



**ACRES**  
D O N E G A L  
CO - O P E R A T I O N P R O G R A M M E

# Donegal Local Action Plan RIVER FINN

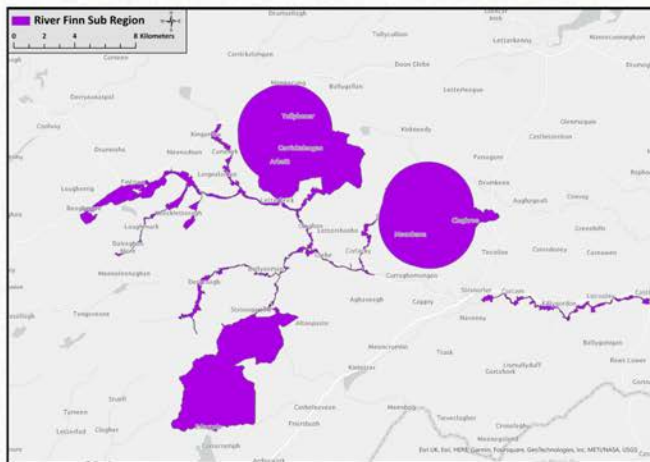


An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



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## RIVER FINN SUB-REGION

The River Finn sub-region covers an area of 12,620 ha and contains one of the most significant water systems in the North west - the River Finn SAC. The river is renowned for its excellent salmon fishing although the number of fish has declined in recent years. Agriculture and forestry are the dominant activities but there are also large areas of wet heath and blanket bogs attracting several important bird species. The main agricultural activities are cattle grazing, suckler and dairy especially in the Finn Valley area. Sheep are grazing in the uplands and lowlands.

## NATURA SITES & HIGH STATUS WATERBODIES

The River Finn sub-region has 4 designated European sites and just one high status waterbody, the Corabber Blue Dot. As this waterbody runs into the Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood Special Area of Conservation (SAC), for the purposes of the ACRES Co-operation programme it is also dealt with through the Lough Derg Local Action Plan. It is clear that water quality is declining in the Corabber and this catchment has been identified by the EPA as an area requiring restoration. ACRES will build on this work and collaborate with farmers and relevant agencies.

### Natura Sites

- Meentygrannagh Bog SAC
- River Finn SAC
- Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood SAC
- Derryveagh and Glendowan Mountains SPA

The River Finn sub-region has one of the most sensitive aquatic species in Ireland in the Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood SAC - the freshwater pearl mussel. Rivers that contain freshwater pearl mussels are sensitive to changes such as an increase in flow energy, increase in siltation and low oxygen levels. Actions to protect this species by improving water quality will be an important aspect of the local action plan.

Considerable work has been carried out through the European funded CatchmentCARE project which ended in April 2023. Rivers such as the Elatagh and Cummirk benefitted from focused work and the Donegal CP team will seek to build on this work with farmers based on these rivers. Other rivers that have also shown a decline, such as the Deele, Finn and Cloghroe, will also be a focus of the River Finn Local Action Plan.

The River Finn region is an important area for breeding curlew, with two of the last breeding pairs in the county having nested in the region in recent years.

Other important species in the area include golden plover, dunlin, merlin, peregrine falcon, lamprey, European eel, Atlantic salmon and Arctic char.





## PRESSURES & IMPACTS

The main pressures in the River Finn sub-region have been identified as excessive nutrients running off into rivers as a result of agriculture activities and chemical pollution (from sheep dip). Forestry and urban waste water are also pressures but these are not dealt with through the ACRES programme. Drainage has also been identified as an issue, as well as physical changes to stream channels such as straightening or widening.

These pressures have resulted in excess sediment in rivers affecting species like the freshwater pearl mussel, Atlantic salmon, lamprey and other species that depend on clean water. Pesticides such as sheep dip have devastating effects on the small insects living in these rivers which are food for the larger fish species.

Breeding waders are also impacted by drainage and runoff that pollutes the local water.



## 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 Co-operation team. An important element of the Donegal Local Action Plan is that we will target 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 habitats like grassland for breeding waders such as curlew.

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 River Finn 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 and grassland management to suit species dependent on grassland habitat (breeding waders).
- Install temporary predator fences on valuable breeding wader sites along with wader scrapes and scrub management.
- A key focus of the measures implemented through ACRES should attempt to address the need to restore or protect freshwater pearl mussel waterbodies. Actions should be aimed at reducing sedimentation to the local rivers, in particular the Corrabber.
- Support water quality improvement actions in the Corabber Blue Dot catchment.
- Particular focus on the Deelee, Cloghroe and Finn rivers looking at reducing nutrient/chemical input - specialised training through a Landscape Action on the use of chemicals and pesticides near water and an explanation of the Source-Pathway-Receptor model.
- Run off and nutrient input – NPIs and Landscape Action measures to address in particular riparian buffers and drain management.
- Commonage Plans – Landscape Actions, formation of commonage groups and group discussion on drainage etc.



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

Website: [www.acresdonegal.ie](http://www.acresdonegal.ie)

Email: [info@acresdonegal.ie](mailto:info@acresdonegal.ie)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/acresdonegal](https://www.facebook.com/acresdonegal)

Twitter/X: [twitter.com/acresdonegal](https://twitter.com/acresdonegal)

We have offices in:

➤ Drumfries

➤ Carndonagh

➤ Letterkenny

➤ Leshowney, near Donegal town