



**THEME:**

Environment

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**MATCH FUNDING:**

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Ireland

**LEAD PARTNER:**

Newry, Mourne & Down District Council

**PROJECT PARTNERS:**

East Border Region Ltd; Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council; Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute; Ulster University; Ulster Wildlife; Monaghan County Council; Institute of Technology Sligo; Golden Eagle Trust; Argyll and the Isles Coast and Countryside Trust; and Scottish Natural Heritage.

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## Project Case Study: Collaborative Action for the Natura Network (CANN) - Community Engagement with CANN Sites

The CANN project is raising awareness through community engagement work to help landowners, land-users, neighbours and local communities appreciate and value the scale of the investment and the potential impact for biodiversity and climate resilience.

The first community engagement pilot was carried out by the Islay Natural History Trust (INHT), a charity dedicated to helping local people appreciate and learn more about the geology and wildlife on Islay, Inner Hebrides islands. In co-operation with CANN, the INHT spearheaded the 'Celebration of Peat - Our Wonderful Peat & Bog' campaign to celebrate the bogs and wetlands on Islay, but also the neighbouring islands of Jura and Colonsay, consulting with local distilleries, Gaelic language groups and schools. This included creating a Peatland Passport to encourage spotting and recording wetland species, running guided walks, a community project to look at all the Gaelic words for bogs and wetplaces and local schools taking part in the John Muir award.

Following the success of the pilot, the same approach was adopted around Peatlands Park in Co Armagh, where the CANN team built relationships with four community organisations: Birches Action Rural Network, Tamnamore Community Development Association, Maghery Matters and Blackwater Community Barge. None of the four groups had a particular interest in environmental issues and all saw Peatlands Park as a government-owned site that had little connection to their group and the local community. However through engagement, this perception changed.

To increase the relevance of the project to these groups, the area of interest was extended from Peatlands Park to the riparian corridor of the River Blackwater and the shores of Lough Neagh. As part of this extensive project it was discovered that many local people had connections to the old Church Hill Estate, which was purchased by NIEA to form Peatlands Park, where they were able to tell stories of grandparents working long difficult hours extracting peat to power the mills in Portadown. This oral history became key to CANN's work.

Plans are afoot to develop similar structures on Cuilcagh and on Sliabh Beagh, where the CANN team are already organising training courses for local land-managers and interested volunteers in Herbicide application and use of chainsaws to deal with invasive rhododendron and pine.