

enjoying water


A photograph of two young boys surfing in the ocean. The boy on the left is wearing a dark blue wetsuit and is holding a black surfboard with yellow and orange stripes. The boy on the right is wearing a blue wetsuit and is lying on a blue surfboard. Both boys have their mouths open in excitement. The background shows a clear blue sky and a greenish ocean with white-capped waves.

A strategy for water based
recreation in the South West

2009-2014

The use of coastal and inland waters in the South West for recreation provides major economic, environmental and social benefits for the region.





A full copy of 'enjoying water',
A strategy for water-based
recreation in the South West
can be downloaded from
www.brighton.ac.uk/waterrecreation

Purpose of the strategy

The aim of this strategy is to maximise the economic, environmental and social benefits of water-based recreation in the South West.

'*Enjoying water*', a strategy for water-based recreation in the South West, has been developed by the University of Brighton, Countryside and Community Research Institute and Exegesis SDM Ltd for the Environment Agency in association with a steering group from British Waterways, Natural England, South West of England Regional Development Agency, Sport England and in consultation with the Government Office for the South West.

The strategy sets out a strategic approach to maximising the potential of inland and coastal waters, encouraging sustainable and responsible opportunities for everyone who wishes to participate, now and in the future.

It is designed to contribute to the economic, social and environmental priorities for the region, as set out in the regional spatial, economic and environmental strategies. These identify the coast and water-based sport and recreation, particularly surfing, diving and angling, as activities in which 'the South West can excel'.

Introduction

The use of coastal and inland waters in the South West for recreation provides major benefits for the region:

- Around 26 million tourists visit the region each year, many to enjoy water-based activities. These visitors generate between £4 billion and £8 billion of income and support 300,000 jobs in the South West. Sport and culture are also important activities for those living in the region, with local people spending over £11 billion, supporting around 200,000 jobs.
- Water-based sport and recreation is particularly significant in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, where they generate in the region of £300 million each year.
- The number of people over 16 who take part in water-based activities is above the national average. This provides a range of physical and mental health benefits.
- Hosting the 2012 Olympic sailing centre at Weymouth and Portland will strengthen the significance of water-based sport and recreation in the region.

During the preparation of this strategy more than 700 individuals and organisations have been consulted through workshops, interviews, interactive website and public consultation on a draft strategy.



Using inland and coastal waters for recreation

The supply of water resources

The South West Region has an abundance of inland and coastal waters, including some of the finest protected landscapes in England. This includes 60 per cent of the nation's protected coastline, the Jurassic Coast World Heritage site and three National Parks. Water resources are generally well distributed across the region, and most people live within 20 minutes of the coast, an estuary or a substantial body of inland water.

Across the region we audited the use of 1400km of coast, over 7500km of rivers and hundreds of square kilometres of estuaries and enclosed waters, an area equivalent to 55 Lake Windermers.

Demand for water-based recreation

Nearly 40 per cent of adults in the region spend some of their leisure time enjoying water. The most popular activities are walking, swimming and visits to the beach. Boating, angling and other pastimes are becoming increasingly popular, with nearly 10 per cent of adults now regularly taking part. There is a significant growth in the number of people enjoying boating/cruising, surfing and kite surfing in the region. Overcrowding at popular locations and under-use elsewhere can be a problem.

We expect the number of people taking up most water-based recreation activities, particularly rowing, surfing, paddlesports and sand/land yachting, to grow. This will be supported by continuing social change, including:

- a general shift towards the 'experience economy', where people prefer experiences to material goods;
- an ageing population with a growing interest in activities associated with health and well-being. In contrast, many younger people are likely to experience increasingly sedentary and indoor lifestyles;
- increasing demand from growth areas and potential for more pressure on resources as temperatures increase due to climate change. This could result in significant changes to future tourism patterns for the region.

Case Study

Canoeing the River Lyn

For many years the National Trust, as riparian owner, has granted permission to members of the British Canoe Union to paddle a two mile section of the River Lyn, from Watersmeet to its confluence with the Bristol Channel at Lynmouth. The section is steep and rocky, and is only suitable for experienced white water paddlers. This seasonal agreement operates subject to there being sufficient water in the river to protect the bed and banks from damage. This is particularly important due to the presence of fish spawning grounds. Because of the success of the agreement, there are now proposals to install gauging equipment and webcams to allow paddlers to use the river during high water spate conditions, during summer months.

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What people say about water resources in the South West Region

“ I think year-round support for water activity is a lot better than it used to be. I think across the board councils have realised that windsurfers, kitesurfers, canoeists use the sea all the year around, and actually it's a very good way of bringing income into resorts that are otherwise very, very quiet in the winter period (kitesurfer)

“ Conflicts arise from crowding as a result of surf schools and growth in the sport. Some beaches are at saturation point ... at weekends hardcore surfers tend to keep well out of Newquay and go to beaches that are a bit more isolated. The beaches that are off the beaten track.... (surfer)

“ We don't know where to go to get information about what water bodies are available for water skiing specifically. (water skier)

“ There's plenty of water we could use in the region, but we find it hard to compete with other paying sports like fishing. There's no money in what we do, no sponsorship, it's purely a fun hobby.... (model boater)

“ If there was more water open to use it would be a lot easier, and there would be a lot more events, I would have thought (triathlete)





Gaps in provision

There are several strategic ‘gaps’ that prevent the full benefits of water-based recreation being achieved in the South West Region. These are:

- lack of access to some inland and coastal waters caused by inadequate infrastructure;
- lack of provision for some activities, particularly for training and informal use. This is most acute for many activities that require inland waters;
- lack of a comprehensive approach to providing information about water-based recreation opportunities;
- lack of opportunities close to where people live, particularly near larger urban areas;
- uneven approach to integrating appropriate water-based recreation into managing fragile environments;
- widespread reluctance to innovate in providing and managing resources for water-based recreation;
- lack of planning guidance on water-based recreation;
- lack of measures to protect watersides from inappropriate development;
- consensus on the potential impacts of climate change;
- lack of appreciation of the social value of water-based sport and recreation.

Case Study

The Cotswold Water Park

The Cotswold Water Park is part of the catchment area of the Upper Thames. It comprises vast deposits of sand and gravel that have been excavated for the last 50 years, creating over 140 lakes in 40 square miles of countryside. The Water Park was designated in 1967 by a Joint Committee formed from the four local authorities (Gloucestershire and Wiltshire County Councils; Cotswold and North Wilts District Councils). Today, there are over 40 different lake owners, some of whom open their lakes for recreation. There are two country parks, an outdoor centre and 74 fishing lakes. It is estimated that 500,000 people visit the park each year, mainly for informal recreation. In addition to fishing, there are lakes catering for rowing, sailing, canoeing and kayaking, outdoor swimming, scuba diving, windsurfing and water skiing.



Initiatives to improve water-based recreation

Weymouth and Portland Olympic Sailing Centre:

Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy will be developed and improved to host the Olympic and Paralympic sailing events in 2012. In addition to a slipway, more boat parking and new lifting and mooring facilities, developers will build a 560-berth commercial marina at Osprey Quay, 250 of which will be used during the 2012 Olympics. It is expected that the entire Osprey Quay will have a major social and economic impact on Weymouth and Portland, both before and after the Olympic Games.

Enjoying the water at Slimbridge Wetland Centre:

Slimbridge Wetland Centre has an established reputation as a leading international centre for the study and care of wetland fauna and flora. As part of its educational provision, it has recently opened 'Welly Boot Land', where youngsters can splash, paddle and get as wet as they like while getting an insight into the lives and habitats of wetland birds. As part of its on-going Splash! development, Slimbridge has also started a canoe safari, using sturdy open canoes. Visitors wishing to paddle a canoe are first taught to handle the craft in the safety of a supervised coracle pool. Once they are ready, the visitors can explore the extensive water areas within the Wetland Centre, allowing them glimpses of the wild reserve through the reeds and grasses. We will encourage similar, sensitive integration of an appropriate level of recreational activities into high quality environments in the South West.

Project Taunton: A major regeneration programme in Taunton, partly funded by the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), will create new jobs, homes, riverside living, retail areas, leisure facilities, and a totally new look to the town. The River Tone is being improved as a linking corridor and catalyst for redevelopment of four major areas in the town. While the river could be used for recreational activities, such as fishing, canoeing and pleasure boating, its main function is to act as a corridor for people to move around the town and experience Taunton from a new perspective.

Angling and watersports at Stithians Lake, West Cornwall:

The South West Lakes Trust manages the recreation and visitor facilities at over 50 of South West Water's reservoirs. The Angling and Watersports Centre at Stithians Lake has been developed to offer a wide range of watersports activities at what is recognised as one of the windiest inland waters in England. In addition to sail sports, Stithians also offers canoeing and rowing, with instruction and equipment available on-site. Fly fishing for trout, with season and day permits, as well as boat hire are also available. On the land around the lake, there are facilities for walkers, cyclists, fitness enthusiasts, bird watchers, a children's play area and campsite. It's likely that other water company sites, such as Sibbyback, Cornwall and Cheddar, Somerset will be developed even further than this model to provide active watersport hubs to meet growing demands and relieve pressure from some sensitive areas.

Blue Gym: Natural England, Environment Agency, Primary Care Trusts (PCTs), Peninsula Medical School, the Blue Environment and the Outdoor Health Forum are working together to pilot a 'Blue Gym' initiative across the South West to promote and encourage better use of inland and coastal waters to benefit people's health. It is intended that 'Blue Gym' will be integrated into the physical activity care pathway with PCTs, particularly those on the coast. The initiative will build up an evidence base on the specific health benefits of inland waterways, marine and coastal environment by 2011. If successful this approach may be rolled out across the rest of England.

Watersports Impact Research Project: A partnership project between RSPB, Natural England, Environment Agency and the Exe Estuary Project, with help from national sporting governing bodies, intends to model and assess the degree to which different water activities may impact on wildlife, particularly wetland birds. The Exe Estuary is one of the most important estuaries for birds in England. Different recreational activities and their frequency will be modelled along with monitoring of feeding and breeding patterns. Any evidence of disturbance will be used to help develop guidance or management techniques that may be used to manage water-based recreation activities in close proximity to similar sensitive wetland locations.

Addressing the gaps

The identified gaps can be addressed in two ways:

1 Priorities (initiatives to meet gaps in provision)

- **Addressing lack of access to water:** We need to improve access to a range of water resources across the region (the provisions of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill are important here). This includes physical improvements (and appropriate new provision) to parking and slipways, and gaining new access to strategically important reservoirs and rivers. New ‘doorstep’ opportunities, particularly in socially deprived areas would be especially valuable. There should also be improvements to waterside access by improving footpaths, cycle tracks and bridleways that follow watercourses. Attention should also be paid to improving public transport links to water resources.
- **Addressing a lack of facilities for some water sports:** There are specific gaps in facilities provided and access to some water sports across the region. Of particular concern is the absence of inland training and venue facilities for scuba diving, some canoe disciplines, inland rowing and inland provision for powered craft. There is potential to improve navigated canals and rivers in the north of the region, for recreation, health and environmental benefits. The potential role of the major towns and cities in addressing these gaps should also be investigated, so people do not have to rely on private transport to get to water-based recreation activities.
- **Integrating water-based recreation into ‘green infrastructure’ planning in urban and peri-urban areas:** Green infrastructure planning needs to include specific guidance on planning and using water resources for recreation and to influence a wider definition of ‘green infrastructure’, so that the full potential of canals, rivers and other water bodies are recognised and valued. Of particular significance here is the opportunity to provide green corridors along or around water bodies, and to ensure that waterfronts are used for recreation and in ways that do not damage the environment. This will mean that water environments remain vibrant and the widest social opportunities and benefits are maximised. For example, work by British Waterways in Bath, Gloucester, Bridgwater and Taunton, demonstrates what can be achieved by an integrated approach to improving water environments in urban areas.
- **Providing better information to improve understanding and use:** Not all current opportunities for water-based recreation are well used or understood. This can lead to overcrowding at popular locations and under-use elsewhere. An information system is needed (either stand alone or linked to current local authority and tourism information systems) to raise awareness of the water-based recreation opportunities available and to encourage people to use these resources responsibly.
- **Promoting a ‘spine’ of inland water resources:** Work with the major water companies and other organisations, including South West Water, Bristol Water, Wessex Water and South West Lakes Trust, together with some of the operators in the Cotswold Water Park, to develop a ‘spine’ of inland water opportunities running from Cornwall to Gloucestershire. This type of co-ordination would ensure that a full range of water-based recreation facilities is available throughout the region, to allow people more local access to high quality facilities nearer to where they live.
- **Develop demonstration sites to pilot and test a range of approaches to improve the quality and availability of water-based recreation in the region: Examples could include:** demonstration sites for partnership working, successful voluntary agreements, effective approaches to conflict resolution and approaches to clarifying landowner liabilities and indemnity issues; a tourism-based voluntary payment scheme for environmental improvements; new forms of canoe access agreement based on new technology and partnerships between land owners, river users and key agencies; development of new quality assurance processes for recreational providers; establishing climate change monitoring sites and areas to help inform adaptation and provide a range of measures to protect and improve water-based recreation. Opportunities also need to be found to demonstrate the health, life skills, and wider social or economic benefits of reducing barriers and widening access to water activities.

The Strategy identifies a number of opportunities that could be delivered to improve the provision for water recreation in the South West and achieve the associated benefits through increased participation.

2 Possible Opportunities Identified

- **Develop a regional network of multi-activity centres that incorporate water-based recreation:** Multi-activity hubs (centres) (catering for water and non-water-based recreation) and associated networks can become a focus for water-based activity, and can create the adequate facilities needed to ensure training can be provided in a wide range of water-based sports.
- **To encourage water-based recreation training centres to be developed as part of multi-activity hubs:** There is a need for both generic and specific (sport-related) skills training if people are to take advantage of the opportunities being created. Generic skills include swimming, life saving, health and safety, club management, child protection and leadership training.
- **Integrating recreational and ecological values in applying the UK Framework for Sustainable Development:** There are opportunities throughout the region to combine providing water-based recreation with protecting the environment, for example, by making certain areas accessible only by non-motorised water craft. There is also an opportunity to recognise the strategic significance of estuaries, inland wetland and coast, to encourage greater innovation and promote a range of activities that are sustainable and that protect and complement a high quality environment.
- **Regeneration of the Cotswold and Wiltshire and Berkshire canals:** The regeneration of the main canals in the Cotswolds would link England's two great rivers, the Thames and Severn, as well as offering water corridors into some of the region's urban areas. These new resources could provide easier access to Gloucester, Bristol and Bath from the wider waterway national network, acting as a catalyst for both urban and rural regeneration, particularly in Swindon. The Cotswold Canal link alone is estimated to bring 1.7 million new visitor days to the region each year, generating £6.8 million a year for the local economy and creating more than 200 permanent new jobs in tourism.
- **Providing new large scale facilities:** Some current gaps might best be addressed by large scale solutions. Examples include: improving facilities at strategically located reservoirs (especially in the Bristol area); continuing the development of the Cotswold Water Park; developing regional water sports centres in North Cornwall and near Bristol; and developing a 'hydrocentre' in Plymouth, to demonstrate how more people can leave their boats and equipment close to the water responsibly, but using different means of transport to get to them. There could be new commercial opportunities for facilities such as 'wave pools' or 'surf rider' machines close to main urban and growth areas within the region.





Looking forward

If we are to provide more and better access to a full range of water-based recreation activities, this strategy must be used as a 'living' document that reflects current and future priorities. It will initially cover a five year period (2009-2014), but will be regularly reviewed and revised as improvements are made or pressures change. To do this effectively:

- All key regional agencies need to work together to take forward this strategy. To encourage its implementation and help identify and target resources. To work with interested groups directly involved in the provision of water based recreation and those groups that especially encourage participation in outdoor recreation activities;
- The Environment Agency is taking the lead for the steering group in co-ordinating and monitoring the delivery of the strategy;
- New ways of working, guidance and best practice should be developed to lead the way forward.

Case Study

Canoeing and kayaking on the River Dart

The River Dart is one of the foremost white water canoe and kayaking rivers in the south of England. Canoeing and kayaking take place from Dartmeet (where the East and West Dart Rivers meet) through to Totnes, with grade 4/5 conditions (very difficult) in the upper reaches down to grade 2 on the lower reaches (conditions suitable for a range of paddlers under tuition or supervision). All canoe and kayak access is subject to adherence to a code of conduct. The canoe and kayak agreement is divided into sections (upper, middle and lower reaches) with different season dates and booking requirements on each section. Following changes to the agreement, negotiated by the British Canoe Union access officer and the Dart Fisheries Association, pre-booking is now only required on the upper reach from Dartmeet. However, it is the loop section that is most popular and is likely to be the most crowded. Following local consultation, the Dartmoor National Park Authority has introduced a shuttle bus to reduce car-related congestion and parking problems at the access points to the loop.

Acknowledgement



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