



**THEME:**

Environment

**FUNDING (ERDF+MATCH):**

€9,210,813.93

**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.

**Start Date:** 01/01/2017

**End Date:** 31/12/2022



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SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES BODY

**Project Case Study: Collaborative Action for the Natura Network (CANN) - Lough Atona Hag Repair**

The cross-border CANN environmental project aims to improve the condition of protected habitats and support priority species found within Northern Ireland, the border counties of Ireland and Scotland.

CANN is producing Conservation Action Plans for a range of sites across the jurisdictions which are designated as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), which accumulatively account for over 25,000 hectares of land. Direct conservation actions are being carried out on 3,650 hectares of these SACs, all with an aim to help and guide the habitats and species found at these sites towards a favourable conservation status.

One of the major projects on Cuilcagh, a mountain on the border between County Fermanagh and County Cavan, has been the restoration of approximately 17Ha of eroded blanket bog within the SAC around Lough Atona.

The site had suffered significant erosion over time and had turned into a maze of peat hags and eroded gullies, with large expanses of bare peat in between. Current estimates put the loss of carbon dioxide equivalent at five tonnes per hectare on eroding peat.

Ulster Wildlife enlisted RPS Hydrologists to develop a restoration plan for the site using LiDAR and detailed aerial imagery. This plan set out the ways and means of reducing erosion and moving the eroded habitats to a more favourable state.

The CANN project have been working with local landowners to ensure the habitats are restored. These landowners were trained in hag-reprofiling techniques and installation of coir rolls to slow the flow and reduce the erosion.

Over the course of three months in the winter of 2020, these landowners reprofiled nearly 2km of peat hags and installed over 400 coir logs across the damaged area of blanket bog. In some areas, which were inaccessible to the diggers and where fine finishing was needed, this work was completed by hand.

The positive changes can already be seen, with deep peat hags reprofiled to gentle vegetated slopes and coir rolls holding back water and creating shallow pools which will eventually fill with the all important sphagnum moss, the building block of bogs.