Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Adoption of Invasive Alien Species control and Peatland Restoration Plan within the Natura 2000 Network in County Mayo in accordance with Regulation 42A EC (Birds and Natural) Habitats Regulations 2011-2021

Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
npws.ie

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1. Introduction

This determination on Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) has been made by the Ecological Assessment Unit (EAU) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011-2021 ('the 2011 Regulations").[1]

On the 25th April 2025, in accordance with the requirements of Regulation 42A(3) of the 2011-2021 Regulations, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage ('the Minister') furnished the EAU with a request for a Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) determination for proposed peatland restoration and Invasive Alien Species control measures within five Nature 2000 sites in the County Mayo. The project, being conducted by the EU LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature, will build on previous iterations of the Natura Communities (Dúlra project) in enhancing local capacity to undertake invasive species control and peatland restoration including associated woodland and riparian habitats. The Natura 2000 sites subject to the project are: Corraun Plateau SAC [Site Code: 000485]; Croaghan/Slievemore SAC [Site Code: 001955]; Lough Gall Bog SAC [Site Code: 000522]; Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC [Site Code 000500], and; Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC [Site Code: 000534].

The EAU have evaluated and analysed the information contained in the referred to above documents and location maps provided and carried out a determination. The purpose of this document is to provide a record and an audit trail of the EAU reasoned thinking in view of best scientific knowledge and the Conservation Objectives of European Sites.

[1] As inserted by Regulation 7 of the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) (Amendment).

2. Background

Pursuant to Regulation 42A(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011 (S.I. 477 of 2011), a Screening for AA is required to be carried out on the project. AA is a process required under Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive. Article 6(3) is transposed in Ireland by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), as amended, and by Part XAB of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended.

All plans and projects which are not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site, but which either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, are likely to have a significant effect on a “European Site”, require an AA of these effects to determine if they will adversely affect the integrity of these sites. The proposed conservation measures are considered to fall under the requirements of AA as applied to all plans and projects.

The Screening for AA process scrutinises the plan or project to determine if there is potential for likely significant effects either individually or in combination with other plans or projects, on a European Site. European Sites are part of the Natura 2000 network and include those designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC), Candidate SACs (cSACs) or Special Protection Areas (SPA). This Screening for Appropriate Assessment describes the outcome of this analysis in respect of the project.

3. Legislation and Guidance

This section provides details on the adopted methodology with sources of guidance and information gathered to inform the preparation of the report.

3.1. Guidance and Data Sources

- Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle. European Commission (2000);
- European Commission. (2001) Assessment of Plans and Projects Significantly Affecting Natura 2000 Sites: Methodical Guidance on the Provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
- European Commission. (2007) Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
- Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. (2010) Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities;
- Appropriate Assessment under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive; Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 and PSSP 2/10;
- European Commission. (2018) Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provision of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC;
- Office of the Planning Regulator. (2021) Practice Note PN01 - AA Screening for Development Management;
- Official Journal of the European Union. (2021) Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6(3) and (4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (Volume 64; 2021/C 437/01);
- Higgins, G.T. (2008) Rhododendron ponticum: A guide to management on nature conservation sites. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 33. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin, Ireland;
- Maclean, J.E., Genney, D., Hall, J., Mitchell, R.J., Burslem, F.R.P. & Pakeman, R.J. 2019. The effect of clearing invasive Rhododendron ponticum on the native plant community of Atlantic oak woodland. Scottish Natural Heritage Research Report No. 1157*;*
- Monaco, A., and Genovesi, P. (2014) European Guidelines on Protected Areas and Invasive Alien Species, Council of Europe, and;
- Peatland ACTION – Technical Compendium. Peatland ACTION sharing good practice for peatland restoration techniques. NatureScot (2022).

3.2. Assessment Methodology

This report is based on review of desktop data. Sources of information utilised for this report and accessed during May 2025 include the following:

- National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS) Designations Viewer[2]; and,
- National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) Maps[3].

3.3. Legislative Background

According to the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC), Member States are required to establish a Natura 2000 network of sites of highest biodiversity importance for rare and threatened habitats and species across the EU.

In Ireland, the Natura 2000 network of European sites comprises SACs, candidate SACs and SPAs.

SACs are selected for the conservation of Annex I habitats (including priority types which are in danger of disappearance) and Annex II species (other than birds). SPAs are selected for the conservation of Annex I birds and all migratory birds and their habitats. The Annex habitats and species, for which each site is selected, are the Qualifying Interests (QI) for SACs and Special Conservation Interests (SCI) for SPAs of each site. Conservation Objectives for the site are defined for these QI or SCI.

A key requirement of the Habitats Directive is that the effects of any plan or project, which is not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European Site, but which alone, or in combination with, other plans or projects, are likely to have a significant effect on a European Site, should be assessed before any decision is made to allow that plan or project to proceed. The obligation to undertake a screening for AA, and if necessary, an AA, derives from Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive and both involve a number of steps and tests that need to be applied in sequential order.

Article 6(3) is concerned with the strict protection of sites, while Article 6(4) is the procedure for allowing derogation from this strict protection in certain restricted circumstances.

[2] National Parks & Wildlife Service Designation Viewer. Accessed at ArcGIS Web Application 06/05/2025

[3] National Biodiversity Data Centre Maps. Accessed at Maps - Biodiversity Maps (biodiversityireland.ie) 06/05/2025

Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive states:

> "Any plan or project not directly connected with, or necessary to, the management of the site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subject to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site's conservation objectives. In the light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implications for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public".

Article 6(4) states:

> "If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted.
>
> Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species, the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest."

The competent authority is required to carry out a screening for AA, and if necessary, an AA as required by Article 6(3) of the Habitats Directive. If the competent authority determines that the plan or project will adversely affect the integrity of a European site, it may only authorise that plan or project by following the Article 6(4) procedure.

The Article 6(3) and 6(4) procedures are outlined as follows:

Stage 1 - Screening for Appropriate Assessment – to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge, if the project or plan, individually or in combination with another plan or project is likely to have a significant effect on the Natura 2000 site.

Stage 2 - Appropriate Assessment – This is required if it cannot be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the project or plan, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will have a significant effect on a Natura 2000 site. The AA must include a final determination by the competent authority as to whether or not a proposed project would adversely affect the integrity of a Natura 2000 site. In order to reach a final determination, the competent authority must undertake examination, analysis and evaluation, followed by findings, conclusions and a final determination. The appropriate assessment must contain complete, precise and definitive findings and conclusions, and may not have lacunae or gaps.

Stage 3 – Assessment of alternative solutions - the process which examines alternative ways of achieving the objectives of the project or plan that avoid adverse impacts on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site.

Stage 4 - Assessment where no alternative solutions exist and where adverse impacts remain - an assessment of compensatory measures where, in the light of an assessment of imperative reasons of overriding public interest (IROPI), it is deemed that the project or plan should proceed.

Under Regulation 42A(1) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations, 2011-2021 (S.I. 293 of 2021), the Ecological Assessment Unit is the competent authority in relation to screening for AA of projects and plans (such as the proposed conservation measures) which the Minister proposes to undertake or adopt.

4. Overview of the Project

Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP, a 9-year EU-funded LIFE Integrated Project, works with farmers, local communities and land owners to add value to the wide range of services provided from our Special Area of Conservation (SAC) network of blanket bogs and associated areas. These peatlands provide clean drinking water, store carbon, support biodiversity, produce high quality food and support resilient rural economies and livelihoods through farming, tourism, recreation and other activities. As part of the project, a pilot voluntary Results Based Payment Scheme (RBPS) will be linked to the quality of the habitat, thereby putting landowners and their skills, expertise and knowledge of their land central to the development of the project.

Focussing on 35 blanket bog sites, this aims to improve the conservation status in Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) of blanket bog, a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive.

The project will also implement a number of actions aimed at enhancing wider community engagement in the project. These include establishing local support groups across the project sites, developing and implementing community knowledge exchange programmes, administering community outreach activities, developing a schools' education programme, supporting communities to develop and manage tourism and recreational activities and develop appropriate infrastructure.

Other actions will include site surveys, ecological assessments, training for conservation actions, control of invasive species, fire prevention, water management and monitoring and evaluation.

The LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN) has been separated into distinct Natura Community (NC) regions (Figure 1). This project is within the Erris NC, encompassing five Special Areas of Conservation.

4.1. Corraun Plateau SAC

The site is situated on the Corraun Peninsula to the south-east of Achill Island, Co. Mayo. Corraun Hill on the summit plateau rises from sea level at its southern boundary to 542 m O.D. and to 541 m O.D. above Lough Cullydoo. The site is dominated by heath-type vegetation, in combination with pockets of peat and rock and a scattering of small lakes. Because the site is bounded to the south by the sea, it displays an interesting range of habitats in a continuum from shore to mountain summit. Wet heath and dry heath are the dominant habitats at this site. A variety of blanket bog types are present at the site. The upland blanket bog on Corraun Plateau has been heavily grazed and now has more of a heath character, with a virtual absence of pools and hummocks. There is a small area of plateau bog at approximately 270 m O.D., between the headwaters of two rivers which is relatively intact.

The extent of blanket bog at lower altitudes has been reduced by grazing and turf-cutting. However, there are still pockets of blanket bog where such species as White Beak-sedge (Rhynchospora alba) and Lousewort (Pedicularis sylvatica) are to be found. Oligotrophic lakes occur in association with the blanket bog towards the northern side of the site. Rocky ground within the site, including silicious screes and rocky slopes, supports a variety of plant species. Several rare bryophytes are known within the site. Other habitats present on the site include deciduous woodland, saltmarsh, sea cliffs, rivers, streams and boulder beaches

The main land uses at the site are sheep grazing and turf-cutting. These activities have a critical impact on blanket bog, heath and grassland habitats. Some areas of heath are being colonised by the Invasive Alien Species - *Rhododendron ponticum*. The site is of considerable conservation significance, primarily for the presence of good examples of six habitats that are listed on Annex II of the E.U. Habitats Directive; the presence of populations of several rare or scarce plant species is notable also.

4.2. Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC

Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC is located on the north-western side of Achill Island, in north-west Co. Mayo. The site consists largely of two mountains, Croaghaun and Slievemore, both over 650 m O.D. It is dominated by cliffs which can exceed 300 m, with scree mantling the slopes above the vertical cliffs. From the high cliffs around Croaghaun towards the northern cliff edge is a group of five cirques perched at various levels above the sea. In these corries some very old and degraded moraines are found. Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC contains interesting mix of blanket bog and heath communities. Alpine heath is found at high altitudes in a mosaic with scree and exposed rock, patches of blanket bog and corrie lakes. The montane heath is of particular importance for its communities of oceanic bryophytes, some of which constitute what is known as the north Atlantic hepatic mat community, which descends on Achill to its lowest known altitude. As well as the typical species for this community, a number of rarities are found.

The main land use at the site is grazing, with stock occurring at high densities in places, especially on the lower slopes where the vegetation is eroded down to mineral soil in places. Peat cutting is carried out in some areas. Other land uses include amenity management, involving track development and provision of car parks, and quarrying immediately adjacent to the boundary at the south centre of the site. This site is of ecological interest for its excellent quality heaths and rocky habitats, supporting a range of rare species of vascular plants and bryophytes. The presence of a number of other typical coastal and upland habitats adds habitat diversity to this scenic site.

4.3. Lough Gall Bog SAC

Lough Gall Bog is on a low-lying peninsula on the western side of Bellacragher Bay, a sheltered sea inlet in north-west Co. Mayo. It is a relatively small area of lowland blanket bog, with a good diversity of features typical of the habitat, i.e. hummock and hollow areas, pool systems, streams, flushes, lakes, swallow-holes, islands and natural drains. It is surrounded by the sea to the north, east and south, giving rise to an unusual and natural transition from blanket bog vegetation to saltmarsh and shingle beach.

Lough Gall Bog is currently largely hydrologically intact, with most of the central and eastern part in an undisturbed condition, not damaged by grazing and with intact peat margins. However, the bog is used for peat-cutting, both by hand and by machine. These practices, particularly the latter, threaten bog habitats since they upset their sensitive hydrology. The bog is also used for grazing, which can also threaten the site if not controlled.

Lough Gall Bog is an excellent example of a western lowland blanket bog, with Rhynchosporion vegetation also well represented. The rarity of this habitat type in Europe is recognised in the priority status assigned to active blanket bogs on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive. Lough Gall has good habitat diversity and an interesting flora. The intact nature of the bog, and the unusual transition from bog to coastal habitats, makes this site of considerable conservation value.

4.4. Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC

This large site is situated in the extreme north-west of Co. Mayo, where the climate is wet oceanic, and gales from the Atlantic are frequent. The soils are predominantly peats, with underlying glacial tills usually only visible along water channels and roads. Four main river systems drain the site: the Glenamoy, the Muingnabo, the Belderg and the Glenglassra Rivers. One medium-sized lake, Lougherglass, occurs on the site. Blanket bog, a priority habitat under Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, dominates the site. Glenamoy Bog is a prime example of the extreme oceanic form of lowland blanket bog and is one of the most extensive tracts of bog in the country. The bog occupies a gently undulating plain, but extends uphill to cover the slopes of Maumakeogh and Benmore in the eastern sector of the site, and northward, out toward the sea cliffs of the north-west Mayo coastline. On steep slopes where the peat is shallow, the blanket bog grades into wet heath. Transition mires or quaking bogs occur where the bog vegetation merges with flush type vegetation influenced by base enrichment, and also at the interface between large pools/small lakes and adjacent blanket bog. Rhynchosporion vegetation is best represented around pool margins and in wet hollows, and is often a component of transition mires.

A number of land use practices have damaged parts of this site. Grazing by sheep and cattle is widespread, and over-grazing, which leads to soil erosion, has caused

damage to parts of the blanket bog, heath and machair habitats. Peat cutting, by hand and to a lesser extent by mechanised means, is widespread throughout, though mostly confined to near roads and tracks. The region in general has been heavily afforested with conifers and much of the site is bounded by plantations. This site is of immense ecological importance because of the presence of a number of E.U. Annex I habitats, including two priority habitats - blanket bog and machair. It supports populations of Habitats Directive –listed plant and animal species, as well as six Annex I Birds Directive species. It also has nationally important populations of other seabirds. Despite serious damage to parts of the site in recent years, large areas remain in good condition. Considerable archaeological interest is contained within the site, including the renowned Céide Fields. Furthermore, the site is of outstanding scenic value.

4.5. Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC

This large area of relatively intact blanket bog and mountains incorporates the catchment of the Owenduff River and much of the Nephin Beg Mountain range, and is situated in Co. Mayo. Lough Feeagh, which is located approximately 5 km northwest of Newport Town, lies in the south-east corner of the site. From here, the site extends northwards to the Owenmore River and almost to the town of Bangor Erris, and westwards to the townland of Ballycroy. Within the site, the terrain varies enormously from the peaks of the Nephin Beg Mountains, which reach a maximum altitude of 717 m, to areas where the land slopes westwards to the floodplain of the Owenduff River. The upper slopes of the mountains in the Owenduff/Nephin complex carry wet heath and cliff vegetation, and patches of upland grassland are frequent. The presence of small corrie lakes and rock basin lakes adds to the habitat diversity of the mountains. Along its southern and eastern limits the site is bounded by coniferous plantations and/or the high mountain slopes of the Nephin Begs. Along its northern and western margins the site is fringed by agricultural land reclaimed from bog or from wet floodplain vegetation.

The remote upland areas along the eastern and southern fringes of this site contain approximately 15 oligotrophic lakes, many of which are fine examples of corrie lakes. Dystrophic lakes of various sizes are found in areas of low-lying blanket bog. Wet heath is likely to be widespread throughout this site, and is found in mosaic and transition with the lowland blanket bog. It is mainly found were peat is shallower, and Cross-leaved Heath (Erica tetralix) is characteristic. The mountain tops, cliffs and crags support a high-level rocky vegetation. Quartzites prevail and typically support species-poor vegetation communities. Where outcrops of mica schist occur, a more diverse flora is found.

The site is heavily stocked with sheep. Cattle graze the riversides, but sheep penetrate into the uninhabited valleys and mountain slopes. Blanket bogs are sensitive to damage from over-grazing - the cover of Sphagnum mosses can be depleted and peat erosion can occur. Damage is currently severe on the slopes west

of Lough Feeagh, where it has contributed to a recent decline in the numbers of Greenland White-fronted Goose which feed there. Peat erosion also threatens water quality in the rivers, which may in turn affect the fish population. Currently, fishing (Brown Trout and Atlantic Salmon) is a popular activity on the site and, together with game-shooting, attracts significant numbers of tourists to the region. The Owenduff/Nephin Complex is one of the best and largest examples of intact blanket bog in the country. The range and quality of habitats present here is excellent, and a number of rare and protected plant and animal species occur. The Owenduff River system is the largest in the country which remains virtually free of conifer plantations. The site is a striking wilderness of bog and mountain, a unique landscape which is of international ecological importance.

4.6. Purpose

Rhododendron ponticum is widely recognised as one of the most problematic non-native invasive species currently threatening Irish biodiversity, particularly our native woodlands. By forming extensive, single species stands it effectively excludes native plant communities from their natural habitats. Increased awareness of its detrimental impacts, coupled with the discovery that it can act as a host for the plant pathogen Phythopthera ramorum, has recently lead to an urgent requirement for *R. ponticum* removal all across Ireland.

Native to South-west Europe and southwest Asia, *R. ponticum* is a large evergreen shrub with leathery leaves, purple to pink flowers and solid stems forming into a trunk when mature. *R. ponticum* spreads by both suckers and seed. Each flower head can produce between three thousand and seven thousand small seeds which can remain viable in the soil for several years. Larger plants can produce several million seeds per year. The small seeds are dispersed up to 100 metres by wind and water under favourable open conditions.

Once *Rhododendron* has invaded an area, few native plants survive. In woodlands, only those trees which manage to grow above the level of the Rhododendron canopy will persist. When such trees die, they cannot be replaced because seedlings cannot become established under the lightless canopy. At this point, the *R. ponticum* completely dominates the area and stands accumulate into thick dense patches.

Potentially toxic chemicals, particularly 'free' phenols, occur in significant quantities in the tissues of Rhododendron, such that foliage is unpalatable to vertebrates (therefore not naturally suppressed through grazing or browsing), and few insects feed on the plant. Another potentially major impact of *R. ponticum* is its effect on native tree species, notably Oak (*Quercus*) and nursery stock through the fungus-like pathogens *Phytophthora ramorum* and *P. kernoviae*, which are harboured by Rhododendron.

The importance of the threat of invasive alien species is reflected in a suite of international, European and national policy and legislation.

Habitats Directive (Article 6.2) obliges Member States to take appropriate steps to avoid the deterioration of natural habitats and the significant disturbance of the species for which a site has been designated. In this context 'taking appropriate steps' means for the Minister to adopt the necessary legal and/or contractual measures to make sure that the deterioration of the natural habitats for which the Twelve Bens/Garraun Complex Special Area of Conservation has been designated is avoided.

In September 2011, comprehensive regulations which address deficiencies in Irish law implementing the EU Birds and Habitats Directives were signed into law. The European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 contain important new provisions to address the problem of invasive species. A black list of unwanted species is set out in the Regulations. It will be an offence without a licence, to release or allow to disperse or escape, to breed, propagate, import, transport, sell or advertise such species. Two regulations that deal specifically with these scheduled lists of species are:

Regulation 49: Prohibition on introduction and dispersal of certain species.

The Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at their tenth meeting set out a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity with 20 headline targets for 2020 organized under five strategic goals. The mission of the Strategic Plan is to —take effective and urgent action to halt the loss of biodiversity in order to ensure that by 2020 ecosystems are resilient and continue to provide essential services.

Target 9 states: By 2020, invasive alien species and pathways are identified and prioritized, priority species are controlled or eradicated, and measures are in place to manage pathways to prevent their introduction and establishment.

On September 29th, 2014, the European Council adopted a Regulation on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species [1143/2014]. The Regulation, that is a binding legal tool for all Member States, entered into force January 1st 2015. The Regulation lays down rules to prevent, minimise and mitigate the adverse impacts of the introduction and spread, both intentional and unintentional, of invasive alien species on biodiversity and the related ecosystem services, as well as other adverse impact on human health or the economy.

On 25th January 2024, Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP), for the period 2023-2030 was launched with 5 objectives. The plan aims to deliver the transformative changes required to the ways in which we value and protect nature. The 4th NBAP has been developed with the support, advice and input of the interdepartmental Biodiversity Working Group and the independent Biodiversity Forum. Objective 2 focuses on invasive species management.

Action 1D5 states that NPWS will continue to support Local Authorities biodiversity projects through the LBAF, which includes action on invasive alien species, throughout the lifetime of this Plan.

Outcome 2H includes actions related to Invasive alien species (IAS) are controlled and managed on an all-island basis to reduce the harmful impact they have on biodiversity and measures are undertaken to tackle the introduction and spread of new IAS to the environment.

5. Project Description

This proposed project intends to:

1. Develop and run *Rhododendron ponticum* control programmes within the Erris Natura Community (NC) area as outlined (Figure 1). This programme will be informed by maps of the respective target areas (Figures 7-11) within five Special Areas of Conservation (Figures 2-6). The control programme will be run in collaboration with the local community and relevant stakeholders.

2. Conduct mapping of *R. ponticum* in target areas within the Corraun Plateau SAC; Croaghan/Slievemore SAC; Lough Gall Bog SAC; Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, and; Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC as outlined in figures 2 - 6 and subsequently extend the control programme to those areas.

3. Implement a Peatland Restoration Action Plan (completion by October 2025) for 350 ha at Briska within Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, as outlined in figures 10 and 11, to follow methods contained within the NatureScot technical compendium[4].

4. Integrate a social component of public awareness, community and stakeholder engagement and education to foster widespread understanding and active participation in these large-scale conservation efforts.

5. Establish biodiversity monitoring plots in key peatland habitats to provide evidence of peatland vegetation community recovery within the target areas (c.5,500 ha) across the Natura 2000 network. The establishment of demonstration sites in Achill and Glenamoy will support the further roll-out of conservation measures to the remainder of the sites, facilitated by trained personnel from within local communities.

5.1. Rhododendron ponticum control

Stem treatment will be the method used to control *R. ponticum*, whereby a solution of glyphosate will be applied to the cut or broken stems of the plant. This is now a widely practised Standard Methodology recognised as a best available technique, outlined in "*Rhododendron ponticum*: A guide to management on nature conservation sites" Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 33[5].

[4] Peatland ACTION – Technical Compendium. Peatland ACTION sharing good practice for peatland restoration techniques. NatureScot (2022).

[5] Higgins, G.T. (2008) Rhododendron ponticum: A guide to management on nature conservation sites. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 33. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin, Ireland.

The only herbicide to be used is glyphosate. The most appropriate herbicide currently available for Rhododendron ponticum control is *Roundup™ Biactive (≡ Roundup™ Probiactive)*.

- Removal of plants less than 20cm in height: Plants will be pulled manually ensuring all root stock is fully removed from the ground and all associated earth is fully shaken off;

- Removal of plants greater than 20cm in height: For plants with a stem diameter of less than 2cm the stem can be broken at the base ensuring that the stem is not fully severed and a 14% solution of glyphosate (6 parts water to 1 part glyphosate) can be manually applied to the broken area. For plants with stem diameter greater than 2cm, a notch will be cut with a hatchet from two sides of each stem and the solution of 14% herbicide manually applied;

- No Foliar Spraying: Foliar spraying is not permitted, ensuring no potential hydrological pathway exists during the course of *R. ponticum* clearance;

- Contractor Materials: Storage of materials and refilling of equipment for *R. ponticum* clearance will be off site and in a secure location. All materials used for the treatment of *R. ponticum* will be removed from the areas on completion of works; and,

- Retreatment and Regrowth: While it may take as long as up to 7 months for the herbicide to take full effect and for the plants to fully die, the treated areas will be inspected by NPWS staff and trained personnel to ensure correct methodologies are being applied by visual inspection of treated plants.

    - Where following visual inspection it is deemed that the Rhododendron plants in the area have not all been eradicated these will be effectively retreated within six months.

    - All cleared sites in an area where seed input is ongoing will require ongoing management so that re-infestation from seed is not allowed to succeed.

    - The project must regularly and systematically be followed-up as required to deal with re-growth and seedling germination within the defined management areas.

    - As long as an external seed source remains, repeated systematic sweeps through the site will be required, to prevent newly established plants from reaching flowering age and setting seed.

The Project Manager will liaise with Regional NPWS staff to ensure that surveys and up to date field data informs the roll out of the control project. If elements of the project are required to take place during the bird nesting season (1st March- 31st

August inclusive), there is provision for, notwithstanding anything contained in Section 40 of the Wildlife Act 1976-2023 (prohibits the cutting, grubbing, burning or other destruction of vegetation growing on “any land not then cultivated” between 1st March and 31st August annually), the authorisation for the destruction of vegetation comprising the species of flora that the Minister considers poses a threat to the objectives of the Birds Directive or the Habitats Directive under Regulation 49(13) of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) 2011 - 2021. The Project Manager and/or a NPWS Authorised Officer will ensure this work is undertaken under licence and that the project can progress (access, route and egress) in compliance with Section 22 and Section 23 of those Acts prior to works (where applicable).

The Project Manager will ensure best practice guidance on correct invasive and non-native species control procedures are adhered to. Work will be reviewed by the Project Manager and/or a NPWS Authorised Officer at regular intervals to ensure that correct procedures are being followed.

The distribution and scale of *R. ponticum* infestation in the target area will be mapped using field surveys. A 5 point scale will be used to quantify the level of infestation. The resulting maps will be digitised in GIS standard NPWS format, with map layers showing *R. ponticum* cover (by infestation level) and the receiving habit type (by Fossitt habitat category).

The foundations for successful delivery of the proposed project will largely be put in place via the current Dúlra project which aims to have a trained local work force for delivery of the proposed works across the NC.

The development of these initiatives within targeted areas will facilitate the mapping of invasive species over time and enable progress monitoring. This approach, should build capacity to set up the administrative process within relevant Natura Communities for similar future initiatives.

6. Part 1: Necessary conservation measures

Answer these questions if the activity is “directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site”. Otherwise go to Part 2.

a). List the European site(s) and the relevant Conservation Objectives (include version number of the Conservation Objective).

Corraun Plateau SAC [Site code: 000485].

NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Corraun Plateau SAC 000485. Version 1. Accessed 07th May 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000485.pdf

Qualifying Interests

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Bad**

European dry heaths [4030]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Bad**

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Bad**

Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Favourable**

Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (*Androsacetalia alpinae* and *Galeopsietalia ladani*) [8110]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Inadequate**

Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Inadequate**

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* in Corraun Plateau SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; lichens and bryophytes; ericoid species and crowberry; dwarf shrub species; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: Sphagnum condition; signs of browsing; and, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground; drainage.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

European dry heaths [4030]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of European dry heaths in Corraun Plateau SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; cover of positive indicator species; dwarf shrub composition; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: senescent ling; signs of browsing; burning; growth phases of ling.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground

- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Alpine and Boreal heaths in Corraun Plateau SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes; positive indicators species; dwarf shrub species; negative indicator species; and, non-native species.
- Vegetation structure: signs of grazing; signs of browsing; and, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground; drainage.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands in Corraun Plateau SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Juniper formation size.
- Vegetation structure: female fruiting plants; seedling recruitment; live juniper;
- Vegetation of composition: negative indicator species.
- Physical structure: germination niches.
- Formation structure: browning/die-back of plants; and, evidence of browsing and bark stripping.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) [8110]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) in Corraun Plateau SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; positive indicator species; grass species and dwarf shrubs; and, bracken, native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: grazing and browsing; and, disturbance;
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation in Corraun Plateau SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species; non-native species; bracken, and, native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: grazing and browsing
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Croughaun/Slievemore SAC [Site code: 001955].

NPWS (2021) Conservation Objectives: Croughaun/Slievemore SAC 001955. Version 1. Accessed 07th May 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO001955.pdf

Qualifying Interests

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Bad**

European dry heaths [4030]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Bad**

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Bad**

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Bad**

Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (*Androsacetalia alpinae* and *Galeopsietalia ladani*) [8110]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Inadequate**

Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: **Inadequate**

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* in Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients

- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; lichens and bryophytes; ericoid species and crowberry; dwarf shrub species; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: Sphagnum condition; signs of browsing; and, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground; drainage.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

European dry heaths [4030]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of European dry heaths in Croughaun/Slievemore SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; cover of positive indicator species; dwarf shrub composition; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: senescent ling; signs of browsing; burning; growth phases of ling.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Alpine and Boreal heaths in Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes; positive indicators species; dwarf shrub species; negative indicator species; and, non-native species.
- Vegetation structure: signs of grazing; signs of browsing; and, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground; drainage.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Blanket bogs (* if active bog) in Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; cover of positive indicator species; dwarf shrub composition; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: senescent ling; signs of browsing; burning; growth phases of ling.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) [8110]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Siliceous scree of the montane to snow levels (Androsacetalia alpinae and Galeopsietalia ladani) in Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; positive indicator species; grass species and dwarf shrubs; and, bracken, native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: grazing and browsing; and, disturbance;
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation in Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species; non-native species; bracken, and, native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: grazing and browsing
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Lough Gall Bog SAC [Site code: 000522].

NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Lough Gall Bog SAC 000522. Version 1. Accessed 07th May 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000522.pdf

Qualifying Interests

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Bad**

Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Bad**

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Blanket bogs (* if active bog) in Lough Gall Bog SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; cover of positive indicator species; dwarf shrub composition; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: senescent ling; signs of browsing; burning; growth phases of ling.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion in Lough Gall Bog SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species, *Rhynchospora spp,* potential dominant species, negative indicator species, non-native species, native trees and scrub
- Vegetation structure: *Sphagnum* condition, signs of browsing, burning
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground, drainage, erosion
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC [Site code: 000500].

NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC 000500. Version 1. Accessed 07th May 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000500.pdf

Qualifying Interests

Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Inadeqaute**

Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Inadequate**

Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Bad**

Humid dune slacks [2190]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Inadequate**

Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Inadequate**

Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds [3160]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Inadequate**

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with Erica tetralix [4010]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Bad**

Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Favourable**

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Bad**

Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Bad**

Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Bad**

Salmo salar (Salmon) [1106]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Inadequate**

Petalophyllum ralfsii (Petalwort) [1395]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Favourable**

Saxifraga hirculus (Marsh Saxifrage) [1528]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Favourable**

Hamatocaulis vernicosus (Slender Green Feather-moss) [6216]

~ Overall assessment of conservation status: **Favourable**

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts [1230]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Vegetated sea cliffs of the Atlantic and Baltic coasts in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat length
- Habitat distribution
- Physical structure: functionality and hydrological regime
- Vegetation structure: zonation, vegetation height.
- Vegetation composition: typical species and subcommunities, negative indicator species, bracken and woody species.

Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria (white dunes) [2120]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Shifting dunes along the shoreline with Ammophila arenaria ('white dunes') in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply
- Vegetation structure: zonation
- Vegetation composition: plant health of dune grasses, typical species and sub communities, negative indicator species

Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation (grey dunes) [2130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Fixed coastal dunes with herbaceous vegetation ('grey dunes') in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply
- Vegetation structure: zonation, bare ground, sward height
- Vegetation composition: typical species and sub communities, negative indicator species (including Hippophae rhamnoides), scrub/trees

Humid dune slacks [2190]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Humid dune slacks in Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply, hydrological and flooding regime
- Vegetation structure: zonation, bare ground, vegetation height
- Vegetation composition: typical species and sub communities, cover of Salix repens, negative indicator species, scrub/trees.

Machairs (* in Ireland) [21A0]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Machairs (* in Ireland) in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply, hydrological and flooding regime

- Vegetation structure: zonation, bare ground, sward height
- Vegetation composition: typical species and sub-communities, negative indicator species, scrub/trees, bryophytes.

Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds [3160]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution
- Typical species
- Vegetation composition: characteristic zonation
- Vegetation distribution: maximum depth
- Hydrological regime: water level fluctuations
- Lake substratum quality
- Water quality: transparency, nutrients, phytoplankton biomass, phytoplankton composition, attached algal biomass, macrophyte status
- Acidification status
- Water colour
- Dissolved organic carbon (DOC)
- Turbidity
- Fringing habitat: area

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* in Corraun Plateau SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; lichens and bryophytes; ericoid species and crowberry; dwarf shrub species; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: Sphagnum condition; signs of browsing; and, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground; drainage.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Juniper formation size.
- Vegetation structure: female fruiting plants; seedling recruitment; live juniper;
- Vegetation of composition: negative indicator species.
- Physical structure: germination niches.
- Formation structure: browning/die-back of plants; and, evidence of browsing and bark stripping.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Blanket bogs (* if active bog) in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; cover of positive indicator species; dwarf shrub composition; negative indicator species; non-native species; native trees and shrubs; bracken; and, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: senescent ling; signs of browsing; burning; growth phases of ling.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Transition mires and quaking bogs in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: number of positive indicator species, number of core positive indicator species, cover of positive indicator species, negative indicator species, non-native species
- Vegetation structure: height
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground, drainage
- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion [7150]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species, *Rhynchospora spp,* potential dominant species, negative indicator species, non-native species, native trees and scrub
- Vegetation structure: *Sphagnum* condition, signs of browsing, burning
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground, drainage, erosion
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Salmon *Salmo salar* [1106]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Atlantic Salmon in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Distribution: extent of anadromy
- Adult spawning fish
- Salmon fry abundance
- Out-migrating smolt abundance
- Number and distribution of redds
- Water quality

Petalwort *Petalophyllum ralfsii* [1395]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Petalwort in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Distribution

- Area of suitable habitat
- Hydrological conditions: soil moisture, water table level
- Physical structure: bare soil
- Vegetation structure: vegetation height
- Vegetation composition: shrub cover, grass cover

Marsh Saxifrage Saxifraga hirculus [1528]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Marsh Saxifrage in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Distribution
- Population size: number of rosettes, area of occupancy
- Hydrological conditions: water level
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species, negative indicator species
- Vegetation structure: sward height, grazing level

Slender Green Feather-moss Drepanocladus vernicosus [1393]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Slender Green Feather-moss (Shining Sickle-moss) in Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Distribution
- Population size
- Area of suitable habitat
- Hydrological conditions: water table level
- Vegetation composition: tree cover, shrub cover, grass cover, bryophyte cover, cover of Calliergonella cuspidate.
- Vegetation structure: vegetation height

Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC [Site code: 000534].

NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC 000534. Version 1. Accessed 07th May 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000534.pdf

Qualifying Interests

Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) [3110]

~ Overall conservation status: **Bad**

Oligotrophic to mesotrophic standing waters with vegetation of the Littorelletea uniflorae and/or Isoeto-Nanojuncetea [3130]

~ Overall conservation status: **Inadequate**

Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds [3160]

~ Overall conservation status: **Inadequate**

Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260]

~ Overall conservation status: **Inadequate**

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

~ Overall conservation status: **Bad**

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

~ Overall conservation status: **Bad**

Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]

~ Overall conservation status: **Favourable**

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

~ Overall conservation status: **Bad**

Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]

~ Overall conservation status: **Bad**

Salmon *Salmo salar* [1106]

~ Overall conservation status: **Inadequate**

Otter *Lutra lutra* [1355]

~ Overall conservation status: **Favourable**

Marsh Saxifrage *Saxifraga hirculus* [1528]

~ Overall conservation status: **Favourable**

Slender Green Feather-moss *Drepanocladus vernicosus* [1393]

~ Overall conservation status: **Favourable**

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) [3110]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Oligotrophic waters containing very few minerals of sandy plains (Littorelletalia uniflorae) in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Typical species.
- Vegetation composition: characteristic zonation.
- Vegetation distribution: maximum depth.
- Hydrological regime: water level fluctuation.
- Lake substratum quality.
- Water quality: transparency, nutrients, phytoplankton biomass, phytoplankton composition, attached algal biomass, macrophyte status.
- Acidification status.
- Water colour.
- Dissolved organic carbon (DOC).
- Turbidity.

- Fringing habitat: area and condition.

Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds [3160]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Typical species.
- Vegetation composition: characteristic zonation.
- Vegetation distribution: maximum depth.
- Hydrological regime: water level fluctuations.
- Lake substratum quality.
- Water quality: transparency, nutrients, phytoplankton biomass, phytoplankton composition, attached algal biomass, macrophyte status.
- Acidification status.
- Water colour.
- Dissolved organic carbon (DOC).
- Turbidity.
- Fringing habitat: area and condition.

Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation [3260]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Water courses of plain to montane levels with the Ranunculion fluitantis and Callitricho-Batrachion vegetation in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.

- Hydrological regime: river flow, groundwater discharge.
- Substratum composition: particle size range.
- Water quality.
- Typical species.
- Floodplain connectivity: area.
- Fringing habitats: area and condition.

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients.
- Community diversity.
- Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath, positive indicators species, lichens and bryophytes, ericoid species and crowberry, dwarf shrub species, negative indicator species, non-native species, native trees and shrubs, bracken, soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: *Sphagnum* condition, signs of browsing, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground, drainage.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Alpine and Boreal heaths in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution

- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes, positive indicators species, dwarf shrub species, negative indicator species, non-native species.
- Vegetation structure: signs of grazing, signs of browsing, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Juniperus communis formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands [5130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Juniper population size.
- Vegetation composition: typical species, negative indicator species.
- Vegetation structure: cone bearing plants, seedling recruitment, dead juniper.

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Blanket bogs (* if active bog) in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients, peat formation, hydrology.
- Community diversity.

- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species, lichens and bryophytes, potential dominant species, negative indicator species, non-native species, native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: *Sphagnum* condition, signs of browsing, burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground, drainage, erosion.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

Transition mires and quaking bogs [7140]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Transition mires and quaking bogs in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area.
- Habitat distribution.
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients.
- Community diversity.
- Vegetation composition: number of positive indicator species, number of core positive indicator species, cover of positive indicator species, negative indicator species, non-native species.
- Vegetation structure: height.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground, drainage.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

Salmon *Salmo salar* [1106]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Atlantic Salmon in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Distribution: extent of anadromy.
- Adult spawning fish.
- Salmon fry abundance.
- Out-migrating smolt abundance.

- Number and distribution of redds.
- Water quality

Otter *Lutra lutra* [1355]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Otter in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Distribution.
- Extent of terrestrial habitat.
- Extent of freshwater (river) habitat.
- Extent of freshwater (lake) habitat.
- Couching sites and holts.
- Fish biomass available.
- Barriers to connectivity.

Slender Green Feather-moss *Drepanocladus vernicosus* [1393]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Slender Green Feather-moss (Shining Sickle-moss) in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Distribution.
- Population size.
- Area of suitable habitat.
- Hydrological conditions: water table level.
- Vegetation composition: tree cover, shrub cover, grass cover, bryophyte cover, cover of *Calliergonella cuspidate*.
- Vegetation structure: vegetation height.

Marsh Saxifrage *Saxifraga hirculus* [1528]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Marsh Saxifrage in Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Distribution.
- Population size: number of rosettes, area of occupancy.
- Hydrological conditions: water level.
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species, negative indicator species.
- Vegetation structure: sward structure, grazing level.

b). State how this activity furthers the Conservation Objective(s)

The project will increase awareness of the benefits of peatland conservation and specific conservation measures amongst land-owners and positively influence perceptions of sustainable land management and increase the number of landowners managing lands sustainably and/or facilitating peatland restoration.

Under Article 6 of the EU Habitats Directive, DHLGH is required to ensure the favourable conservation status of all Annex I habitats and Annex II species within SACs. Since Rhododendron is known to negatively alter habitat, the implementation of the removal measures within these sites as outlined above will directly contribute to the Site Specific Conservation Objectives. Notably:

Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* [4010]

- **Community diversity.**
- **Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath, positive indicators species, lichens and bryophytes, ericoid species and crowberry, dwarf shrub species, negative indicator species, non-native species.**

European dry heaths [4030]

- **Community diversity**
- **Vegetation composition: cross leaved heath; positive indicators species; cover of positive indicator species; dwarf shrub composition; negative indicator species; non-native species.**

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

- **Community diversity.**
- **Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes, potential dominant species, negative indicator species, non-native species.**

In the absence of the project, the Conservation Objectives for five Special Areas of Conservation, as outlined above, would not be achieved as there would be continued highly detrimental impacts of Invasive Alien Species; *Rhododendron ponticum*, dramatically reducing levels of native habitat cover and species richness.

Particular threats to European dry heaths, Northern Atlantic wet heaths and blanket bogs will increase, with encroachment and replacement of representative native vegetation and the habitats rich bryophyte and lichen communities. The project will be beneficial to maintaining and working towards achieving favourable conservation condition of the peatland and heath habitats in the site and the typical species of these protected habitat types.

c). Does this activity have the potential to impact negatively on any Conservation Objective (CO), Qualifying Interest (QI)/Special Conservation Interest (SCI) for this or any other European site?

A review of best available scientific information shows no evidence of any chemical legacy through the application of this method of *R. ponticum* treatment in soils, suggesting that chemical impacts do not pose any indirect or legacy effects, or barriers to habitat recovery.

The effect on European Sites and their Qualifying Interests/Special Conservation Interests within a defined Zone of Influence of the project was

assessed using expert opinion. No significant adverse impacts on the QI or SCI features of any other SAC or SPA are anticipated.

Yes ☐ No ☑

d). Are there aspects of this activity which are NOT directly connected with the management of the site?

Yes ☐ No ☑

If the answer to EITHER of the above questions is **Yes** a Screening for AA is required, go to Part 2.

If the answer to BOTH questions is **No** go to Part 5.

7. Part 2: Identification of European Sites within the Potential Zone of Influence of proposed activities

List all European sites which may be affected by this activity because they are linked by an ecological pathway. If the site has a second European designation (SAC, SPA) this also needs to be considered.

8. Part 3: Assess the likelihood of significant effects

Provide this information for **each site** listed in Part 2.

List the QI/SCIs for the site(s), their current conservation condition and the Site Specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO) for that QI/SCI. Then answer the questions about the impact on that QI/SCI.

Tick all the boxes below which may apply.

Your answer will determine if the activity is likely to have a (negative) effect on this QI/SCI. Negative effects may arise because of the activity's location within the site; its proximity to the QI/SCI or the size of the land take involved; the abstraction of

water or minerals; emissions or waste arising; the types of transport or machinery being used; the length of time involved or seasonality of the work.

a). There is likely to be a reduction in the area of QI/SCI habitat ☐

b). The physical/chemical quality of the environment is likely to be changed in a way which may cause the deterioration of the QI/SCI habitat (e.g. applying lime to an acidic soil) ☐

c). The structure of the ecological community is likely to be altered (e.g. through altered species composition) in a way which will have negative impact on the QI/SCI. ☐

d). A QI/SCI species is likely to be disturbed (e.g. through noise, vibrations) ☐

e). The population size, characteristics or reproductive success of a QI/SCI species is likely to be changed either directly or indirectly (e.g. lighting close to a bat roost entrance) ☐

f). QI/SCI species or habitats are likely to be more vulnerable to change or less resilient to external change (e.g. to flooding, fire or drought) ☐

g). There are likely to be effects on other species /habitats (not a QI/SCI for this site) which are ecologically linked with this QI/SCI and, as a consequence, there are likely to be negative effects on this QI/SCI (e.g. the impacts on geese which are the SCI when their non-QI feeding areas are damaged). ☐

h). This activity will cause a deterioration in the conservation condition of this QI/SCI. ☐

i). There are likely to be other ecological effects not listed above which are likely to have a significant effect on the QI/SCI. ☐

Explain the effects:

_____

If you have ticked a box for any QI/SCI in any of the sites affected by this activity the likelihood of a significant effect cannot be ruled out and the activity MUST be screened IN for AA.

9. Part 4: In Combination Effects

Is this activity likely to cause negative effects in combination with any other plan or project?

(In answering this question you should consider any other consents which have been applied for or granted. For example, other ARCs, planning consents, forestry consents, or activities authorised as part of an agreed farm or land management plan. List the plans or projects considered).

_____

_____

No ☑ **Yes** ☐ **Uncertain** ☐

If the answer is Yes or Uncertain the activity MUST be screened IN for AA. Fill in Part 5 accordingly.

10. Part 5: Findings of the Screening for AA

Screening not carried out as the activity is "directly connected with or necessary to the management of the site". ☑

Likely significant effects are expected or uncertain.

This activity Screens **IN** and AA **is** required. ☐

Likely significant effects are NOT expected.

This activity Screens **OUT** AA **is not** required. ☐

Signature: Darren Ellis, Ecological Assessment Unit

Date: 7th May 2025

11. Part 6: Conclusion

Following an analysis of the activity, the EAU determines[6], in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the 2011 Regulations, that the Invasive Alien Species control measures and Peatland Restoration Action Plan within: Corraun Plateau SAC [Site Code: 000485]; Croaghan/Slievemore SAC [Site Code: 001955]; Lough Gall Bog SAC [Site Code: 000522]; Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC [Site Code 000500], and; Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC [Site Code: 000534] are entirely comprised of activities that directly support the Conservation Objectives of this European site.

It can be concluded with certainty that the project is a necessary conservation measure that is directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site.

[6] Darren Ellis (Ecological Assessment Unit, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) 7th May 2025.

12. Supplementary Information

Figure 1 (below). LIFE IP Wild Atlantic Nature Natura Communities Specials Areas of Conservation.

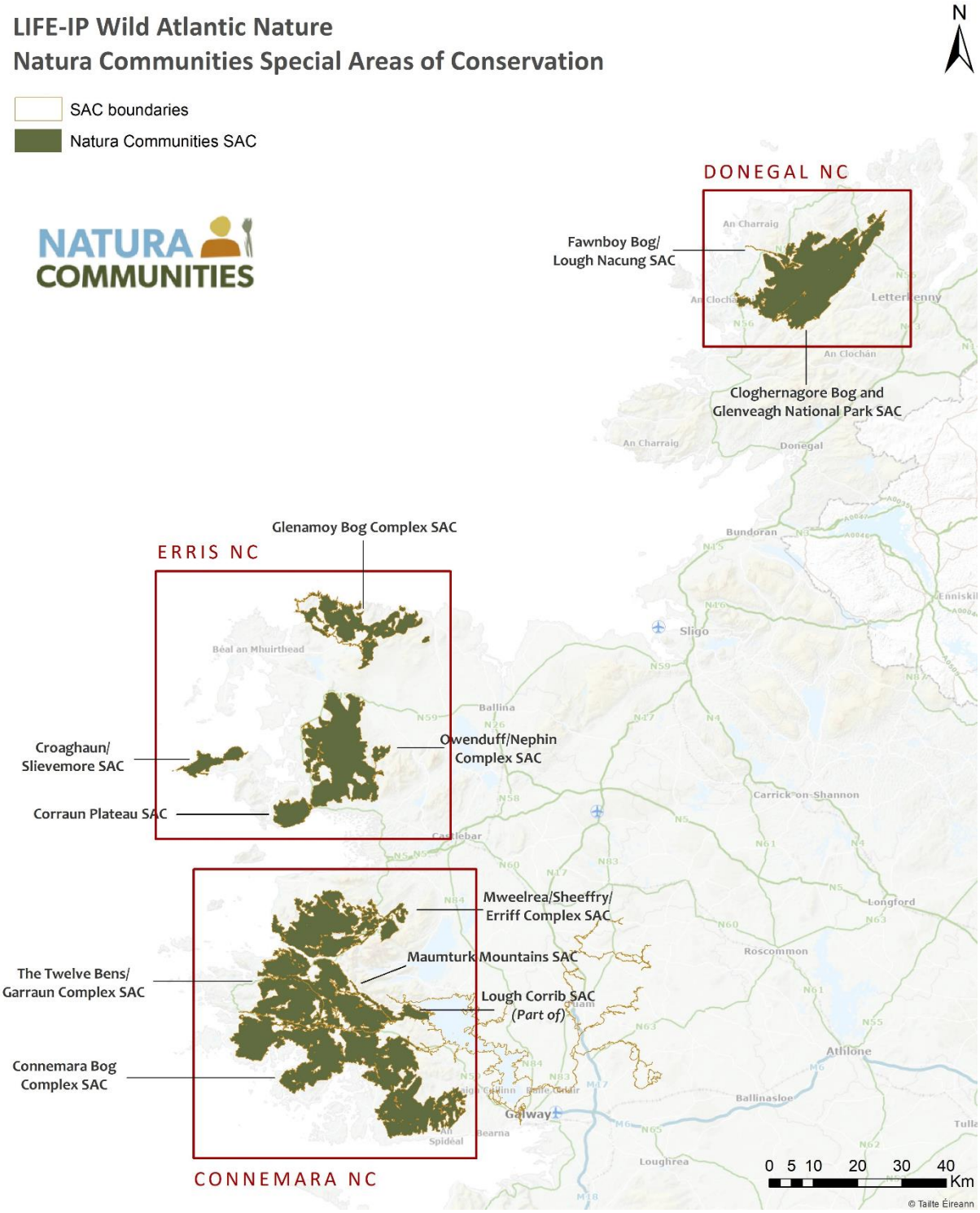


Figure 2. (Below) Corraun Plateau SAC as per NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Corraun Plateau SAC 000485. Version 1.

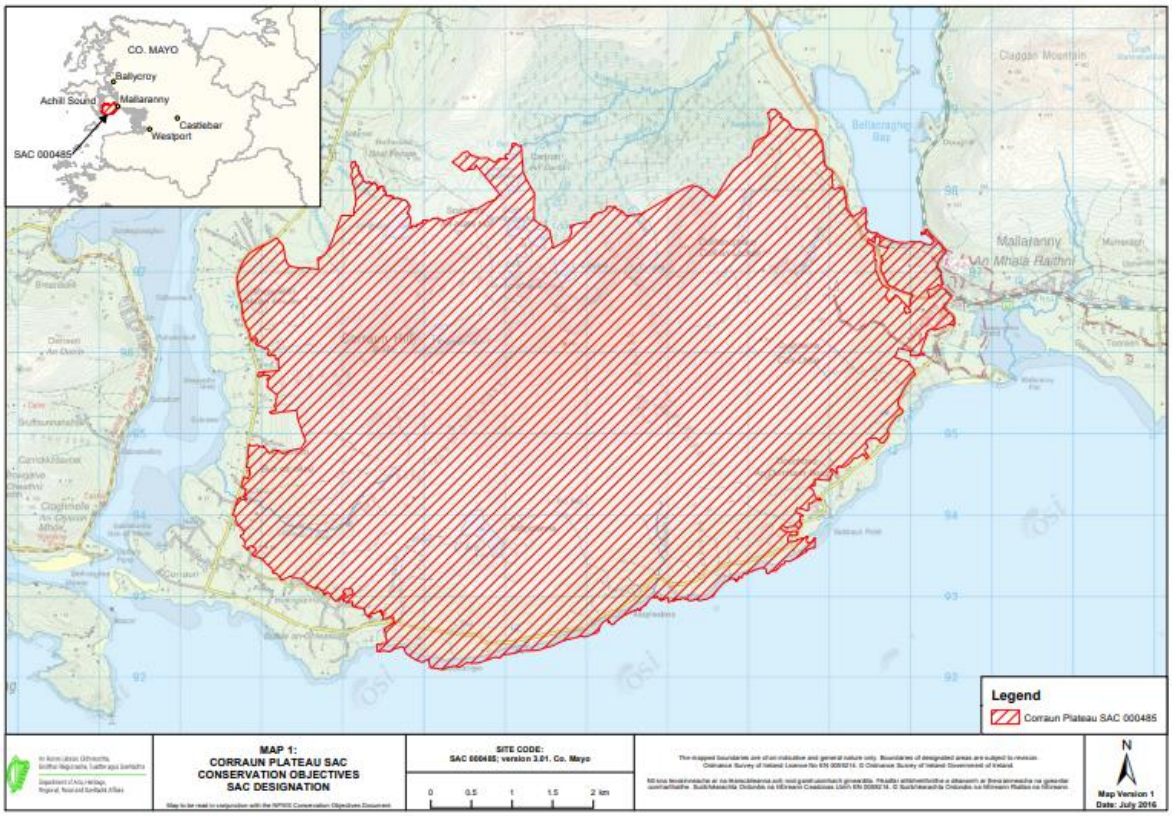


Figure 3 (below). Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC as per NPWS (2021) Conservation Objectives: Croaghaun/Slievemore SAC 001955. Version 1

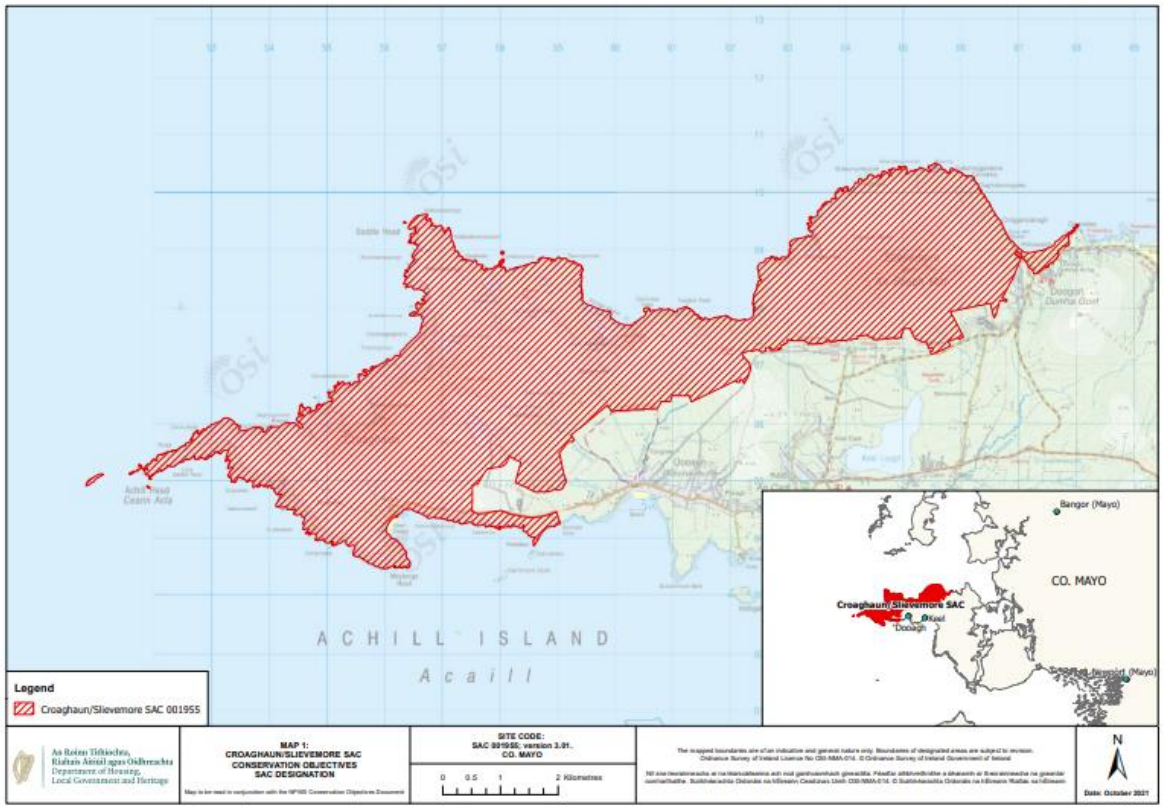


Figure 4 (below) Lough Gall Bog SAC as per NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Lough Gall Bog SAC 000522. Version 1.

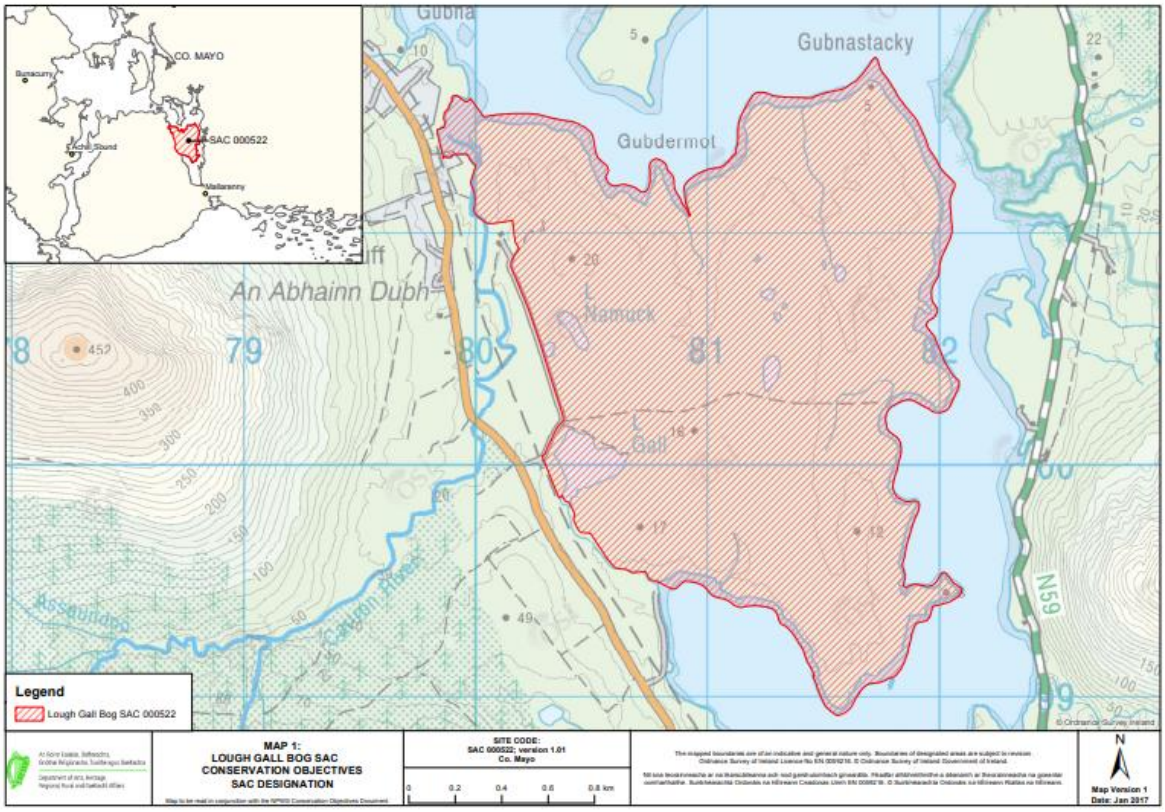


Figure 5 (below). Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC as per NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Glenamoy Bog Complex SAC 000500. Version 1

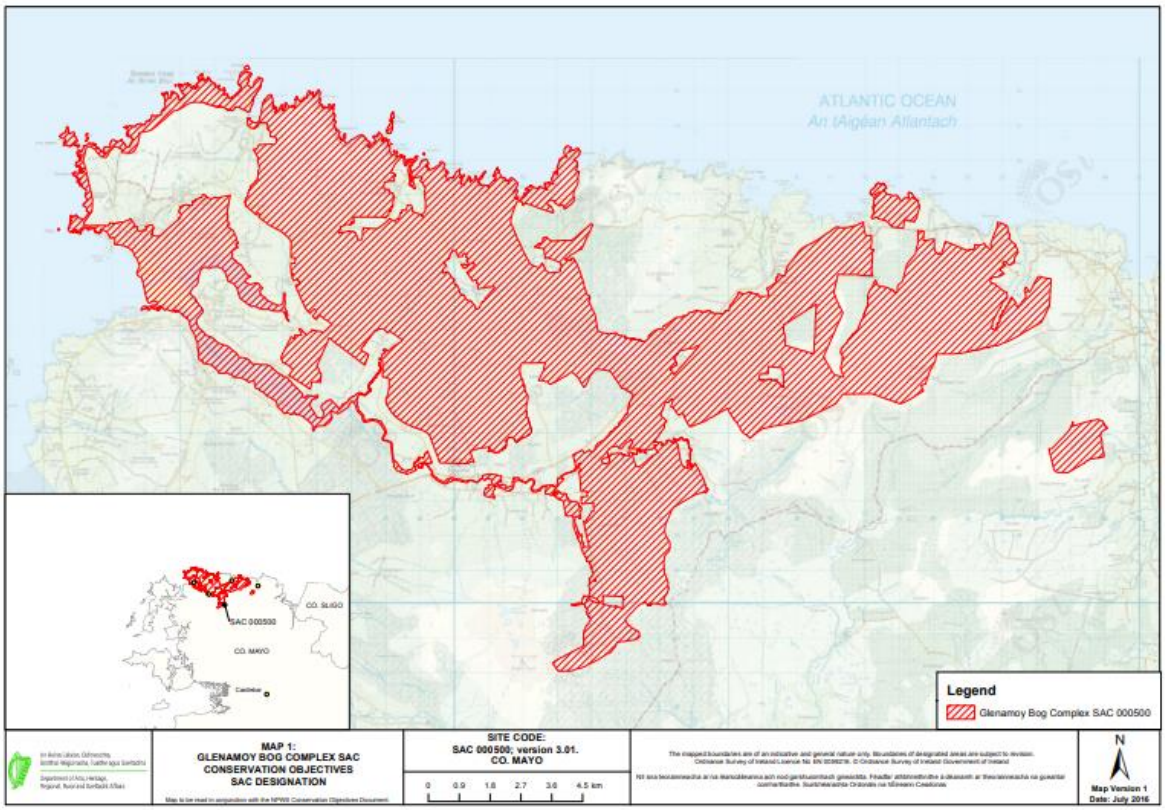


Figure 6 (below). Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC as per NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC 000534. Version 1.

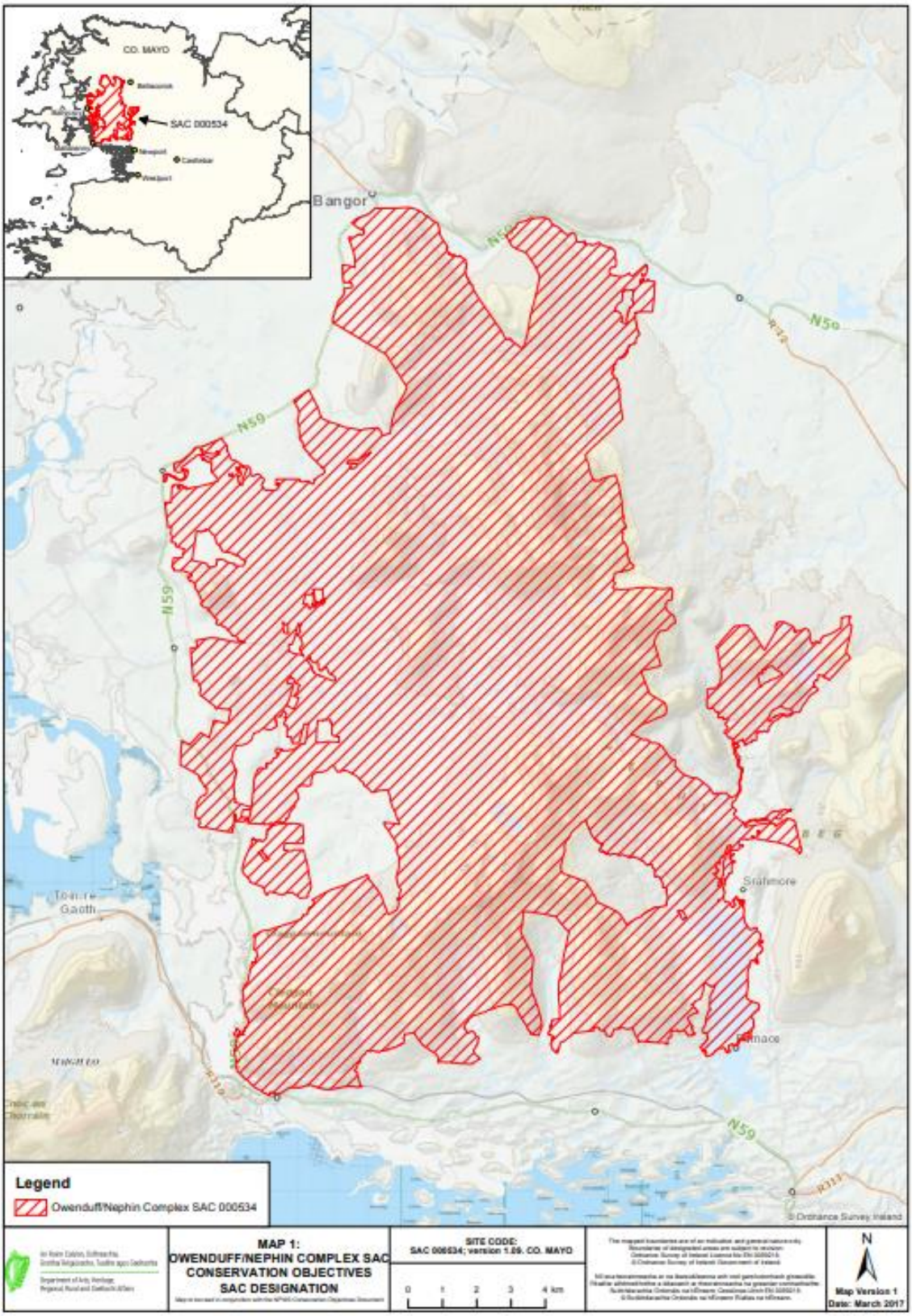


Figure 7 (below). Corraun Plateau SAC with area at Cuillaloughaun targeted for Rhododendron ponticum control outlined in purple.

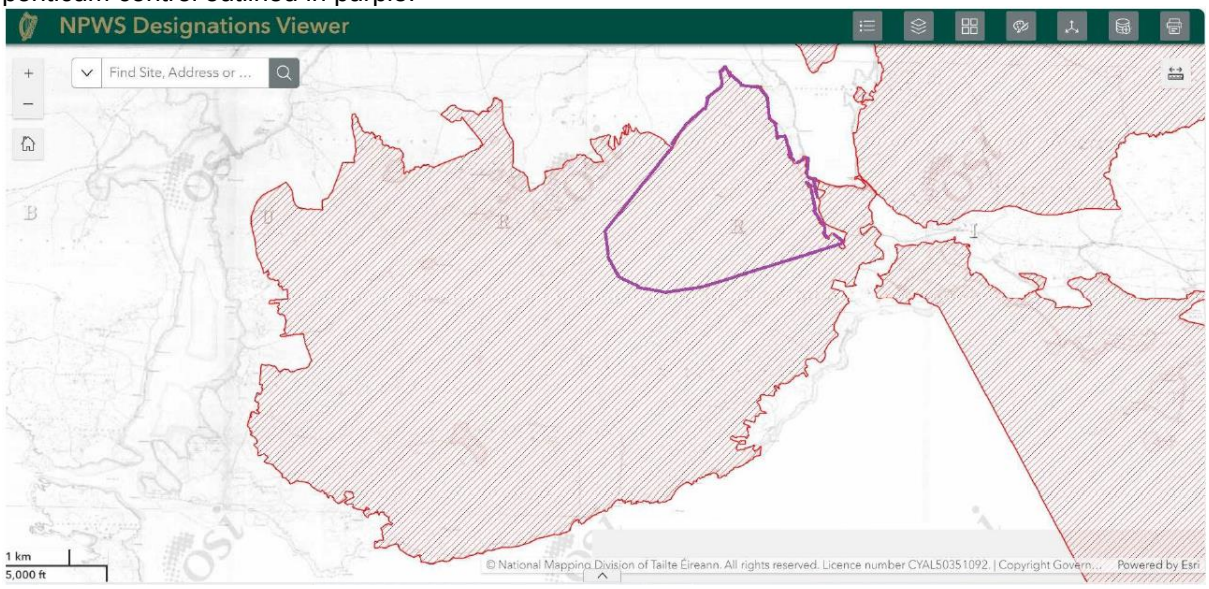


Figure 8 (below). Croaghan/Slievemore SAC with area at Slievemore targeted for Rhododendron ponticum control outlined in purple.

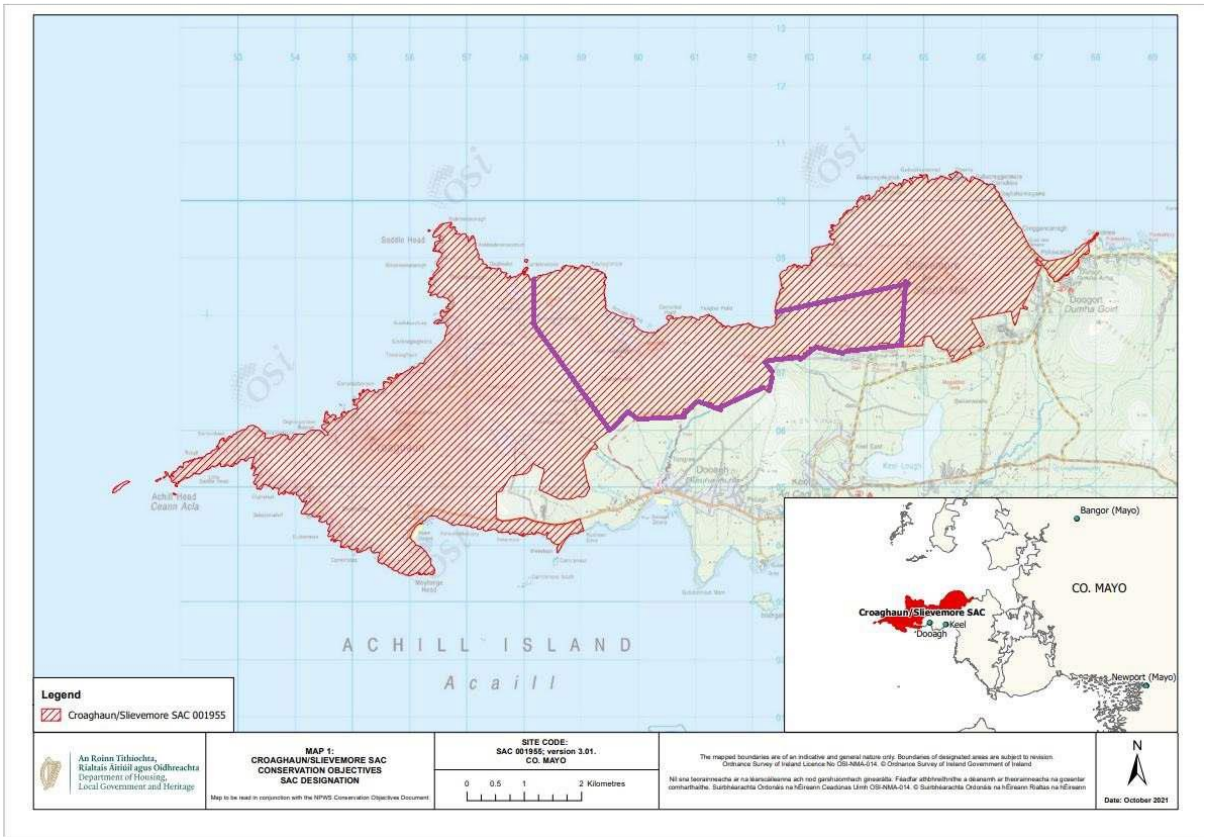


Figure 9 (below). Glenamoy Bog Complex with areas targeted for Rhododendron ponticum outlined in purple.

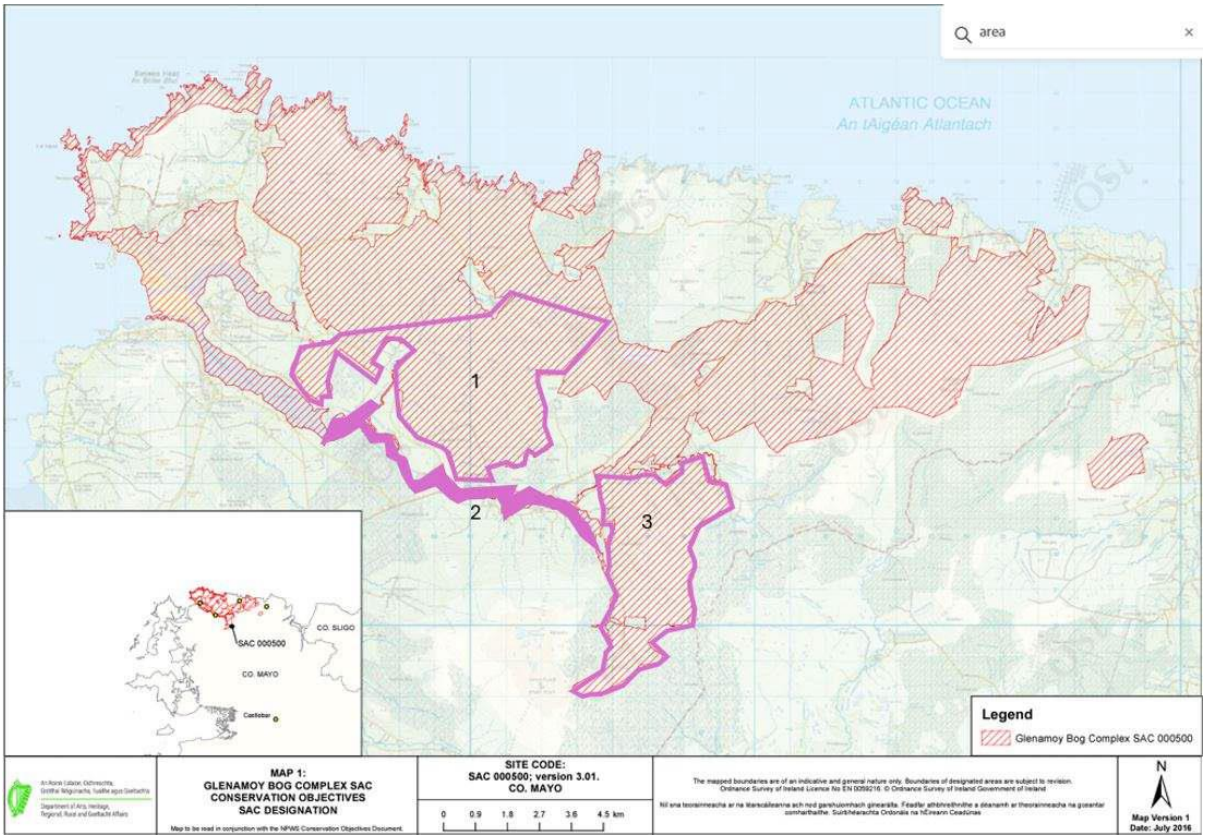


Figure 10 (below). Briska area within Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC proposed for Restoration Action Plan.

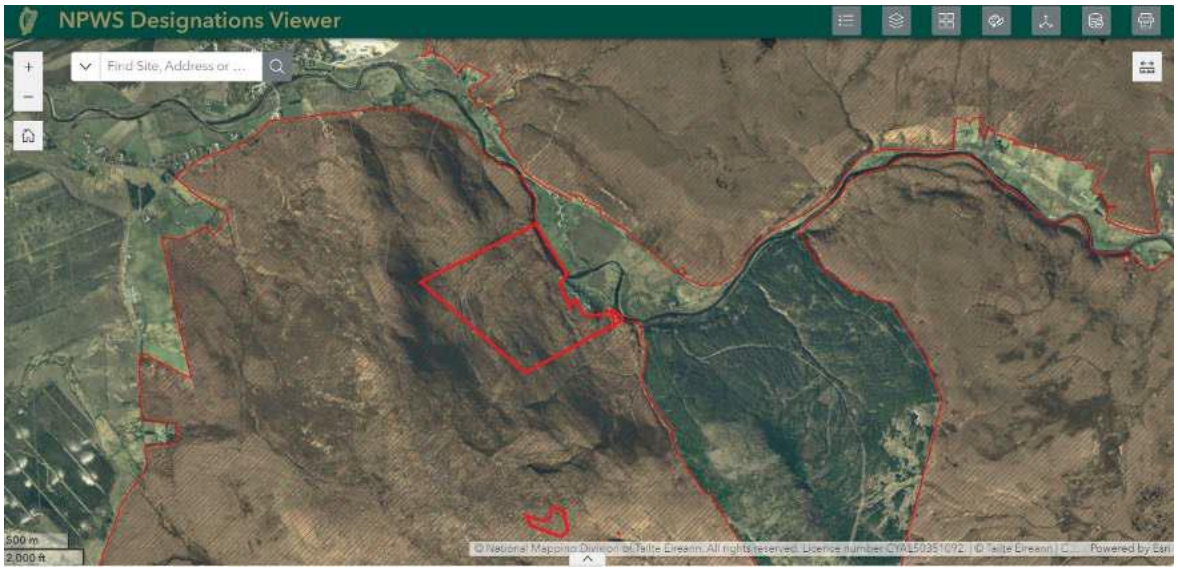
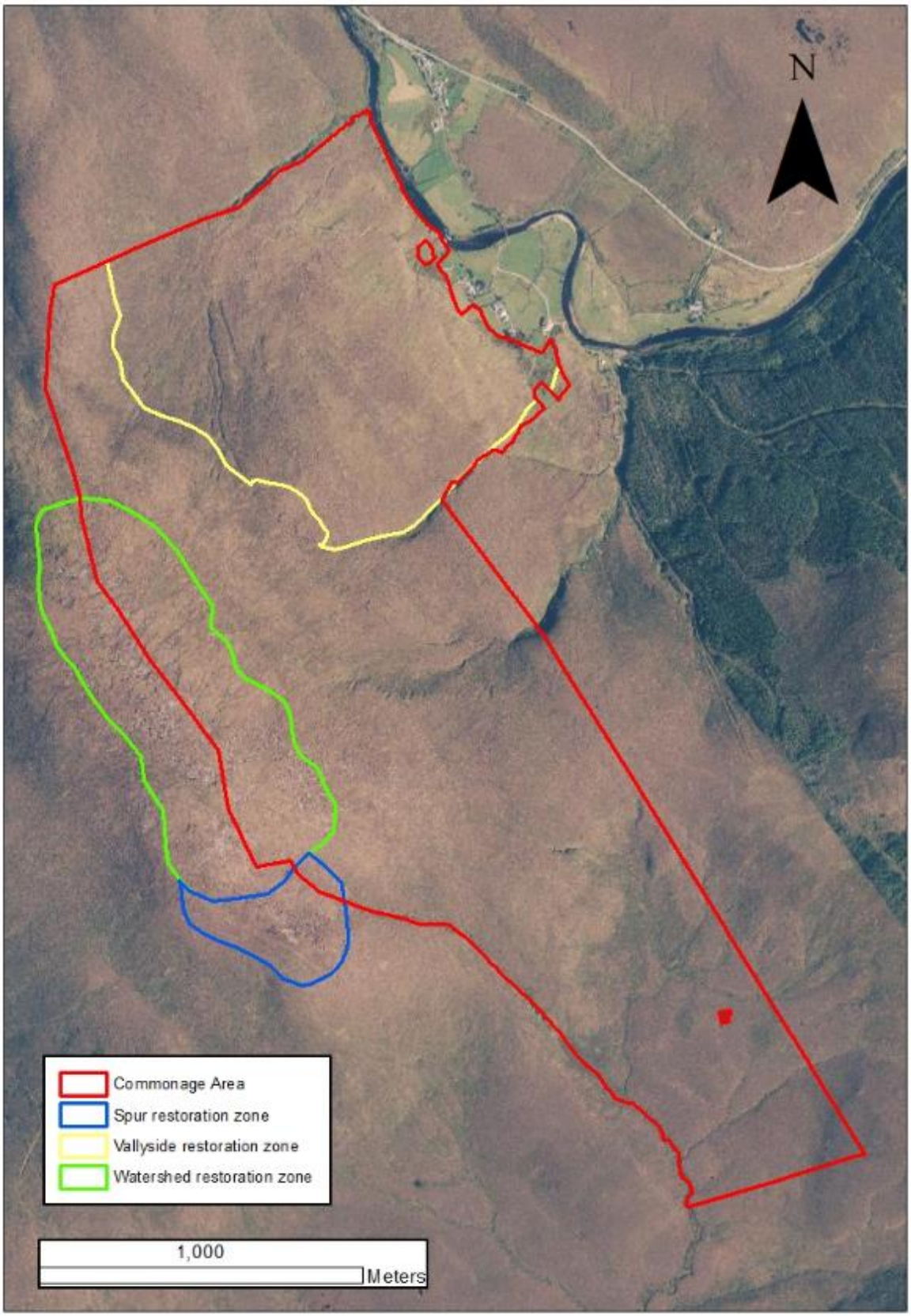


Figure 11 (below) Briska area within Owenduff/Nephin Complex SAC proposed for Restoration Action Plan.



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