New Zealand Outdoor and Active Recreation – a Policy Manifesto
Section 1: The Value of Outdoor and Active Recreation

New Zealand is a landscape of beautiful and diverse land and water resources that provide ubiquitous opportunities for a wide range of active recreation activities. Historically, outdoor recreation grew from tikanga Māori pastimes and colonial modes of engagement living in and moving through specific natural environments. In the present world, outdoor and active recreation is vital to New Zealand society and a key mechanism to achieve the World Health Organisation’s vision of “More active people for a healthier world”.

Active recreation offers freedom of choice and spontaneous, playful opportunities for all citizens. The wide range of different forms of physical activity from mahinga kai, walking and gardening, through to children’s play, outdoor Olympic sports such as downhill mountain biking, and rehabilitative therapeutic gardens are more likely to meet the needs of a wide range of individuals and communities.

Being physically active through daily and diverse engagement in safe and enabling environments improves mental and physical health, quality of life and individual wellbeing. Multiple health benefits ensue including prevention of non-communicable disease such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes, hypertension, overweight and obesity. In contrast, disengagement and physical inactivity is associated with poor health, a rise in health costs and loss of productivity and associated costs such as pain and unhappiness to individuals and families.

Active recreation supports the social integration of families, friendship networks and others and engages diverse ethnic groups. People define themselves and their communities through their recreation opportunities and involvement. Family relationships and spiritual connections through whakapapa and tangata-whenua are particularly important for Māori and Pasifika. In addition, healthier, happier individuals are more likely to do well in other areas of their lives, such as in social and professional situations. These social factors lead to robust community cohesion and resilience and contribute to social, cultural & economic development (WHO 2018).

One of the challenges of our day is to re-examine the relationships between people and nature with sustainability and climate change in mind. In moving to a low carbon society, values need to move from being anthropocentric to eco-centric. Physically engaging in nature promotes knowledge, pro-environmental values and kaitiakitanga. Furthermore, research shows that being in nature relates positively to wellbeing, quality of life, happiness and educational performance. In contrast, disconnection from nature is detrimental to health and wellbeing. Physical activity in natural environments is particularly beneficial to promote higher levels of physical activity.
Greater understanding of these benefits and their downstream impacts, along with awareness of how policies, laws and regulations influence recreation delivery, are key to ensuring that New Zealand’s Outdoor and Active Recreation opportunities remain among the world’s best.

The outdoor and active living manifesto draws from and supports the WHO global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030. Furthermore, it aligns closely with the Treasury Living Standards Framework (2018). Strong links are made to natural capital through positive and proactive engagement and kaitiakitanga in natural environments, to human capital through the strong health and recreation focus that contributes to wellbeing, and to social capital through the social integration of individuals, whānau and communities. In addition, the importance of outdoor activities as the root of the adventure and ecotourist industries contributes considerable financial capital. The physical geographical assets of the country are impressive.

In terms of the wellbeing domains, strong links have been identified to subjective wellbeing, social connections, cultural identity, time use through quality leisure time, knowledge & skills and health. Of particular importance is the domain of human relationships with the natural environment.
Section 2: The recent history of funding support for Outdoor and Active Recreation

Timeline:

1973: The Community Sport Development Fund (CDF) is instigated by the 3rd Labour Government. Focused on grass roots mass participation in recreation and sport, delivered at a community level. 50 cents per head of population was granted in each local authority. This was increased to 75 cents per head in 1974 and then up to a $1.00 in 1975.

1986/87: The Hillary Commission is created by the Recreation and Sport Act 1987 and assumes responsibility for administering the Community Sport Development Fund.

1991: The Hillary Commission is allocated 20% of Lotto profits to distribute.

1992: The CDF guidelines place an increasing emphasis on supporting the training needs of volunteers, particularly sports coaches.
**2002/03:** The Community Sport Development Fund is disestablished, and the funds are folded into SPARC. SPARC expands the policy of allocating funds through National Sports Organisations (NSOs). Funding emphasis is increasingly placed on Sport at the expense of Recreation.

“*We, the Local Authorities of New Zealand condemn the decision of SPARC to abolish the Community Sports Fund without any meaningful consultation with us and seek speedy redress from the relevant Cabinet Ministers*” – Resolution, LGNZ National Conference, 2002

**2012:** SPARC changes its name to Sport NZ. The number of funded National Recreation Organisations is reduced and large increases in funding are applied to NSO’s.

“The new name better captures who we are, and our role as leaders of the country’s sport system. It will still be our aim to get more Kiwis into sport, more kids into sport and, through High Performance Sport NZ, more winners on the world stage.” Sport NZ, 2 February 2012

The most popular forms of sport and active recreations as undertaken by New Zealanders on an at-least-annual basis in 2018. (Reference: Sport NZ Active NZ Survey, 2018)

- Walking - 85%
- Running/Jogging - 38%
- Individual workout using equipment - 38%
- Swimming - 35%
- Playing games (e.g. with kids) - 32%
- Day tramp - 23%
- Road cycling - 19%
- Group fitness class (e.g. aerobics) - 18%
- Yoga - 16%
- Mountain biking - 14%
- Marine fishing - 14%
- Canoeing/kayaking - 12%
- Golf - 11%
- Dance/dancing - 9%
- Surfing/bodyboarding - 9%
- Table tennis - 8%
- Snowsports - 8%
- Pilates - 7%
- Overnight tramp - 7%
- Football - 7%
- Tennis - 7%
- Freshwater fishing - 6%
- Hunting - 5%
- Touch rugby - 5%
- Netball - 5%
- Basketball - 5%
- Bowls - 5%
Section 3: Known and proven benefits of Outdoor and Active Recreation on current wellbeing domains:

1. (a) Physical health
   - Increases fitness and cardiovascular function, reduces blood pressure, obesity, resting heart rate, and has a positive influence on other health markers. (ref:12,28,32,34–37)
   - Reduces risk for major diseases [12,28,32,34–37] including heart attack [35], thirteen types of cancer [34], stroke, and type 2 diabetes [32]
   - Helps the elderly to maintain their physical performance [48]
   - Helps to prevent multiple sclerosis [51] and the onset and progression of myopia [52]
   - Reduces smoking, alcohol and substance misuse [31]

(b) Mental health and Psychological wellbeing
   - Overwhelming positive effects on general mental health and psychological stability [5,11,17,18,20,25,31,33,53–58]
   - People recreating in natural environments have greater feelings of revitalization and positive engagement, decreases in tension, confusion, anger, and depression. [3]
   - Negative affective mental states like stress, depression, anxiety, tension, confusion, anger, rumination, loneliness, and neuroticism are reduced by participation in outdoor and active recreation. [3,10,18,24,33,46,53,59,61,63,65,68,73,74,76–84].
   - Increased self-esteem, self-efficacy, social effectiveness, self-confidence, and a better self-concept. [5,9,22,59,60,64,67–72,88–101]
   - Improved personal control, increased sensitivity to one’s own wellbeing, self-regulation, emotional coping, and better stress management. [5,31,46,81,84,91,92,98].
   - Used in the treatment of disorders including Alzheimer’s disease [32], dementia [33], or major depressive disorders [74].
   - Used as a therapeutic tool for a range of groups with specific needs such as children with disabilities [93], persons with disabilities after acute injuries [63], veterans [92], MS patients [103], ADHD sufferers [88,104,105], young people at risk and disorderly adolescents [106], dementia patients [33], or drug addicts [85].

2. Knowledge and Skills
   - Improves motor skills, an increases emotional intelligence, personal responsibility, mindfulness and an enhances sensory and aesthetic awareness [5,14,17,18,22,25,31,59,60,64,69,84,85,88–91,93,95,97,100,101,106–116]
   - Improves educational performance and motivation. This includes increases in sense of purpose for learning and motivation to study, higher engagement within lessons, better academic learning, efficacy, and better achievements. [5,18,60,107,112,116].
   - Has positive effects on the cognitive aspects of learning [17,32,56,74,80,88,104,117,118] such as attention [56,118] and memory span [74,80], brain structure, function, and connectivity [117], as well as intellectual flexibility and problem-solving-skills.

3. Social connection
- Provides opportunities and places for social interaction, contacts, and relations that lead to increased social connectedness [5,64,101,110,122,131–134]
- Positive effects in the inclusion or integration of special groups including individuals with physical and/or mental disabilities [13,15,26,63,64,108, 135], young people with autism [120], disengaged youths [107], or for the reintegration of youth at risk [106].
- Reduces social isolation of the elderly [53]

4. Environment
- Positive effects on environmental awareness, attitudes, and behaviour. This includes an increased connectedness to nature and awareness, as well as positive effects on environmentally responsible behaviour and kaitiakitanga [5,18,20,25,31,95,99–101,115,123–130]

5. Subjective wellbeing
- Better subjective health perception [45,46] and a better physical quality of life. [45,46]
- Positive impact on overall wellbeing, quality of life, happiness, and life satisfaction [5,14,15,20,31,33,45,46,48,53,58–66]

6. Cultural Identity
- Contributor to bonding capital for families, groups, and communities [5,53,79,97,121]

7. Safety and Security
- Benefits for crime reduction [5,20,31,85]
- Benefits for prosocial behaviour [60,88,95,106,119,121,131]

8. Time use
- Support physical activity throughout the entire life course. Outdoor and Active Recreation is shown to be used as a tool to successfully activate sedentary, non-active people, promote active and healthy lifestyles, and are able to influence positive attitudes towards physical activity. As Outdoor and Active Recreation has connections to lifetime activity-habits, it can foster adherence to physical activity over the life course and help people to find and maintain an active way of life. [3,11,14,23,27,28,31,41,47,58,68,75,79,91,95,101,106,118,136].
- Physical activities in outdoor settings are more beneficial compared to indoor ones. Participants in Outdoor and Active Recreation report greater enjoyment and satisfaction with the activity. They also declare a greater intention to repeat the activity at a later date. [3]
- In the context of urban recreation, venues like parks, forests, and other green spaces, as well as local rivers or lakes are easy to access and can be seen as low-cost opportunities that are open for all and are valued by people with a low-income [11].
Section 4: Policy prescription

- Funding is readily accessible to initiatives that promote, reduce barriers, and increase participation in outdoor and active recreation activities.

- Sport NZ funding for Outdoor and Active Recreation is increased to more accurately reflect participation rates in the various forms of recreation vs those in traditional ‘sports’.

- Appropriately skilled/trained people are available to safely introduce participants to outdoor and active recreation. (Paid and volunteer). Training of skilled outdoor leaders is Government funded for both paid and volunteer workers.

- Active recreation opportunities and role models are promoted to increase their perceived value to an equivalent level to sport.

- All NZ youth have free access to a quality overnight outdoor experience outside the school grounds as part of the public education system.

- EOTC is a compulsory component of teaching training.

- Increased regard for recreational access across Crown Pastoral Leases by Land Information New Zealand, and during Overseas Investment Office assessments of land purchases by overseas investors.

- A review of the Reserves Act 1977 to ensure it supports recreation provision in a changing world.

- Sustained funding for cycleways, Great Rides and associated infrastructure.

- Increased funding to ensure New Zealanders have easy access to learn to swim and water skills programmes at schools or in communities.
- Enhanced funding for the DoC ‘Healthy Nature, Healthy People’ programme.

- Grant criteria for the International Visitor Levy (IVL) is made contingent on funding tourism infrastructure that doubles as useful recreational infrastructure for local New Zealanders.

- Amend the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) to define 'Community Associations' as incorporated societies or charities that employ people up to 100 hours per week in total.

- Non-profit organisations engaging in Outdoor Education for school-aged children should be exempt from Department of Conservation concession fees.

- WorkSafe fund the provision of the widely used SupportAdventure website, and regular review and updates of the Activity Safety Guidelines and the SMP template.

- The National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management is amended to include a specific reference to recreational access to freshwater and the inclusion ‘Human Health for Recreation’ as a compulsory value.

- The Resource Management Act is amended to give Outdoor and Active Recreation greater prominence in the planning process.
References:


77. Townsend, M.; Weerasuriya, R. Beyond Blue to Green: The Benefits of Contact with Nature for Mental Health and Well-Being; Beyond Blue Limited: Melbourne, Australia, 2010.


