

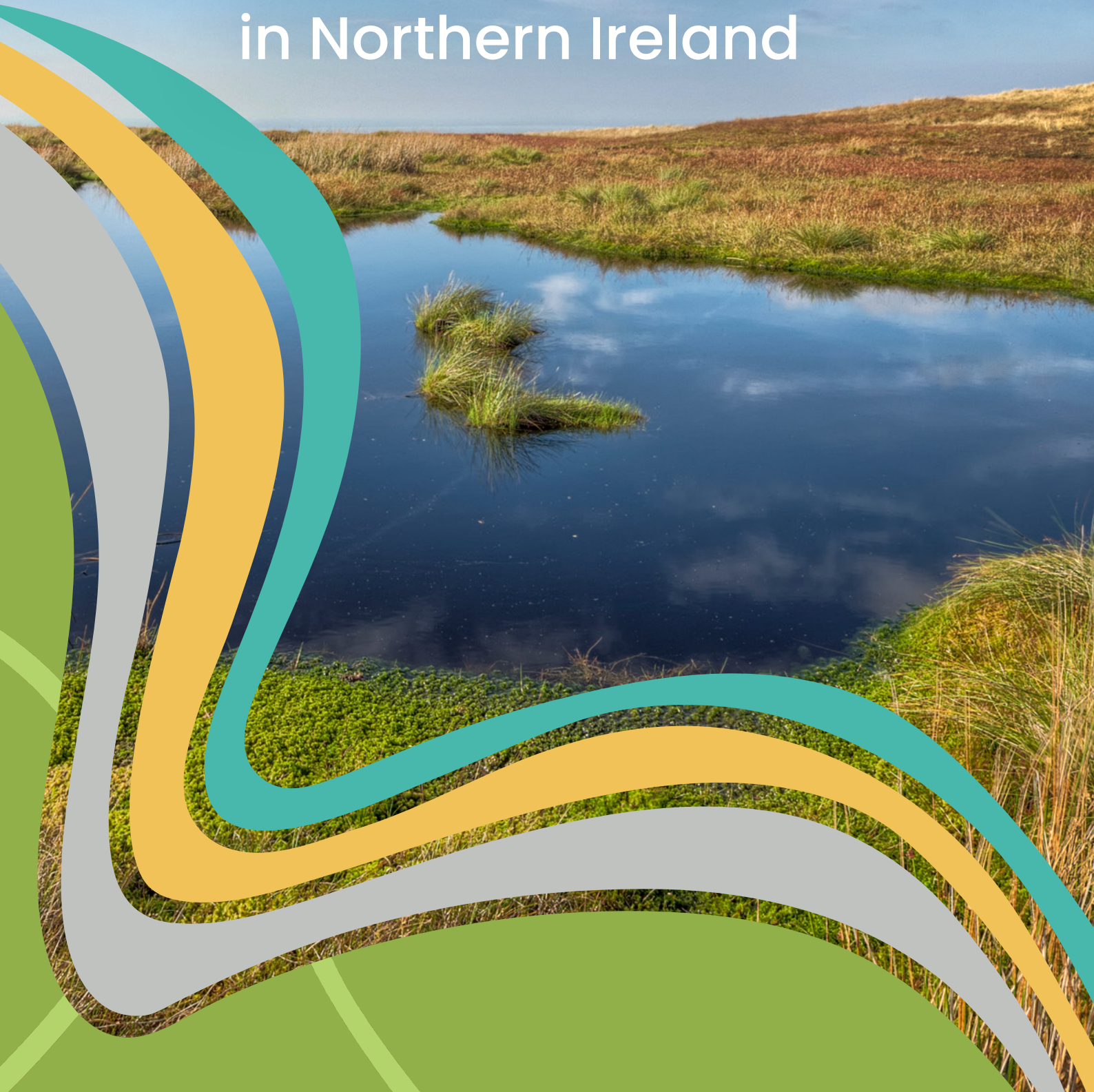


LANDSCAPES NI

ENRICHED LANDSCAPES, ENRICHED LIVES

2024

Manifesto for Landscapes in Northern Ireland



OUR MEMBERS

Belfast Hills Partnership
Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands
Landscape Partnership
Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust
Culcagh Lakelands Global Geopark
Lagan Valley Regional Park
Lough Erne Landscape Partnership
Lough Neagh Partnership
Mourne Gullion Strangford Global Geopark
Mourne Heritage Trust
National Trust
Northern Ireland Environment Link
Out-scape
Ring of Gullion Partnership
Sperrins Partnership
Strangford Lough and Lecale Partnership

Landscapes NI is the network of all the landscape management organisations in Northern Ireland.

The Vision for the network is “Cherished landscapes benefiting people and nature in Northern Ireland”.

To achieve this vision we have a mission to “work together to promote landscapes and associated policy and practice in Northern Ireland.”

Landscapesni.org  



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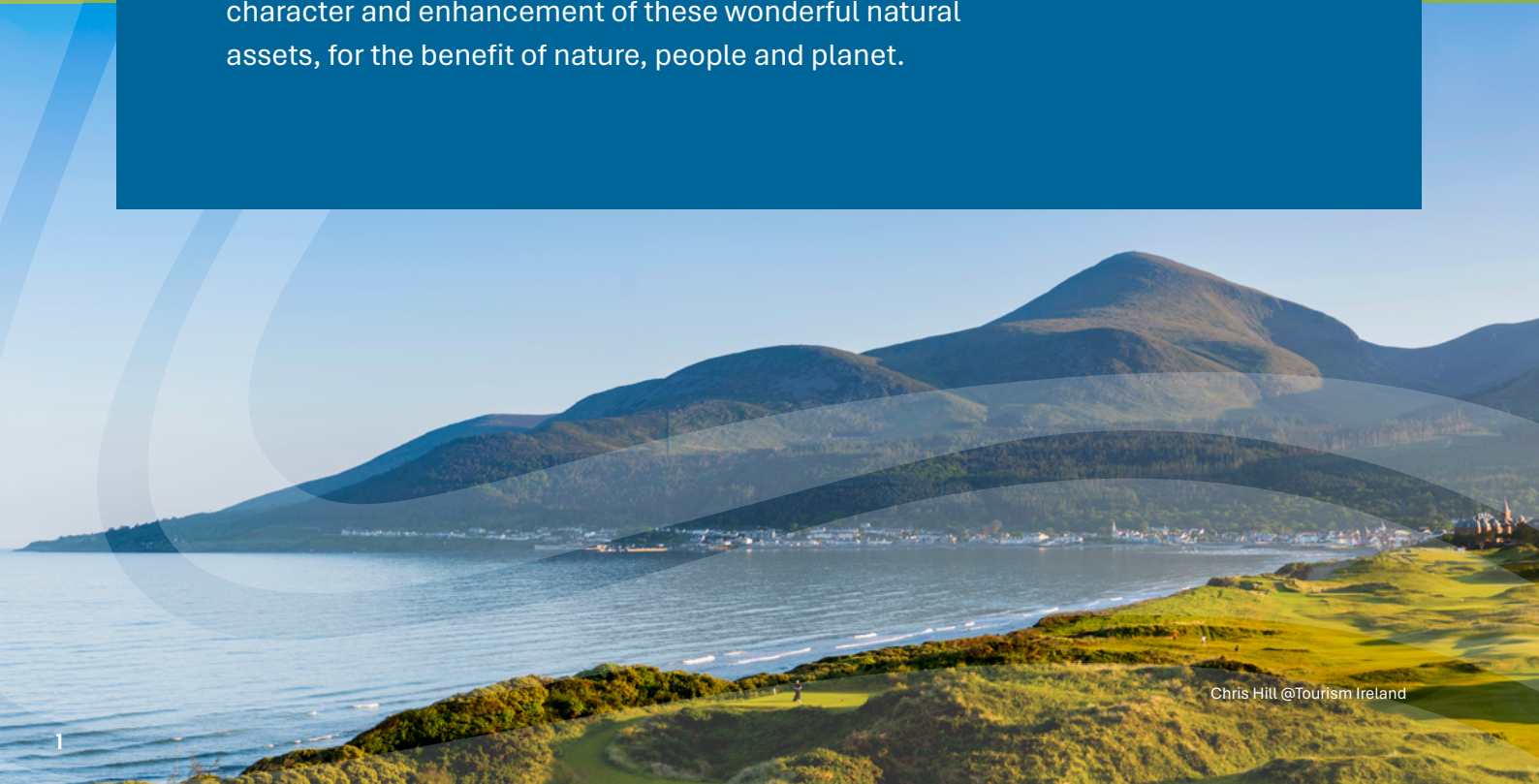
INTRODUCTION

In Northern Ireland we have a myriad variety of iconic and special landscapes in a relatively small area that help to define our collective identity.

From our amazing coastlines stretching from the Causeway Coast to Strangford Lough, to the rolling landscape of the Sperrins and Belfast hills and tranquil shores of Loughs Erne and Neagh to the iconic peaks of Slieve Gullion and the Mourne Mountains, these landscapes are more than just scenic backdrops. They are how our communities gain a strong sense of place, our natural health service, the source of inspiration in arts and culture, the provision of strong nature connections and increasingly the foundation of our prosperity both in economic and well-being terms. They deliver on a huge breadth of cross sectoral agendas and needs and so fundamentally require joined up approaches.

In the complex tapestry of Northern Ireland's political landscape, our natural landscapes are shared spaces that do not represent one culture over another but rather inspire a collective sense of awe and belonging. Landscape management bodies, if adequately resourced, can be a catalyst for collaborative working, enhancing and supporting the efforts of government departments and agencies, local authorities, communities, and stakeholders in the long-term restorative stewardship of these special places.

This manifesto is a call to ensure the protection of landscape character and enhancement of these wonderful natural assets, for the benefit of nature, people and planet.





@Tourism Ireland



@WWT



Chris Hill @Tourism Ireland



Chris Hill @Tourism Ireland

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LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The legal framework for the management and support for landscapes in Northern Ireland is woefully inadequate and there is a historic legacy of significant under-investment in the care of our landscapes despite commitments at a UK level to the Council of Europe Landscape Convention.¹

The current legislation provides no definitive duties for public bodies but enshrines the principle of “should and may” leaving landscape management as a discretionary activity. A revised legislative framework for designated landscapes must be developed to take stronger cognisance of changes in societal needs, climate action, nature restoration and engagement and connection to nature through access.

Elsewhere across these islands there has been significant legislative and policy change to reflect a clear call that our landscapes are not just scenery but living, breathing entities that sustain nature and healthy and thriving communities. There is increasing investment in holistic management, community engagement, and sustainable practices to ensure that landscapes thrive and continue to shape a strong sense of place but also effectively deliver on climate and biodiversity crises through multi-stakeholder approaches.

Northern Ireland is an outlier with respect to provision for landscape management and moreover is continuously falling further behind.

It is clear that there is a need for urgent action on nature restoration, climate issues and human health. Our landscapes are significantly impacted by these issues but through effective management and realistic investment can be a powerful resource in tackling and reversing these threats.



¹www.coe.int/en/web/landscape



**“
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”**

MANIFESTO GOALS

1

Landscape legislation and policy

The landscape legislation in Northern Ireland is almost 40 years old and existing policy is over 20 years old and both are significantly out of date. Therefore, there is an urgent need for new legislation and policies that support effective area-based approaches to landscape management in Northern Ireland. We call for government to work collaboratively with the sector to develop revised legislation and policy to provide new and effective mechanisms to deliver living, healthy and resilient landscapes.

2

Land use and change

Our landscapes are built upon natural and geological processes but have been influenced by man for centuries through farming, forestry, mineral and water extraction and other industries. We need to rethink and consider land use and scenery changes that effectively balances environmental, social and economic priorities in the context of climate change and biodiversity loss, especially in our iconic and designated landscapes. We call for a new land-use strategy and associated measures that provides a positive new policy and regulatory framework that protects and enhances our landscapes.

3

Conservation and Restoration

Our landscapes have been a living legacy built upon unique geological diversity and a testament to the resilience of nature but are now under un-precedented threat from climate change, pollution, nature depletion etc. We call for long term significant and core investment in conservation efforts that will restore key habitats, ensuring that biodiversity flourishes and ecosystems thrive, preserving the essence of our unique landscapes.

4

Climate Action

Our landscapes encompass some of the most important areas for climate action and resilience, being home to wetlands, peatlands, woodlands and marine habitats storing vast quantities of carbon and filtering our water and therefore are key to climate solutions. We call for investment in nature-based solutions for climate action enhanced by landscape level interventions and for this to be widely recognised, celebrated and supported.

5

Community engagement and inclusion

Our landscapes belong to us all, create and support a cohesive sense of place and it is our collective responsibility to care for them. Through innovative and effective engagement, education and participatory planning, we must empower everyone within local communities, visitors and other key stakeholders to be stewards of our landscapes. We call for resources to support strong community engagement and education so that everyone can enjoy and care for such special places.

6

Heritage and Cultural Preservation

Our landscapes are not just a backdrop; they are a living testament to our shared history and culture, shaping our sense of place. We call for appropriate resource and support to promote, protect and provide access to our historic landmarks, archaeological sites and intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that they continue to inspire and enrich people for centuries to come.

7

Sustainable Development

Progress need not come at the expense of our landscapes or our sense of place. We call for the clear integration of landscape considerations into every facet of development, prioritizing sustainable practices that safeguard our natural and cultural heritage for current and future generations while meeting the needs of a growing and changing population.

8

Restorative Farming practices

Our landscapes are shaped by agricultural practices and rural community life. The promotion and implementation of restorative farming practices that enhance soil health and carbon sequestration, promote improved biodiversity, eliminates pollution and enhances water quality is essential to the health of our landscapes and their associated communities. We call for policy change that empowers farmers to provide long term resilient landscapes and ecosystems through new incentives, education and support delivered at local landscape level.

9

Outdoor Recreation

Existing countryside recreation legislation is over 40 years old and out of date and we lag significantly behind other areas of the UK and Ireland which have revised legislation and invested in unlocking the potential of the outdoors. There has been a sustained step change in participation and interest in the use of our landscapes since the Covid 19 pandemic. Our existing outdoor recreation legislation, infrastructure and services are grossly inadequate to meet current needs and opportunities. We call for new outdoor recreation policy and legislation along with a strategic programme of investment in outdoor access infrastructure and services.²

10

Tourism

Our landscapes are increasingly recognised as fundamental to our tourism offer in Northern Ireland and are used significantly in promotion. The structures and resources for supporting landscape-based tourism while minimising adverse impacts on biodiversity, habitats and rural communities are currently very limited. We call for new policies and approaches for sustainable and regenerative tourism that contribute to equitable dispersal of benefits across our rural communities and provides innovative mechanisms for tourism to support the care of our landscapes.

² www.out-scape.com/hub_news/outscapes-priorities-policy-briefing-paper/

CONCLUSION

Across Northern Ireland, our iconic and varied living landscapes provide people and nature with a fantastic range of benefits and resilience. They significantly deliver on multiple governmental and societal challenges and needs including but not limited to tackling climate change, biodiversity loss, rural regeneration and health and well-being for all our citizens.

The realisation of the opportunities identified in this manifesto requires genuine co-design and cross sectoral/departmental approaches through commitment by central and local government enshrined in policy and legislation along with existing area-based landscape organisations.

TOGETHER, WE CAN ENSURE THAT NORTHERN IRELAND'S LANDSCAPES REMAIN A SOURCE OF NATURAL BEAUTY AND INSPIRATION, BUT MORE THAN THAT, REMAIN DEEPLY ROOTED IN OUR COLLECTIVE PSYCHE AND SENSE OF PLACE.



Chris Hill @Tourism Ireland



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Design by jennyevadesign.com



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Funded and supported by



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