Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Screening for Appropriate Assessment

Adoption of barrier replacements, within Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve Special Area of Conservation and Rosturra Wood Special Area of Conservation in accordance with Regulation 42A EC (Birds and Natural) Habitats Regulations 2011-2021

Prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
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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 11th September 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 the replacement of 4 no. existing metal barriers with new ones of similar specification within Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC [Site Code: 000261] (3 barriers) and Rosturra Wood SAC [Site Code: 001313] (1 barrier), Co. Galway. The sites are also located within the Slieve Aughty Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA) [Site Code: 004168]. Hereafter referred to as "the project".

The EAU have evaluated and analysed the information contained in the referred to above documents as well as the 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; and,
- 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 September 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 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 15/09/2025

[3] National Biodiversity Data Centre Maps. Accessed at Maps - Biodiversity Maps (biodiversityireland.ie) 15/09/2025

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 (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 project) which the Minister proposes to undertake or adopt.

4. Overview of the Project

Derrycrag Wood (Figure 1) is an old oak woodland, situated 1.5 km south-east of Woodford, Co. Galway, and is traversed by the Woodford River. Before commercial conifer planting in the 1930s and 1940s, this would have been part of the largest oak woodlands in the country. In the fragments remaining, the Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) canopy can be up to 17m tall. The woodland also contains Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*) and Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*), and Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and Yew (*Taxus baccata*) are locally abundant. Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) occur on the slightly richer soil.

Rosturra Wood (Figure 2) also comprises part of what was formerly a large stand of Sessile Oak (*Quercus petraea*) woodland. It is situated about 3 km east of Woodford, Co. Galway and consists of two separate areas. In the 1930s and 1940s much of the wood was cleared and planted with coniferous species. However, the wood retains significant remnants of the original stands of Sessile Oak and its associated ground flora. The wood is situated on rich loamy soils and consequently the size and quality of the hardwood and the diversity of the ground flora is greater than in most Irish Sessile Oak woods. The canopy of Rosturra Wood consists of large trees of Sessile Oak, with occasional Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), Downy Birch (*Betula pubescens*) and Hazel (*Corylus avellana*). Oak woods are rare in Ireland and those found on rich soils which are not the result of planting are even more rare. The remnants of original oak wood at Rosturra Wood (and at the neighbouring Derrycrag Wood and Pollnaknockaun Wood) are part of what was, until 1940, the largest area of natural oak wood in the country. Oak and Yew woodland such as that found at Rosturra Wood are habitats of considerable conservation significance.

The sites are also located within the Slieve Aughty Mountains Special Protection Area (SPA) [Site Code: 004168] (Figure 3).

It is proposed to replace the three existing metal vehicle barriers at Derrycrag Wood and one at Roscturra Wood with new ones. The current barriers have been in place since before the designation of the site as an SAC when it was under the management of Coillte (in the late 1970’s) and are now in need of replacement.

4.1. Purpose

The four existing barriers have been in place since the late 1970’s and are now in need of replacement. The main entrance barrier to Derrycrag Woods in particular has become very difficult to open which is a concern as it is the main access point for emergency vehicles to the site. These barriers need to be in good working order for the health and safety of the public as well for access for management purposes of the site.

5. Project Description

The proposed project will involve the removal of the existing four barriers in need of replacement (locations illustrated in Figure 4 Derrycrag Wood and Figure 5 Rosturra Wood). The old barriers will be replaced by ones of similar specification in the same locations. The work is planned to be carried out in the winter months. Given the size and weight of the barriers it is expected that some light machinery such as a mini digger will be needed to lift the old barriers out and to lift the new one in. Machinery will be restricted to the graveled track and entrance way.

In terms of the QI for the SAC, there are oak trees in the vicinity of the main entrance of Derrycrag Wood but will not be within the zone of work or the immediate area beyond that. The other two entrances in Derrycrag and the entrance in Rosturra do not have oak trees present. Works will not be carried out in the QI habitat. In terms of the QI's for the SPA, there will be no nesting merlin or hen harrier in the areas where the works would take place and the works will not affect these species.

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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).

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

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?

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.

Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC [Site code: 000261].

NPWS (2018) Conservation Objectives: Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC 000261. Version 1. Accessed 16th September 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO000261.pdf

Rosturra Wood SAC [Site code: 001313].

NPWS (2018) Conservation Objectives: Rosturra Wood SAC 001313. Version 1. Accessed 16th September 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO001313.pdf

Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA [Site code: 004168].

NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA 004168. Version 1. Accessed 16th September 2025.

Available at: https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004168.pdf

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.

Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC [Site code: 000261].

Qualifying Interests

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

~ *Overall Conservation status*: **Bad**

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

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

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Old sessile oak woods with Ilex and Blechnum in the British Isles in Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

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

Rosturra Wood SAC [Site code: 001313].

Qualifying Interests

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

~ *Overall Conservation status*: **Bad**

Conservation Objectives for Qualifying Interests.

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 Rosturra Wood SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

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

Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA [Site code: 004168].

Special Conservation Interests

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) [A082]

~ 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 Decreasing / Unfavourable.

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.

Site Specific Conservation Objectives for Special Conservation Interests.

Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) [A082]

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Hen Harrier in Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Population size.
- Productivity rate.
- Spatial utilisation by breeding pairs.

- Extent and condition of heath and bog associated habitats.
- Extent and condition of low intensity managed grasslands and associated habitats.
- Extent and condition of hedgerows.
- Age structure of the forest estate.
- Disturbance to breeding sites.

Merlin (*Circus cyaneus*) [A082]

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Merlin in the Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA, which is defined by the following list of attributes:

- Population size.
- Productivity rate.
- Distribution: extent of available nesting options within the SPA.
- Extent and condition of suitable open habitat for foraging.
- Disturbance to breeding sites.

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:

The effect of the proposed project on all QI features of the Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC, Rosturra Wood SAC and Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA have been considered. The replacement of the entrance barriers to these sites will be short term and localised and will not overlap with any of the QIs or SCIs of the sites. There is not considered to be any potential for disturbance beyond a de minimus level on QI of SCI for which these sites have been designated.

No significant adverse impacts on the QI features of the SACs or SCIs of the SPA are anticipated.

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: Ryan Wilson Parr, Ecological Assessment Unit

Date: 16th September 2025

11. Part 6: Conclusion

Following an analysis of the project, the EAU determines, in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the 2011 Regulations, that an Appropriate Assessment of the proposed replacement of the four entrance barriers within the Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC, Rosturra Wood SAC and Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA is not required because it can be concluded, on the basis of objective scientific information following a Screening for Appropriate Assessment, that the project individually or in combination with other plans or projects is considered not likely to have significant effects on a European site or sites in view of the sites' Conservation Objectives.

12. Supplementary Information

Figure 1. (below): Location of Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC as per the NPWS (2018) Conservation Objectives: Version 1. (Accessed on: 16/09/2025).

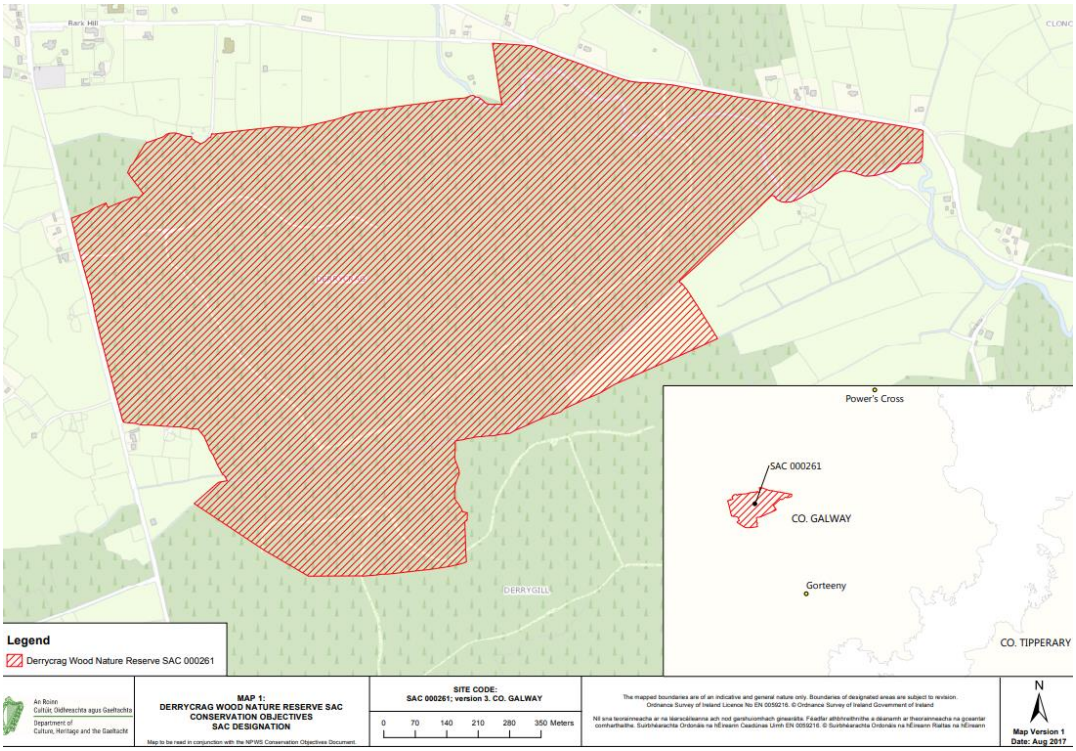


Figure 2. (below): Location of Rosturra Wood SAC as per the NPWS (2018) Conservation Objectives: Version 1. (Accessed on: 16/09/2025).

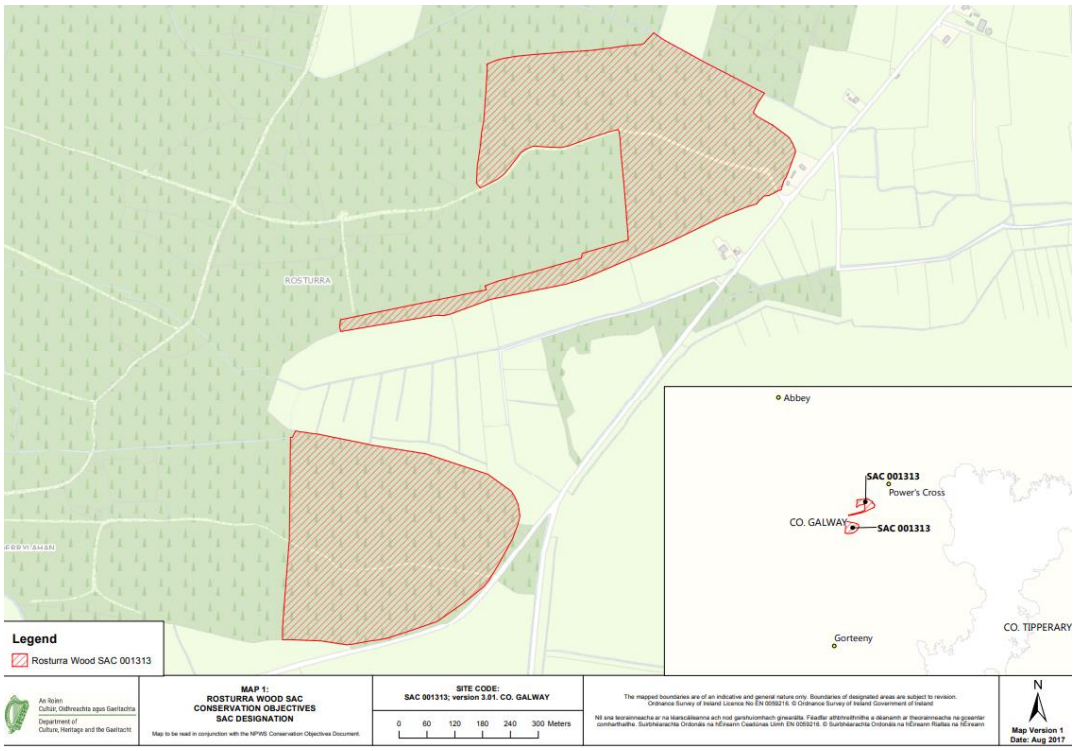


Figure 3. (below): Location of Slieve Aughty Mountains SPA as per the NPWS (2022) Conservation Objectives: Version 1. (Accessed on: 16/09/2025).

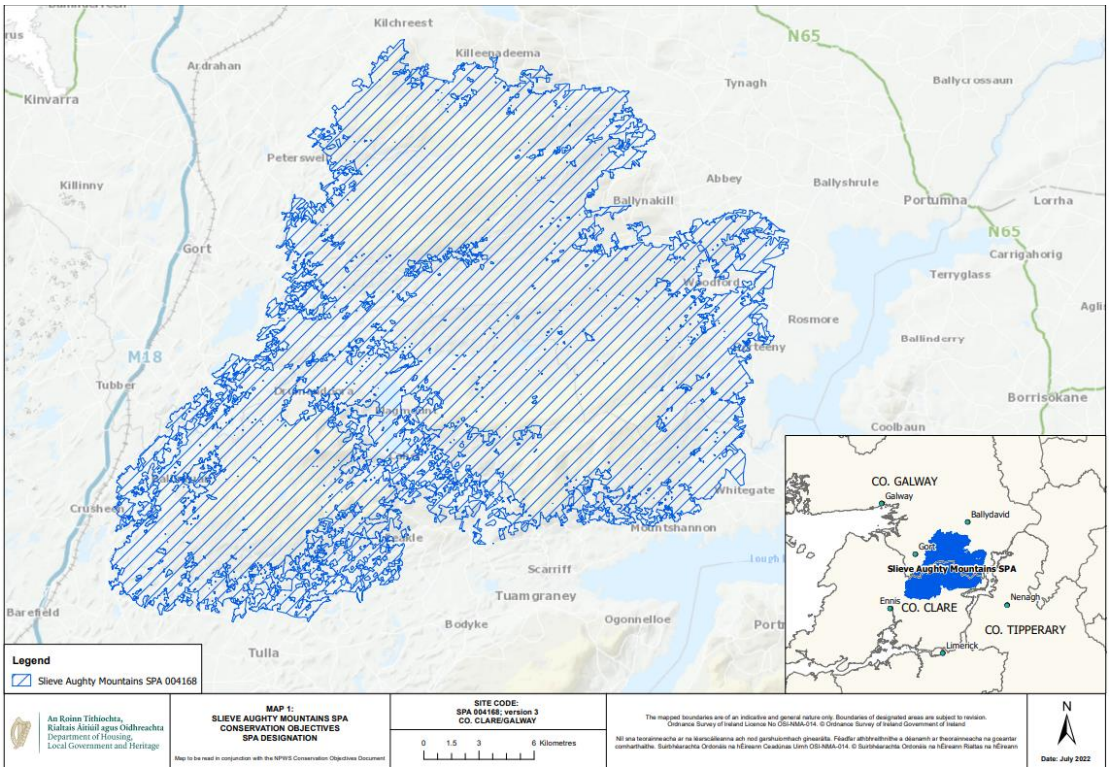


Figure 4 (below) Locations of the three barriers in need of replacement in Derrycrag Wood Nature Reserve SAC (marked by yellow stars).

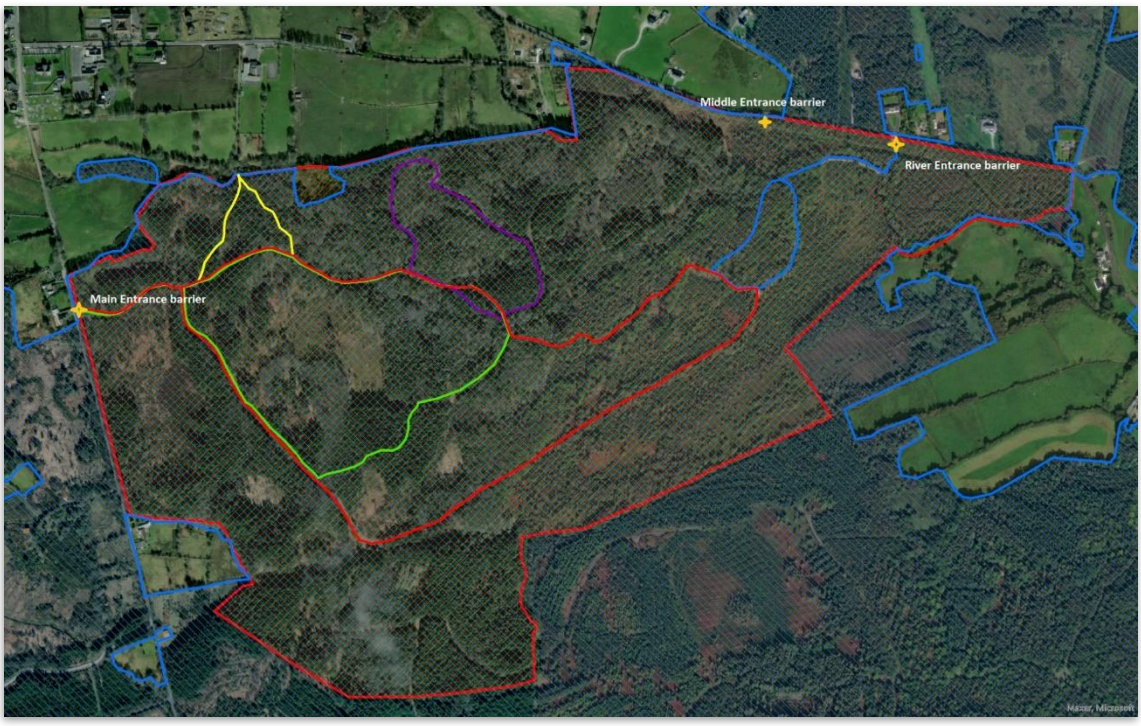
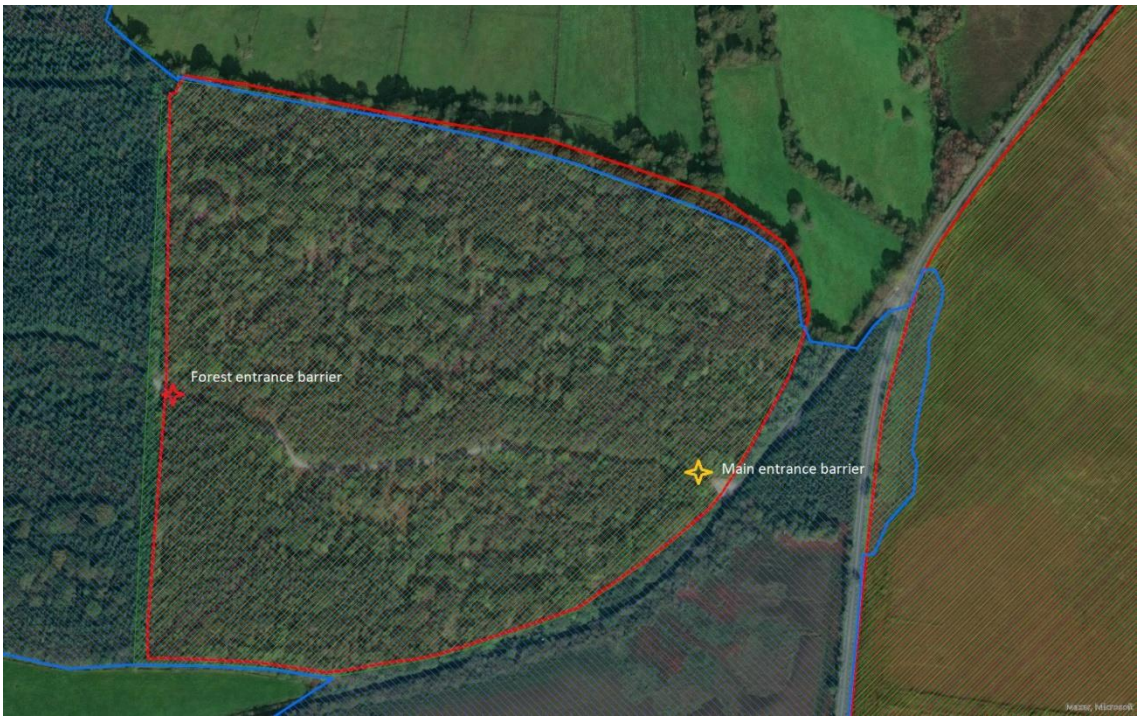


Figure 5 (below) Locations of the one barrier in need of replacement in Rosturra Wood SAC (marked by yellow star)



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