



# Youth Manifesto for Nature and the Environment

Ulster  
Wildlife



Youth  
Forum



# Youth Manifesto for Nature and the Environment

## The next Programme for Government provides an opportunity to take long overdue action for nature and climate.

The actions taken by our government will affect the futures of every young person here, and as such we believe it is only right that our voices are heard loudly and clearly. Young people have a unique role to play in addressing the environmental challenges we face in Northern Ireland. By virtue of our age, we have the longest period of time to drive forward and achieve the positive changes that are needed. But we also have the most to lose if we don't take action now to protect and enhance our environment.

This manifesto is a call for all political parties to take immediate and decisive action on the joint nature and climate crises. Nature's recovery is vital for tackling climate change and also essential in building a green

recovery to the Covid-19 pandemic; providing a platform for the Northern Ireland economy as it seeks a sustainable future.

To achieve nature's recovery, and in turn to mitigate climate change, it is no longer enough to think about slowing the loss of the natural world and protecting what remains of our wildlife. We need to stop and reverse the declines, and put nature into recovery, at scale and at pace.

**We can turn things around before it's too late - nature is capable of extraordinary recovery, but only if we act now.**

**Ulster Wildlife Youth Forum**

**1 in 10 species**  
are at risk of extinction here

**80%**



of our peatlands are emitting rather than storing carbon

**In 2021,**

none of our water bodies achieved good or high overall status.



Northern Ireland is **the least wooded** country in Europe



## What we want to see in the next Programme for Government:

### For Nature



Our connection to nature is much more important than we may think; nature is not a luxury but is in fact essential to our humanity and health. We need wildlife and wild places to thrive. By creating more space for nature, we are creating better lives for everyone.

Many of our current systems and laws have failed the natural world and it is now time to turn things around. We need to do things differently, business as usual won't be good enough and the next ten years will be critical.

We have already grown up in a nature-depleted world with many more species likely to decline or be lost entirely in the coming decades if we don't take action

- Halting and reversing the systemic loss of nature by implementing a national nature recovery network with at least 30% of land and 30% of sea protected, connected and well managed for nature by 2030. An ambitious Environment Strategy and nature restoration targets set in law
- New sustainable agriculture and fisheries policies that ensure fair returns for farmers and fishers, while cutting pollution and emissions, and restoring nature through regenerative practices.
- Establish an independent Environmental Protection Agency to oversee and enforce all relevant environmental legislation. And consider a youth panel as part of the structure.

### For Climate



Biodiversity loss and climate change are both driven by human economic activities and mutually reinforce each other. Neither will be successfully resolved unless both are tackled together.

We must ensure that global temperature rise will be limited to the 1.5°C target set out in the 2015 Paris Agreement – and Northern Ireland must play its part by truly implementing green, sustainable growth. Ultimately, our economy is dependent on a stable natural environment and we need to act now if we want to stop eroding the very fundamentals of our society's prosperity and well-being.

- Rapid implementation of a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland with ambitious targets, including carbon budgets, climate action plans and the inclusion of 'nature-based solutions'.
- Fully implementing 'nature-based solutions' to climate change e.g. peatland restoration, blue carbon solutions such as restoring kelp forests and sea grass, and woodland creation and restoration to support our journey to net zero.
- Banning all new fossil fuel infrastructure in Northern Ireland with no new licenses for fossil fuel exploration or extraction being issued.

### For Young People



We must promote the well-being benefits of being outdoors in nature, particularly with the levels of poor mental health increasing in our young people. We need to mainstream outdoor learning in schools to support young people's health. The benefits of outdoor learning include (but are not limited to): improved health and wellbeing, decreased stress levels, can have a positive impact on behaviour and learning and increases care for the environment.

We also need to invest in our future through the support and creation of 'green jobs' and plan a just transition towards a low carbon economy.

- Ensuring more time is spent learning in and about nature in schools, with guidance issued to schools on a minimum recommended time spent learning outdoors per week.
- Providing funding to improve the outdoor spaces and overall sustainability in schools and provide training to facilitate learning more outdoors, particularly for those in lower socio-economic areas.
- Introducing a 'Nature Jobs' scheme to support young people to gain skills and employment in nature conservation and restoration to help fill the existing skills gap in the sector.





"During the pandemic we have seen how much our society and economy can change when we treat something like a crisis. We need to be acting with the same urgency to tackle the nature and climate crises." Dakota, 22, Belfast

"Delaying will not make the climate and biodiversity crisis go away. What will, is action. The future of humankind depends on a healthy and diverse environment – we must protect this land." Émer, 18, Armagh.

"I believe that the biggest impact towards fighting environmental change is by introducing policies that encourage as many people to act as sustainably as possible." Ciaran, 23, Belfast

"We know the facts, we know what we have to do, we just need to act." Aoife, 15, Newry

"Climate action looks like banning environmentally destructive projects and passing an AMBITIOUS climate act that doesn't prioritise capital over people and nature. It looks like taking the climate crisis seriously because everything we have is at stake." Georgia, 18, Lisburn

"Climate anxiety had been on the rise for years along with pollution and deforestation. If there's ever a right time to start fighting back, it's now" Jessica, 17, Omagh

"If we implement nature based solutions instead of mechanical, we can save money and restore habitats faster" Cormac, 19, Belfast

This document was produced by Ulster Wildlife's Youth Forum – through the Our Bright Future Partnership. Our Bright Future is an ambitious and innovative partnership led by The Wildlife Trusts which brings together the youth and environmental sectors. The programme, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, is helping young people aged 11-24 gain vital skills and experience and improve their wellbeing. At the same time, they act as catalysts for delivering change for their local environment and community; whilst contributing to a greener economy.

[www.ourbrightfuture.co.uk](http://www.ourbrightfuture.co.uk)  
[www.ulsterwildlife.org](http://www.ulsterwildlife.org)

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