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**ACRES**  
**DONEGAL**  
CO-OPERATION PROGRAMME

# Donegal Local Action Plan LOUGH DERG

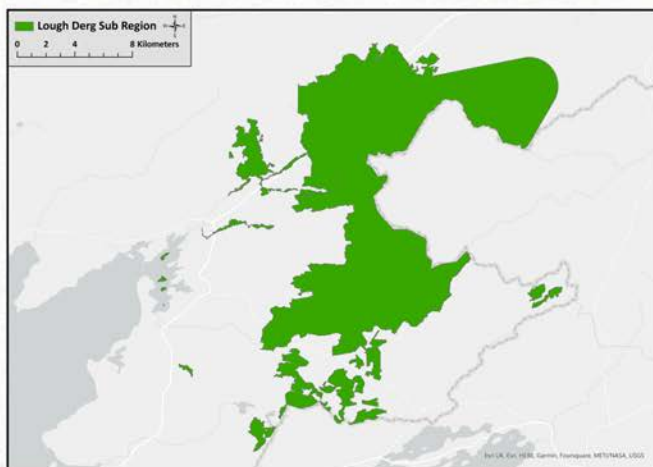


An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



Co-funded by  
the European Union

2024



## LOUGH DERG SUB-REGION

The Lough Derg sub-region covers an area of 20,538 ha. The dominant farming activity is beef and sheep. The area hugs the border with Northern Ireland and includes a number of large lakes including Lough Derg and Lough Eske. The area is dominated by a limestone landscape that characterises the habitats and species within. Much of the sub-region is protected for bog and aquatic habitats such as the Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau, an important area for geese and swans. The area also hosts species such as Atlantic salmon, freshwater pearl mussel, sessile oak and the Killarney fern.

## NATURA SITES & HIGH STATUS WATERBODIES

The Lough Derg sub-region has 17 designated sites of EU, international and national interest. Primarily, these designations are protecting wet heaths and blanket bogs which are currently considered not to be reaching good ecological status. The area is an important stronghold for the protected hen harrier.



### High Status Waterbodies in Lough Derg

There are two high status rivers in the area - Lowerymore River and Bridgetown River. Both of these rivers are under pressure and need protection from any further deterioration.

A number of water dependent species are considered of high priority in the sub-region. These include the Atlantic salmon, the white-clawed crayfish and the freshwater pearl mussel.

The Loughs Agency (fisheries authority for the area) considers the Derg River as having excellent structures for salmon spawning. However, loss of pools and spawning gravels are having a negative effect on survival rates. These losses are attributed to damaged river banks, over-widened channels and sediment release. Additionally, the white-clawed crayfish found at Lough Nagreage and Billary river are at risk from an extensive range of pressures including surface water pollution, disturbance to bank vegetation, non-native species and disease.

The freshwater pearl mussel has suffered a considerable decline in range and population over recent years. It is sensitive to river changes such as flow rate, oxygen levels, and silt and sediment levels in the water. This species requires focused protection and will be a priority under the new ACRES programme.

### Natura Sites

- Ballintra SAC
- Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood SAC
- Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC
- Dunragh Loughs/Pettigo Plateau SAC
- Croaghonagh Bog SAC
- Tamur Bog SAC
- Lough Nageage SAC
- Lough Golagh and Breesy Hill SAC
- Pettigo Plateau Nature Reserve SPA
- Lough Derg (Donegal) SPA
- Donegal Bay SPA

### International Sites

- Pettigo Plateau Ramsar

### Nationally Designated Sites

- Cashelnavean Bog NHA
- Lough Hill Bog NHA
- Meenagarranroe Bog NHA
- Barnesmore Bog NHA
- Lough Fad Bog NHA





## PRESSURES & IMPACTS

The Lough Derg sub-region has many protected sites but these are failing to reach favourable conservation status. The pressures identified include drainage, peat extraction, overgrazing, forestry, burning and agriculture reclamation. Excess nutrients from slurry, chemical fertiliser and pesticides used in agricultural activities have also been detected. In a karst landscape such as this, contamination can rapidly enter groundwater, negatively impacting aquatic species and drinking water supplies.

The Pettigo Plateau is designated for the Annex I Greenland white-fronted goose and maintaining this area in a favourable state is a priority. Geese graze on its peatlands and surrounding areas, however, loss and degradation of foraging habitat is an issue. Actions for farmers to reverse impacts are included in the ACRES programme.



## 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 effect of climate change.

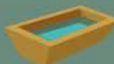
Non-Productive Investments (NPIs) and Landscape Actions (LAs) are measures that farmers can apply for through their farm advisor and through the Donegal Co-operation team. An important element of the Donegal Local Action Plan is that we will focus these actions - 'right measure, right place' - to achieve 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). This includes improving aquatic habitats in the sub-region to support freshwater pearl mussel populations and white-clawed crayfish.

The CP team will work with farmers to choose actions that will support the goals of the 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 on your land.



#### NPI: Tree Planting

Plant native trees for carbon capture, to help soak up excess nutrients, and provide nesting and feeding areas for wildlife.



#### LA: Targeted Grazing

Change livestock density to improve ground 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 Lough Derg 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 to manage overgrazing and undergrazing and reduce occurrence of *Molinia*.
- Support hen harrier through targeted NPIs and LAs.
- Support geese and swans through targeted NPIs.
- A key focus of the measures implemented through ACRES should attempt to address the need to restore or protect freshwater pearl mussel waterbodies which cover large parts of the sub-region. Measures will be aimed at reducing nutrient input and sediment into rivers.
- Nutrient, chemical and organic pollution are significant pressures across the sub-region and these may be addressed with landscape actions such as specialised training 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.
- Measures to support crayfish populations in a number of locations will be investigated.
- Control of *Rhododendron ponticum* in the Bridgetown high status waters.



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

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We have offices in:

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