

Healthy Parks Healthy People

EUROPE



HPHPe TOOLKIT

Health & Well-being benefits
from Parks & Protected Areas



Healthy Parks Healthy People

EUROPE

Healthy Parks, Healthy People is a Europe wide programme to support Parks and Protected Areas at the national, regional and local level to deliver better outcomes for the health of people and nature. It aims to improve public health and well-being for all, reducing health inequalities, protecting, restoring and investing in biodiversity, and responding to the climate emergency.

europarc.org/healthy-parks-healthy-people

What is this guidance for?

The purpose of this document is to encourage understanding of and commitment to the principles of Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe (HPHPE). It provides a practical toolkit to aid the delivery of programmes and projects by Parks and Protected Areas which will contribute to people's health and well-being.

Who should read this?

This guidance is aimed at those responsible for the management of Parks and 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.

How can it help you?

This toolkit is structured under the 4 pillars of the Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe programme. For each pillar, a range of tips, tools, information and inspiration are provided. A key part of this toolkit is the HPHPE check list. This aims to help Parks and Protected Areas staff to develop goals and actions across 7 areas of work, based on the learning and experience of our network.

It is designed to encourage you to consider your current practice and 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



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Introduction

Nature is Good for your Health.



Ranger-led walk, Atholl, Perthshire, Scotland
Photo by: Lorne Gill/NatureScot

In recent years, study after study has shown significant and sustained increases in people's health and happiness when connected to nature. For many people, this connection has been further emphasised during the coronavirus pandemic, be it the sight of wildlife from the kitchen window, the experience of the natural world changing through the seasons in our gardens or local greenspaces, or the opportunities that the easing of lockdowns brought to visit Europe's Parks and Protected Areas.

Across many European countries, there are common public health challenges caused by our increasingly sedentary, urbanised lifestyles, growing social isolation, and an ageing population. The result is a wide range of non-communicable health conditions which could be prevented or reduced. More than one in four people will suffer from poor mental health during their lifetime, a percentage now likely to increase as a result of disruption to many people's lives and livelihoods as a result of the pandemic. The deep seated health inequalities present in most countries will also have intensified.

Together with these health challenges, Europe is also experiencing a period of sustained biodiversity loss associated with the drive to more productive agricultural and forestry sectors, together with the removal of places for nature and replacement by buildings, industry, roads and other infrastructure, not to mention the impacts of climate change. To address these issues, there are well-developed and diverse systems of Parks and Protected Areas and a range of progressive policies for biodiversity and green and blue infrastructure at both the European and national levels. **But more action is urgently needed as the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 - Bringing nature back into our lives makes clear.**

Europe's Parks and Protected Areas are diverse, ranging from small nature reserves through to extensive working landscapes with millions of people living within them or close by. Many experienced significant visitor pressures following the easing of COVID-19 lockdowns during 2020. This has again turned the spotlight on some **long-standing challenges for the management of these places resulting from growing visitor numbers, problematic behaviour, and conflicts between different user groups**. At the same time, the pandemic has clearly shown the importance from a health perspective of investing in the provision and planning of these places in dealing with a pandemic. This is especially important for those in towns and cities where most people in Europe now live.

The European Green Deal has ambitions for a more sustainable Europe. However, the action required to improve public health and reduce health inequalities needs to be connected to the linked challenges of climate change and reversing the decline in the natural world that we depend on.

To support this vision, the EUROPARC Federation launched its **Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe programme**, as both a recognition of challenges and a call to action. More than ever, it is now that we urgently need to look after our Parks, Protected Areas and other natural spaces, **not just for the health of nature, but for the well-being of people too**.



Healthy Parks, Healthy People Europe (HPHPe)

In many ways, the role of Europe's Parks and Protected Areas in the delivery of health objectives is a natural extension of their traditional role in facilitating access and recreation and providing opportunities for environmental education and volunteering. Aligning this work with health outcomes, developing action to address health inequalities and doing more of it in partnership with the health sector can be challenging. However, when it becomes a recognised part of the everyday business of Europe's Parks and Protected Areas it will help increase the value both people and policy makers place on the protection of nature. It should also add significantly to the case for continued and additional investment in these natural assets.



HPHPe is a EUROPARC Federation programme, developed to inspire and inform the actions needed by Europe's Parks and Protected Areas to make this happen in practice.

The programme has a simple vision of “happier and healthier people more connected to nature-rich Parks and Protected Areas”.

To realise this vision, it seeks the following outcomes

- Europe's Parks and Protected Areas providing well managed and accessible facilities for all and engaging more people in health promoting activities;
- Policy, practice and partnership working in place realising the potential of Europe's Parks and Protected Areas as key assets for improving public health and well-being and reducing health inequalities; and
- More people from all backgrounds enjoying the health benefits of connecting with nature and supporting the case for better protection, restoration and further investment in Europe's Parks and Protected Areas.

europarc.org/healthy-parks-healthy-people-europe/

Plans for the implementation of Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe are structured under the **following pillars**:

1) Making the case



to increase awareness and understanding of nature-based health interventions in Parks and Protected Areas through the development of key messages, information and case studies.

2) Building partnerships



to establish broad based platforms at the European, national and regional level that bring together health, environmental and other sectors to discuss, develop and champion nature-based solutions in policy and practice.

3) Developing capacity & practice



to promote best practice, build capacity and develop the evidence base on nature-based health interventions in Parks and Protected Areas.

4) Connecting people and nature



to improve well-being and grow stronger pro-nature attitudes and behaviors in more people through the use of Parks and Protected Areas for improving public health.

The programme is also characterised by the following cross-cutting themes, that are important to be considered across all 4 pillars, in order to ensure HPHPe can deliver maximum benefits for Parks and people.



Policy

A policy framework at **national, regional or local level** that establishes the connection between the natural environment and health benefits.



Partnerships

Community engagement and cross-sector partnerships with joined-up working providing wider benefits.



Practise

A strong evidence- base of good practice, with **innovative projects** being shared throughout the Parks & Protected Areas network.



Support

A range of resources, to **inform and inspire managers of Parks and Protected Areas**, with implementation of HPHPe, supported through capacity building and networking.



Leadership

To advocate that global and EU strategies on biodiversity, climate change, green infrastructure and youth should make more direct reference to health benefits and encourage the investment required to deliver.

To deliver the HPHPe this toolkit has been developed, to enable Parks and Protected Areas, to consider their role in the delivery of health objectives. Fundamentally it seeks to ensure the importance of Parks and Protected Areas for health promotion and improvement is raised and adds to the case for the continued and additional investment in these natural assets.

The 7 topics that are relevant to the work of Parks and Protected Areas are presented in the **HPHPe check list**. They are critical in delivering the **4 pillars** of the HPHPe programme and advise on practical implementation and action at a national or Park level national or Park level.

Through the adoption of the HPHPe programme and with this toolkit, EUROPARC seeks to ensure that

- More of Europe's Parks and Protected Areas providing **well managed, accessible facilities and engaging target groups** in health- promoting activities.
- More policy, practice and partnership working to maximise the potential of Europe's Parks and Protected Areas as key assets for **improving public health and well-being and reducing health inequalities**.
- More people from all backgrounds enjoying the health benefits of connecting with nature and supporting the case for **better protection, restoration and further investment in Europe's Parks and Protected Areas**.



Illustration by Frits Ahlefeldt

HPHPe - Sustainable Development Goals, the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy - Bringing Nature back into our lives.

The Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe programme, delivered through the European network of Parks and Protected Areas is relevant to international EU policy.



Although **SDG 3 Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages**, mainly focuses on health risk reduction, there is an aspect of promoting mental health and well being that Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe programmes in Parks can deliver.

Target 3.4: By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from noncommunicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being, especially relevant.



SDG 15 Life on land

Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

National sustainable development strategies should look to a Healthy Parks Healthy People approach in relating actions for Health and Nature.

sdgs.un.org/topics/national-sustainable-developmentstrategies



DG Environment

Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius, stated that: "Nature brings us wide range of benefits. It provides us with food, medicines, business opportunities, and at the same time it is our natural shield from air, water and noise pollution. **Access to nature is also essential for health.** During the Covid-19 lockdowns across Europe, we had a chance to realise how important green areas are for our mental and physical well-being.

To build a healthier and more resilient society we thus need to value our nature Protected Areas and invest more into green infrastructures, including in urban areas and public spaces. This is one of the aims of the 2030 EU Biodiversity Strategy".

1

Making the Case

to increase awareness and understanding of nature-based health interventions in Parks and Protected Areas through the development of key messages, information and case studies.

Setting the scene

Europe's nature is a health promoting asset, and our Parks and Protected Areas are well placed to support health outcomes for their visitors and those living near them.

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 Parks and Protected Areas offer a range of good practice, in increasing physical activity, improving mental health and addressing health inequalities.

Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe aims to show how the contribution of Parks and Protected Areas to health outcomes can be strengthened through greater recognition in relevant policy, practice and funding at the European, national and regional level.

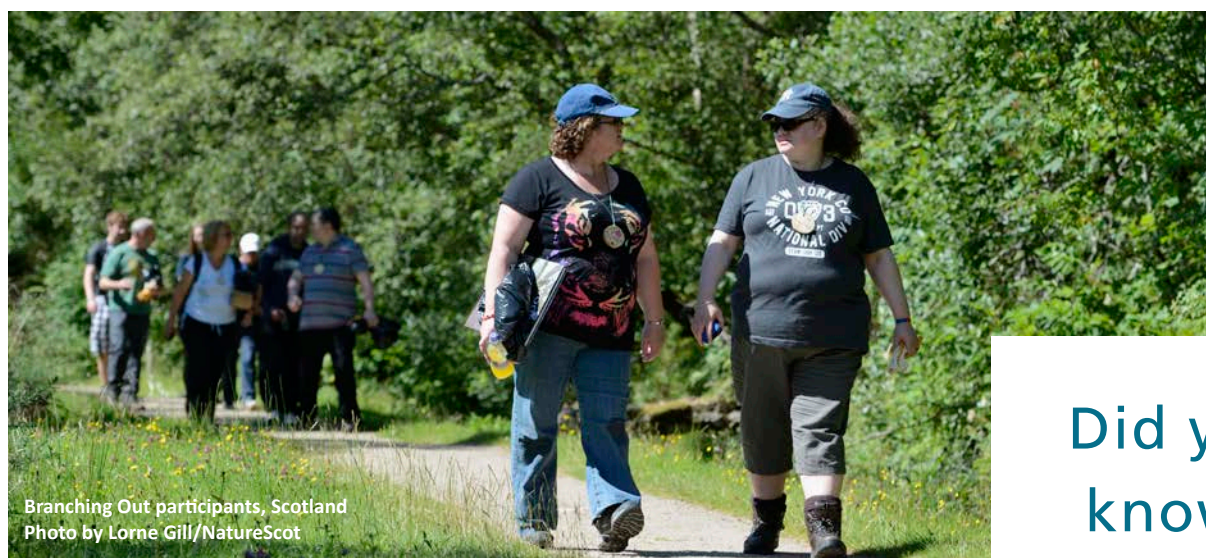
Key Messages

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 and value-for-money 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 good Policy, Practice and Partnerships.



Did you know?

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 or illness.

Evidence shows that contact with nature contributes to good physical, mental, emotional and social health and well-being:

- 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. [\[Download 4\]](#)

Case studies

Experience from our Network

Europe's 'natural health centres', the contribution of National Parks and other Protected Areas

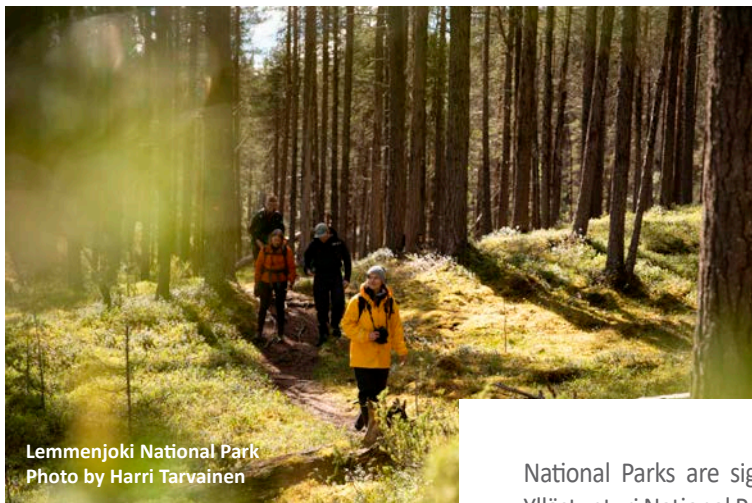


Provincial Council of Barcelona

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.

[Find out more here](#)



[Find out more here](#)



Parks and Wildlife Finland

National Parks are significant exercise environments for Finns. For example, in Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, visitors moved a total of about 10.3 million kilometers in 2019 by their own power. This equates to roughly the same distance as 257 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 2019 has been calculated by Metsähallitus, Parks & Wildlife Finland at approximately 322 million euros in total.

What did we learn?

- Gathering evidence to substantiate your rationale for parks involvement in health programmes, is a key element in "Making the Case".
- Offer evidence and guidance about people health and wellbeing to all the components of Protected Areas' management: planning of uses and activities, ecosystem conservation, public use management and communication.
- Investing in visitor surveys that invite feedback about health benefits will pay dividends, in providing information that can influence perception and opinion about the value of the Protected Area.
- Learning from other situations across Europe helps so staying connected to and contributing to the EUROPARC HPHPe network is essential.

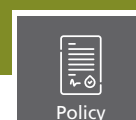
What you can do

HPHPe Check List



Making the case > 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 represent a valuable asset which can contribute to an overall policy framework that seeks public health benefits from a well managed suite of nature sites.



Goal

A clear link between the strategic objectives of Protected Area site management and health policies and priorities at national / regional / corporate level.

What to do

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.

A site management plan that responds to local health issues.

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.

2

Building Partnerships

to establish broad based platforms at the European, national and regional level that bring together health, environmental and other sectors to discuss, develop and champion nature-based solutions in policy and practice.

Setting the scene

Closer links between environment and health are vital within the Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe framework, but cross-sector partnerships can include also transport, leisure, education, planning, sport, tourism and business.

HPHPe is all about promoting a shared understanding across sectors of the contribution nature can make to delivering better public health and closer partnership working. Key to this are co-produced policies, a common language to aid mutually supportive objectives and integrated delivery of projects and programmes. Many sectors have an interest in and role to play in developing nature-based solutions to social, environmental and economic challenges, and these can deliver direct or indirect benefits to health and well-being.

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.

Key Messages

- ✦ Calls for “biodiversity in all policies” are increasingly mirrored and complemented by calls for “health in all policies”
- ✦ Engaging communities of place and interest is also vital for integrated planning, co-production and delivery
- ✦ Use existing, or develop new networks to enable collaboration at strategic and operational levels between health, environment and other stakeholders.
- ✦ Secure organisational commitment to strategic partnerships by involving appropriate staff in their leadership / progress reports.
- ✦ Identify champions who can raise the profile of partnership and raise awareness of the shared objectives within their sector.

Case studies

Experience from our Network

Scotland - working in partnership

“There is compelling evidence that green exercise improves not only our physical health, but also our emotional and mental health as well. I welcome the joined-up approach encompassed in the Our Natural Health Service initiative, the impact of which is entirely consistent with Realistic Medicine.”

Dr Gregor Smith, Deputy Chief Medical Officer

The Our Natural Health Service initiative is a cross-sectoral partnership led by NatureScot (previously Scottish Natural Heritage) involving public and voluntary sector stakeholders from health, environment, transport, education and sport. The main aim is to mainstream the use of nature-based solutions into

health policy and practice and an action programme has been developed to help address physical inactivity, poor mental health and health inequalities.

At the core of implementation of **Our Natural Health Service** are four large scale **Green Health Partnerships** which bring together a range of bodies to demonstrate how to up-scale and integrate action to increase 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 co-ordinate activity and co-produce outputs that contribute directly to local health and social care priorities. Key elements of work include: improving access to information about opportunities to engage in outdoor activities, raising awareness of the value of the natural environment and green infrastructure, and developing local green health projects that are accessible to those whose health would benefit most.



[Find out more here](#)

Finland - working in partnership

Benefits of nature for human health and well-being are increasingly recognised in Finland. Finnish society faces major challenges such as ageing population, growing prevalence of mental health problems, obesity and type 2 diabetes. Multi-sectoral co-operation to tackle these challenges with health benefits of nature has increased substantially over recent years between e.g. health, nature, sports, education, research and private sectors.



One significant tool that has helped, and continues to promote co-operation between actors of various kinds, has been the [Healthy Parks, Healthy People Finland 2025 programme](#) co-ordinated by Parks & Wildlife Finland. P&WF is a unit of Metsähallitus that manages all national Parks and other state-owned Protected Areas in Finland as well as historic sites.

The goal of the programme is to improve social, physical and mental well-being of the Finnish people with the help of 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 and leisure time. Communication and multi-sectoral co-operation is one of the three main themes of the programme.

As a national agency, P&WF can build partnerships and implement actions nation-wide. Projects led by P&WF, as well as by partners, have been the most efficient way of implementing Healthy Parks Healthy People programme in Finland. Best practices are being applied to different regions, thus creating wider benefits across the country.

[Find out more here](#)

What did we learn?

- In establishing cross-sectoral partnerships, it's important to spend time learning some of each others' professional language.
- Understanding partners' strategic priorities will help identify common ground and the co-benefits from working together.
- Local partnerships mean tapping into stakeholders' detailed knowledge of issues and priorities and co-ordinating action to connect people to place.

What you can do

HPHPe Check List



Building Partnerships > Strategic Planning



Goal

To establish strategic partnerships and connections to local communities / target groups.

What to do

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.

Discuss the principles of Healthy Parks Healthy People with strategic partners, and explore the development of programmes / projects based on 5 Ways to Well-being through Nature (see page 22 of the Toolkit).

Building Partnerships > 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
- BAME (black and minority ethnic)
- 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

Outreach programmes that influence healthy behaviours by inspiring and enabling people to connect to Parks and Protected Areas.

What to do

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.

3

Developing Capacity and Practice

to promote best practice, build capacity and develop the evidence base on nature-based health interventions in Parks and Protected Areas.

Setting the scene

If Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe is to succeed in its vision of “happier and healthier people more connected to nature-rich Parks and Protected Areas” it is essential to expand the capacity of members of the EUROPARC network and the cross-sector partners that they work with. This means awareness raising, skills development and sharing good practice, all of which will lead to the generation of better evidence on what makes a successful nature-based health initiative or intervention.

A range of training and development is available across Europe and within nations, and EUROPARC will be developing a Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe online network to help connect people and exchange learning, experience and resources as they are developed. There will also be opportunities to engage in webinars and conference workshops, but capacity-building also needs to be home grown by working with and through key local partners and training providers as local circumstances vary greatly across Europe.

Key Messages

- ⚡ Parks and Protected Area staff are the vital ingredient needed to realise their sites' potential to deliver health and well-being objectives.
- ⚡ Networking between and within organisations that manage Parks and Protected Areas should be facilitated to share experience and build capacity in health-promoting site management and related monitoring and evaluation.
- ⚡ Support is available in a range of published advice, guidance and examples of good practice, as well as training and development opportunities.
- ⚡ Learning from the health sector and people who want to use Parks and Protected Areas to improve their health and well-being will add knowledge and understanding

Case studies

Experience from our Network

Improving the effectiveness of nature conservation and quality of management practices, including those that are related to realising health outcomes, requires professional knowledge, experience and expertise.

Parks and Protected Area practitioners, including Natura 2000 sites, require tailor-made capacity building support and networking opportunities to find inspiration and ideas, that can be adapted to implement HPHPe in their local areas.

[Competencies for Effective Natura 2000 Management - Article](#)

EUROPARC through the LIFE e-Natura2000.edu project has created online learning modules that support the core competencies of Parks and Protected Areas. These core skills are needed to develop the new partnerships, practices and policy needed in a HPHPe area of work.

[LIFE EDU Brochure](#)

EUROPARC will also be seeking to create new learning opportunities specific to the HPHPe programme to bring this toolkit to life. In the meantime do check out these current resources.

When entering a new field of work, such as the HPHPe programme it pays to look beyond your immediate context and seek ideas and solutions “beyond your border”. Our colleagues in>NNL/EUROPARC Germany have brought together “shared know-how” from across Europe. Many examples gathered here with a health aspect to them.

[Sharing Know How - Manual](#)

What did we learn?

- Building knowledge and understanding of health issues through dialogue and project work with the health sector, staff recruitment and inclusion of health expertise or governing or advisory structures.
- Keeping skills, competencies and knowledge up to date is necessary to be effective. Save time and money.
- Learning from others.
- Staying connected in networks.

What you can do

HPHPe Check List



Developing Capacity and Practice > 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

Parks & Protected Area staff have the necessary skills and confidence to work in partnership with the health sector and local health groups.

What to do

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.

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.

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.

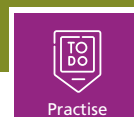
Provide opportunities for Parks & Protected Area staff to share experience and good practice within the organisation in order to build understanding and capacity.

HPHPe Check List



Developing Capacity and Practice > 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

Identify and protect the qualities of the national Park and other Protected Areas which are important for health outcomes.

What to do

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, viewing hides; interpretation points; hands-on displays etc.

A range of accessible destinations and opportunities for green exercise that meet diverse needs.

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.

Versatile, high quality destinations and people that provide opportunities for physical activity and contact with nature.

Engage target groups in assessing the suitability of sites / services for their needs, and make reasonable adjustments.

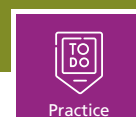
Provide activity programmes, such as [5 Ways to Well-being](#) (see page 22) through Nature – directly, or through green exercise providers (voluntary sector / outdoor recreation businesses etc) - that address identified barriers and represent nature-based solutions to health and social needs.

Review the provision and roles of rangers, wardens or other staff involved in visitor management and outreach to maximise support for health outcomes.



Developing Capacity and Practice > Monitoring and 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.



Goal

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.

What to do

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 detailed information on the site's contribution to health outcomes, consider using on-site visitor surveys.

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.

4

Connecting People and Nature

to improve well-being and grow stronger pro-nature attitudes and behaviors in more people through the use of Parks and Protected Areas for improving public health.

Setting the scene

The Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe programme aims to contribute to the public health agenda and grow stronger pro-nature attitudes and behaviors in more people through the use of Parks and Protected Areas for improved health and well-being. Collaborative working between the environment, health and other sectors can connect more people to nature whilst delivering mutual objectives.

At a strategic level, promoting “health in all policies” will help link environment, transport, education, sport and planning to government health priorities, and working together to develop nature-based solutions will enable cross-sector integration. In terms of on-the-ground delivery, a “nature for all” approach to help attract new audiences to Parks and Protected Areas and help reduce health inequalities.

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.

There are many examples of promotional projects and targeted interventions aimed at connecting people to nature.

Key Messages

Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe is promoting use of the **5 Ways to Well-being**, through Nature approach as the basis for green exercise projects in Parks and Protected Areas, as well as wider programmes and communications campaigns.

Nature-based programmes and projects should be targeted at those people who would benefit the most, i.e. contribute to tackling health inequalities.

Programmes and projects should be supported by communications initiatives that raise awareness within the public and the health sector of the health and well-being benefits of spending time outdoors.

#NatureForAll is a source of further communications resources
natureforall.global

In terms of communications associated with nature-based health projects, here are some key messages developed as part of Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe that will help to convey a consistent approach.



Messages aimed at the public:

- A walk in the Park – one step towards feeling healthier and happier
- Spending time in nature can lift our mood, combat anxiety and boost the immune system
- Outdoor activity and contact with nature can help sleep patterns, reduce stress, improve mood and self-esteem
- Healthy people need healthy nature
- By protecting nature, nature protects us!
- We can all protect nature, we all benefit from it!

Messages aimed at partners and stakeholders:

- Human health depends on healthy ecosystems - natural systems must be protected, restored and rationally managed
- Parks and Protected Areas are key assets for improving public health and reducing health inequalities
- Natural and human resources exist - we can work together and learn from each other
- Europe's diverse natural environment is an under-utilised resource for improving public health
- Parks and Protected Areas are the perfect places to deliver nature-based solutions – healthy Parks support healthy people
- Contact with nature is important for our physical, mental and social health and well-being
- Parks and Protected Areas are our 'natural health centres' – healthy people need healthy nature
- Outdoor activity and contact with nature can help tackle key health challenges, contributing to prevention, treatment and recovery
- Investing in nature conservation is investing in social health



Scarpe Escaut Nature Regional Park, France
Photo by Samuel Dhote

Did you know?

Some countries or organisations have developed specific nature-based programmes which aim to connect people and nature to achieve improvements in health and well-being. The practice of **Shinrin-Yoku**, or **forest bathing**, originated in Japan in 1982 as part of a national health program designed to reduce the stress levels of the population and has inspired a range of forest therapy programmes.

In Scotland, **Branching Out** is an outdoors multi-activity programme developed by Scottish Forestry for adults with mental health issues.

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)

5 Ways to Well-being through Nature

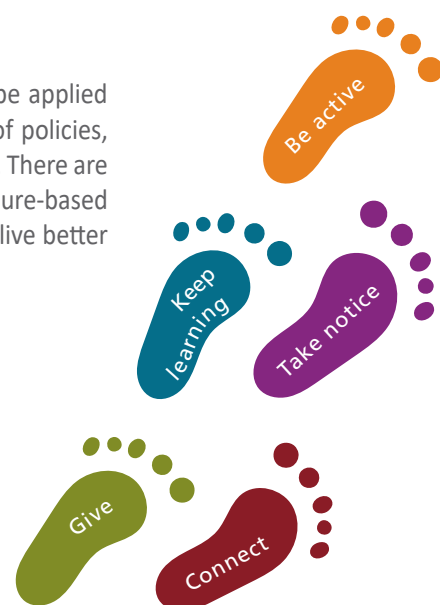
To stimulate implementation of Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe, EUROPARC is promoting development of programmes and projects that use the **5 Ways to Well-being through Nature** approach.

A way to bring environment and health professionals around the table to discuss nature-based solutions, The approach is based on the 2008 report by NEF (New Economics Foundation). The Five Ways to Well-being are a set of **evidence-based public health messages** aimed at improving people's mental health and well-being. The Five Ways lend themselves to outdoor settings and can engage people in healthy physical activity and caring for nature whilst they:

Be active
Keep learning
Take notice
Connect
Give

The approach aims to help people to change their behaviour and can be applied at both a broad-reaching programme level involving the development of policies, campaigns or initiatives, and as a site-based targeted health intervention. There are a number of examples of how the Five Ways have been adapted as a nature-based solution to help people realise that contact with nature can make them live better and feel better, including:

- Led by the public health department, the South Australia Government has delivered a communications campaign that encourages people to use the natural environment for health and well-being benefits
- In Cumbernauld, Scotland, Wild Ways Well is a local project delivered by environmental NGOs that supports people with mental health and associated problems – see next page.



Case studies

Experience from our Network

Wild Ways Well

Delivered by The Conservation Volunteers and Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Wild Ways Well project aims to get people suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health out into the greenspaces of Cumbernauld in Scotland. Whilst out amongst the trees, Parks and reserves participants get a chance to slow down, relax, enjoy being in the company of other like-minded people, and participate in a variety of environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the Five Ways to Well-being approach.

[Find out more here](#)



Photo by Lorne Gill/NatureScot



Hoge Kempen National Park, Belgium

[Find out more here](#)

Perhaps you can set up a local programme that encourages people to visit your Park / Protected Area regularly?

30:30

In 2015 the University of Minnesota initiated a structured project called “Nature Heals: 30x30”. The project challenged students and staff to use a variety of nature-based activities to spend 30 minutes in nature every day over 30 days. People who registered received emails providing information about the health benefits of a daily dose of nature, and ideas of where they could go and activities they could do independently for self-care and stress management.

A similar project has been run in the Flanders region of Belgium. 30:30 encourages people to spend a minimum of 30 minutes every day in a green environment doing any kind of movement and is a partnership between health insurance provider [cm.be](#) and forest advocate organisation [bosplus.be](#).

What did we learn?

Consider adopting the 5 Ways to Well-being through Nature approach in your Healthy Parks Healthy People programmes.

- Communicating the benefits of nature for people is good, but much better when that is backed up with support and appropriate park infrastructure
- Ensure your health and nature messages are clear and targeted
- Do something simple and do it more regularly
- Take an inclusive approach, work with other sectors, to disseminate messages and opportunities more widely
- Use of different communication channels for different audiences and make sure the language is not technical

The Health benefits of engaging 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.

There is a **significant relationship between self-reported stress and the proportion of greenspace** in the local area.

(Ward Thompson et al, 2012)

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)



Connecting People with Nature > Project Development

Nature-based health projects can be developed at various levels, from national public health communications campaigns to targeted health interventions delivered on-site. Projects should be developed in partnership with health and other relevant sector staff, and ideally co-produced through engagement with the envisaged communications audience / intervention participants (people from the target area or clinical group).

Health-focused projects in Parks and Protected Areas can be seen as providing:

Promotion of sites for individuals taking part in independent everyday contact with nature – e.g. recreation, pastimes, volunteering, outdoor learning, active travel;

or supportive programmes:

- Nature-based health initiatives e.g. health walks groups, conservation volunteering, community growing initiatives
- Nature-based interventions for people with a defined health or social need e.g. weekly on-site sessions of therapeutic & exercise activities as a treatment or recovery intervention for a fixed period



Goal

Partnerships developed with healthcare practitioners, green exercise providers and community-based services / groups

What to do

Identify key stakeholders to discuss the site's potential to offer beneficial activities for people with physical / mental health issues

Develop project proposals that will increase the site's contribution to addressing local health priorities and seek partnership funding as appropriate

Agree a monitoring & reporting framework

A range of opportunities available that help people maintain, improve or recover their health and well-being

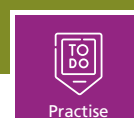
Provide and promote opportunities provided by site-based staff or voluntary sector green exercise providers / community-based groups

Implement monitoring & reporting framework

HPHPe Check List



Connecting People with Nature > Outreach



Goal

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

What to do

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 based on 5 Ways to Well-being through Nature to suit their needs.

Work with health & care partners and green exercise providers to deliver learning exchange.

Outreach programmes that influence healthy behaviours by inspiring and enabling people to connect to Parks and Protected Areas

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.

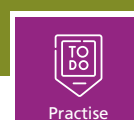


Connecting People with Nature > Communications

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

Health professionals have greater awareness and understanding of the health and well-being benefits from contact with nature

What to do

- 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 such as 5 Ways to Well-being through Nature so that they can see the impact themselves / in participants.

Health practitioners and the public have easy access to information about local nature places and opportunities to participate in health-promoting activities

Make sure Protected Areas are included in local information / directories, and that these are promoted to the health sector and target health groups.

HPHPe Check List



Goal

People spend more time in nature and they understand health benefits

What to do

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:

- 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 based on the 5 Ways to Well-being through Nature encourage positive and enjoyable behaviours that are within individuals' own control

The HPHPe Check-list summary below is designed to encourage you to consider your current practice and 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

Detailed advice on each of these topics has been provided in the 4 chapters of this toolkit. A separate resource which brings together all of this advice on the 7 topics can be found at europarc.org/healthy-parks-healthy-people-europe.



1) 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 ✓

3) Project development is there:

A project / range of activity programmes specifically designed to improve health & well-being and delivered directly, or through green exercise providers ✓

A mechanism which enables you to connect and work with local partners from the health sector to co-produce nature-based projects aimed at health improvement ✓

5) 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 ✓

7) 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 ✓

2) 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 of activity programmes delivered directly, or through green exercise providers ✓

Staff who are well trained to support visitors with health issues ✓

4) 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 ✓

6) 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 ✓

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 ✓

Conclusions

Nature can bring health benefits by connecting people, place and purpose. Time in a safe and healthy natural space, is a known antidote to stress. It lowers blood pressure, enhances the immune system, reduces anxiety and improves mood.

The COVID-19 experience has again thrown into sharp focus people's need to access nature for their health and well-being. The climate emergency further adds to the case for linking the action needed to improve well-being and reduce health inequalities with action to protect and restore biodiversity.

To have healthy people you need Healthy Parks and access to them. The challenge is to do this in ways which provide opportunities for all to connect with nature, while retaining and enhancing the biodiversity of these places. As this toolkit has illustrated, HPHPe is both a conservation approach and a set concrete actions that are needed to gain political support, integrate policy frameworks and direct funding for Europe's Parks and Protected areas whilst too guide HPHPe and at a practical level in planning and management.

The Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe programme is complemented by a toolkit, a collection of "how-to" experience that has emerged across Europe in the last few years. We hope that it will provide the insight and inspiration to all those involved in Europe's Parks and Protected Areas to establish HPHPe programmes and projects tailored to their needs and circumstances, and which will lead to more good practice being developed which can be shared across our network.



EUROPARC remains committed to working in partnership across sectors, and advocates for better policy integration and of course investment, to deliver our vision of **"happier and healthier people more connected to nature-rich Parks and Protected Areas"**.

Want to learn more about HPHPe, be part of the programme and join our network! Then please contact us at (hphpe@europarc.org).

Useful References

- [The health benefits of the great outdoors: A systematic review and meta-analysis of greenspace exposure and health outcomes](#) 2019 C T-Bennet, A Jones
- [Nature and mental health: an ecosystem service perspective](#) 2019 Bratman et al
- [Health and the natural environment: a review of evidence, policy, practice and opportunities for the future](#) 2018 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



Healthy Parks
Healthy People
EUROPE

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For more information about the
Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe :
europarc.org/healthy-parks-healthy-people



EUROPARC
F E D E R A T I O N

The Healthy Parks Healthy People Europe is managed by the EUROPARC Federation, the largest and most representative Protected Area network in Europe. EUROPARC members comprise almost 40% of the Natura 2000 network, with Nature and Regional Parks alone covering 8% of Europe's land. More information at: europarc.org.





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