

Donegal Local Action Plan

GLENCOLMCILLE





GLENCOLMCILLE SUB-REGION

The Glencolmcille sub-region covers an area of 15,808 ha and the dominant farming activity is sheep and beef. The area is characterised by extensive upland bog with vegetated cliffs but also has important sand dunes in the north at Maghera. There are a number of loughs high up in the peatland areas that are home to the rare Arctic char and whose cool waters feed important fishing rivers such as the Owenteskiny River. There is a rich archaeological heritage in the area particularly at Glencolmcille and along the south coast

NATURA SITES & HIGH STATUS WATERBODIES

Much of the Glencolmcille sub-region is contained in the 3 Special Areas of Conservation (SACs): Slieve Tooey/Tormore Island/Loughros Beg Bay SAC, Slieve League SAC and St. John's Point SAC with a significant area of upland and lowland blanket bog at Crocknamurrin Mountain Bog in a Natural Heritage Area (NHA). The sub-region also contains West Donegal Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) and Inishduff Island SPA that are internationally important for bird species such as shag, chough, razorbill and a number of other seabird species. Although the conservation status of the region as a whole is favourable, some blanket bogs and heaths are at risk from agricultural activities/reclamation. The Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP project will be working in the region over the next few years to identify the kind of measures needed to restore these peatland areas.

Natura Sites
Rathlin O'Birne Island SAC
St. John's Point SAC
Slieve Tooey-Tormore IslandLoughros Beg Bay SAC
Slieve League SAC
Inishduff Island SPA
Rathlin O'Birne Island SPA
West Donegal Coast SPA

Nationally Designated Sites Inishduff NHA Crocknamurrin Mountain Bog NHA



High Status Waterbodies in the sub-region

Owenteskiny River and the Fintragh River are high status rivers although the status of the Owenteskiny is currently classed as poor. The pressures are thought to be from forestry and high levels of nutrients.

Approximately 50% of the rivers in the sub-region are considered at risk. Agriculture has been highlighted as the key pressure in this area. The Environment Protection Agency (EPA) has identified a number of rivers and lakes for review to establish how they can be restored or protected. Working with local stakeholders, such as anglers and other community groups in a collaborative effort, could make a big impact on the health of these waterbodies and improve outcomes for both agricultural and fishing sectors in the region.

There is a rich abundance of wildlife in the area and many species will be targeted by the Local Action Plan. These include: chough, geese and swans (especially barnacle geese), marsh fritillary butterfly, peregrine falcon and the narrow-mouthed whorl snail.



PRESSURES & IMPACTS

Important bird species in the sub-region are impacted mostly by the loss of foraging areas, fragmented habitats and drainage. Pressures as a result of undergrazing and overgrazing will be addressed by the ACRES programme through a targeted approach.

For water, the key risk is agricultural activities that allow excessive nutrients to run off from the soil into the rivers, drainage, toxic chemicals from sheep dip and illegal dumping. Turf cutting is a pressure in some areas which releases sediment into small upland streams and drains, leaving bare soil and degraded peatland. Other pressures include forestry and physical changes to the rivers.

Through the ACRES programme, farmers will be offered actions that help reverse these impacts.



TAKING ACTION

The ACRES programme, like previous agri-schemes, provides participating farmers with a chance to improve their farm infrastructure, access continued agricultural support payments and support rural sustainability. ACRES differs from previous schemes because it also supports farmers to take on actions to benefit wildlife, improve water quality and help increase resilience to the effects of climate change.

Non-Productive Investments (NPIs) and Landscape Actions (LAs) are measures that farmers can apply for through their farm advisor and through the Donegal Cooperation team. An important element of the Donegal Local Action Plan is that we will focus these actions towards - 'right measure, right place' to achieve our aims.

NPIs and LAs are targeted to certain areas and species. The Donegal ACRES team have made recommendations on what areas to focus on (see last page). These include improving habitats like vegetated cliffs and river banks, that are home to many important species such as chough, peregrine, geese and Atlantic salmon.

The CP team will work with farmers to choose actions that will support the goals of the local action plan to create a healthy environment with a thriving farming community.



EXAMPLE NPI AND LA



NPI: Watering Systems Install solar pumps, pasture pumps and water storage tanks to help keep livestock out of watercourses.



LA: Invasive Alien Species
Training on identification of
invasive species, understanding
their impact and how to control
them on your land.



NPI: Tree Planting
Plant native trees for carbon
storage, to help soak up excess
nutrients, and provide nesting and
feeding areas for wildlife.



LA: Targeted Grazing
Change livestock density to
improve land that has been
undergrazed or overgrazed, using
temporary or virtual fencing.



NPI: Fencing
Repair or install new fencing to
block access to watercourses,
protect trees and wildlife habitat
plots or crops.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made for the Glencolmcille sub-region and activities will primarily be targeted at these specific sites or species. Further actions may be developed over the lifetime of the project.

- Targeted grazing of peatlands and grassland management to suit species dependent on grassland habitat (chough and marsh fritillary)
- Identify suitable peatland sites for potential landscape actions.
- Support geese and swans through targeted NPIs.
- A significant proportion of farming land on the Fintragh catchment has been submitted to the ACRES
 programme and measures to support the protection of the watercourses in this catchment will be
 encouraged. Collaboration with the relevant agencies will be important to get the right measures in
 the right place.
- Nutrient and chemical pollution issues may be addressed through commonage landscape actions.
 Specialised training will be provided to farmers on the use of chemicals and pesticides near water, and including an explanation of the Source-Pathway-Receptor model for understanding how pollution reaches rivers and lakes
- Support the work of other agencies and local angling group by promoting protection of peatland areas along the Owenteskiny River.
- Commonage Plans Landscape Actions, formation of Commonage groups, discussion on drainage and impacts of open connections to watercourses, tackling invasive species such as Rhododendron.



A full copy of the ACRES Donegal Local Action Plan 2023-2028 can be downloaded from our website.

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