



# BeActive... BeOutdoors... BeResponsible...

Perceptions about  
Outdoor Sports by  
Protected Areas Managers  
A Summary Report



**SEE** SUSTAINABILITY AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION  
IN OUTDOOR SPORTS

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**ENOS**  
Erasmus Network  
of Outdoor Sports





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SUSTAINABILITY AND  
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IN OUTDOOR SPORTS

# PART ONE

# 1



## **BeOutdoors** **Why Outdoor Sports in Protected Areas** **are important.**

*Who doesn't love being outdoors in beautiful natural surroundings?*

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, Outdoor Sports have exploded across Europe. The benefits associated with the combination of physical activity and being in nature are well documented. Outdoor sports provide greater mental and physical resilience for citizens. It connects people to nature, and has the potential to raise awareness about the need to be more sustainable in our interactions with our environment.



Like all activities, Outdoor Sports create impacts on vulnerable natural ecosystems. Some of those impacts have the potential to be detrimental.

Furthermore, Outdoor Sports often take place in Protected Areas, whose main purpose is to protect their rich level of biodiversity. Comprehending the perception of Protected Area managers about the impact of Outdoor Sports is a first step towards a better understanding of both the benefits outdoors sports bring, as well as ensuring their activities are more sustainable and any harmful impacts, minimised and mitigated.

The goal of the Sustainability and Environmental Education in Outdoor Sports (SEE) project is to develop good education about the practice of outdoor sport with a focus on **responsible behaviour**. Skill development for Outdoor Sports leaders, trainers, guides or instructors in sustainability practices for their sports is key.

In the framework of this project, we gathered for the first time the views and perceptions of Protected Area managers about Outdoor Sports in their parks. A comprehensive **survey was undertaken by the EUROPARC Federation** among **94 protected areas from 24 countries** gathering information about the opportunities and issues associated with the practice of a range of different Outdoor Sports.

A full report detailing all of the main findings is available on the SEE project website<sup>1</sup>.



Data was received from:

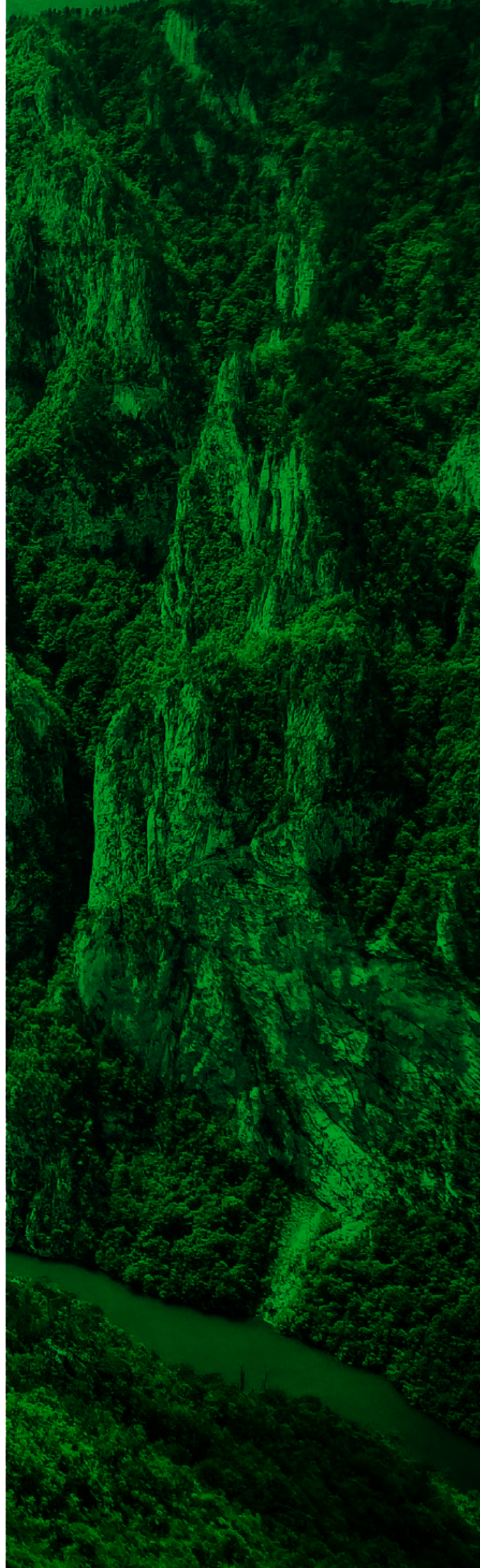


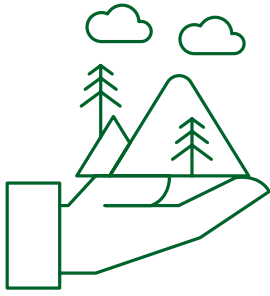
**94** Protected Areas



**24** Countries

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.see-project.eu/>





## BeResponsible

### Summary of the survey findings about Outdoor sports and Protected Areas.

*Outdoor sports in general were not seen as a major problem in the majority of Protected Areas but rather could bring benefits.*

The survey conducted as part of the SEE project, asking Protected Area managers about their experiences and perceptions was the first of its kind and highlighted some interesting elements.

One of the primary results showed that **Outdoor Sports in general were not seen as a major problem** in the majority of Protected Areas but rather could bring benefits. Clearly though there were a range of issues that impacted Protected Areas as a result of Outdoor Sports activities and indicated that some Outdoor Sports in certain locations could have high impacts and be detrimental for the Protected Area. Specific, localised management with focused engagement with users is recommended

Where negative impacts of Outdoor Sports were indicated, the **main issues were disturbance to wild fauna, congestion and usage levels** with associated parking problems, pollution risks and erosion of fragile soil systems. Further, the data has revealed a **significant increase in usage of Outdoor Sports in Protected Areas as a result of Covid** and aligned with that, there have been greater levels of irresponsible behaviour.

Having Outdoor Sports enthusiasts understand the natural heritage of the Protected Areas and the sensitivities associated with vulnerable species within any habitat is clearly important but the capacity to communicate and liaise with the sports effectively has been identified as an issue.

The survey showed **a reasonable level of engagement between Protected Areas and Outdoor Sports users**, whether through representation or dialogue with local clubs or federations, which seemed to mainly be taking place through social media and online forums. On the other hand a significant proportion **do not involve the Outdoor Sports** sector in the decision making of regulations. Barely a quarter **of the overall protected areas have periodic meetings with Outdoor Sports representatives** and the majority of respondents identified informal meetings as means of engagement.

The review of the survey data outlines **clear advantages through engagement with the Outdoor Sports sector**. Those Protected Areas that are engaged in collaborative projects perceive that their areas are more valued by Outdoor Sports practitioners. They also state better awareness of nature and environmental issues, perceive a better sense of community thanks to Outdoor Sports practice and see more active involvement of Outdoor Sports practitioners in nature conservation activities. This surely is a valuable lesson for all Protected Areas managers, to seek and put in place meaningful engagement with the Outdoor Sports communities making use of these areas.

The survey does also highlight the need for further research on the reasons why some Outdoor Sports enthusiasts do not act responsibly, with a need for more details on monitoring and the causality of Outdoor Sports and detrimental impacts on the Protected Areas is highly recommended.

This summary report presents the SEE project partners with the opportunity to develop good educational material and methods in the training of Outdoor Sports that effectively address the issues detected in Protected Areas. This will provide Outdoor Sports leaders, coaches or instructors with appropriate methodologies to motivate and educate practitioners in responsible and sustainable behaviour that will ensure they can continue to enjoy the benefits of their Sports whilst ensuring the Nature in which it takes place is not irrevocably harmed.





## BeActive Top 20 Recommendations on what should be done next for Outdoor sports in Protected Areas!

All agree that Outdoor Sports and Protected Areas need constructive engagement, effective management and responsible, sustainable and nature-sensitive participation.

Having undertaken an analysis of the results of the survey, these **Top 20 Recommendations** for Protected Area managers, Outdoor Sports practitioners and their respective European networks will enable everyone to **BeOutdoors!**

### For Protected Area Managers

1. Engage with Outdoor Sports stakeholders on a regular basis and work together on collaborative projects, communication and the management of activities in the area.
2. Ensure that any regulations are grounded by research on causality and collaborate closely with the sports stakeholders.
3. Engage with the sports stakeholders to gain volunteers to help with nature conservation projects.
4. Share and promote good practice and keep EUROPARC informed on good case studies for sharing across Europe.
5. Promote the ENOS – EUROPARC 10 good principles for responsible use of protected areas.

### For EUROPARC Federation

The largest European network  
of Protected Areas

6. Collect and provide good practices on outdoor sport management.
7. Build capacity among its members on sport management in Protected Areas.
8. Promote roundtables and dialogue events with the outdoor sport sector.
9. Provide communication support.
10. Promote the ENOS – EUROPARC 10 good principles for responsible use of protected areas.

## For Outdoor sports Federations, Clubs and Educational/Training Organisations

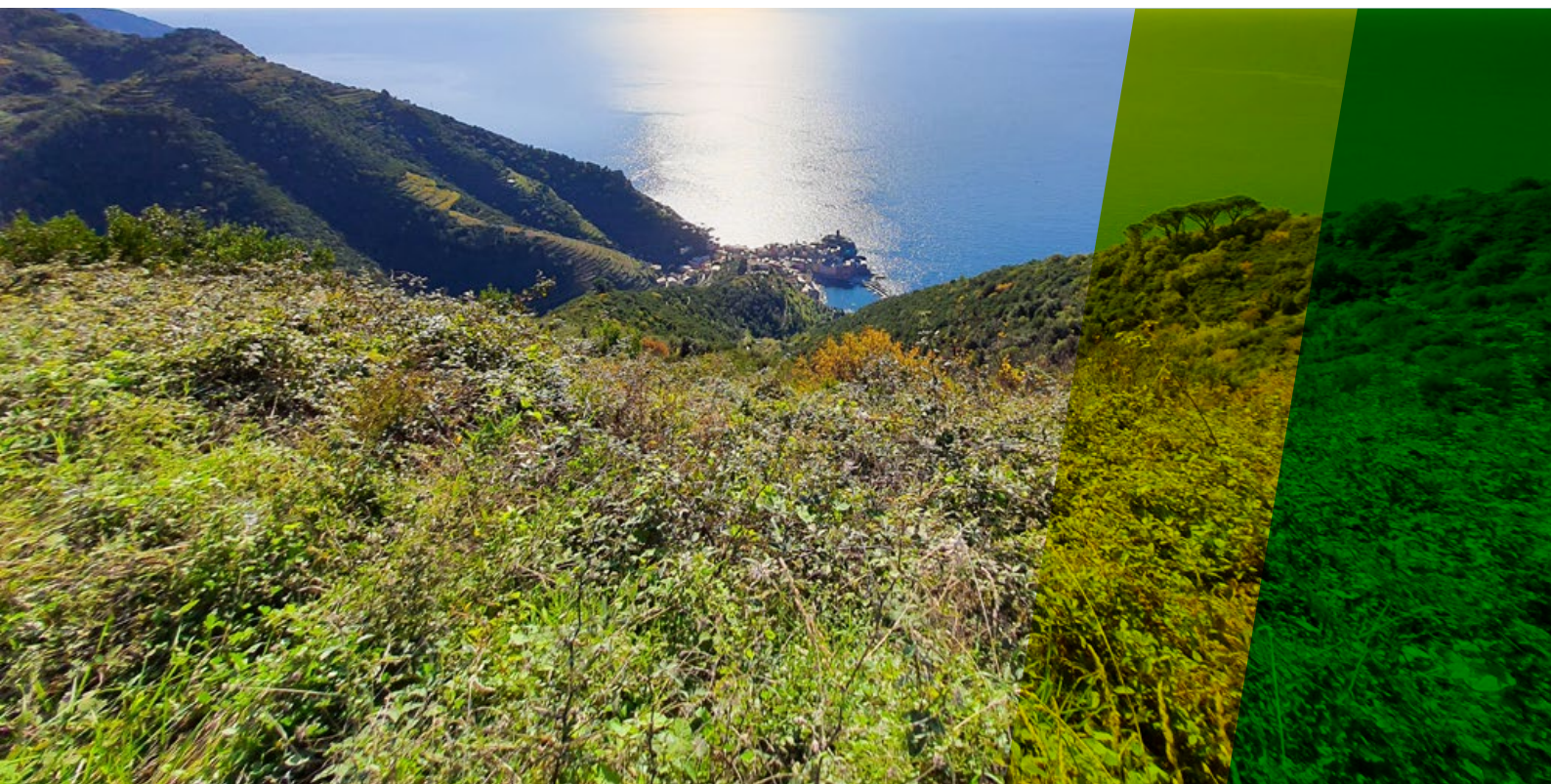
- 11.** Address issues and perceived negative impacts, through education and training courses to encourage, responsible, sustainable pro-environmental behaviour.
- 12.** Communicate to members and practitioners on the regulations and policies as well as responsible and respectful behaviour in natural and protected areas.
- 13.** Seek to engage with the Protected Area managers in your country or region and suggest engagement and collaborative working.
- 14.** Promote the ENOS – EUROPARC 10 good principles for responsible use of protected areas.

## For All Outdoor sports Enthusiasts and Practitioners

- 15.** Appreciate and value the opportunity the Protected Area offers you to enjoy your sport in nature.
- 16.** Respect regulations, plan carefully and co-operate with Protected Area staff and rangers and follow the ENOS – EUROPARC 10 good principles for responsible activity in Protected areas.
- 17.** Get involved as nature advocates and seek out opportunities to volunteer and “give back” to your local area and act to protect and restore our natural areas.

## For ENOS The European Network of Outdoor Sports

- 18.** Explore opportunities to gain deeper insight on attitudes and barriers to responsible behaviour in natural areas.
- 19.** Promote roundtables and dialogue events with the nature sector.
- 20.** Promote the ENOS – EUROPARC 10 good principles for responsible use of protected areas.





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# PART TWO

**BeActive, BeOutdoors,  
BeResponsible;**  
What does the Survey tell  
us about Outdoor sports in  
Protected Areas?



# BeResponsible: A Cautiously Positive View from Protected Area Managers.

Experienced Protected Area Managers were asked to reflect on their personal, subjective evaluations of perceptions of issues associated with Outdoor Sports.

A large majority indicated that Outdoor Sports were viewed positively (45%) or neutrally (38%), with 17% indicating the presence of Outdoor Sports was negative.

There would appear to be a lot of good practice across the Protected Area network that could be shared to enable Protected Area managers and Outdoor Sports practitioners to minimise problematic impacts and encourage positive engagement. Negative impacts are present and can be severe in localised situations, therefore solutions need to be identified that provide the Outdoor Sports experience in sustainable, less impactful practice.

Figure 1: Overall perception of Outdoor Sports (%)



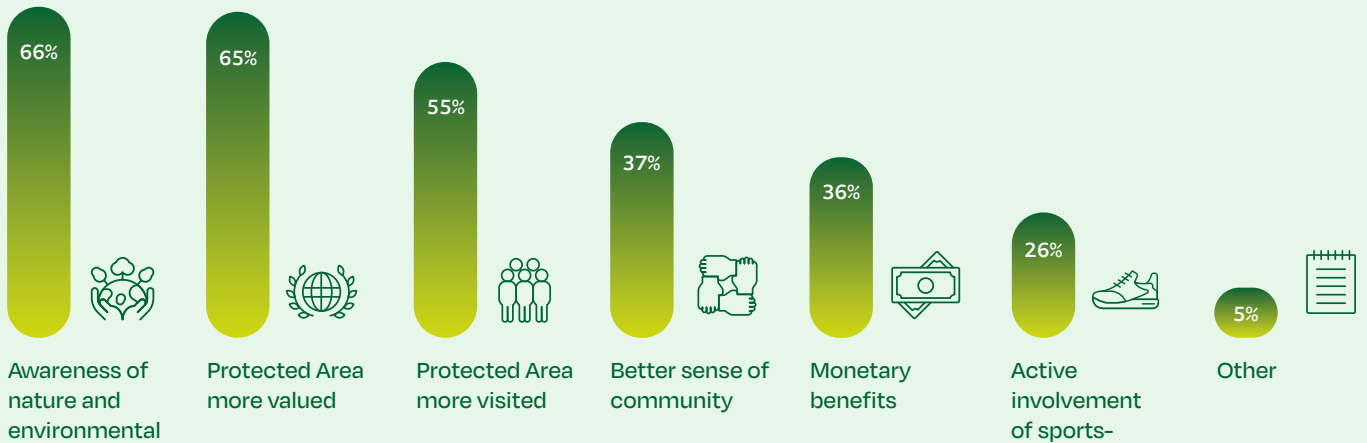


## BeOutdoors: Outdoor sports value Protected Areas.

Outdoor sports bring numerous benefits to the practitioners, but what are the benefits for the Protected Area?

Two thirds (66%) of survey respondents indicated that Outdoor Sports in their Protected Areas are linked to **better awareness of nature and environmental issues**, and as many (65%) believe that their Protected Area is **more valued by Outdoor Sports practitioners**.

Figure 2: **Benefits for Protected Areas from Outdoor Sports (%)**



# 66%

of respondents stated that Outdoor Sports in their Protected Area are linked to better awareness of nature and environmental issues.

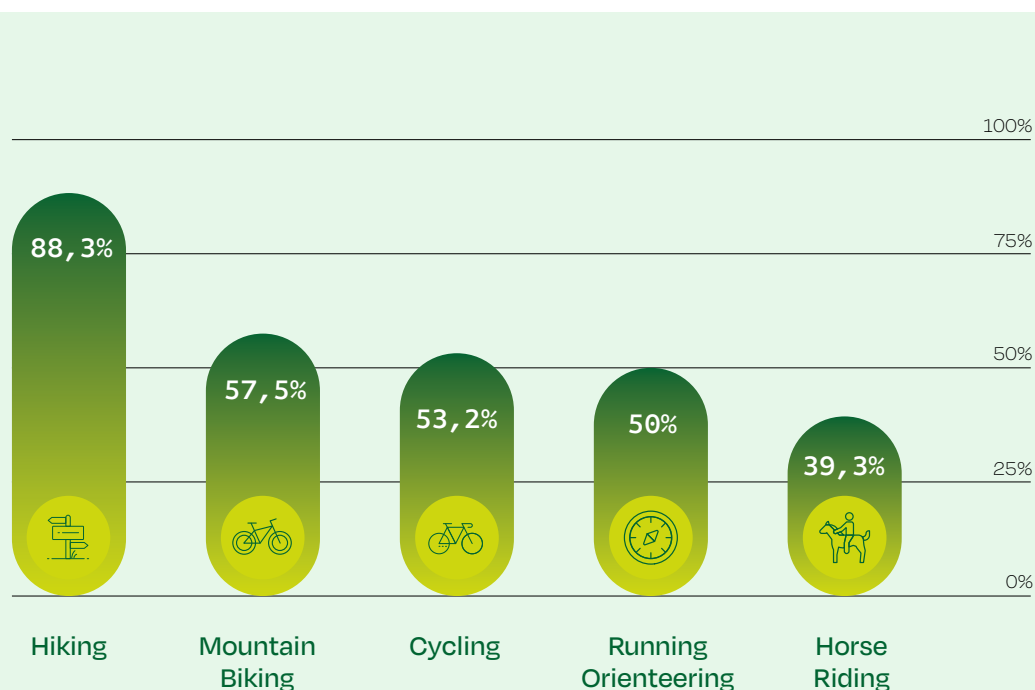
## BeOutdoors: Which Outdoor Sports Take Place in Protected Areas?

Protected Area managers were asked to select up to five Outdoor Sports that take place in their Protected Areas, with preference given to those that

- a) have the most participation and/or
- b) that generate most negative impacts.

The 5 sports most highlighted across the survey were **hiking, mountain biking, cycling, running or orienteering and horse riding**. The least highlighted Outdoor Sports were all water sports. This does not come as a significant surprise as even coastal or wetland Protected Areas often also have land-based trails used by hikers, bikers and runners.

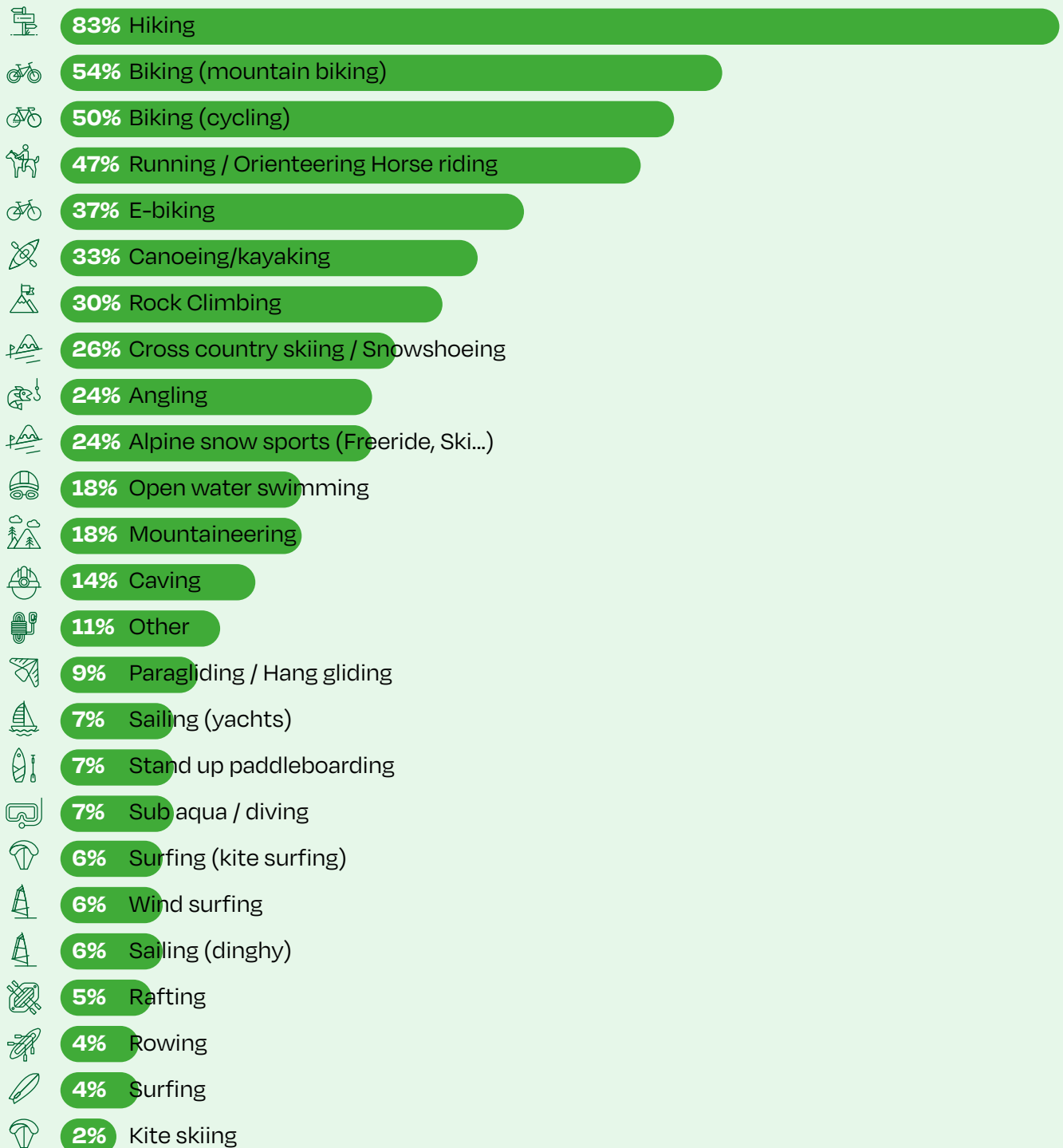
Figure 3: The 5 sports most highlighted





The complete range of sports popularity among the Protected Areas surveyed was:

Figure 4: **Number of protected areas and the Outdoor Sports practiced**



## BeResponsible: What do Protected Areas say are the challenges associated with Outdoor sports?

Protected Area managers scored from 0 – 6 issues related to a particular sport from their experience, with 0 indicating “no perceived issue” and 6 represents “a major perceived issue”. People had the chance to add additional issues if they wished.

### The most common perceived negative impacts caused by Outdoor Sports in Protected Areas were

- Disturbance of wild animals
- Unleashed dogs with users
- Overcrowding
- Littering
- Erosion
- Parking issues
- Conflicts with other users
- Practising in restricted areas or at restricted times

Not all of these issues are caused by all sports equally.

When considering all protected areas surveyed together, issues arising from **high visitor numbers** (overcrowding, parking issues) and from **irresponsible behaviour** (littering, conflicts, and practice in restricted areas or times) were all common although were ranked relatively low in terms of concern. It must be noted though that for a number of parks, such issues were of great concern and caused locally severe detrimental impacts.

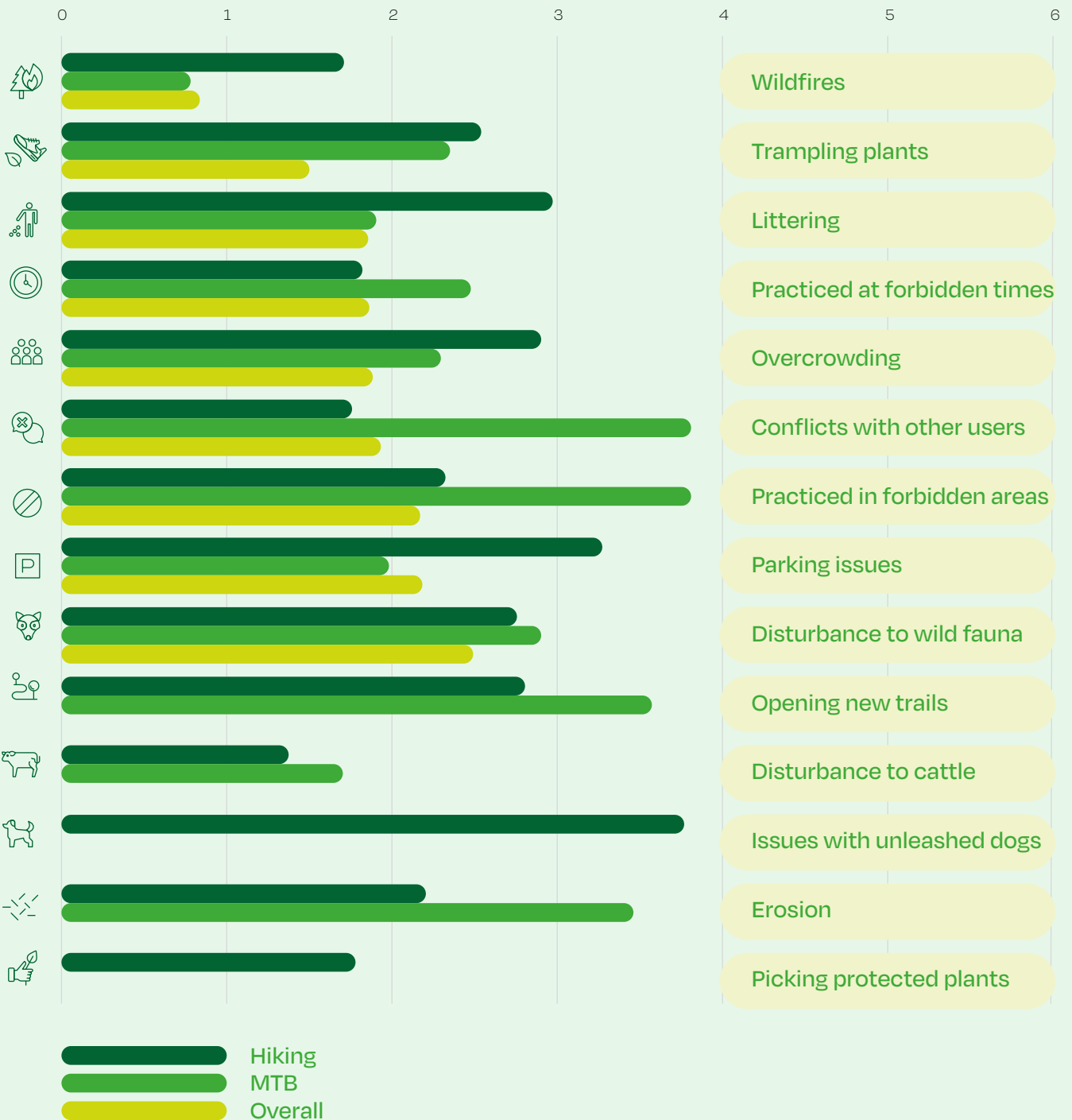
\*There were 4 additional issues in hiking and 2 additional ones in MTB that were not included in the overall list for all the sports due to issues of relevance.

The project has developed a series of **sport data sheets** which are available on the project website at [www.see-project.eu](http://www.see-project.eu). These provide a more detailed overview of the issues caused by each single sport.






**Figure 5: Average score of perceived issues (0-6) across all sports with comparative scores for Hiking and MTB**






 **Overcrowding**

 **Practicing in restricted areas**

 **Disturbing wild fauna**

 **Erosion**

 **Conflicts with other users**

 **Unleashed dogs**

 **Parking issues**

 **Littering**

**Common perceived  
issues caused by  
outdoor sports  
in protected areas**

## BeResponsible: Is Covid a “booster” for Outdoor sports — and irresponsible behaviour?

An overwhelming majority (80%) of managers indicated that demand and use of their Protected Areas had increased during Covid. More than half (55%) however, indicated that this correlated with an increase in irresponsible behaviours.

During and certainly following the Covid-19 pandemic, there is clear information that Outdoor Sports are important to EU citizens with the mental and physical benefits associated with the combination of physical activity and being in nature more generally recognised. These benefits and the circumstances of the pandemic have increased the popularity of Outdoor Sports and also motivated newcomers who may not have the skills or knowledge to know how to enjoy being in nature responsibly.

Figure 6: Popularity of Outdoor Sports during Covid

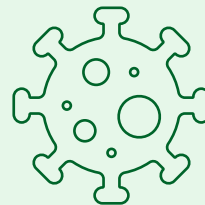
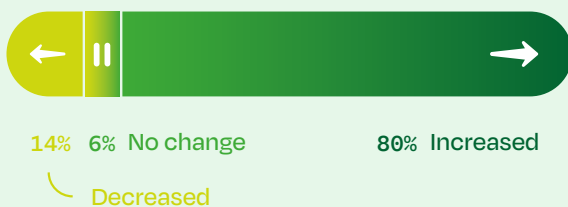


Figure 7: Change in behaviour of Outdoor Sports practitioners (%)



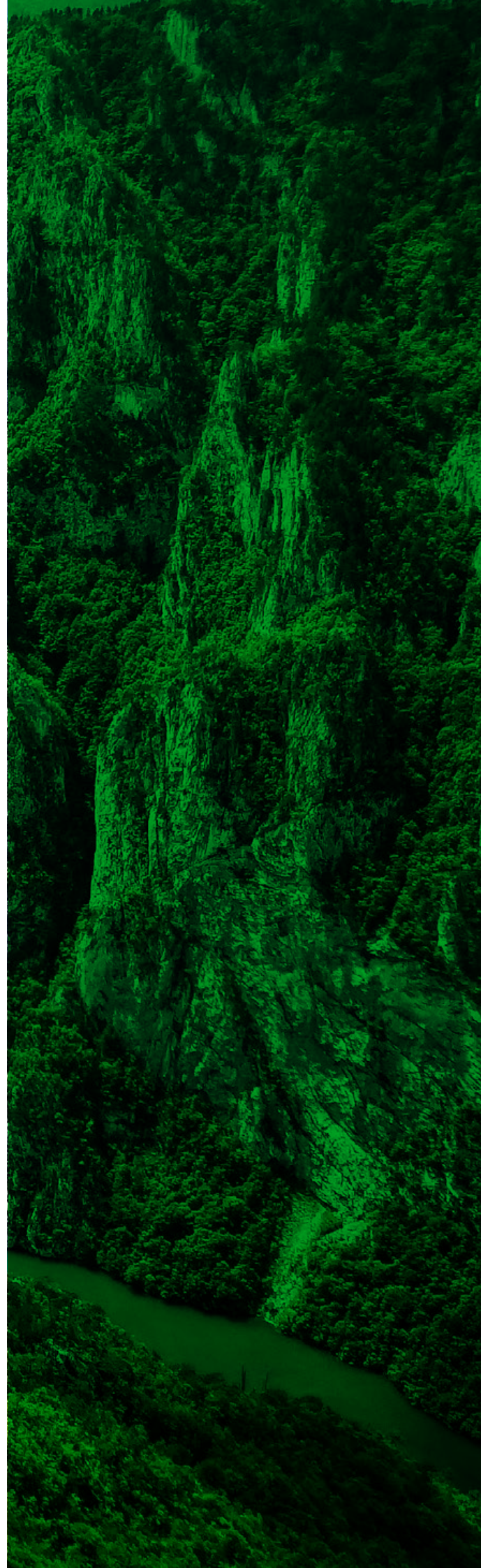


## Be Responsible: Making or breaking the Rules?

In an open question, Protected Areas Managers stated which Outdoor Sports were the least compliant with any regulations. The two most frequently mentioned sports were Mountain biking (n=53) with 49.1% and Rafting (n=4) with 50% of the surveyed Protected Areas stating that they were least compliant.

However, as noted, only 4 protected areas indicated that rafting was one of the main activities that took place in their area and out of those 4, 2 highlighted that they were least compliant. Other activities that were highlighted as least compliant by the protected areas in which they took place were as follows:

- E biking (n=53) with 21.2%
- Kite surfing (n=6) with 16.9%
- Sub aqua (n=6) with 16.9%
- Climbing (n=25) with 16%
- Paragliding (n=7) with 14.3%
- Snow sports (n=42) with 11.9%
- Hiking (n=83) with 10.8%
- Cycling (n=50) with 10%
- Canoeing / kayaking (n=30) with 10%
- Angling (n=24) with 8.3%
- Horse riding (n=37) with 5.4%



## BeActive: Protected Area management strategies for Outdoor sports.

Various types of protected areas were represented in the survey, ranging from global designations such as Geoparks and UNESCO World Heritage Sites through to national, regional or local level designations. National Parks, though, were in the majority at 46% of all responses.

Within these protected areas, there was a broad and representative range of European habitats, from coastal and marine sites through to mountains and uplands. Many Protected Areas are rarely restricted to just one single habitat. This means managing Outdoor Sports across these ranges of habitats is challenging.

When it comes to having a specific management strategy for Outdoor Sports in the Protected Area, only 52% indicated there was something in place, although 66% highlighted that they do monitor visitor numbers.

**Developing good management strategies** through engagement and co-design with the Outdoor Sports sector could be instrumental in helping to mitigate perceived negative impacts and issues.

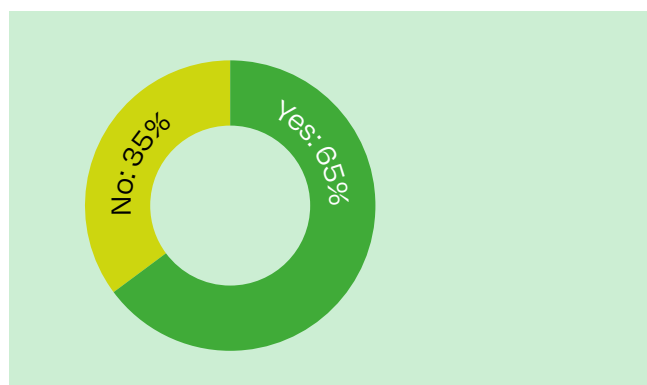
The vast majority (95%) of the protected areas had some form of general infrastructure such as way marking, trails, parking and furniture to help manage users.

However, less than 54% had specific infrastructure such as equipment rental, canoe access points, take-off structures for the management of Outdoor Sports.

**Developing appropriate infrastructure** in the right locations to better manage Outdoor Sports could also help to mitigate perceived negative impacts and issues.

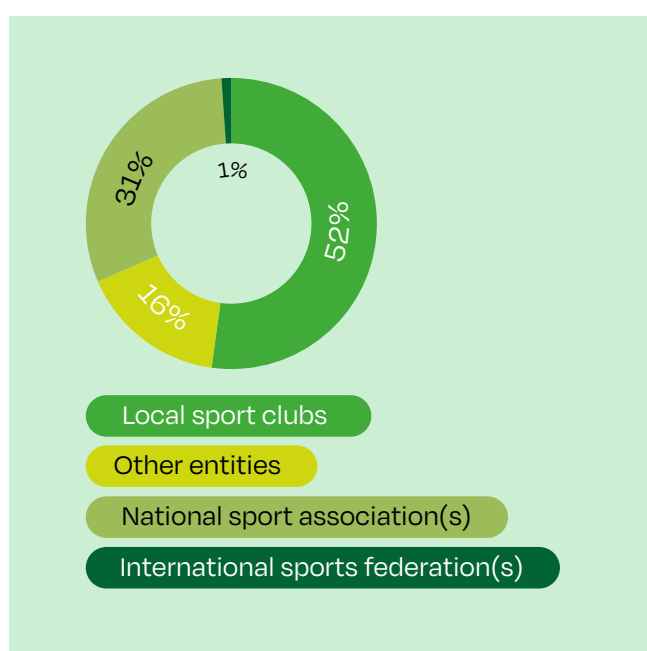
A significant number of Protected Area Managers (65%) indicated that they engage with the Outdoor Sports (OS) sector in decision-making on related regulations.

Figure 8: Does the PA authority engage with the OS sector in decision-making on regulations?



Of those that do engage, 52% do so via local sports clubs and 31% consult with national sport associations. A small proportion of 1% engage with international sports federations and the remaining 16% engage with other entities.

Figure 9: Who does the PA authority engage with?





41% of the respondents who do engage with the Outdoor Sports sector hold periodic meetings with Outdoor Sports representatives. 31% stated they are in loose contact with the Outdoor Sports sector, while 28% said that their protected area has a sports representative as part of the park consulting or management board.

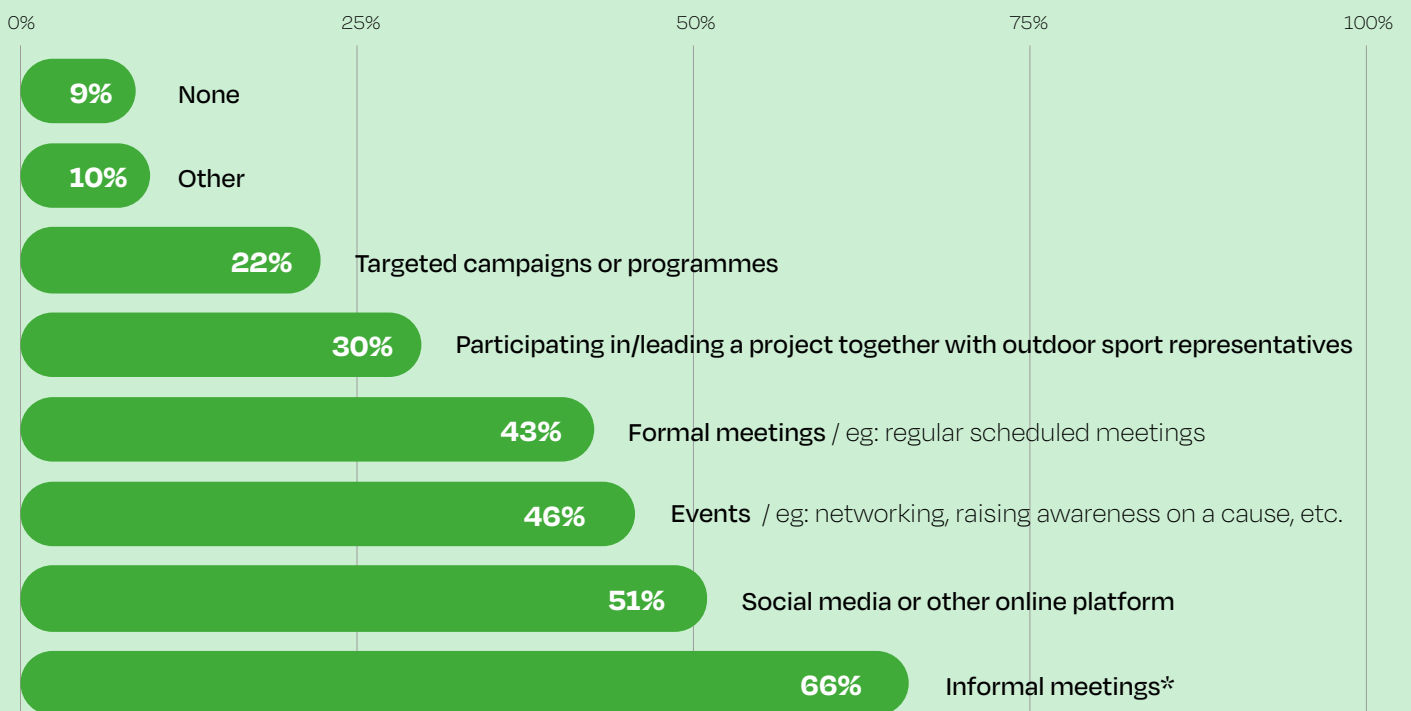
It was interesting to find out that the main ways Protected Areas used to engage with the Outdoor Sports sector were either informal contact or using social media or other online platforms.

### Only 43% of protected area managers have formalised regular scheduled meetings.

Genuine engagement and collaborative working between the management organisation and the Outdoor Sports has been shown to be effective<sup>2</sup> in helping to manage issues and conflicts and so developing systems for engagement rather than just having an ad hoc approach could be important.

<sup>2</sup> Inglés, E., Puig, N., & Labrador, V. (2016). Sports management in protected mountain areas. Sustainable development through collaborative network governance: a case study. *Journal on Protected Mountain Areas Research and Management*, 8, 53-61.

Figure 10: Means of engagement (%) with the Outdoor Sports sector



\* eg: random encounters between rangers and outdoor sports practitioners



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# 10 Good Principles for Outdoor Sports in Protected Areas

## Plan your visit sustainably

When we enter a Protected Area, we all make an impact on the natural environment no matter how small this might be. It is important not just to care for ourselves but the nature around us. Nature is inviting you into her home, be a good guest!



Come on foot, bike or public transport as a priority.



When using private vehicles, try to share the ride.



Circulate with caution and park in the spaces reserved.

## How to make the most out of your visit and to take care of the Protected Area?

**1 You are a privileged guest.**  
Stay in the trails, respect the natural environment and regulations to guarantee the beauty of the place.

**3 If you come with a dog,**  
take extra care of it. Follow the regulations. Dogs can disturb other species.

**5 Everyone wants to enjoy the place.**  
Give way to other users; anticipate that they often do not feel or see you coming, respect speed limits.

**7 Night is for species to be alone.**  
Avoid going in the night for your safety and let the animals live in peace.

**9 Avoid excessive noise.**  
Enjoy the quietness and calm, animals need quietness as we do.

**2 Plan your activity carefully.**  
Gather the information you need to enjoy your activity and the place; you will appreciate it better.

**4 Take care of yourself and others.**  
and be prepared to help others, regardless their sport.

**6 Help us to keep this place clean.**  
Leave no trace and take with you the waste you make.

**8 Keep "secret places" secret!**  
Use social media and GPS tracks with responsibility and according to official regulations.

**10 See it, Say it, Sort it!**  
If you see something wrong, tell the park. Open your eyes, appreciate nature and enjoy!

## Get Out & Get Into Nature

[www.outdoor-sports-network.eu](http://www.outdoor-sports-network.eu)  
[www.europarc.org](http://www.europarc.org)





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