

CONNECT**MID-TERM SUMMARY REPORT**

Mid Term Evaluation Report (18 months)	
From:	01.01.25
To	30.06.26



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1. Overview and Executive Assessment

The CONNECT project has completed its first 18 months of implementation and is **on track**, with a consolidated evaluative judgement of **GREEN – on track with manageable delivery risks**. As stated in the report, *“The partnership has produced substantial foundations and has demonstrated adaptive management when the original plan encountered practical constraints.”*

The project’s core objective—to strengthen collaboration between protected-area management, nature-conservation actors and the outdoor-sport sector—is being realised through substantial evidence generation, stakeholder engagement, pilot testing, and early guidance development.

Across WP2–WP5, **22 tasks** were reviewed, supported by **302 survey responses**, **25 interviews**, **two pilots**, **nine conference appearances**, and **15 LinkedIn posts**.

WP1, led by ENOS, has successfully established the governance, coordination, monitoring, quality-assurance and reporting systems that underpin the entire project.



2. Work Package Progress Summary

WP1 – Project Management and Coordination (ENOS)

Status: GREEN

WP1 has delivered a robust management architecture, including the kick-off meeting (Lyon, Feb 2025), the Project Management and Implementation Plan, common templates for reporting, monitoring, KPIs, milestones and deliverables. There is also financial transparency through individual organisation agreements and a recurring online meeting cycle and quality-assurance processes.

Minor issues related only to reporting alignment, now resolved through the central dashboard.

Partners now share a common working method, improved role clarity, and a reliable evidence trail supporting final reporting and sustainability.

WP2 – Research and Evidence Base (Mid Sweden University)

Status: GREEN

WP2 has produced a substantial mixed-method evidence base with the literature search completed and three surveys undertaken with protected areas (69 respondents), federations (83 respondents) and clubs (150 respondents).

From these screener surveys, 25 semi-structured interviews have been carried out that strengthen qualitative depth

A challenge was that there was a lower than expected survey response rate and so the addition of interviews has been a way to extract more qualitative data.

A key recommendation at month 18 is to provide WP4 with staged outputs rather than waiting for a single final report

WP3 – Stakeholder Engagement and Pilots (EUROPARC Federation)**Status: GREEN**

WP3 has delivered strong engagement foundations with a Stakeholder Engagement Meta Plan published and stakeholder mapping and workshops completed.

Two pilot events have been successfully delivered in Ireland and the Netherlands. The remaining 3 pilots were rescheduled due to staff turnover, capacity constraints and an animal-disease outbreak at one of the sites.

These two initial pilots have produced high-quality foundations and resilient implementation, but host-site dependency remains the principal operational risk.

Pilot insights:

- **Ireland:** Delivered early to maintain sequence; supported by municipal and neighbouring park staff.
- **Netherlands:** Delivered with strong local focal-point engagement; report in development.
- **Sweden & Germany:** Rescheduled; host-site changes managed adaptively.
- **France (Pyrenees):** Planned for April 2027.

The engagement quality was excellent with participants actively involved in discussions, practical activities and co-creation activities. There have been positive relationships formed at a local level which is very encouraging.

WP4 – Guidance Development (Leave No Trace Ireland)**Status: AMBER**

WP4 is beginning to progress but sits on a critical dependency path due to its reliance on WP2 synthesis and reports and outputs from pilot exchanges in WP 3.

This creates timeline challenges and so early drafting began before all evidence was available as an appropriate mitigation but of course that presents its own risks.

WP5 – Communication and Dissemination (Surfrider Foundation Europe)**Status: GREEN**

WP5 has delivered the communication strategy with an associated visual identity and templates. The project webpage is live and to date there have been nine conference appearance sessions and fifteen LinkedIn posts.

The current metrics have measured activities and outputs rather than outcomes. Audience analytics, engagement quality and uptake indicators are required in the next phase.

Project partners and local stakeholders undertaking a practical beach clean, Ireland

3. Cross-Cutting Outcomes and Emerging Impact

The project has already generated credible early outcomes:

At an individual level, the partners and local stakeholders have gained skills in stakeholder mapping and engagement, mixed-method research and pilot facilitation.

At a stakeholder level there has been an effective consultation reach through 302 surveys with 25 follow up interviews.

At the partners' own organisational level there have been effective shared management systems, templates, communication assets and cross-sector relationships embedded.

At a local/regional level, the pilots have created place-based dialogue and tested the meta-plan in diverse contexts.

At a European level, the project is building a transferable model for sport–nature cooperation, with future potential through the European Nature Academy course and final guidance.

The project has also been delivering a number of effective horizontal priorities

- Environment: Strong alignment; need to quantify green practices.
- Digital transformation: Effective use of Teams, Drive, Miro; future analytics required.
- Democratic participation: Strong participatory potential; need to document influence on decisions.
- Inclusion & diversity: Data exists but needs consolidation.



4. Conclusion

At Month 18, the CONNECT project has delivered a strong foundation for the second half of the project. The partnership has shown resilience and practical problem solving when sites, staff and circumstances changed. When developing relationships and collaboration there is a recognition that time is required and also the ability to deal with changes and shifting priorities

The project will be working to complete and report on the research element and produce reports for the other pilot exchanges as resources both for the partners and the toolkit – but also to be used at local level to encourage continued dialogue and engagement

The CONNECT project is on track to deliver durable Erasmus+ results and a transferable European model for collaboration between protected areas and outdoor-sport stakeholders.

Project partners and local stakeholders sharing knowledge in Weerribben Wieden National Park, Netherlands

