



Community
Wetlands
Forum

Walking Trails and Recreation Information Sheet





Walking Trails and Recreation

🌿 In this information sheet you will find:

- Information on the benefits of walking trails
- Navigating landownership
- Designing and building a trail
- Insurance

- Trail registration
- Trail management and maintenance
- Further information and resources





Introduction

Walking trails are a more common feature and amenity across Ireland today. This document outlines the necessary steps and things you need before embarking on such a project and how best to develop and manage a walking trail.

Sport Ireland is the national authority for sport in Ireland. [You will find all the criteria for trail development on their website.](#) Sport Ireland maintains a National Trail Register listing all trails which meet these criteria.

Walking trails

Including a trail near or through a wetland or bog can greatly increase the number of visitors to the site. New users will include people out to walk their bog or exercise by walking or jogging, providing health benefits to the local community.

Some benefits of walking trails:

- Helps people to be active outdoors and to connect with nature and heritage
- Can increase community development activities among the local population
- Visiting trail users spend money in the local economy
- Overseas tourists engage with walking trails while holidaying in Ireland
- Effective way of managing outdoor recreation while protecting natural habitats and the environment





Balancing conservation needs with recreation can be a challenge. Walkways can allow people to enjoy and learn about the bog or wetland and elevated boardwalks can minimize impacts. Ideally, the trail should allow users to experience a variety of habitats, but they do of course need to be kept away from those areas that are most sensitive to disturbance including habitats and species, for example, ground-nesting birds.



Navigating landownership

It is imperative for trail developers to have a good understanding of land ownership in Ireland and to be clear about the ownership of the land where the proposed trail is to be developed. This may be private land or public land, including both public and private rights of way. In all cases, a trail can only be developed with the full consent of all relevant landowners and land managers. Landowners should always be contacted about a proposed trail development at the very start of the planning process. The landowner's permission will have significant impact on where a trail can or cannot be developed or even if a proposed trail can be developed at all.

The trail management committee is expected to have a Permissive Access Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with all landowners whose land forms part of the trail.



You will find more detailed information about working with private and public landowners in *A Guide to Planning and Developing Recreational Trails in Ireland* along with other resources on the Sports Ireland website.

Designing your trail

Community groups first need to be conscious of the legislation and the requirements around trails and trail infrastructure. With protected sites, such as Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protected Areas and Natural Heritage Areas, this might require a Natura Impact Assessment, Appropriate Assessment, consent from the National Parks and Wildlife service (NPWS) or other authorities, or planning permission.

Consultation with the Forest Service, Inland Fisheries Ireland or NPWS in relation to possible impacts is recommended by Sport Ireland. Consideration must be given to car parking, and therefore, applications for planning permission. Detailed information on trail planning is available in the Sport Ireland publication *A Guide to Planning and Developing Recreational Trails in Ireland*.



Trails can take various forms. They could be a track or a path, a boardwalk or a 'bog-bridge'. If the level of use demands it, a permanent track could require the application of gravel, planings, tarmacadam or rubber as a substrate.

It's important to consider what infrastructure you already have before planning. Many bogs have established bog roads that were/are used to gain access to and around the bog. These can be easily developed into walking trails with support from the County Council or the state body managing the bog.



- ✻ Planings are a secondary material, namely substrate resulting from the removal of the top layer of tarmac from a road before resurfacing and can be obtained from the local authority at no cost.
- ✻ A boardwalk is a raised walkway, constructed similar to garden decking from timber, composite plastic or metal material and ideally should be 1,200mm wide to allow for wheelchairs and buggies.
- ✻ A bog-bridge is raised above the bog itself using sleeper-sized timber connected lengthwise to each other 2-3 units wide. Bog-bridges are typically 420-780mm wide and suitable for walking only.

It is useful to contact the recreation sections of either Coillte or NPWS for advice on scoping, designing and materials for all trails.

It is important to consider potential trail users and their needs when designing a trail. This will help you to grade the difficulty of the trail and determine how best to make your trail accessible to people with limited mobility, wheelchair users and people with young children.

Building the trail

Sport Ireland recommends that community groups first familiarize themselves with the seven principles of Leave No Trace before developing a trail.

Seven Principles of Leave No Trace

1. Plan Ahead and Prepare
2. Be Considerate of Others
3. Respect Farm Animals and Wildlife
4. Travel and Camp on Durable Ground
5. Leave What You Find
6. Dispose of Waste Properly
7. Minimise the Effects of Fire



Guidelines on trail surfacing are available on the Sport Ireland website. Wooden boardwalks and bog-bridges are often wet, and you must consider improving the grip to minimize the risk of slipping. This can be done with the use of studs, chicken wire or other methods. Some argue that the plastic material used for boardwalks is superior from a safety perspective. Either way a non-slip surface is advisable.

Having skilled volunteers to hand, or support through the Rural Social Scheme (RSS) or the Tús Community Work Placement Scheme allows costs to be largely reduced to materials alone. The Abbeyleix Bog Project boardwalk was built in just two months with this input.

Insurance

The Occupiers Liability Act places certain standards of care on owners/occupiers of land used for recreation. Public and employers' liability insurance will be needed during trail construction or must be held by those contracted to build the trail.

You can obtain public liability insurance through Sport Ireland. You must meet their requirements and pass an assessment to obtain the insurance. The trail is then inspected and approved on an annual basis by Sport Ireland.

Sport Ireland Insurance Criteria

- 🌿 A map board with a clearly defined route
- 🌿 Information on grading (difficulty level of the route)
- 🌿 Length
- 🌿 Way marking signage
- 🌿 Hazards
- 🌿 Advice on use by dogs
- 🌿 7 Leave No Trace principles
- 🌿 Contact details for emergencies and feedback

Insurance for public liability and indemnity may be needed where any facilities are provided or larger events planned. A stand-alone policy can be taken out in the name of a community group, with discounts available where the group is a member of Irish Rural Link or The Wheel.

Alternatively, existing insurance cover may be available in cases where the group is a sub-group of a wider organization such as the local Tidy Towns or community



development association. If the group operates within a designated area managed by Coillte then existing insurance cover may be available, but it would be necessary to confirm this locally.

Registering the trail

To register the trail with Sport Ireland, it must meet certain standards of information, surfacing and management, including for funding, so it is advisable to check first. This can be done using the Sport Ireland checklists available online while developing your trail.



Trail management and maintenance

Management and maintenance of a trail and/or boardwalk will also be needed. You should set up a trail management committee with representatives from all stakeholders involved. Where the trail crosses private land, responsibility for maintenance falls to the trail management committee.

The National Walk Scheme (funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development) has an annual call for funding to support trail maintenance for community environmental groups, trail management committees and landholders. Applications must be in relation to Waymarked Ways and recognized Looped Walking Routes and be made via the Local Authority or Local Development Company. Qualifying trails must be open to the public, supported by all landowners and be of suitable standard to be included on the Sport Ireland trail register.



Further information and Resources

For further information about trail development and management is available on the Sport Ireland website and in our *Guidelines for Communities Managing Local Wetlands and Peatlands*.

[A Guide to Planning and Developing Recreational Trails in Ireland](#)

[Sport Ireland Website](#)

[Seven Principles of Leave No Trace](#)

