Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Determination on Rhododendron survey within Caha Mountains SAC [Site code: 000093] in Counties Cork and Kerry, 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 10th March 2026, 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 Rhododendron survey of Caha Mountains SAC [site code: 000093]. These proposed measures are hereafter referred to as "the project".

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 information and the Conservation Objectives of European Sites. This determination does not constitute consent or authorisation for the proposed works. The proponent is responsible for ensuring that all other necessary consents, licences, or permissions are obtained, including, where relevant, a declaration under Section 5 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

[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);

3.2. Assessment Methodology

This report is based on review of desktop data. Sources of information utilised for this report and accessed during April 2026 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 17/04/2026

[3] National Biodiversity Data Centre Maps. Accessed at Maps - Biodiversity Maps (biodiversityireland.ie) 17/04/2026

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

The Caha Mountains consist of Old Red Sandstone and form part of the dramatic backbone of the Beara Peninsula, between Turner's Rock (on the Glengarriff-Kenmare Road) and the Healy Pass. Within the site there are a series of peaks and ridges up to 630 m high, radiating out from Caha Mountain itself. The southerly directed ridge forms a broad boggy plateau studded with small lakes - at about 420 m. The area also features glacial valleys and corries, such as the one within which Barley Lake occurs. Generally, the terrain is rocky with many of the slopes featuring rock faces interspersed with grassy shelves. Substantial cliffs are present in the northwestern half of the site. The site is of high scientific interest due to the presence of a number of habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive, including one priority habitat.

The proposed project would undertake a large scale multi year survey of invasive plant species, predominantly *Rhododendron ponticum* in The Caha Mountains SAC (Figure 1) located in the Beara peninsula between south Kerry and West Cork, covering an area of approx 6300ha of mountainous terrain featuring blanket bog, heath and oligotrophic lakes.

R. 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.

4.1. Purpose

A 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 *R. ponticum* has invaded an area, few native plants survive. In woodlands, only those trees which manage to grow above the level of the *R. ponticum* 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 *R. ponticum*, 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 *R. ponticum*.

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 Lough Eske and Ardnamona Wood SAC 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

The outcome of the survey will be to ascertain the extent of Rhododendron within the SAC and thereby inform the development of an Eradication Plan. The project proposes to use aerial imagery, drone-work and on site foot surveying to cover large sections of the SAC. The project will take place over 2 phases:

Phase 1: use of high resolution aerial photography coupled with the use of AI tools to produce a broad presence/absence map of the SAC for Rhododendron.

Phase 2: based of the work of phase 1 mapping drones will be used along with ground surveying to produce a more detailed report of rhododendron within the SAC to include area and categorisation of the plants such as maturity and level of infestation. The data collected from the survey and the GIS maps produced, along with the condition class and density estimates, will be used to score the regions into management zones for the purpose of determining further more detailed mapping and zones of priority, which could facilitate the requirements for the involvement of landowners and treatment contractors.

Subsequent drone surveys will be carried out by NPWS regional staff focusing on areas with Rhododendron present within or close to the SAC. This will conducted annually until an eradication programme has been completed.

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).

Caha mountains SAC [Site code: 000093].

NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Caha mountains SAC [00093]. Version 1. Accessed 17th April 2026.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000093.pdf

Qualifying Interests

Freshwater Pearl Mussel *Margaritifera margaritifera* [1029]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: Bad

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

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: Bad

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

European dry heaths [4030]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: Bad

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

- Overall assessment of Conservation Status: Bad

Species-rich Nardus grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe) [6230]

- ~ 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

Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210]

- ~ Overall assessment of Conservation Status: Inadequate

Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]

- ~ Overall assessment of Conservation Status: Inadequate

Geomalacus maculosus (Kerry Slug) [1024]

- ~ Overall assessment of Conservation Status: Inadequate

Trichomanes speciosum (Killarney Fern) [1421]

- ~ Overall assessment of 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 Caha mountains 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; and, 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 Caha mountains 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 Caha Mountains 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 Caha mountains 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 Caha mountains 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

Species-rich Nardus grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas [6230]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Species-rich Nardus grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas in Caha Mountains SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area

- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Community diversity
- Vegetation composition: positive indicators species; high quality indicator species; species richness; non-native species; negative indicator species; Sphagnum cover; Polytrichum cover; and, shrubs bracken and heath cover.
- Vegetation structure: forb to graminoid ratio; sward height; litter cover; disturbed bare ground; and, grazing or disturbance.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Blanket bogs (* if active bog) in Caha Mountains 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 Caha Mountains 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

Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation in Caha Mountains SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Ecosystem function: soil nutrients
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator fern and Saxifraga species; positive indicator species; non-native species; bracken, and, native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: grazing and browsing
- 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 Caha Mountains 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

Kerry Slug *Geomalacus maculosus* [1024]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Kerry Slug in Caha Mountains SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Distribution: occupied 1km grid squares
- Habitat extent: heath and blanket bog with sandstone outcrops

Killarney Fern *Trichomanes speciosum* [1421]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Killarney Fern in Caha mountains SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

- Distribution
- Populations
- Colonies
- Population: life cycle stage
- Population size: area of occupancy, living sporophyte fronds
- Population structure: young and unfurling fronds, fertile fronds, juvenile sporophyte fronds emerging from gametophytes
- Habitat extent
- Hydrological conditions: wet/damp microhabitats, relative humidity, desiccated fronds
- Light levels: shading
- Woodland canopy: percentage cover
- Invasive species: occurrence

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

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 ponticum* is known to negatively alter habitat, the implementation of the surveying and mapping of this invasive species will inform a future effective eradication plan. Removal measures within the site as informed by the surveying proposed by this project will directly contribute to the Site Specific Conservation Objectives. Notably:

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

- **Vegetation composition: non-native species.**

European dry heaths [4030]

- **Vegetation composition: non-native species.**

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

- **Vegetation composition: non-native species.**

Species-rich Nardus grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas [6230]

- **Vegetation composition: non-native species.**

Blanket Bogs [7130]

- **Vegetation composition: non-native species.**

In the absence of the project, the Conservation Objectives for Caha Mountain SAC would not be achieved as there would be continued highly detrimental impacts of invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* and other invasive non-native vegetation species, dramatically reducing levels of habitat cover and species richness. This project will provide the data and information required to prepare and conduct an effective eradication plan.

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?

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.

The potential effect of disturbance on QI while undertaking the survy work is considered negligible, given the experience of NPWS staff undertaking the practical fieldwork, the short-term duration and specific targeted location of measures. There is not considered to be any potential for disturbance beyond a de minimus level on QI for which the Caha mountain SAC is designated.

No likely significant effects 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. ☐

Prepared by: Donna Gavign, Ecologist, Ecological Assessment Unit

Date: 17th April 2026

11. Part 6: Determination

Following an analysis of the activity, the EAU determines, in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the 2011 Regulations, that the Rhododendron survey of Caha Mountains SAC 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.

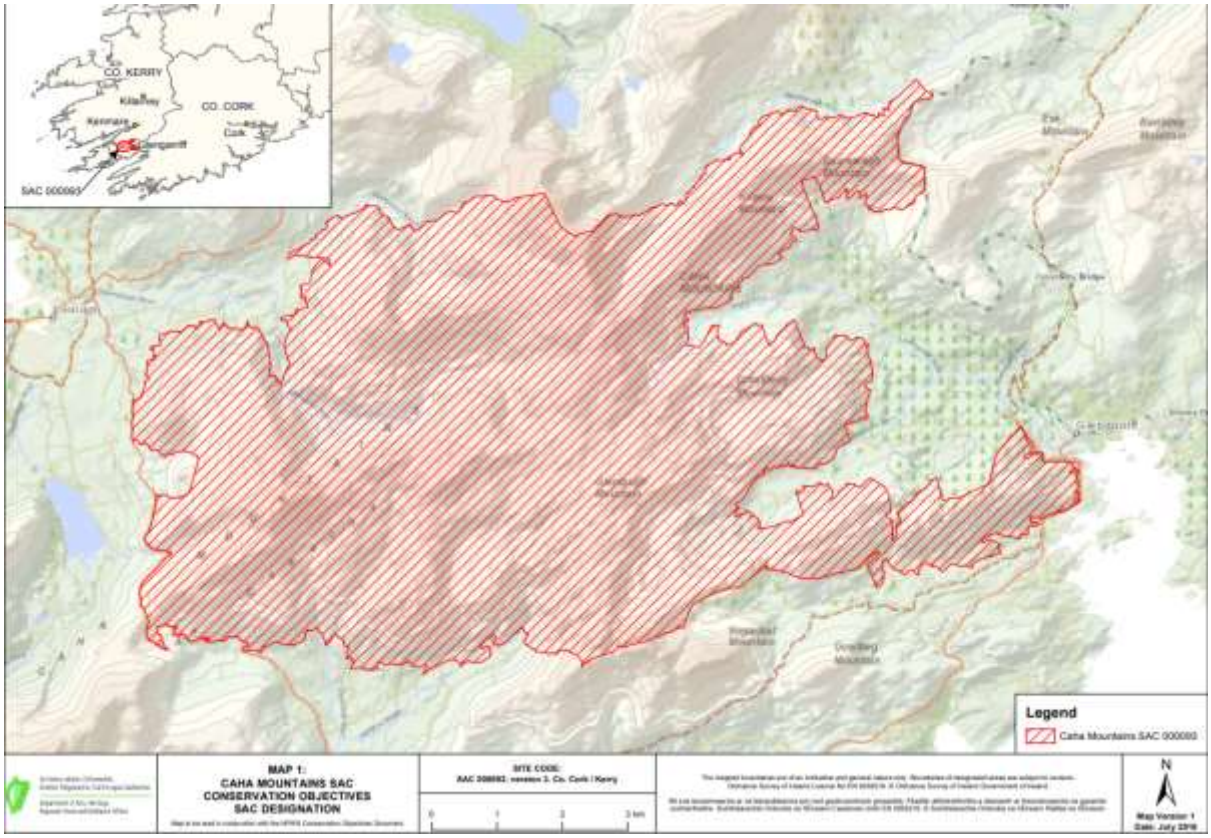
Determined by: Laura Connolly, Ecologist, Ecological Assessment Unit

Signed: Laura Connolly

Date: 20th April 2026

12. Supplementary Information

Figure 1.(below): Location of Caha Mountains SAC as per the NPWS (2016) Conservation Objectives: Caha Mountains SAC 000093. Version 1.



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