

## Natura Communities Case Study

### Project Background

In seeking to address the issue of turf cutting on Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and the harmful impacts to blanket bogs associated with this practice, as well as the health and welfare of householders, LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature in conjunction with Forum Connemara are seeking to establish a pilot project to trial a retrofitting and habitat restoration project to inform future policy.

### The Problem

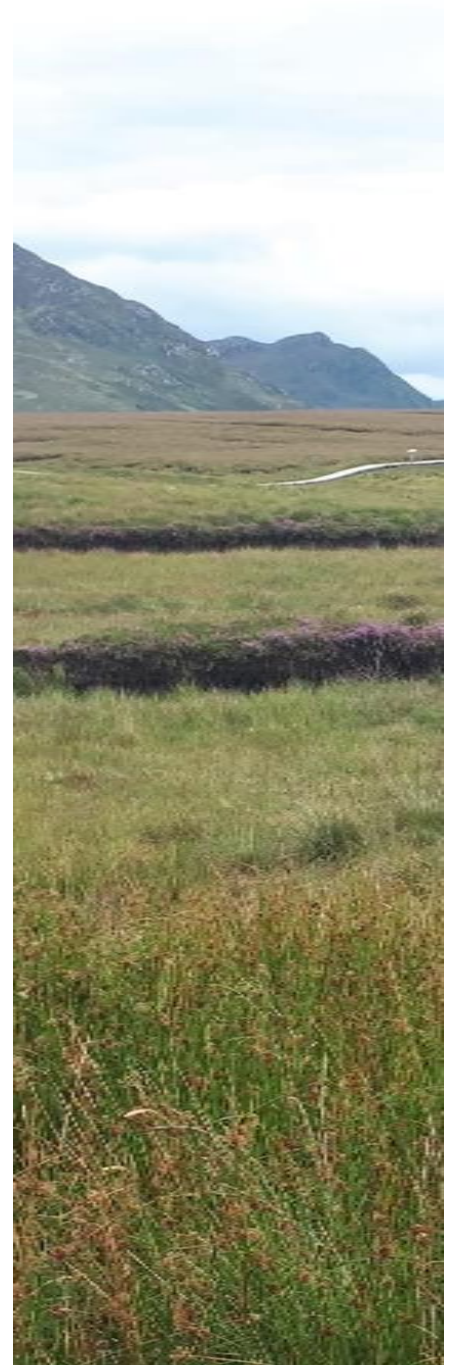
Turf is an important domestic fuel for some households. Turf cutting and peat extraction from our blanket bog SACs is impacting both habitat quality and ecological functioning of bogs. Bogs are a natural carbon sink, and the opening of turf banks dries out the bog and the carbon that was once locked in the peat is released back into the atmosphere. The burning of fossil fuels, including turf, for heating our homes can have negative health impacts on householders. Many farmers with lands in blanket bog SACs are participating in the ACRES Results-based Agri-environment Payment Scheme (RBPS). Where there is active turbary (turf cut in assessment year) points will be deducted from farm scores resulting in decreased payments for participants.

### Project Aims

- To develop a template for reducing dependence on turf in the pilot Natura 2000 areas and to demonstrate the process using pilot households with turbary rights in the northwest.
- To use existing funding opportunities such as SEAI retrofitting grants to retrofit homes that rely on turbary on SACs.
- To establish alternative fuel source(s) as appropriate.
- To develop a restoration plan for associated turbary areas to safeguard the conservation of the site into the future.

### Project Plan

The plan for the project is to work with homeowners with turbary rights to develop a plan for their household, which includes retrofitting, establishing an appropriate alternative fuel source (if necessary), and developing a restoration plan for the turbary areas. Participants will be assisted with applications for the relevant retrofit grants and management of suppliers in the retrofits of their homes. Suitable restoration actions in the turbary areas will be identified to go towards restoring the integrity of the site for improving its conservation status.



## Project Stages

- Engagement & communications to include inputs from all relevant stakeholders
- Review of best practice by assessing similar projects elsewhere
- Design of pilot project with detailed strategy to include governance, communications, and specific targets
- Implementation of the pilot project
- Project reporting to include procedure undertaken and if pilot is successful to propose a further roll-out including costing.

## Who is involved?

The Land Use & Domestic Energy Project is being led by Forum Connemara. 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.

The project involves getting a range of stakeholders involved on different aspects of the project. These stakeholders are listed below (not an exhaustive list):

- Forum Connemara
- LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Land owners
- Land managers
- Farmers
- Farming associations
- Turf cutters
- Forestry organisations
- Private businesses, including tourism and recreational interests
- Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications
- Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
- National Parks and Wildlife Service
- Mayo County Council
- Local community groups



WILD ATLANTIC  
NATURE LIFE



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

See our website for more case studies: <https://www.naturacommunities.ie/>