

Natura Communities Case Study

Project Background

The Bundorragha is one of the most important river catchments in Ireland for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel (*Margaritifera margaritifera*). The catchment is also comprised of extensive areas of high quality peatland and upland habitats, incorporating an area of 4,065ha of both privately owned lands and commonage. Most farmers in this area are participating in the Pearl Mussel Project (PMP) European Innovation Partnership (EIP), a Results-based Agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBPS). The majority of the lands in the Bundorragha Catchment form part of the Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) within the Natura 2000 network.

The Problem

Lands within the PMP programme are subject to annual assessment of habitat quality. Of the agricultural lands assessed in the programme, approximately 12% are recorded as being in sub-optimal condition due to the presence of the non-native invasive species, Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*). The maturity and density of the Rhododendron varies throughout this area from sparsely distributed immature seedlings to dense thickets of mature plants.

Project Aims

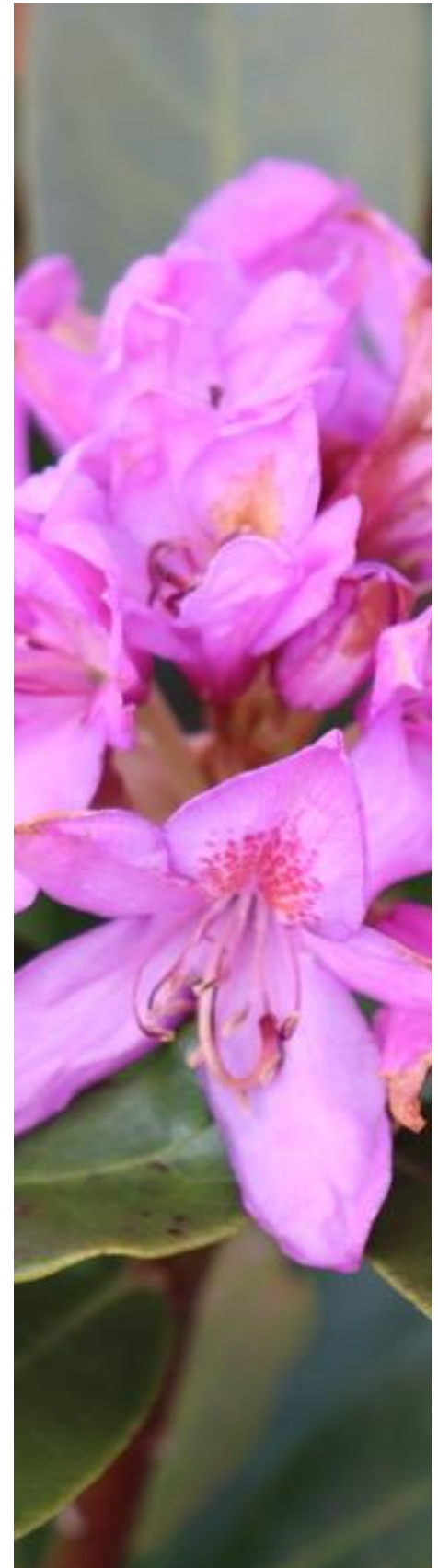
- To develop and demonstrate a rhododendron control programme for the entire Bundorragha River Catchment, County Mayo.
- To build capacity in the local community to equip them to tackle this major threat to local biodiversity.
- To provide a template of how similar projects could be run elsewhere in Ireland.

Project Plan

The project team, in collaboration with the local community and relevant stakeholders, will develop a control programme for Rhododendron at the catchment level.

As part of this project the implementation of the programme will be tested within a sample area that can develop the most suitable control techniques across typical scenarios where rhododendron occurs, e.g. varying densities, habitats, and locations.

This pilot study will help inform the approach to implementing a catchment wide plan.



The projects will build on the learnings of other projects such as the [MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP](#) and the [North Connemara EIP](#), both these projects have developed innovative approaches in partnership with farmers towards addressing the threat posed by Rhododendron in their respective areas.

Project Stages

- Project launch
- Stakeholder and community engagement
- Catchment wide survey of Rhododendron extent and distribution
- Training local groups in best practice eradication methods
- Testing eradication in various scenarios within catchment
- Develop final action plan for Phase II implementation

Who is involved?

The Bundorragha Catchment Rhododendron Control Project is a community led project being headed by Leenane Development Association. This project is funded by National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage via LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature, a project that focuses on adding value to our Natura 2000 network of sites for landowners, communities and the wider public, with a particular focus on blanket bogs.

- Leenane Development Association
- Pearl Mussel Project EIP
- LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature
- Wetlands Survey Ireland
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- Mayo County Council
- South West Mayo Development Company
- Coillte
- Local Authorities Waters Programme (LAWPRO)
- Irish Farmers Association
- Irish Natura & Hill Farmers Association

Project Co-ordinator

“Living and farming in Bundorragha you come to realise that you have inherited a legacy of a pristine landscape that is home to the best population of the Freshwater Pearl Mussel in Europe. With the arrival of the Pearl Mussel Project EIP, it meant for the first time we had the expertise on the ground to show us what we were doing right and what we could do to help enhance the quality of the vegetation and water that is so important for the protection of this very rare species, which lives for up to 120 years. One of the biggest threats to the Freshwater Pearl Mussel is the invasive species Rhododendron as it could squeeze out the native upland vegetation in the catchment. When Rhododendron was first introduced into the area, little did anyone know how ideal the conditions were for it to really start to become a major problem. Therefore, it’s really exciting that we have secured funding via LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature to put a programme in place that will hopefully eventually lead to the eradication of Rhododendron in the whole Bundorragha river catchment area.”

Martin Gavin, Leenane Development Association



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An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

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