Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Determination on Invasive Alien Species (*Rhododendron ponticum*) control within Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation [Site Code: 002122] and Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area [Site Code: 004040] 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 16th January 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 Invasive Alien Species (*Rhododendron ponticum*) control measures at Glenasmole, Co. Dublin, within Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation [Site Code: 002122] and Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area [Site Code: 004040]. Hereafter referred to as "the project".

The EAU have evaluated and analysed the information contained in the referred to above document 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 the 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

- AA of Plans and Projects in Ireland - Guidance for Planning Authorities (Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, 2010 revision);
- AA under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive; Guidance for Planning Authorities. Circular NPW 1/10 and PSSP 2/10;
- 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 Environment Directorate-General, 2021);
- Communication from the Commission on the precautionary principle. European Commission (2000);
- Guidance Document on Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission, 2007);
- Guidelines for Good Practice AA of Plans under Article 6(3) Habitats Directive (International Workshop on Assessment of Plans under the Habitats Directive, 2011);
- Managing Natura 2000 Sites: The Provision of Article 6 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC (European Commission Environment Directorate-General, 2018); [hereafter referred to as MN 2018]; and
- Office of the Planning Regulator Practice Note PN01 - AA Screening for Development Management (OPR, 2021).
- 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;
- 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 January 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 qualifying interests.

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 26/01/2026

[3] National Biodiversity Data Centre Maps. Accessed at Maps - Biodiversity Maps (biodiversityireland.ie) 26/01/2026

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 (S.I. 477 of 2011), the Ecological Assessment Unit is the competent authority in relation to screening for AA of projects and plans (such as the proposed activity) which the Minister proposes to undertake or adopt.

4. Overview of the Project

Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation (SAC) [Site Code: 002122] is a complex of upland areas in Counties Wicklow and Dublin, flanked by the Blessington reservoir to the west and Vartry reservoir in the east, Cruagh Mountain in the north and Lybagh Mountain in the south. Most of the site is over 300 m, with much ground over 600 m. Wicklow Mountains is important as a complex, extensive upland site. It shows great diversity from a geomorphological and a topographical point of view. The vegetation provides examples of the typical upland habitats with heath, blanket bog and upland grassland covering large, relatively undisturbed areas. In all, twelve habitats listed on Annex I of the E.U. Habitats Directive are found within the site. Several rare or protected plant and animal species occur, adding further to its value.

The vegetation over most of Wicklow Mountains SAC is a mosaic of heath, blanket bog and upland grassland (mostly on peaty soil, though some on mineral soil), stands of dense Bracken (Pteridium aquilinum), and small woodlands mainly along the rivers. Mountain loughs and corrie lakes are scattered throughout the site. The two dominant vegetation communities in the area are heath and blanket bog. Heath vegetation, with both wet and dry heath well represented, occurs in association with blanket bog, upland acid grassland and rocky habitats.

Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA) [Site Code: 004040] is an extensive upland site, comprising a substantial part of the Wicklow Mountains. Most of the site is in Co. Wicklow, but a small area lies in Co. Dublin. The predominant habitats which make up the SPA are blanket bog, heaths and upland grassland. The open peatlands provide excellent foraging habitat for Merlin with small birds such as Meadow Pipit being their main prey. The cliffs and crags within the site also provide ideal breeding locations for Peregrine. Other birds of the open peatlands and scree slopes that have been recorded within the site include Ring Ouzel and Red Grouse. The site is of high ornithological importance as the populations of Merlin and Peregrine which it supports are of national importance, with both species listed on Annex I of the E.U. Birds Directive. Part of Wicklow Mountains SPA is a Statutory Nature Reserve.

The project proposes to control the Invasive Alien Species *Rhododendron ponticum* which is currently posing a threat to the Conservation Objectives of the Wicklow Mountains SAC and SPA. It is also the aim to restore natural riparian habitats to help protect the high water quality status of the River Dodder, which is deemed necessary for the conservation management of the site.

5. Purpose

Rhododendron ponticum is a large evergreen shrub with leathery leaves, purple to pink flowers and solid stems forming into a trunk when mature. Native to southwest Europe and southwest Asia, *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.

R. ponticum exhibits aggressive persistence in the mild humid climate of Ireland. Once it has invaded an area, few native plants are able to reproduce and it has been seen to spread rapidly throughout blanket bogs and heaths. It also poses a significant threat to woodlands, as 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, *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*.

There are legislative and policy obligations on the control of invasive *R. ponticum*, contained within the Habitats Directive and Ireland’s National Biodiversity Action Plan.

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 Wicklow Mountains SAC and SPA have been designated is avoided.

6. Project Description

The project, which is a component of the Peatlands and Natura Community Engagement Scheme 2026, proposes to treat invasive *Rhododendron ponticum* in the Wicklow Mountains SAC and SPA where it is present within the area of Glenasmole, Co Dublin (Figure 2). The location in south Co. Dublin is in the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains and comprise mostly boggy heath, scrub and native trees. The project will include, a public awareness element, delivered through a project introduction evening, which will provide an outline of the project to the community and education on the negative impacts of *R. ponticum* on protected habitats and the methods of control to be employed. Landowner permission has been received.

Volunteers trained during the project and NWPS recommended contractors will treat *R. ponticum* using the standard NPWS approved methods[4], taking into consideration correct health and safety protocols as follows:

Stem treatment

Where possible, seedlings will be hand pulled using mechanical means and placed to dry, preventing regrowth.

Plants less than 20 cm in height: For plants with a stem diameter of less than 2 cm the stem will be broken at the base ensuring that the stem is not fully severed and a 14% solution of glyphosate will be applied to the broken area. Targeted use of herbicide will remove the risk of damage to non-target vegetation.

Plants more than 20c m in height: For plants with a stem diameter of less than 2 cm the stem will be broken at the base ensuring that the stem is not fully severed and a 14% solution of glyphosate will be applied to the broken area. For plants with a stem diameter greater than 2 cm, a notch will be cut with a hatchet and/or chainsaw from two sides of each stem and a solution of 14% glyphosate applied to the cuts. Plants will be left in situ to die.

Stump treatment

Plants less than 20 cm in height: For plants with a stem diameter of less than 2 cm the stem can be broken at the base ensuring that the stem is not fully severed and a 14% solution of glyphosate will be applied to the broken area. Plants more than 20 cm in height but with a stem diameter less than 2 cm can be treated in the same way.

Plants more than 20 cm in height and with a stem diameter greater than 2 cm: Plants must be cut flush to the ground and the stump treated by applying a 10% solution of glyphosate directly into holes drilled in the stump. The brash will be chipped and removed from the site (unless otherwise agreed with individual landowners).

There will be no adverse impacts from this targeted treatment as glyphosate is to be applied only to the stems of *R. ponticum*. The areas will be surveyed before and after treatment to check the need for follow up treatment and the regeneration of native species.

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”

[4] 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;

between 1st March and 31st August annually), the authorisation for the destruction of vegetation comprising the species of flora or vegetation 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.

7. 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).

Wicklow Mountains SAC [Site code: 002122].

NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Mountains SAC 002122. Version 1. Accessed 26th January 2026.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002122.pdf

Qualifying Interests

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**

Calaminarian grasslands of the Violetalia calaminariae [6130]

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

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**

Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0]

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

Lutra lutra (Otter) [1355]

- 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 Wicklow 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; 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 Wicklow 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; and, macrophyte status.
- Acidification status.
- Water colour
- Dissolved organic carbon (DOC)
- Turbidity
- Fringing habitat (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 Wicklow 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 Wicklow 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 Wicklow 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

Calaminarian grasslands of the Violetalia calaminariae [6130]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Calaminarian grasslands of the Violetalia calaminariae in Wicklow Mountains SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Physical structure: bare ground
- Soil toxicity: copper content
- Vegetation structure: height and cover
- Vegetation composition: metallophyte bryophytes.

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 Wicklow 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 Wicklow 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 Wicklow 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 Wicklow 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 Wicklow 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

Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles [91A0]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles in Wicklow Mountains SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- Woodland size
- Woodland structure: cover and height; community diversity and extent; natural regeneration; dead wood; veteran trees; and, indicators of local distinctiveness.
- Vegetation composition: native tree cover; typical species; and, negative indicator species.

Otter Lutra lutra [1355]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Otter in Wicklow Mountains 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

Wicklow Mountains SPA [Site code: 004040].

NPWS (2022) Conservation objectives for Wicklow Mountains SPA [004040]. First Order Site-specific Conservation Objectives Version 1.0. Accessed 26th January 2026.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004040.pdf

Special Conservation Interests[5]

Merlin (Falco columbarius) [A098]

- ~ Article 12 Reporting for the period 2013-2018 indicate the long-term and short-term population trend directions (based on expert opinion and extrapolation of limited data respectively) are Uncertain.

Peregrine (Falco peregrinus) [A103]

- ~ Article 12 Reporting for the period 2013-2018 indicate the long-term and short-term population trend directions (based on complete survey/statistically robust estimates) are Increasing / Favourable.

Site Specific Conservation Objective: To maintain or restore the favourable conservation condition of the bird species listed as Special Conservation Interests for this SPA.

[5] See online Article 12 web tool: https://nature-art12.eionet.europa.eu/article12/summary

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 removal measures within the site as outlined above will directly contribute to the Site Specific Conservation Objectives. Notably:

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

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- 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.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

European dry heaths [4030]

- Habitat area
- Habitat distribution
- 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.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

- 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.
- Indicators of local distinctiveness.

In the absence of the project, the Conservation Objectives for Wicklow Mountains SAC and Wicklow Mountains SPA would not be achieved as there would be a continuation of highly detrimental impacts from the invasion of *Rhododendron ponticum*, reducing levels of habitat cover and native species richness.

The project will be beneficial to maintaining and working towards achieving favourable conservation condition of the Qualifying Interest habitats in the SAC and the typical species occurring there.

By promoting the restoration of native vegetation and healthy ecosystem functioning, the project will directly benefit the Special Conservation Interests for which the SPA has been designated. The project is expected to result in the restoration of potential nesting areas for Merlin and hunting grounds for both Merlin and Peregrine.

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 Rhododendron treatment in soils, suggesting that chemical impacts do not pose any indirect or legacy effects, or barriers to habitat recovery.

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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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.

11. 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: Darren Ellis 26th January 2026

12. Part 6: Determination

Following an analysis of the activity, the EAU determines, in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the 2011 Regulations, that the Invasive Alien Species (*Rhododendron ponticum*) control measures within the Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation and Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area 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

Date: 27th January 2026

13. Supplementary Information

Figure 1. (below): Location of Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation [Site Code: 002122] and Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area [Site Code: 004040] as per NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Mountains SAC. Version 1. Yellow arrow indicates project location.

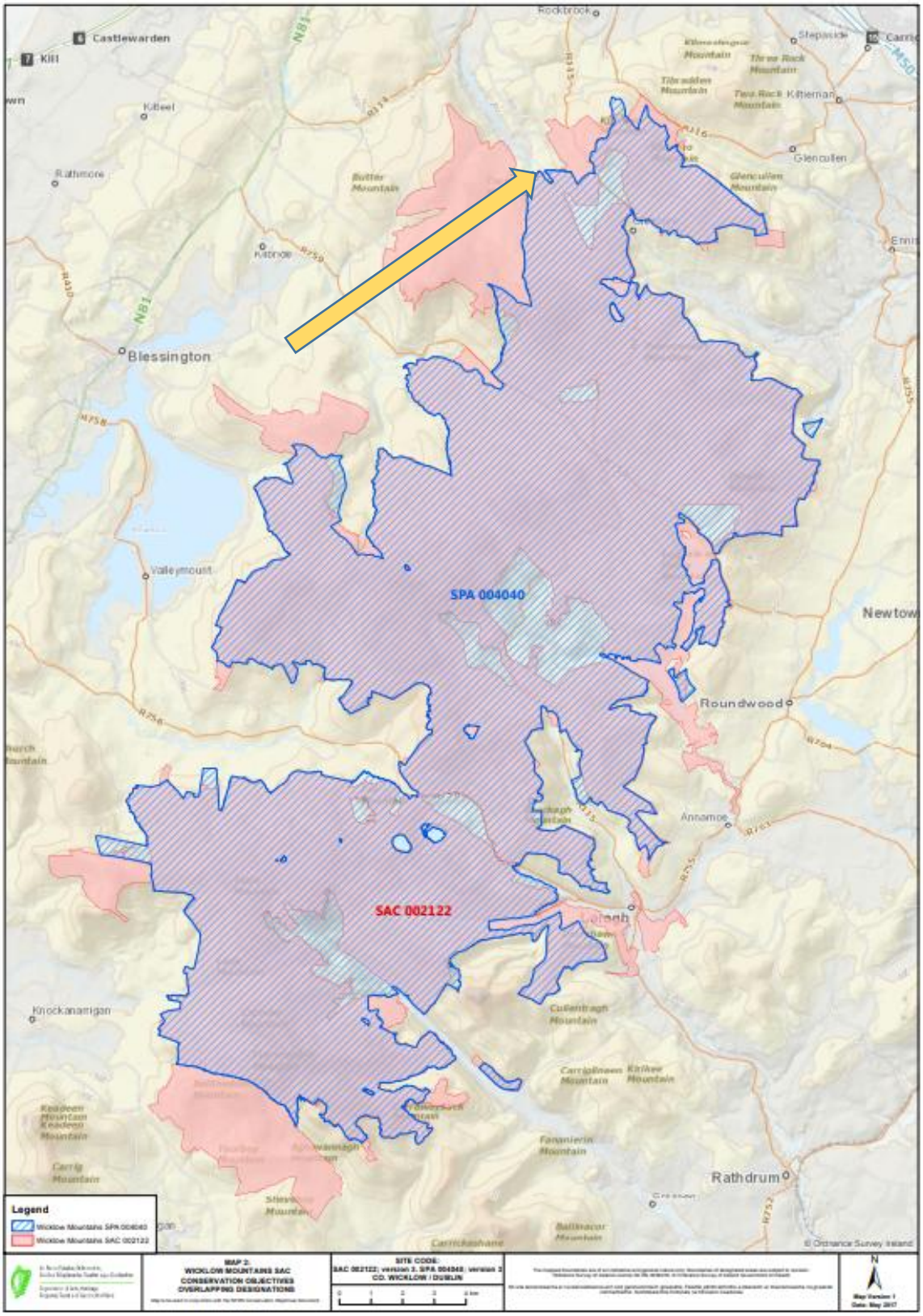
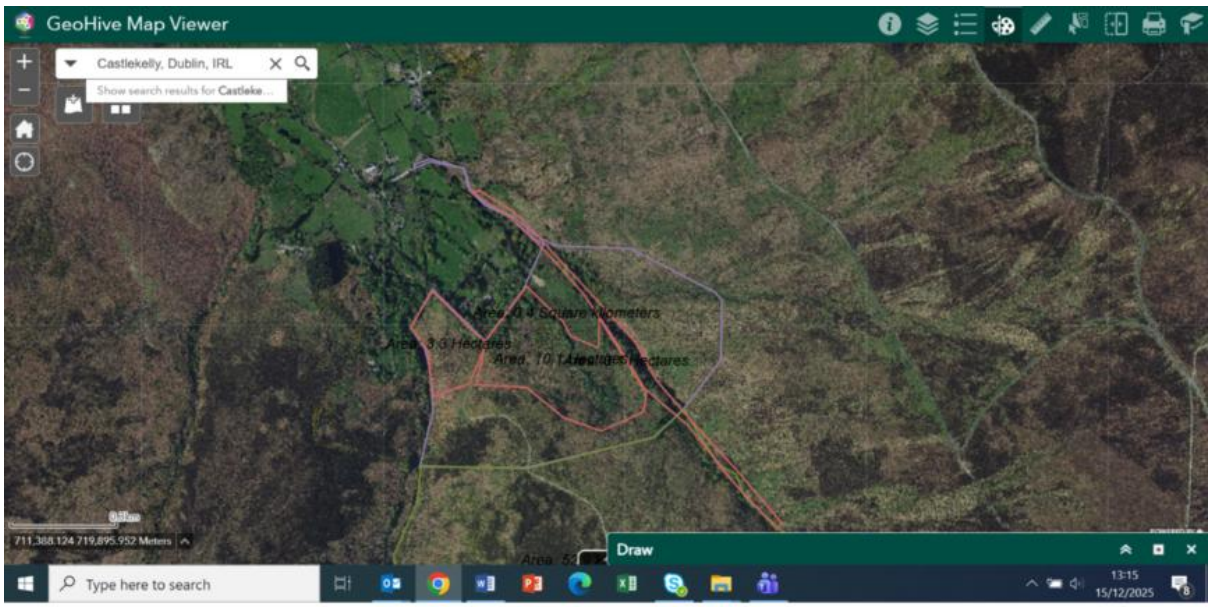


Figure 2. (below): Outline of proposed Invasive Alien Species (*R. ponticum*) management target areas within Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation and Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area.



Private land mainly Iain Wright ca 40ha. Most dense around the land surrounding gardens and Maureens Brook

WMNP – Scattered apart from Maureens Brook 53 ha

Hot zones 3 core areas – on both Private land and WMNP ca 17ha.

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Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

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