Forestry England

New Forest Recreation Management Strategy

A Sustainable Off-road Cycle Network

21 January 2021
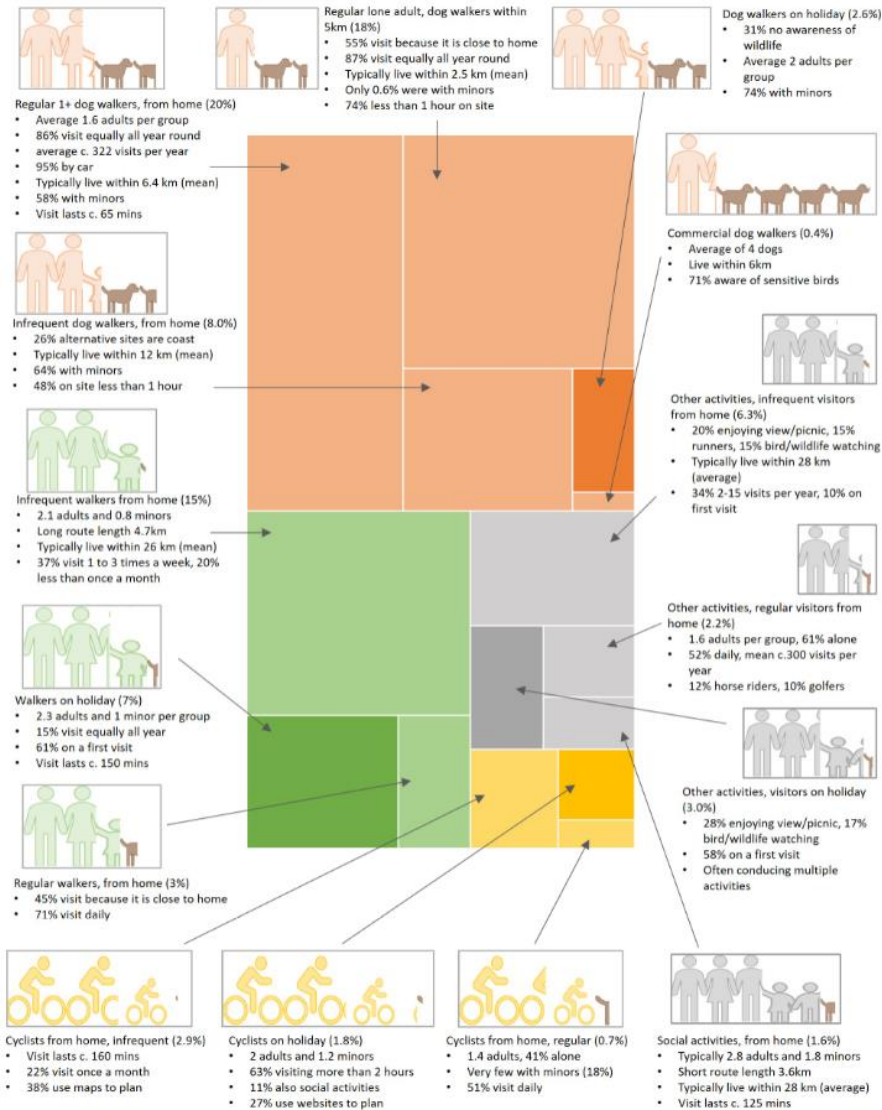
Richard Burke – RMS Programme Manager

1. What do we want to achieve?

Reference is made to cycling in four of the 22 strategic actions agreed by the RMS Steering Group. These are collated below.

Action	Excerpts of 'What will be done?'
2.3. Use appropriate and proportionate enforcement activities to deter illegal use of the Forest	Organisations with the powers to enforce laws and byelaws (e.g. landowners and managers, the Police and local authorities) will work together to: • agree when enforcement is appropriate, and by whom • clarify what evidence is needed to achieve a successful outcome • use their enforcement powers to protect the Forest. The current activities that may need to be addressed in this way include: parking on open Forest verges, dropping litter (including from vehicles), flying of drones where this is not allowed, wild camping, lighting fires, commercial fungi picking, parking in car parks overnight, feeding of commoners' animals, **cycling** off the permitted network and out of control dogs.
2.4. Manage organised activities and larger events to minimise negative impacts on wildlife, the working Forest and on local people.	Safety Advisory Groups will continue to advise, share best practice and where possible control public events (e.g. in villages and on the roads) to limit any negative impacts. We will continue to encourage full compliance with the **Cycle Event Organisers'** Charter
4.2. Manage the distribution and type of recreation facilities to protect the Forest, improve people's enjoyment and use resources effectively	Options include: • routes that could be developed to encourage people to travel to or around the New Forest without a car (i.e. on foot, by **bicycle** or on public transport, including the New Forest Tour) • selective improvements to the network of permitted off road routes for **cycling**, carriage driving and organised events (in particular to address key gaps in the **cycle** network and thereby reduce the need for people to drive from residential areas or **cycle** on potentially dangerous roads – or be tempted to use other tracks and trails) • route information on **cycle** waymarkers to help people navigate on permitted Crown land **cycle** routes • road safety improvements e.g. at junctions that are difficult for **cyclists**, and where off-road routes have to cross busy roads
5.3. Work with Defra and Natural England to include incentives for access improvements on private land including future environmental land management grants, where these would benefit the public and reduce (or not increase) pressure on nearby sensitive areas.	Where there is no conflict with wildlife habitats and species, planning policies or other important constraints, we will then help landowners consider whether new walking, **cycling** and horse riding routes could fit with their plans for their land. This concept of drawing recreation away from designated areas could be extended to include campsites and other recreation facilities

- **RMS 22 Strategic actions – reference to cycling**

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Regular 1+ dog walkers, from home (20%)
- Average 1.6 adults per group
- 86% visit equally all year round
- average c. 322 visits per year
- 95% by car
- Typically live within 6.4 km (mean)
- 58% with minors
- Visit lasts c. 65 mins

Infrequent dog walkers, from home (8.0%)
- 26% alternative sites are coast
- Typically live within 12 km (mean)
- 64% with minors
- 48% on site less than 1 hour

Infrequent walkers from home (15%)
- 2.1 adults and 0.8 minors
- Long route length 4.7km
- Typically live within 26 km (mean)
- 37% visit 1 to 3 times a week, 20% less than once a month

Walkers on holiday (7%)
- 2.3 adults and 1 minor per group
- 15% visit equally all year
- 61% on a first visit
- Visit lasts c. 150 mins

Regular walkers, from home (3%)
- 45% visit because it is close to home
- 71% visit daily

Cyclists from home, infrequent (2.9%)
- Visit lasts c. 160 mins
- 22% visit once a month
- 38% use maps to plan

Cyclists on holiday (1.8%)
- 2 adults and 1.2 minors
- 63% visiting more than 2 hours
- 11% also social activities
- 27% use websites to plan

Cyclists from home, regular (0.7%)
- 1.4 adults, 41% alone
- Very few with minors (18%)
- 51% visit daily

Regular lone adult, dog walkers within 5km (18%)
- 55% visit because it is close to home
- 87% visit equally all year round
- Typically live within 2.5 km (mean)
- Only 0.6% were with minors
- 74% less than 1 hour on site

Dog walkers on holiday (2.6%)
- 31% no awareness of wildlife
- Average 2 adults per group
- 74% with minors

Commercial dog walkers (0.4%)
- Average of 4 dogs
- Live within 6km
- 71% aware of sensitive birds

Other activities, infrequent visitors from home (6.3%)
- 20% enjoying view/picnic, 15% runners, 15% bird/wildlife watching
- Typically live within 28 km (average)
- 34% 2-15 visits per year, 10% on first visit

Other activities, regular visitors from home (2.2%)
- 1.6 adults per group, 61% alone
- 52% daily, mean c.300 visits per year
- 12% horse riders, 10% golfers

Other activities, visitors on holiday (3.0%)
- 28% enjoying view/picnic, 17% bird/wildlife watching
- 58% on a first visit
- Often conducing multiple activities

Social activities, from home (1.6%)
- Typically 2.8 adults and 1.8 minors
- Short route length 3.6km
- Typically live within 28 km (average)
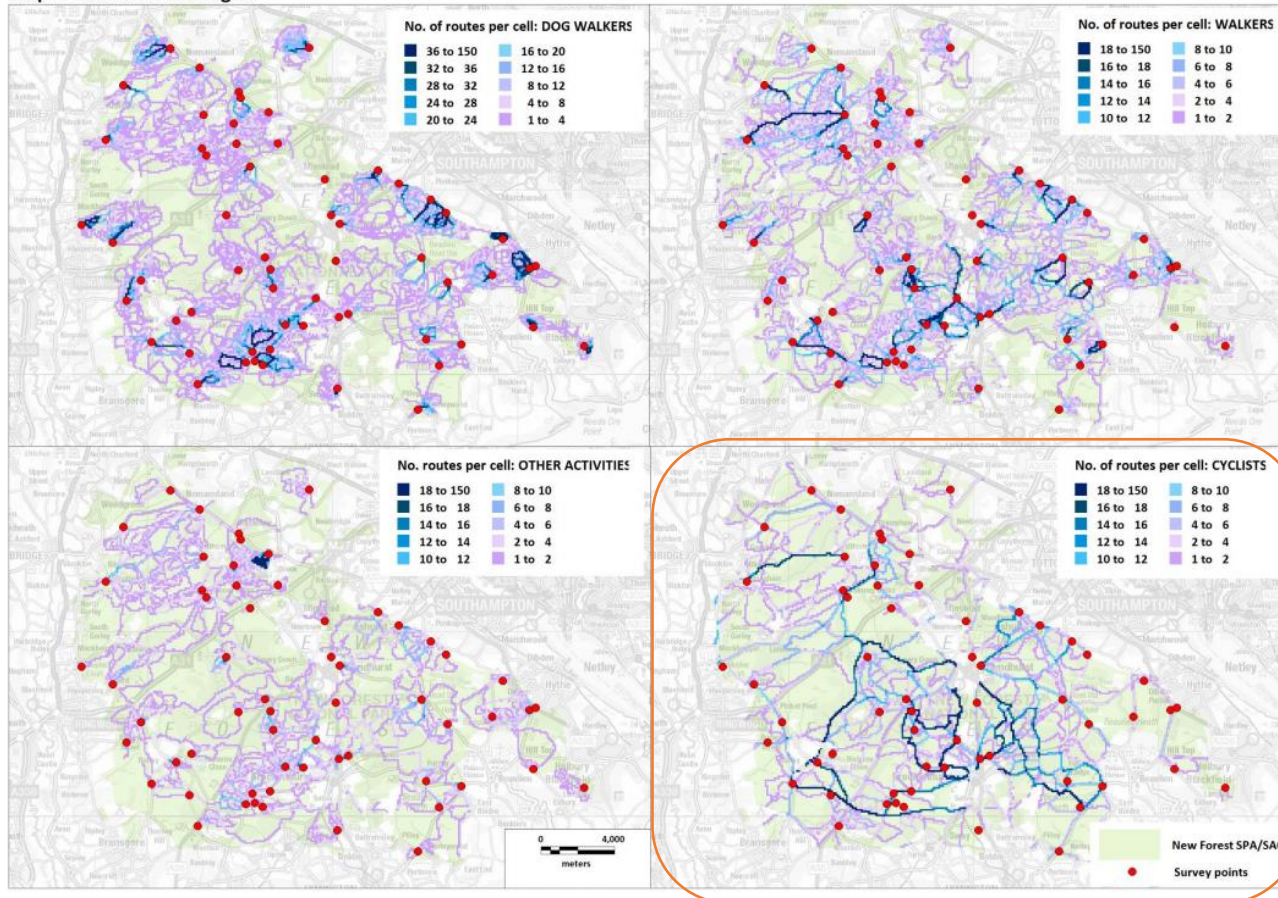- Visit lasts c. 125 mins

- Most recent data is from Footprint Ecology Visitor Survey 2018-19

- Off rd cycling accounts for 5.4% of visitors:

  ➢ Local regulars 0.7%
  ➢ On holiday 1.8%
  ➢ Local infrequent 2.0%

Map 6: Routes on 100m grid

- **Footprint visitor survey data**

➢ Cycling activity isn't as widespread as other activity.

➢ Strava data shows a similar picture

➢ Strava shows very little evening use, even less from 9pm.

- Local view on cycling – who are cyclists?

  - ➢ Everyone – normal people, mums, dads, families?
  - ➢ People enjoying the place for the same reasons we do

- Impact of cycling – perception vs reality.

  - ➢ Erosion
  - ➢ Disturbance of fauna
  - ➢ Interactions with commoning/ working forest
  - ➢ Noise/ Tranquillity

- We need to evidence impacts rather than propagate rhetoric

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- Not joined up – doesn't work as a network

- Doesn't link centres of population – Waterside

- People drive to the middle of the Forest

- Not family friendly - village links are an issue

- Crossing points of major roads are a barrier

- Doesn't link well to the major hire centres or stations

- Not logical as to which tracks are allowed or why

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- A lot of people don't know about it

- Local people don't understand it

- We don't provide trailhead information

- People don't understand maps

- Our network way-markers aren't helpful

- How do you best access it?

- Which car parks access the network?

- Why should you use it?

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- The network isn't a network

- Access isn't analogous to wider cycle access so not logical

- We provide limited information off-site and wayfinding onsite

- It's not a great experience for a lot of its users

  ➢ But we still expect everyone to use it

  ➢ We complain when they don't

- Informed by data and insight

- Is supported long term by stakeholders

- Backed up with good information off/ onsite

- Has the support of cyclist/ cycling groups

- Provides a safe, positive visitor experience

- Is a true network and connects

- All users valued and understood

- Value what's good about cycling, the Forest

- Robustly deal with what's bad or what doesn't work

- Means we're being reasonable when we need to enforce off track activity

- ## We need better data and insight

  - ➢ Where are cyclists going, why, when?

  - ➢ Where do they come from?

  - ➢ What do they live, travel from, park?

  - ➢ Why do they cycle off track?

  - ➢ What are the actual impacts?

- ## How do we get it?

  - ➢ Footprint Visitor Survey

  - ➢ STRAVA Metro/ Mobile phone data

  - ➢ Local teams – NPA Cycle Ranger/ F Eng Rangers & VR's,

  - ➢ Targeted local engagement and online surveys

  - ➢ Speak to experts – CWG, bike clubs, bike shops, hire centres

- A better network that:

  ➢ Links to towns and villages and other cycle infrastructure

  ➢ Makes use of more gravel tracks

  ➢ Links to hire centres

  ➢ Links to points of interest – Bolderwood, Reptile Centre

  ➢ Links to cycle hub car parks at periphery

  ➢ Is logical and focuses use onto robust tracks

  ➢ Has obvious, coherent and helpful wayfinding furniture

  ➢ Is safe and intuitive

  ➢ Provides a great visitor experience

  ➢ Provides safe major road crossings

- A network that:

    ➢ Is backed up with a website and app

    ➢ Access points are clear and easy to find

    ➢ Works for hire centres – uses/ waymarks their routes

    ➢ Has clear and helpful trailhead information

    ➢ Has clearly marked through routes and circular routes

    ➢ Is patrolled by knowledgeable staff/ cycle volunteers

    ➢ Is promoted by all stakeholders

    ➢ Engages people in understanding why they need to use the network

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- Engage with and ask for support from:

  ➢ Cycle shops and hire businesses

  ➢ Cycle clubs and initiatives

  ➢ Partners – NPA, NFDC, HCC, Verderers, CDA, NE

  ➢ Volunteers – volunteer cycle group – patrol/ inspect/ engage

  ➢ Other local businesses – café's, places of interest

  ➢ Transport networks

  ➢ Tourism providers – Go New Forest

The future visitor journey

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Go online, even via a partner org website, easily find the New Forest Recreation website/ use the app

Click the cycle link, see the car parks close to you with cycle access

Use the interactive map to plot a route on the network to suit your family, time, fitness

The map tells you how long it takes, who its suitable for, what work/ drift is going on today, which cps are closed, which ones are busy or even full

You enter the Forest and your satnav takes you to the start point, you see signage specifying a cycle friendly car park - a periphery car pk with a robust cycle route into the Forest.

You park, you might pay in future, your money pays for additional Rangers or better infrastructure.

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Once parked you unload your car and check out the trailhead information point

You check your route and note any other points of interest, places to stop, NF Marque café's etc

You read the New Forest Code and understand the importance of sticking to trails

You set off on a well managed and well-maintained trail that's intuitive and easier to follow than not

You're reassured by regular way-markers that tell you where to go and how long it takes, you bump into a Ranger who chats about the Forest and why it's great that you're sticking to the route

You visit Bolderwood, use the café that's run by a commoner, the toilets and cycle to the Reptile Centre to see the exhibition about commoning and how it supports ground nesting birds

You head back to the car having had a great day out, you're tired, the kids are happy you've learned about the place you've been cycling in

You feel you've engaged with your local environment and want to protect it, you make a £3 donation on the app before you go home *and lecture your friend about cycling off the network*.