health sector / community groups / NGOs to provide free / subsidised transport to local sites ➤ Provide specific site-based activities for the visiting groups eg guided walks, environmental art, conservation work ➤ Signpost to wider opportunities to help participants sustain long-term behaviour change

Outreach work links to **Site management, Communications issues** and **Staff training**.

4) Communications

Communication including promotion and dissemination should address two main groups:

- **Health professionals** - communications aimed at this audience need to stress the health benefits, because protected areas are generally safe, accessible and free places for recreation, exercise and relaxation. Protected areas can provide opportunities for physical exercise, locations and activities that are beneficial to mental health, and a range of other well-being benefits linked to therapeutic activities.
- **Wider public** - communications aimed at this audience need to stress fun and enjoyment that can be derived from the environment.

Goal	Actions
<p>health professionals have greater awareness and understanding of the health and well-being benefits from contact with nature</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify local health partners / champions that will help to “spread the word” on how nature can benefit people’s health ➤ Establish regular meetings between protected areas and health professionals to exchange information and experience ➤ Invite health professionals to wider meetings (with protected area authority, local community, entrepreneurs, etc) to raise awareness about health issues and how to improve it. These wider protected area partners will communicate health benefits to their clients/visitors. ➤ Provide opportunities for health professionals to engage in nature-based activities / health interventions so that they can see the impact themselves / in participants
<p>people spend more time in nature and they understand health benefits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Increase the integration of health objectives into visitor programs offered by guides, nature centres, nature education specialists, rangers, etc ➤ Organise promotional events/initiatives for target groups to encourage them to enjoy the environments while also learning that protected areas are an accessible resource that can contribute to their health and well-being. Events can be on a wide range of topics designed to motivate participation by under-represented groups ➤ Attractive messages for different target groups. Main channels of communication are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banners on protected areas website • Posters on web, and at nature centres, schools, hospitals, etc • Campaigns for children and youth to inspire and encourage them to engage with nature ➤ Cooperate with interesting social media actors to motivate groups, and children and young people in particular, to engage in outdoor recreation ➤ Health messages can be direct and indirect, recognising that some people will not respond to ‘take part because it’s good for you’ – the key is to have an enjoyable experience.
<p>health practitioners and the public have easy access to information about local nature places and opportunities to participate in health-promoting activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make sure protected areas are included in local information / directories, and that these are promoted to the health sector and target health groups

Communications work links to **Outreach, Site management, and Staff training**

5) Monitoring & evaluation

Research information on the significance of contact with nature on human health and well-being is continuously increasing and becoming more versatile. Information on health benefits of protected areas is important at various levels. It is essential for local land managers and for local health sector, as well as for regional, national and international health policy, planning, reporting, research and comparisons.

Goal	Actions
<p>generate evidence of the health benefits resulting from the use of protected areas and use the findings to aid future site management, contribute to wider planning and policy, and support the case for further investment in nature-based solutions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ensure that your site's visitor monitoring system includes the gathering of quantitative information on visitors and their characteristics as well as their views on health and well-being benefits ➤ To provide more detail on the site's contribution to health outcomes, consider using one-time on-site visitor surveys for actual users, or online surveys for actual or potential users ➤ Establish monitoring and evaluation methods for any specific nature-based health programmes using your site ➤ Report and disseminate the results in an appropriate form in order to make the information available and understandable to target audiences such as decision makers and general public

Monitoring & evaluation work links to **Outreach** and **Staff training**

Examples from Parks & Wildlife Finland that demonstrate how to measure and report health and well-being benefits perceived by visitors.

Parks & Wildlife Finland - Questions about perceived health and well-being in a visitor survey questionnaire.

How did this visit to Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park influence the state of your health and well-being in the following sectors? (Please answer each point and choose the alternative, which describes your feelings the best.) 5 = totally agree, 4 = somewhat agree, 3 = no opinion, 2 = somewhat disagree, 1 = totally disagree)	totally agree		totally disagree		
	5	4	3	2	1
Increased social well-being (e.g. strengthened social relations, improved working capacity, enjoyed going things alone or together)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased mental well-being (e.g. satisfaction with life, improved mood, recovery from mental stress, learned something new)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Increased physical well-being (e.g. enjoyed sensing the nature, maintained the fitness, learned new skills, physical well-being)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

In the table below are the results of the question above in a single visitor survey report. When this question is asked in a same way across all the protected areas, it allows also for regional and national reporting and comparisons.

	Responses		Evaluation, %					Average
			totally disagree	some-what disagree	no opinion	some-what agree	totally agree	
	n	%						
Increased social well-being	1 874	97	1	1	14	37	47	4,28
Increased psychological well-being	1 874	97	0	0	7	34	58	4,5
Increased physical well-being	1 872	97	0	0	6	29	64	4,56
TOTAL	1 879	98						4,45

International and cross-sectoral expert co-operation and scientific research is essential in developing new approaches to exploring the various dimensions between nature and health. Several good examples already exist in Europe, and sharing of them among protected area managers is a good starting point. For example, Parks & Wildlife Finland has established a visitor monitoring system already in 2000 and questions of visitors' perceived health and well-being benefits were integrated as a standard part of the on-site visitor surveys in 2013.

Download –

[Visitor Monitoring in Nature Areas - a manual based on experiences from the Nordic and Baltic countries 2007](#)

6) Staff training and development

Protected area staff are the vital resource to demonstrate how their sites can be ‘natural health centres’. They have roles in policy development, site planning, and providing services and experiences that will engage people in health-promoting activities. One or more staff at all levels are needed to act as champions within their own organisations – helping to secure corporate commitment to this work and sharing good practice, and also invest effort in building working partnerships with health-related bodies so that the benefits are targeted at those in most need.

Goal	Actions
<p>parks & protected area staff have the necessary skills and confidence to work in partnership with the health sector and local health groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify appropriate staff at all levels of the organisation to act as champions for the health agenda ➤ Ensure that staff have access to appropriate training and development opportunities, including job shadowing, study tours, networking etc
<p>parks & protected area management organisations recognise the contribution their sites can make to health and well-being at individual, community and wider population levels, and show commitment to achieving on this objective</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provide all staff with access to information on the range of social issues, including health, that engaging people with nature and greenspace can contribute to ➤ Provide opportunities for parks & protected area staff to share experience and good practice within the organisation in order to build understanding and capacity



EUROPARC

F E D E R A T I O N

EUROPARC Federation

Waffnergasse 6

93047 Regensburg, Germany

office@europarc.org

www.europarc.org

