Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

# Screening for Appropriate Assessment

## Adoption of trail maintenance measures at St Kevin's Way trail within the Wicklow Mountains 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
**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 6th March 2024, 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 proposed trail maintenance at St Kevin's Way trail within the Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation [Site Code: 002122], Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area [Site Code: 004040], Co. Wicklow. 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 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 that 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 May 2024 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 29/05/2024

[3] National Biodiversity Data Centre Maps. Accessed at Maps - Biodiversity Maps (biodiversityireland.ie) 29/05/2024

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

Wicklow Mountains SAC 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 300m, with much ground over 600m.

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.

This project aims to upgrade a 50m section of trail with a floating gravel upland path where it is deemed appropriate by National Park management (Figure 3). This section of the trail has become eroded and widened due to walkers avoiding the centre of the trail which is mostly wet and muddy, thus eroding the edges.

## 4.1. Purpose

The project is a necessary management activity to prevent degradation of the site. This trail receives regular intense footfall and as such demands constant attention and renewal. The presence of the car park and viewpoint close to this section of trail add to the pressure. The upgrade to a floating gravel trail will reduce the footprint of the trail and reduce the amount of maintenance required and thus reduce disturbance to the habitat on an ongoing basis.

## 4.2. Project Description

The footprint will be reduced as currently visitors to the site walk on either side of an existing boardwalk as well as on the boardwalk, creating a 3.0m - 15.0m wide footprint. An upland inverted gravel path will range from 0.85m – 1.2m wide. This allows for restoration and recovery of trail-side vegetation along the 50m stretch of this section of the St Kevin's Way trail.

Instead of using geotextile or tree branches as the underlying layer, sheep's wool will be used (to a depth of 300mm) as the floating layer. The wool layer helps spread the ground pressure across a wider area and therefore reduces the tendency of the trail

to sink into the bog below. To add an extra layer to support the sheep fleece the vegetation of heather and other shrubs growing on the top of the bog is left in place and the sheep fleece is simply “rolled” onto the existing surface. In places it will be necessary to install retaining edges, these will be constructed using imported granite and peat sods “harvested” from a turf bank adjacent to the site. The retaining edges should be constructed to have a natural look. It is essential to avoid a garden path look where the edges are uniform and continuous.

Waterbars will be constructed along the trail to prevent the water channeling along the trail and causing further erosion where required. The repaired paths will be narrower than the path at present which has become eroded, braided and channeled due to water incursion and heavy usage by visitors. Vegetation recovery will be assisted with light-touch restoration techniques where appropriate.

Prior to works, a NPWS Authorised Officer will ensure the project can progress (access, route and egress) in compliance with Section 22 and Section 23 of the Wildlife Acts 1976-2021 (where applicable).

## 5. 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 31st May 2024.

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

**Qualifying Interests**

Otter *Lutra lutra* [1355]

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

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

Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds [3160]

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

European dry heaths [4030]

Alpine and Boreal heaths [4060]

Calaminarian grasslands of the Violetalia calaminariae [6130]

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

Blanket bogs (* if active bog) [7130]

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

Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8210]

Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation [8220]

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

## 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.
- Water quality: nutrients.
- Water quality: phytoplankton biomass.
- Water quality: phytoplankton composition.
- Water quality: attached algal biomass.
- Water quality: 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.
- Water quality: nutrients.
- Water quality: phytoplankton biomass.
- Water quality: phytoplankton composition.
- Water quality: attached algal biomass.
- Water quality: 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.
- Vegetation composition: positive indicators species.
- Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes.
- Vegetation composition: ericoid species and crowberry.
- Vegetation composition: dwarf shrub species.
- Vegetation composition: negative indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.
- Vegetation composition: native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation composition: bracken.
- Vegetation composition: soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: *Sphagnum* condition.
- Vegetation structure: signs of browsing.
- Vegetation structure: burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground.
- Physical structure: 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: lichens and bryophytes.
- Vegetation composition: number of positive indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: cover of positive indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: dwarf shrub composition.
- Vegetation composition: negative indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.
- Vegetation composition: native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation composition: bracken.
- Vegetation composition: soft rush.
- Vegetation structure: senescent ling.
- Vegetation structure: signs of browsing.
- Vegetation structure: burning.
- Vegetation structure: 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.
- Vegetation composition: positive indicators species.
- Vegetation composition: dwarf shrub species.
- Vegetation composition: negative indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.
- Vegetation structure: signs of grazing.
- Vegetation structure: signs of browsing.
- Vegetation structure: burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground.
- 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.
- 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 (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe) [6230]**

To restore the favourable conservation condition of Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe)* 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.
- Vegetation composition: high quality indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: species richness.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.
- Vegetation composition: negative indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: *Sphagnum* cover.
- Vegetation composition: *Polytrichum* cover.
- Vegetation composition: shrubs, bracken and heath cover.
- Vegetation structure: forb to graminoid ratio.
- Vegetation structure: sward height.
- Vegetation structure: litter cover.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground.
- Physical structure: 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.
- Ecosystem function: peat formation.
- Ecosystem function: hydrology.
- Community diversity.
- Vegetation composition: positive indicators species.
- Vegetation composition: lichens and bryophytes.
- Vegetation composition: potential dominant species.
- Vegetation composition: negative indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.
- Vegetation composition: native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: *Sphagnum* condition.
- Vegetation structure: signs of browsing.
- Vegetation structure: burning.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground.
- Physical structure: drainage.
- Physical structure: erosion.
- 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.
- Vegetation composition: negative indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: grass species and dwarf shrubs.
- Vegetation composition: bracken, native trees and shrubs.
- Vegetation structure: grazing and browsing.
- Physical structure: 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.
- Vegetation composition: positive indicator species.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.

- Vegetation composition: bracken, 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.
- Vegetation composition: non-native species.
- Vegetation composition: bracken, 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.
- Woodland structure: community diversity and extent.
- Woodland structure: natural regeneration.
- Woodland structure: dead wood.

- Woodland structure: veteran trees.
- Woodland structure: indicators of local distinctiveness.
- Vegetation composition: native tree cover.
- Vegetation composition: typical species.
- Vegetation composition: 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 11th June 2024.

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

**Special Conservation Interests**[4]

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.

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.

The Conservation Objectives seek to maintain protected SAC feature(s) where evidence exists that it is in favourable condition in the site, or where there is uncertainty concerning the assessed condition of a feature but no reason to suspect deterioration in condition since designation.

Where evidence exists that a feature is declining and/or damaged and therefore not in a favourable condition in the site, the Conservation Objectives will seek to restore the protected feature.

As regards the objectives of the measures that must be implemented in the Natura 2000 network, these are also referred to in Article 1(l) of the Habitats Directive which states "*necessary conservation measures are*

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

*applied for maintenance and restoration, at a favourable status, of the natural habitats and/or populations of species which the site is designated*".

The implementation of the project as outlined above will prevent and reduce the disturbance to habitats adjacent to the trail caused by existing recreational pressure. The upgrade to a floating gravel trail will reduce the footprint of the trail and reduce the amount of maintenance required and thus reduce disturbance to adjacent habitats on an ongoing basis. The project will directly contribute to the Site Specific Conservation Objectives of Wicklow Mountains SAC, notably:

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

- Habitat area
- Vegetation structure: Sphagnum condition;
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground; drainage.

**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 distribution.
- Vegetation composition: soft rush.
- Physical structure: disturbed bare ground.

The project will be beneficial to maintaining and achieving favourable conservation condition of the Wet Heaths [4010], Dry Heaths [4030] in the site and the typical species of these protected habitat types.

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

The effect on European Sites and their Qualifying Interests/Special Conservation Interests within a defined Zone of Influence of the proposed trail maintenance measures was assessed using expert opinion.

In determining potential impact pathways on SCI species for the Wicklow Mountains SPA, either within the bounds of the SPA or outside the SPA bounds, the disturbance distances for Merlin and Peregrine, including both core and maximum foraging ranges have been considered.

The potential effect of human disturbance and machinery on the ground while undertaking the trail maintenance measures is considered negligible, given the project will take place outside the bird breeding season and will extend over the short-term (c.30 days) and at various locations intermittently.

There is not considered to be any potential for disturbance beyond a *de minimus* level on the SCI bird populations for which the Wicklow Mountains SPA is designated.

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

Yes ☐ No ☑

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

Yes ☐ No ☑

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

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

## 6. 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.

## 7. 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.**

## 8. 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.**

## 9. 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, Head of Ecological Assessment

Date: 3rd January 2025

## 10. Part 6: Conclusion

Following an analysis of the activity, the EAU determines[5], in accordance with Regulation 42A(8) of the 2011 Regulations, that the proposed trail maintenance at St Kevin’s Way trail 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 these European sites.

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 sites.

[5] Ryan Wilson-Parr (Head of Ecological Assessment, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage) 3rd January 2025

# 11. Supplementary Information

Figure 1. (below): Location of Wicklow Mountains SAC as per the NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Mountains SAC 002122. Version 1. (Red arrow indicates project location).

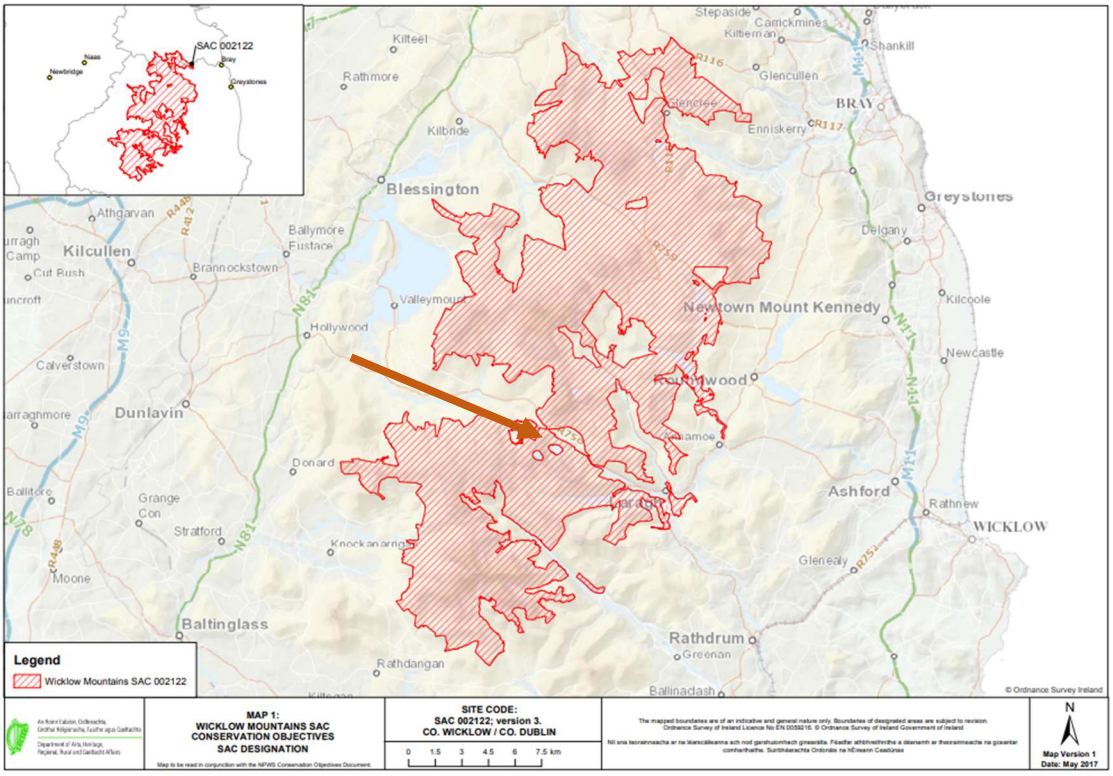


Figure 2. (below): Location of Wicklow Mountains SPA as per the European Communities (Conservation of Wild Birds (Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area 004040)) Regulations 2012. (S.I. No. 586/2019) as shown in NPWS (2017) Conservation Objectives: Wicklow Mountains SAC 002122. Version 1. (Red arrow indicates project location).

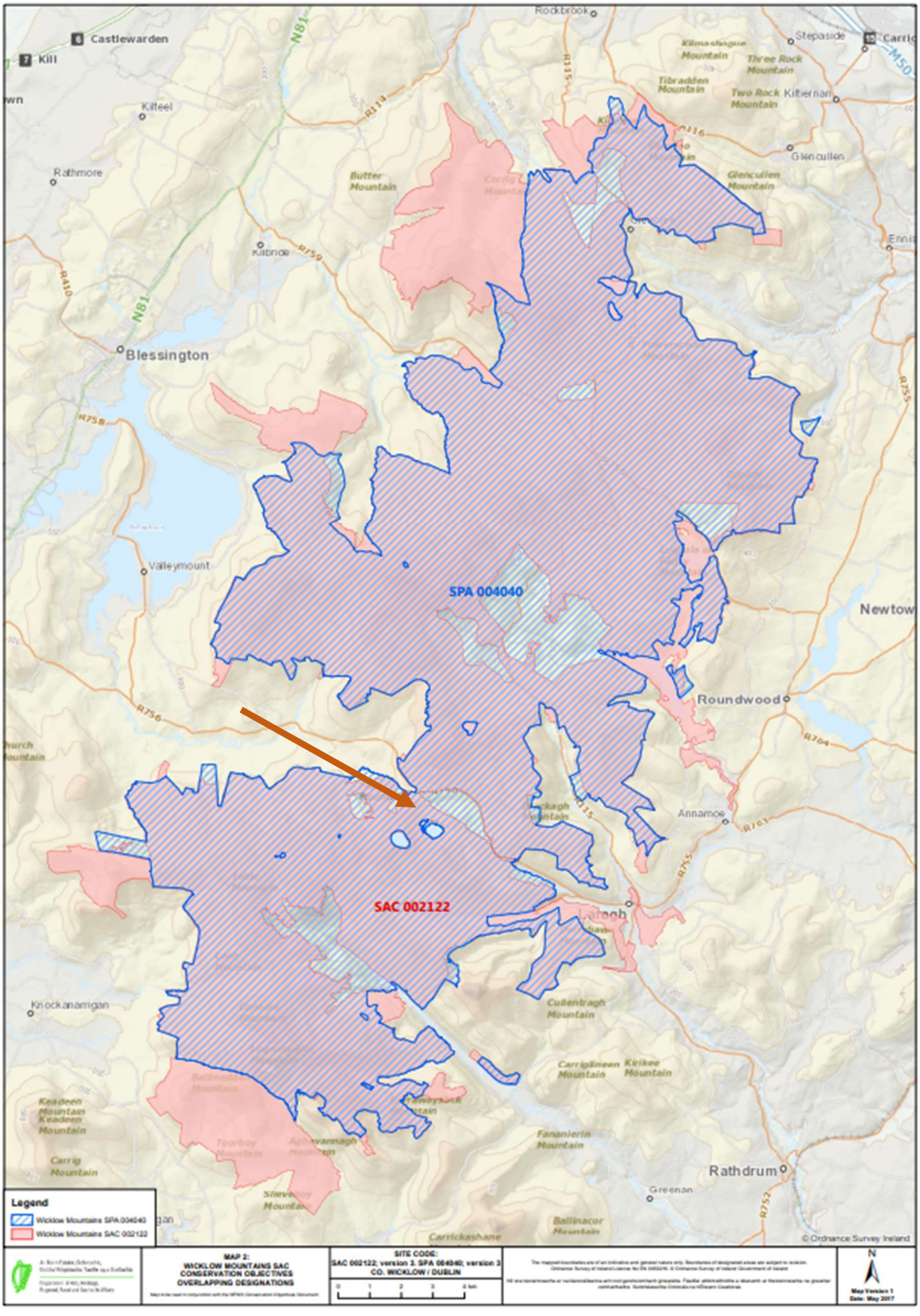


Figure 3. (below): NPWS Map Viewer with the Ordnance Survey Discovery basemap. Showing the St Kevin's Trail in the townland of Brockagh (Dashed red line). Wicklow Mountains SAC and Wicklow Mountains SPA Red arrow shows location of the short section of the path to be maintained.

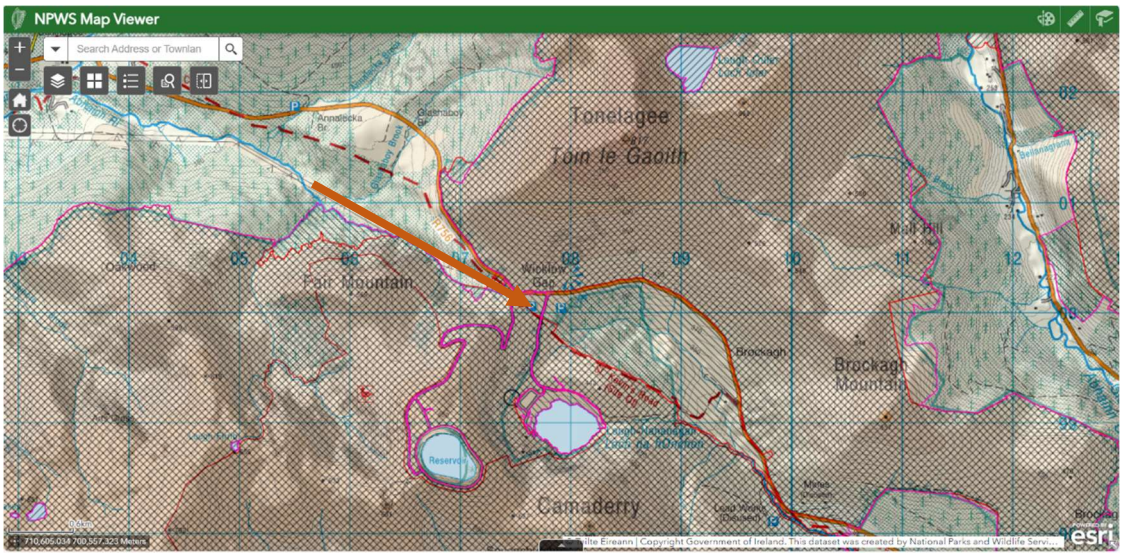
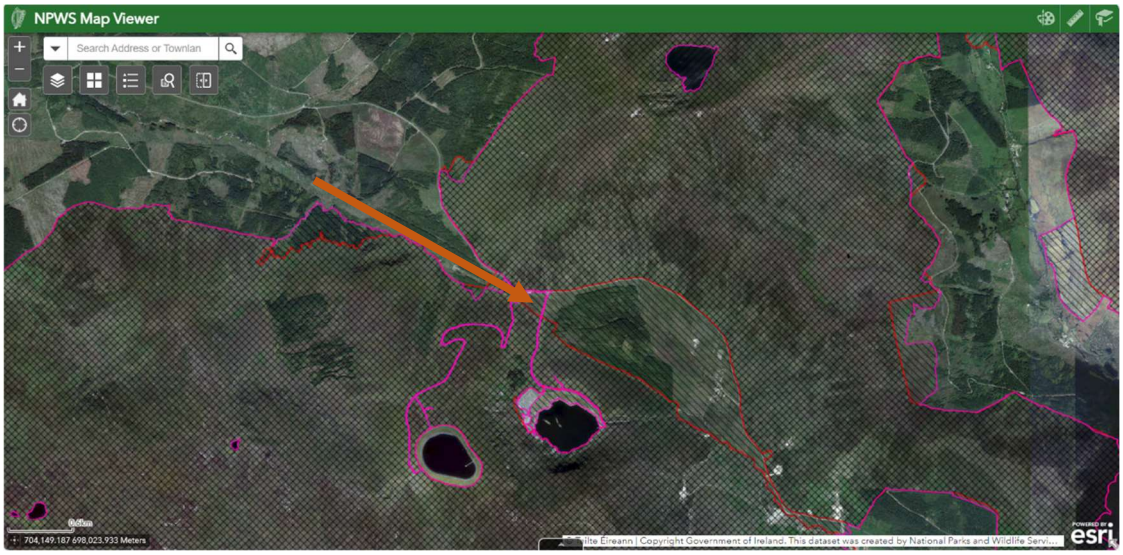



Figure 4. (below): NPWS Map Viewer with the Ordnance Survey orthophotography basemap showing the St Kevin's Trail in the townland of Brockagh (Dashed red line). Wicklow Mountains SAC and Wicklow Mountains SPA Red arrow shows location of the short section of the path to be maintained.



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