



Minister Roche Launches Five- year Management Plan For Wicklow Mountains National Park and officially opens the National Park Headquarters building at Kilafin, Co. Wicklow.

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. Dick Roche, T.D., today (29 April) launched the Management Plan for Wicklow Mountains National Park 2005-9 and officially opened the Wicklow Mountains National Park Headquarters at Kilafin, Laragh, Co. Wicklow.

The National Park Management Plan is the product of extensive and lengthy consultation between the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Minister's Department, the Wicklow Mountains National Park Council and the wider public. It is the first Management Plan to be published as part of his Department's current strategy of management planning for all Ireland's six National Parks.

Wicklow Mountains National Park was established in 1991 and now encompasses 17,000 hectares in the heart of Wicklow. Its new Management Plan builds on the achievements of the past and the challenges of maintaining and developing the Park as an area of conservation of natural heritage while, at the same time, encouraging sustainable use of its resources. The Plan sets out targets and focussed interventions for each of the five years of the Plan's life-span to 2009.

Minister Roche said: "This Management Plan provides a platform for the introduction of strategies which have a strong emphasis on the conservation of our natural heritage while encouraging public appreciation of that heritage. It encourages sustainable recreational and educational use of the Park. It provides information and facilities for visitors that will increase awareness of our natural heritage. And, it also facilitates the research which is essential in achieving our commitments to conservation".

The Minister went on to outline the Management Plan objectives for 2005, the first year of the five-year Plan, which include:

- the continuation of pathworks and the completion of stone pitching of the White Route at Glendalough;
- as a critical first phase in the delineation of the Park's boundaries, the mapping, checking and auditing of access points and boundaries;

- the carrying out of an access audit of the Park for visitors with disabilities or limited mobility, coupled with some works to enhance disability access and to promote an universally accessible nature trail;
- the commencement of preparation of a Vegetation Map of the Park;
- the completion of the review of the Education Programme for the Park together with decisions on future orientations;
- the completion of the sensory garden at the Glendalough Information Office;
- construction of a new Coronation bridge at Bolger's Cottage, further underpinning the Plan's commitment to the provision of greater access;
- the identification of further lands to be transferred to the Park from Coillte and agreement of a schedule for this transfer;
- the launch of a Wild Camping Code for the Park in conjunction with the Irish Mountaineering Council and some other user groups; and
- the preparation of a Hydrology Report for Shranamuck, otherwise known as the cut-over area of the Liffey Head Bog, with a view to restoring the habitat to its previous pre-cutting state.

The Minister said: "I hope that the foregoing provides you with a flavour of the types of focussed interventions which can be achieved by way of a management planning process for this Park. To enable me to implement the Plan, I should mention that I have at my disposal some 18 personnel based in the Park and a total budget of €1.75 million for the Park this year. Compared with a total budget of € 1.05 million for 2004, this represents a 67% increase in the budget for 2005, and is an earnest of my commitment to implement this Plan".

Minister Roche commended all those who contributed to the process of elaborating this 5-year Plan, mentioning in particular the members of the Wicklow Mountains National Park Council who represent various stakeholders, such as farmers and recreational users. "It is my sincere wish that the fruitful partnership between the members of the Park Council and the personnel of the National Parks and Wildlife Service of my Department will continue in the monitoring and review of progress of this Plan in order to achieve the strategies and targets laid out therein", the Minister stated.

The Minister also took the opportunity to officially open his Department's new headquarters for the Wicklow Mountains National Park at Kilafin. He congratulated the Office of Public Works team and the builders for the quality, design and project management of the works undertaken which he described as practical, aesthetically pleasing, and in sympathy with their rural and woodland environment.