



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.

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SPECIAL EU PROGRAMMES BODY

Project Case Study: Collaborative Action for the Natura Network (CANN) - Wildfire Management Planning for CANN sites

The Pau Costa Foundation (Spain) recently completed a Wildfire Management Plan (WMP) for Cuilcagh Mountain and are currently working to create a strategy for the Sliabh Beagh SACs, north and south. A WMP aims to allow stakeholders and responders to understand the fire risk and the landscape management needed to alter fire behaviour in the area, as well as reducing the risk of further landscape-scale fires in the future. The plan will provide recommendations to encourage actions to sustainably manage the environment, improve the responder's (fire-service and local landowners/fire rangers) capacity to control wildfires and reduce their impact on peatland habitats.

Pau Costa has been working with Earthy Matters on Sliabh Beagh and have completed Phase One of the fieldwork. High risk and key priority areas were identified, including areas where fires occurred in 2011 and 2017, allowing assessment of the damage caused and quantify the land's recovery. To do this, the team studied peat and moss depth; burn severity; vegetation cover; habitat degradation; signs of regrowth and mapped physical features such as fire breaks. Many hundreds of quadrats were studied. Findings were mixed, with some confirming that most of the fires were deliberately set and that forecasts for fire season were poor. However, it appeared that the 2011 and 2017 fire sites had made somewhat of a recovery, with plenty of healthy sphagnum found in generally moist conditions and relatively little *Molinia*. *Molinia* is not only adapted to survive fire but substantially increases fire risk by its presence. It was also discovered that in the 2021 fires, only the top surface of moss was scorched, and underneath, it was still alive. The surveys also found that the habitats burned in 2011 and 2017 are being used for nesting birds again.

On Tuesday 27 July 2021, a special workshop was delivered online, studying Wildfire Management in Ireland. Over 100 participants, from as far afield as South America, UAE and India, took part, where they gained an in depth understanding of the history, practice, science and application of wildfire management as it has been experienced in projects across Ireland over the last decade.

The next fieldwork phase will consist of looking at high-risk potential areas for fire as polygons on the map and the critical points where fires can start, spread and be stopped. Of particular interest will be wet anchor areas that won't burn and can act as natural fire breaks, and man-made features like roads and lanes that act as firebreaks, thus helping reduce vulnerability and finding ways to compartmentalise fire and prevent landscape-scale events like 2017 happening again.