

National Parks & Wildlife Service

Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC (Site code 002350)



Raised Bog Restoration Plan (Report)

Version 2

October 2022

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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the Restoration Plan

This restoration plan has been developed by National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to set out proposals for restoration of raised bog and associated habitats at Curraghlehanagh Bog Special Area of Conservation (SAC) (002350). This plan identifies technically feasible restoration measures for the various zones of the bog including the high bog, cutover bog and surrounding margins and provides details of progress on implementation of the restoration plan.

The restoration measures set out will enable nature conservation targets for Active Raised Bog (ARB) at this SAC to be met. Although the focus of the restoration plan is on ARB habitat, it is anticipated that restoration measures will also benefit other peatland habitats and can contribute to socio-economic benefits for the local community, improvements to biodiversity and reduced carbon emissions. Monitoring of this restoration plan will be undertaken to ensure that the intended restoration measures are successfully contributing to the achievement of the site-specific targets for ARB at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC.

Action 1.1: Develop restoration plan further in partnership with stakeholders.

This restoration plan will be developed further in conjunction with stakeholders to ensure that restoration is carried out in such a way that the conservation requirements of the site can be met, whilst minimising any impacts on adjacent land and maximising benefits to the local community. The plan will develop and change over time through input from stakeholders and **will be considered a living document**. The primary aim of this restoration plan is to ensure that site-specific conservation objectives for Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC can be met.

Section 2 of the restoration plan sets out the restoration measures that have been proposed for Curraghlehanagh Bog. Section 3 outlines how a drainage management plan for Curraghlehanagh Bog has been developed to support the implementation of this restoration plan. Section 4 describes potential for community benefits to be explored through the plan and Section 5 outlines progress with implementation of the plan.

Map 1 outlines the location and extent of Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC and Map 2 illustrates the restoration measures that have been implemented to date as well as any proposed/outstanding restoration measures to be implemented at Curraghlehanagh Bog.

This document provides an outline of the detail of the restoration plan but is supported by detailed datasets that are available on the NPWS Restoration Projects Map Viewer. This map viewer provides NPWS with an up-to-date view of all restoration plan details and supporting information including status of landowner investigations, landowner consent, progress with construction and details of proposed and remaining restoration measures.

1.2 Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC

Curraghlehanagh Bog is part of a bog cluster situated approximately 6km north of Mountbellew in Co. Galway. It is mainly in the townlands of Curraghlehanagh, Rushestown and Milltown. The SAC includes the raised bog and surrounding areas which include cutover bog, wet grassland, improved grassland, scrub and deciduous woodland. The SAC lies on a relatively low-lying plateau entirely within the upper reaches of the Shiven River. Mature coniferous forestry was felled from the high bog and cutover area to the north as part of a Coillte LIFE-funded restoration project (LIFE 04 NAT/IE/000121). Habitat diversity is increased with the presence of a narrow strip of old mixed woodland on the north-eastern margin of the bog. Two bog bursts and associated tear pool

complexes occur on the eastern side of the bog. A number of flushes occur at the western edge of the high bog. The bog is a western raised bog that has been classified geomorphologically as a basin bog (Cross 1990; Douglas & Mooney 1984).

The SAC has been selected for three Annex I habitats. These are:

- [7110] Active raised bogs*
- [7120] Degraded raised bogs still capable of natural regeneration
- [7150] Depressions on peat substrates of the *Rhynchosporion*

*Priority habitats

This restoration plan has been developed to address restoration measures for these peatland habitats.

Curraghlahanagh Bog supports a good diversity of raised bog microhabitats including hummock/hollow complexes, pools and flushes, and regenerating cutover which add to the diversity and scientific value of the site. Current land use on the bog consists of peat-cutting along the north and east margins. Damaging activities associated with this land use include drainage and burning. Fire damage has been recorded in the 1980s but the present abundance of bog mosses indicates significant recovery of the bog surface in these areas. These are all activities that have resulted in loss of habitat and damage to the hydrological status of the bog, and pose a continuing threat to its viability.

1.3 Site-specific conservation objectives

Detailed site-specific conservation objectives (SSCOs) aim to define the conditions necessary to maintaining or achieving the favourable conservation condition of a habitat or species at site level. The maintenance of habitats and species within sites at favourable condition will contribute to the maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

A conservation objective has been set for Curraghlahanagh Bog SAC for ARB habitat using attributes and targets based on parameters set out in the Habitats Directive. In summary, one of the key targets is to restore the area of ARB to 35.5 ha. The area of ARB was reported as 9.8 ha during the latest monitoring survey (2012) and it has been determined that there is potential for 19.8 ha of Degraded Raised Bog (DRB) to be restored to ARB on the high bog following restoration measures. There is also long-term potential for 5.9 ha of bog peat-forming habitats (BPFH) to develop if restoration measures are undertaken on cutover areas. Several targets have been set for other attributes relating to the quality and condition of ARB habitat, including a target to restore adequate transitional areas to support/protect the active raised bog and the ecosystem services it provides. The restoration measures proposed by this restoration plan aim to achieve these targets. Further information on the SSCO's can be found in the Curraghlahanagh Bog SAC conservation objectives document (NPWS, 2015a) and the conservation objectives supporting document – raised bog habitats (NPWS, 2015b).

2 Restoration measures at Curraghlahanagh Bog SAC

2.1 Introduction

Hydrological processes are key drivers of raised bog ecology, as raised bogs are predominately fed by precipitation. For ARB to develop or be maintained, mean water levels need to be near or at the bog's surface for most of the year. Seasonal fluctuations should not exceed 20cm below ground surface, and water levels in the peat should be within 10cm of the surface, except for very short periods of time (Kelly & Schouten 2002). Gentle slopes that limit intermittent lateral losses of water (through surface run-off) and encourage sustained water-logging are the most favourable to achieve these conditions. These conditions may be maintained on steeper slopes in areas of focused flow

(flushes) (Mackin et al.; 2017a; Regan et al., 2020). However, it will not be possible to raise the water level to high enough levels across the entire high bog surface, particularly approaching marginal areas, to enable ARB to develop. Even in high bog areas that do not have potential for ARB to form, water levels should be raised as necessary to support habitat for the areas where ARB can occur.

The main aim of restoration on raised bogs is to maintain or improve the quality of existing areas of ARB or improve the hydrological conditions that will allow ARB to develop in areas with suitable topographic conditions (gentle slopes and/or areas of focused flow). This requires measures to be implemented on both the high bog and cutover areas. Measures implemented on selected areas of cutover will also help to minimise the impact that drainage and cutting has had on the hydrological integrity of the high bog and support a diversity of other transitional wetland habitats (e.g. wet woodland and fen), as well as the species they sustain. Once restored, these transitional cutover zones may provide further ecosystem services through flood attenuation and water supply maintenance and purification, increased carbon sequestration and improvements to the site's overall biodiversity value.

The main restoration measures that may be considered for improving hydrological conditions on raised bogs include:

- Drain blocking (includes drains on both high bog and the margins)
- Removal of forestry/tree clearance
- Installation of marginal dams
- High bog excavation/re-profiling
- Inoculation with *Sphagnum* species
- Bunding on high bog or cutover bog

Further details on each of these measures can be found in Irish Wildlife Manual No. 99 'Best practice in raised bog restoration in Ireland' (Mackin *et al*, 2017b). Additional measures may be considered in particular instances where there are specific problems that are causing damage to an SAC. The most relevant restoration measures for Curraghleanagh Bog SAC are outlined in Section 2.2 – 2.5 below.

2.2 Blocking of high bog drains

Blocking high bog drains slows the flow of water off the surface of the bog and increases the water table in the peat. Drain blocking is a proven and effective restoration measure on Irish raised bogs with minimal maintenance requirements. The approach has been demonstrated at a number of raised bogs in Ireland with very positive results evident in less than 10 years (**Figure 2.1**) as outlined by Fernandez *et al.* (2014a).

Sometimes, there are concerns from local communities living close to raised bogs that drain blocking on the high bog will result in, or exacerbate, flooding. Blocking high bog drains, in fact, slows the flow of water off the bog potentially reducing the frequency and magnitude of flood events by restoring the hydrological function of the bog. To address these concerns NPWS have developed a drainage management plan for Curraghleanagh Bog, with further details of this plan outlined within section 3.

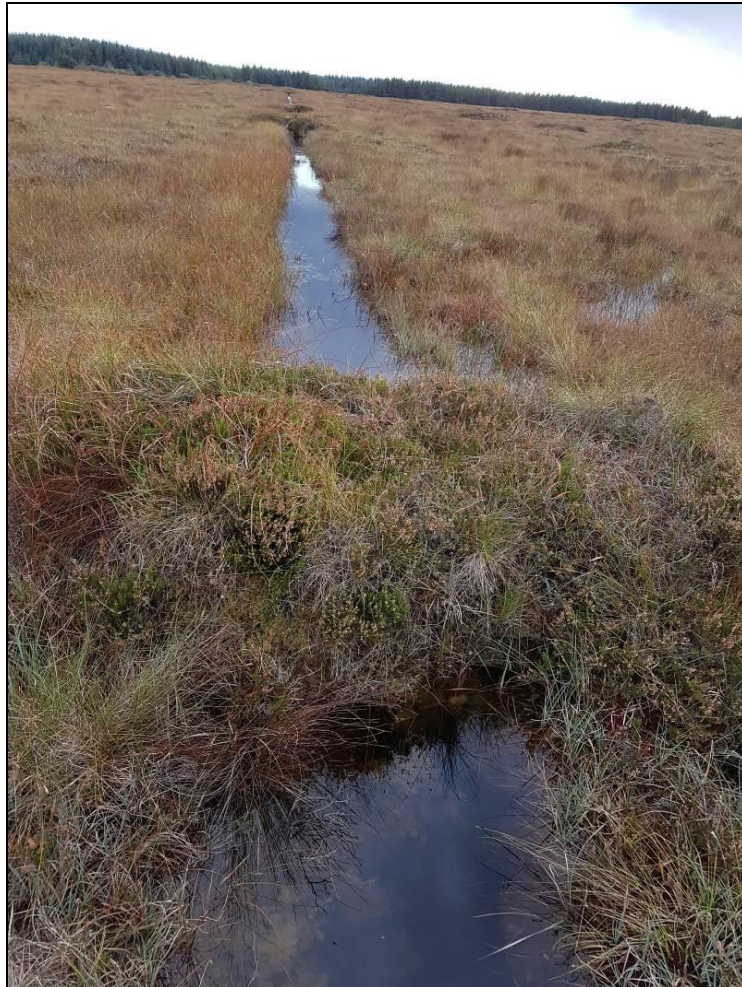


Figure 2.1 Example of a peat dam to block a typical high bog drain

Action 2.1: Block all remaining high bog drains within at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC.

Several high bog drains have been blocked on Curraghlehanagh Bog. However, there are still several functional drains that need to be blocked to restore the hydrological function of the bog. In addition, ongoing monitoring of the drain blocking activity is required to ensure dams do not fail over time. Details of the locations of blocked drains on the high bog can be found in Map 2.

2.3 Blocking of drains on cutover bog

Blocking of cutover drains slows the flow of water off the cutover areas and increases the water table in the surrounding peat. This can help to reduce the rate of infiltration through the high bog and can lead to conditions that allow peat to form on the cutover (**Figure 2.2**).

Drain blocking on cutover areas has been carried out at a number of raised bogs in Ireland to date resulting in the development of peat-forming vegetation on cutover areas. As with blocking of high bog drains, there are sometimes concerns from local communities living close to raised bogs that drain blocking on cutover bog will result in, or exacerbate, flooding. Blocking drains on cutover bog can slow the rate at which water is lost from the bog therefore potentially reducing the frequency and magnitude of downstream flood events. This restoration measure is primarily focused on former spread-grounds and only in very rare occasions, where it is absolutely essential, includes agricultural land. Drains in these areas will only be blocked in agreement with landowners and where there is a suitable hydrological barrier such as a functional drain to prevent impacts outside of the restoration area.



Figure 2.2 Water table at the surface of cutover bog following successful drain blocking resulting in *Sphagnum* development less than 10 years after drain blocking (this was previously an area of bare peat)

Action 2.2: Block remaining functional drains on cutover areas within Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC.

Some cutover drains have already been blocked on Curraghlehanagh Bog and ongoing monitoring of the drain blocking activity is required to ensure dams do not fail over time. In addition, there are several areas of cutover with drains remaining to be blocked. Blocking of cutover drains may reduce ongoing subsidence of the high bog and in some areas will also lead to the development of peat forming habitats. It is proposed that these drains are blocked, primarily with peat dams, with some plastic reinforcements where necessary to prevent erosion. The required conditions are for the water table to be maintained at or close to the surface, therefore large areas of standing water or deep pools are not desired. Details of the locations on the cutover where it is proposed to block drains can be found in Map 2.

2.4 Contour bunding

Contour bunds on the high bog aims to reduce the rate of lateral flow through the upper layers of the peat. In contrast to some other bunding techniques, contour bunding is not intended as a means of impounding surface water. This method involves excavating a trench 1.5-2.0m deep, re-

compacting peat into the trench and building a slightly raised bund 25-30cm above the current ground surface. In addition, these bunds have 5m long 'finger bunds' constructed using the same technique at approximately 25m spacing to prevent flow along the bund which may lead to erosion. After 1-2 years it is anticipated that the bund will have subsided close to current ground level and therefore will not appear as a prominent feature on the bog surface.



Figure 2.3 Contour bund constructed at Knockacoller Bog SAC, Co. Laois

Contour bunds are most effective where there is cracking or slumping in the upper layers of the peat as the re-compacted trench assists in sealing up these cracks and slows the flow rate through the peat, supporting a higher water table behind the bund. The key issue with this technique is that the extent of the impact extending back into the bog depends on the hydraulic gradient (which is closely correlated to surface slope). As a result, the extent of impact from such bunds is likely to be extremely limited where the surface slope at the margins is steep. This method is best suited to sites with a relatively gentle slope towards the margins or as a means of effectively blocking a dense network of shallow surface drains on the high bog. Ground conditions will play an important factor in whether the bund can be constructed in such circumstances, therefore this method is most effective on drier sites where machines can operate safely and effectively.

Action 2.3: Construct further contour bunding on the high bog and monitor the impact of the existing contour bund at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC

0.5km of contour bunding has already been constructed on the high bog at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC. It is proposed that a further 5km of contour bunding is constructed. Details of the locations on the high bog where existing contour bunding is located and whether further contour bunding is proposed can be found in Map 2. The impact of the contour bund will be monitored over time to determine how effective this measure has been and determine the cost/benefit of implementing this measure.

2.5 Cell bunding

Cell bunding involves the creation of individual cells, consisting of a cutoff walls extending into the peat substrate and protruding above the ground surface to create a water table close to or slightly above the ground surface (maximum depth typically 10-20cm). The approach permits the interception of laterally flowing groundwater by low permeability cutoff walls, while the surface bunds prevent lateral discharge of surface water; this also encourages recharge to the underlying water table, helping contribute to the water balance, while also maintaining an elevated water table in those areas up gradient of standing water. Due to topographic variability, the depth of water will also vary significantly resulting in enhanced ecological diversity across the banded area.

Cell bunds are typically constructed by excavating a trench 1.0-1.5m deep, recompacting the excavated peat into the trench and constructing a bund 0.5-0.6m high above the ground surface (Figure 2.4). Water level control structures (pipes or overflow weirs) are incorporated into these cells as a means to regulate water levels and evenly distribute water across the site.



Figure 2.4 Example of existing cell bund constructed at Cloncrow Bog NHA (The vegetation in this photo has developed in the 2 years since cell construction)

Action 2.4: Construct additional cell bunds at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC and monitoring the impact of existing cell bunding

Significant cell bunding works have already been implemented on parts of the cutover at Curraghlehanagh Bog which is showing very positive results. This will be monitored over future years to establish efficacy of the measure and ensure that there are no failures. There is potential for the construction of additional cell bunding in several areas of the site including the northern and eastern cutover as illustrated in Map 2.

2.6 Removal of forestry/tree clearance

In the past numerous raised bogs were planted with conifers. This has resulted in significant impacts on the hydrological function of these bogs. Both site preparation works, such as drainage and use of fertilisers, dries out and alters the natural bog vegetation, while the presence of growing trees lowers the water table further due to increased rates of interception and evapotranspiration. Felling of forestry is typically combined with other restoration measures including drain blocking, and when both are applied to a suitable area they can be extremely effective in raising water levels in the peat.

Felling of forestry as well as removal of trees growing sporadically is a proven restoration measure and has been used by Coillte at numerous raised bogs both on high bog and cutover, particularly as part of a number of LIFE funded restoration projects (**Figure 2.**).

a) Bog surface prior to forestry removal and drain blocking



b) Bog surface after forestry removal and drain blocking



Figure 2.5 Example of the impact of felling forestry on a raised bog to restore more natural hydrological conditions

Action 2.5: Clear 2.7 ha of forestry within Curraghleanagh Bog SAC.

There are coniferous forestry plantations on the cutover at Curraghleanagh Bog SAC. It is not considered necessary to fell all of these as some are unlikely to be having a significant impact on the hydrology of the high bog. It is proposed that forests considered to be having an impact on the hydrology of the high bog will be felled.

2.7 General site management

In addition to the proposed measures, it is important that the restoration plan contributes to improving general site management. This includes considering issues such as:

- Fire prevention and response
- Management of littering/fly-tipping

Burning of the high bog can result in significant damage to a raised bog by removing peat-forming vegetation which reduces the capacity of the peat to retain water. This causes much more rapid surface run-off and therefore can result in more widespread drying out and increased peak flows in surrounding streams. There have been no recent reports of burning at Curraghleanagh Bog SAC; however, the bog has been damaged in the past.

Issues such as littering and fly-tipping are also common problems on raised bogs. Depending on the nature of the material dumped this can lead to pollution in surrounding areas.

Action 2.6: Prepare a fire prevention and control plan for Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC in consultation with local stakeholders.

It is proposed that a fire prevention plan is developed for Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC to identify past occurrences of fires, the likely causes and develop an effective plan to prevent fires in future as well as an appropriate response should a fire occur in the future. Issues such as fire prevention and management of littering/fly-tipping also need to be addressed as part of a wider strategy of raising public awareness on the importance of these habitats.

3 Drainage Management Plan

One issue that can cause concerns, particularly for local stakeholders, relates to whether restoration may result in increased flooding in the surrounding area. In many instances bog restoration has the opposite effect by returning more natural hydrological conditions whereby flow is attenuated and reaches the surrounding watercourses more slowly than when drains were present. This is evident at bogs such as Killyconny Bog SAC (000006) where extensive restoration has been carried out on cutover bog and there have been no adverse impacts on adjoining agricultural land.

Nonetheless, many individuals may remain unconvinced on these issues until several years after restoration has taken place. Therefore, in order to provide reassurance, an integrated drainage management plan for the bog and its surroundings has been developed as part of this restoration plan. The drainage management plan is intended to support the conservation objectives for Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC by ensuring the drainage network can be maintained without impacting on the conservation objectives. The plan assesses instances of existing impediments to the effective management of the drainage network (e.g., undersized culverts or channels) and provides recommendations in relation to remedial works and maintenance works going forward. Implementation of such measures will ensure that the risk of flooding will be significantly reduced.

Action 3.1: Engage with local stakeholders in relation to the implementation of recommendations of the Drainage Management Plan.

Implementing this plan will require input from local stakeholders to ensure that required actions can be implemented.

4 Community benefits

Through consultation with the local community and other stakeholders it will be possible to develop ideas for maximising socio-economic benefits for the local community through restoration. These might include building or improving existing facilities, where appropriate (i.e., tracks, board walks, bog bridges), encouraging the creation of small tourism enterprises, promoting the benefits to human health and well-being and enhancing the value of the site as an educational resource. There are many cases where local communities, including local businesses, are actively involved in or supporting the conservation and restoration of raised bogs across the country. Examples of this are found at Abbeyleix Bog (Co. Laois), Carrownagappul Bog SAC (Co. Galway), Girley Bog Natural Heritage Area (NHA) (Co. Meath), Lodge Bog (Co. Kildare) and Scohaboy Bog NHA (Co. Tipperary).

Curraghlehanagh Bog offers potential for recreation and amenity; based on existing tracks and roadways around the bog. Any proposed amenity facilities will need to be implemented in a way that does not impact on the site-specific conservation objectives for the site.

Apart from immediate economic benefits, the restoration of raised bogs can provide many other benefits to the wider community, such as provision of clean water, flood attenuation and water flow regulation, preservation of archaeological artefacts and other sources of historical knowledge and, not least, helping Ireland reduce its national greenhouse gas emissions and, therefore, helping to combat climate change.

Action 4.1: Optimise the community benefits of the restoration plan.

As the restoration plan is further developed and implemented, opportunities to improve the recreation and amenity value of the bog and surrounding areas and promote local initiatives, while protecting and enhancing its natural values, will be explored by and with the local community. Promoting community involvement in the long-term management of the site both during and after restoration measures are carried out, will be encouraged.

5 Restoration Plan Implementation

5.1 Preparatory actions

Prior to implementation of the restoration plan several preparatory actions are required before construction of restoration measures can commence. A summary of these preparatory actions is outlined below:

- Hydrological characterisation – collation of existing hydrological data, hydrological surveys, instrumentation with monitoring data (where necessary);
- Review of proposed restoration measures in line with best practice at the time of implementation (including exploring opportunities to implement enhanced measures);
- Detailed ecological surveys (primarily comprising surveys of cutover areas, but where necessary also includes high bog areas e.g., if ecotopes have not been surveyed in many years);
- Landownership Investigations (investigations into ownership, turbary rights etc.);
- Stakeholder consultation and community engagement (meeting with stakeholders to outline restoration plans and consider any concerns raised by the local community);
- Compensation/land acquisition (compensation or acquisition of lands required to implement the required restoration measures on private lands);
- Appropriate Assessment Screening;
- Compilation of tender/construction documents including preparation of health and safety file;
- Surveying and setting out of the works;
- Implementation of restoration measures (including construction supervision and contract administration);
- Post-works inspections and preparation of as-built survey information;
- Update of restoration plan to outline works completed and remaining works required in future, including updating of all works within a GIS-based data viewer.

5.2 Progress to date

Significant progress has been made in implementing the proposed restoration plan at

Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC, both in terms of progress with preparatory actions as well as implementation of substantial restoration measures across the northern half of the SAC. A summary of progress to date is outlined below:

5.2.1 Hydrological characterisation

Status – Complete

Detailed hydrological characterisation of Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC has been completed. This comprised detailed surveys of the high bog and cutover to collect data to enable the restoration plan to be refined, as well as identifying opportunities for enhanced restoration measures comprising contour bunding on the high bog and cell bunding in cutover areas. A hydrological monitoring network was established in 2020, comprising piezometer nests at eight locations across the bog (high bog and cutover). These are monitored at frequent intervals to assess the hydrological impact of restoration measures and this information is used as a feedback mechanism in reviewing the restoration plan.

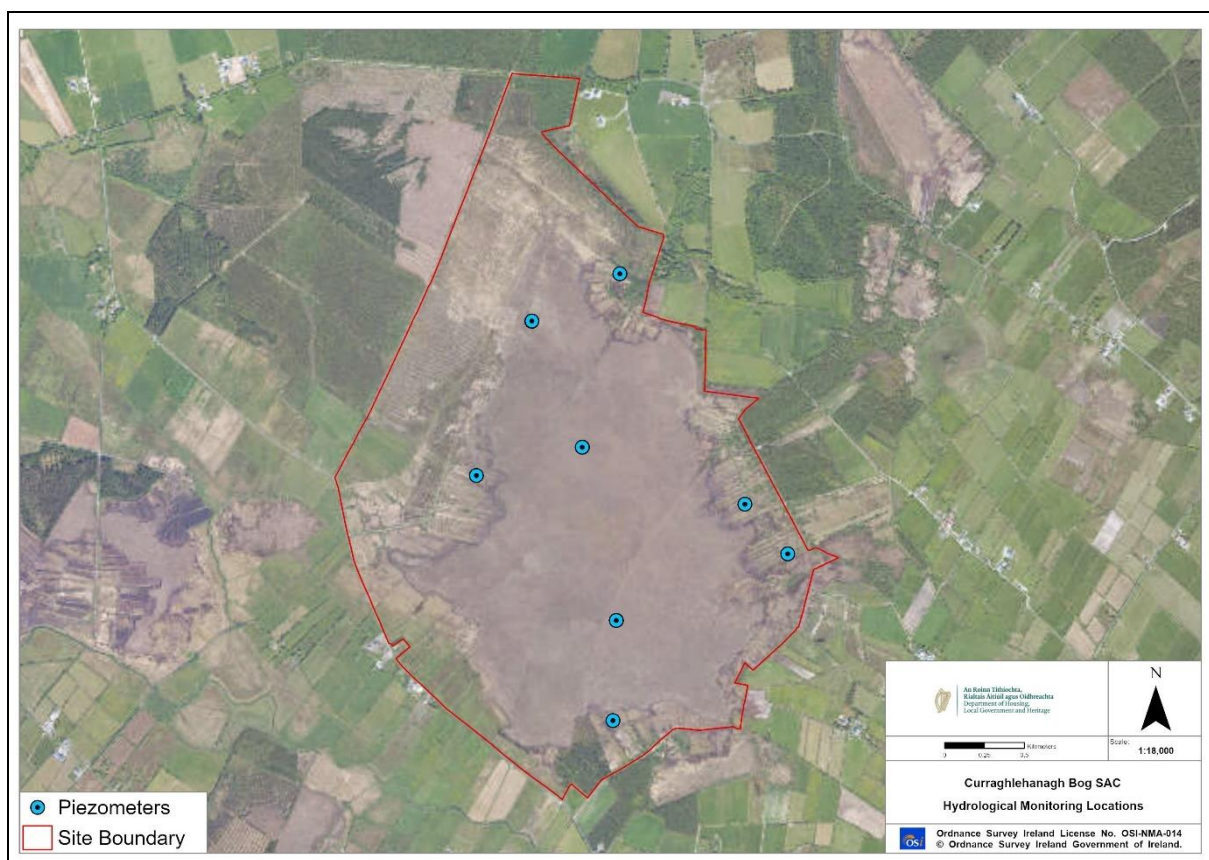


Figure 5.1 Location of hydrological monitoring network at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC

5.2.2 Review of proposed restoration measures in line with best practice at time of implementation

Status – Complete

Following detailed hydrological characterisation of Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC in 2020, a comprehensive review of proposed restoration measures was completed which identified the potential to implement contour bunding across the high bog, trench bunding across the cutovers, and the blocking of drains on the high bog and cutover bog with peat dams. Details of the proposed restoration measures at Curraghlehanagh are illustrated in Map 2.

5.2.3 Detailed ecological surveys

Status – Complete

The most recent ecotope survey of Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC was completed in October 2012 which determined that at that time active raised bog (7110) covered 9.84ha (6.72%) of the high bog. There are two areas of central ecotope surrounded by sub-central ecotope. These are characterised by pools, lawns, hummocks, hollows and high *Sphagnum* cover of up to 75%. There are five other areas of sub-central ecotope.

In addition to the high bog survey, a cutover habitat survey was carried out in 2020 in accordance with Irish Wildlife Manual No. 128 'The Habitats of Cutover Raised Bog' (Smith & Crowley, 2020). This survey involved detailed mapping of the various vegetation communities occurring on the cutover bog and also classified these in terms of sensitivity to damage from restoration activities. The survey primarily reported areas of lower and medium sensitivity, with some smaller pockets of high sensitivity. This mapping together with mapping of the high bog ensures the restoration plan takes into account the existing sensitive habitats present on site to minimize potential impacts and also establishes a baseline status that can be used to monitor the results of measures.

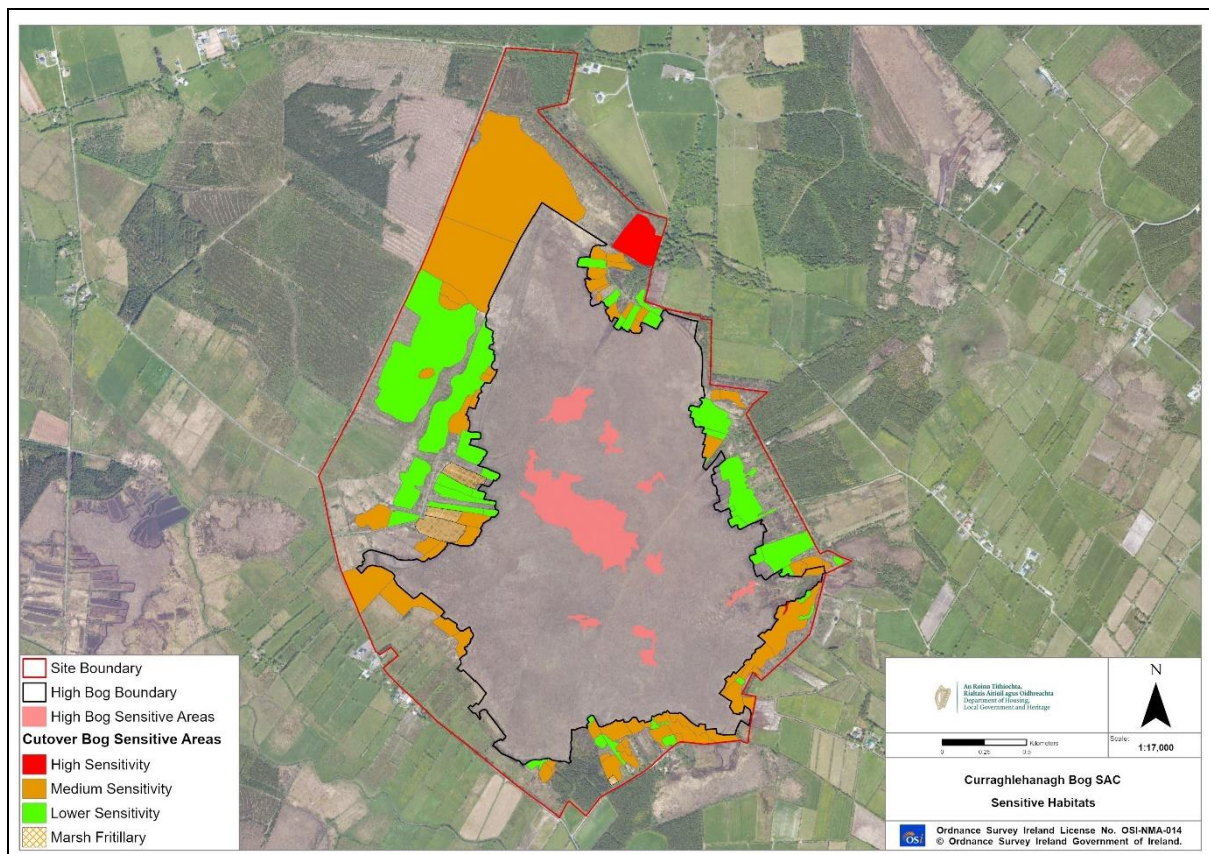


Figure 5.2 Sensitive habitats mapped at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC

5.2.4 Landownership Investigations

Status – Complete

Comprehensive landownership investigations have been completed at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC. These have identified that there is a mixture of public and private ownership, with some areas of unregistered land. In addition, there are some areas where private individuals hold turbary rights. These investigations have identified individuals to be consulted at the next stage in the restoration plan implementation process.

5.2.5 Stakeholder consultation and community engagement

Status – Ongoing (partially complete)

Comprehensive stakeholder consultation and community engagement has been carried out at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC. This has included meeting with all private individuals owning the freehold or having a turbary right at the bog, and other state bodies.

5.2.6 Compensation/land acquisition

Status – Ongoing (partially complete)

Compensation has been offered to all qualifying landowners and turbary right holders within the bog. The majority of landowners have now accepted compensation, with a small number of individuals that have outstanding concerns to be resolved. These discussions are ongoing, and it is anticipated that these issues will be resolved.

5.2.7 Appropriate Assessment Screening

Status – Complete

An Appropriate Assessment Screening report has been prepared to consider the potential for significant effects on any European Sites from the implementation of the restoration plan at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC. As the bog has been selected as a Special Area of Conservation for the presence of raised bog habitats, the proposal to allow restoration measures to take place in Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC **is directly connected with and necessary to the management of this site as a European site**. The proposed restoration measures are essential to support the reestablishment of appropriate hydrological conditions within the SAC to enable nature conservation targets for Active Raised Bog (ARB) at this SAC to be met.

However, following a precautionary approach and to inform a risk assessment, screening for Appropriate Assessment was undertaken to assess, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of those European sites considered, whether or not the project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on any European site.

The findings of this screening exercise determined that the proposed restoration measures:

- Will not give rise to potential likely significant effects on the Qualifying Interests/Special Conservation Interests of any other European site within the project's zone of influence, in view of best scientific knowledge and in view of the conservation objectives of those sites; and
- Will not give rise to potential in-combination or cumulative effects with the other plans or projects considered.

5.2.8 Compilation of tender/construction documents and Health & Safety file

Status – Phase 1 Complete (further phases required)

A work package comprising details of restoration measures that could be implemented (where landowner permissions were in place) was compiled together with detailed specifications for the proposed measures (including the high bog contour bund and cutover trench bund). In addition, a health and safety file was compiled to ensure the works could be carried out in accordance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations. Generally, this work involves the following activities:

- Identify hazards arising from the design of the various schemes.

- Eliminate these hazards, or where not practicable to do so, reduce the risk of these hazards.

5.2.9 Surveying setting/out of the works

Status – Phase 1 Complete (further phases required)

The surveying and staking out of drains and dams can be difficult due to the nature of the bog environment. Vegetation and soft ground conditions can make identification of features and surveying of same, difficult and potentially dangerous. The setting out of the works is generally done using bamboo stakes to mark the locations of the restoration features which are to be constructed such as the dams or bunds. All works proposed during phase 1 of the restoration plan were set out as required. This activity provides an additional opportunity to review the restoration measures in detail on the ground and where necessary minor modifications can be made (e.g., adjusting the placement of particular dams due to dense vegetation coverage or alignment of bunds due to ground conditions). This ensure that the risk of damage to the raised bog is minimized as inadequate planning can increase the risk of machines entering unsuitable areas.



Figure 5.3 Example of Finding Suitable Locations Along a Drain For a Peat Dam

5.2.10 Implementation of restoration measures

Status – Phase 1 Complete (further phases required)

A significant proportion of the restoration works at Curraghlehanagh Bog SAC have been completed. This includes construction of 551 peat dams and 4.7 km of bunding. In total, 1489 more dams are planned to be installed as well as 6.38 km of bunding.

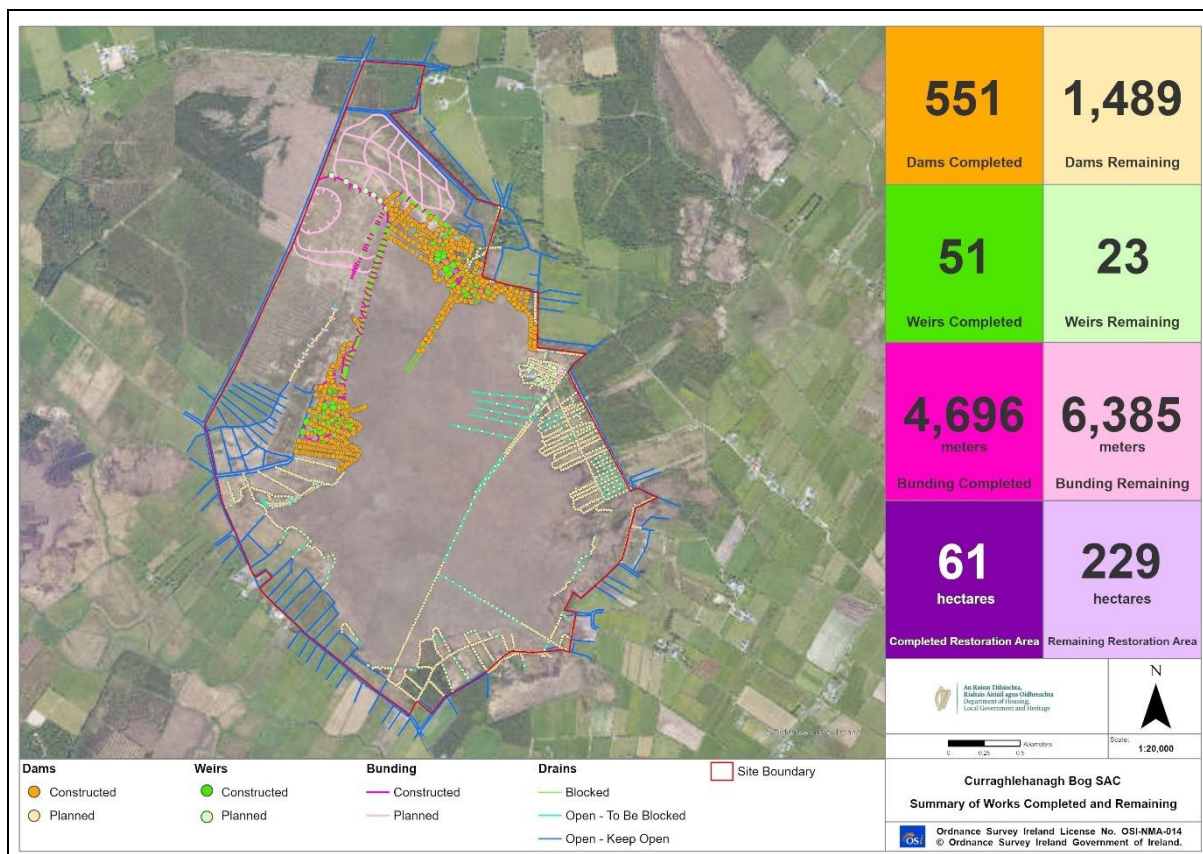


Figure 5.4 Summary of works completed to date and works remaining

5.2.11 Post-works inspections and preparation of as built survey information.

Status – Phase 1 Complete (further phases required)

Post-works inspections have been completed and an as-built drawing prepared (summarised in Figure 5.4). This has included detailed aerial surveys of the bog to collect high-resolution ortho-imagery and oblique images to ensure a detailed as-built drawing could be prepared.

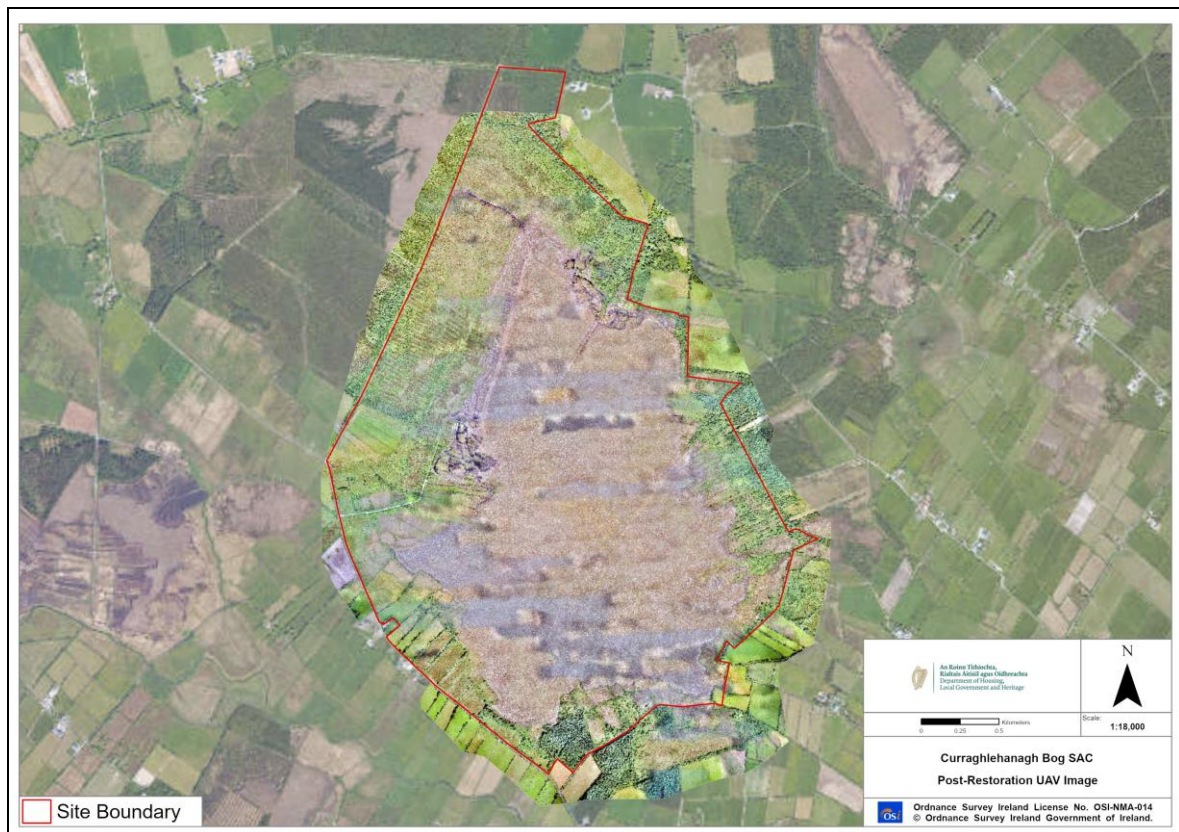


Figure 5.5 Example of high-resolution ortho-imagery illustrating contour bunding on the high bog



Figure 5.6 Example of oblique imagery illustrating contour bunding on the high bog



Figure 5.7 Example of oblique imagery illustrating cell bunding on cutover illustrating finger bunds extending perpendicular to the main bund

The Implementation of the Protected Raised Bog Restoration Programme has produced impressive results thus far on Curraghlehannagh Bog SAC. Figure 5.8 below, shows the effects of the restoration works on groundwater levels, indicating an increase from 13cm below ground in August 2020 to 5cm below ground in August 2022 from a piezometer well (4S) readings. This rise in the water table level will improve the hydrological conditions in order to facilitate peat-forming vegetation to establish in these areas.

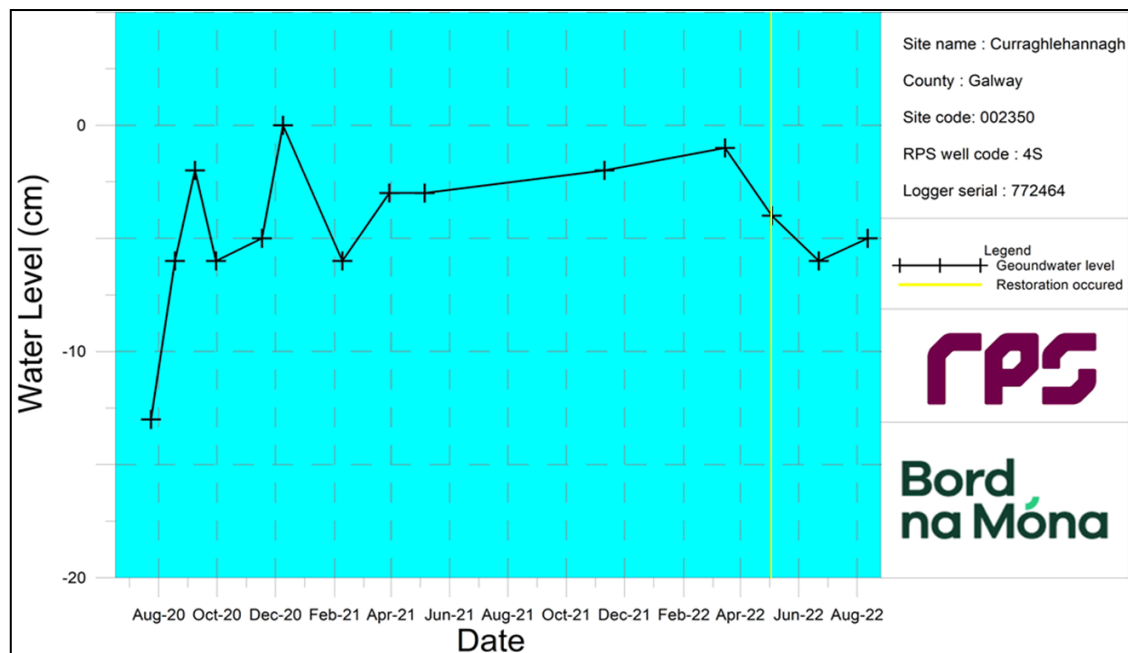


Figure 5.8 Example of Curraghlehannagh Bog SAC Pre and Post Works Water Levels

5.2.12 Update of restoration plan to outline works completed and remaining works required in future.

Status – Ongoing

This restoration plan has been updated with the details of the works completed to date and details of the restoration measures remaining to be implemented. In summary, at present it is estimated that 1,489 dams and 6.4km of bunding are left to be installed, in areas where there is ongoing consultation with the relevant landowners. It is anticipated that these works will be implemented over the coming years when consent from landowners is received. As this restoration plan is a live document, it is anticipated that restoration measures will be reviewed on an ongoing basis as experience and best-practice evolves nationally and internationally.

There are also a number of challenges which require careful management to ensure that the continuing delivery program is achieved. These challenges include;

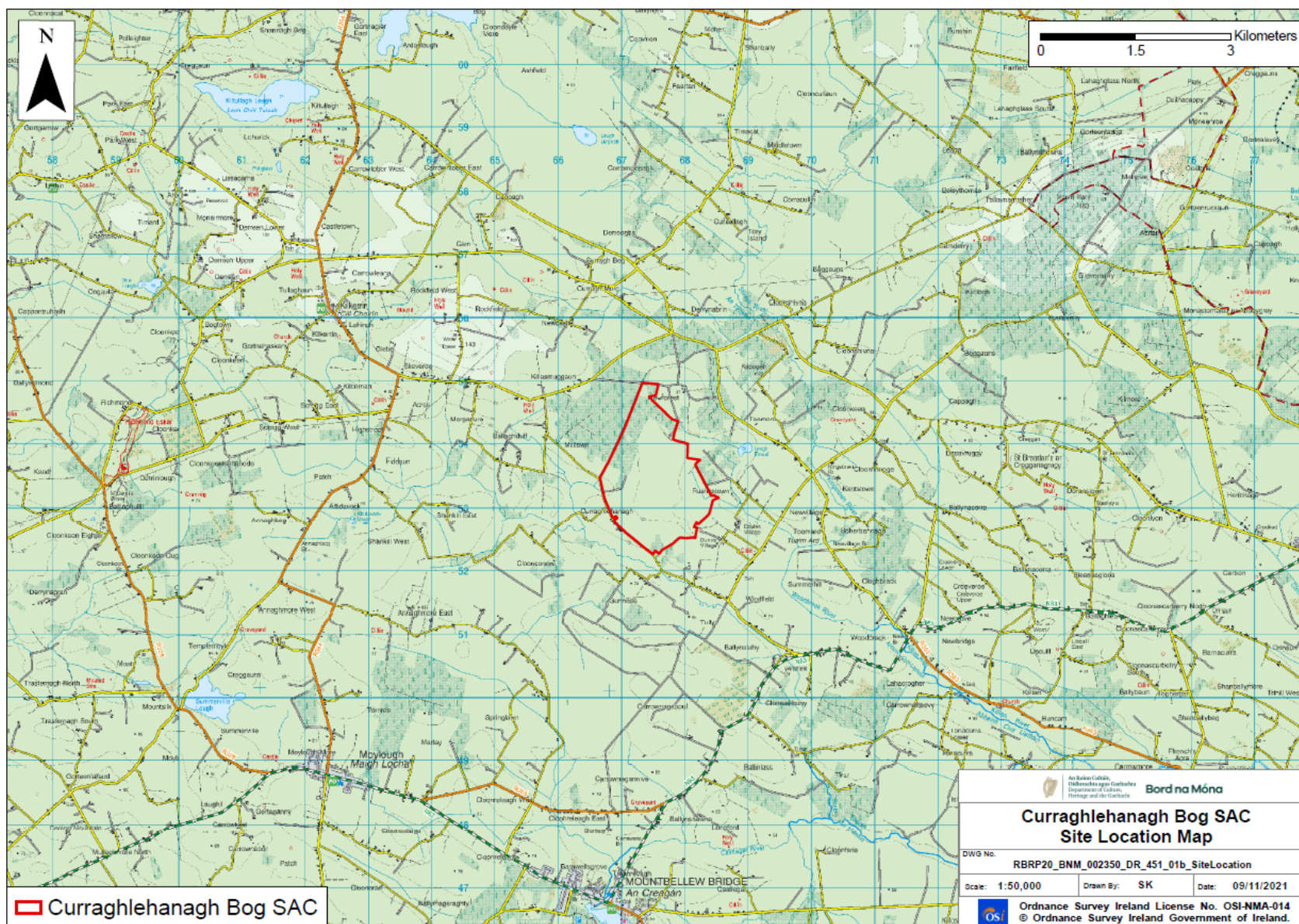
Unregistered lands – The establishment of title to lands can be complicated and can, in cases, ultimately fail to establish ownership.

Private-ownership and Burdens – Stakeholder and Community engagement is required to persuade private-owner to make lands available for the purposes of restoration works. This work is very time-consuming due to the complexities of landownership and title status within Irish raised bogs.

The Wildlife Act is the principal national legislation providing for the protection of wildlife in Ireland and the control of some activities that may adversely affect wildlife. This Act places restrictions on when works, such as vegetation removal, can be carried out – i.e., particularly during the nesting season certain works are not possible between March and August inclusive.

Availability of Contractors - Restoration Works on protected sites is extremely specialised and requires Contractors who have both the experience and appropriate low-bearing pressure plant, to construct the works.

Ground Conditions – Raised High Bogs present challenging conditions to operate machinery and construct restoration works.





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7 Glossary & Acronyms

ACTIVE RAISED BOG (ARB)	Areas of uncut raised bog where the conditions are right for peat to continue to form, and where species of plants and animals typical to intact bogs can thrive. ARB is listed as a priority habitat in Annex I of the Habitats Directive.
ANNEX I	Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive lists natural habitats types of Community interest whose conservation requires the designation of SACs.
ANNEX II	Annex II of the EU Habitats Directive lists animal and plant species of Community interest whose conservation requires the designation of SACs.
BIODIVERSITY	A general term used to describe all aspects of biological diversity including the number of species present in a given environment, the genetic diversity present within a species and the number of different ecosystems present within a given environment.
BOG WOODLAND	Woodland formed on a wet peaty substrate, with permanently high groundwater level. The water is poor in nutrients (ombrotrophic) and the ground surface has high cover of bog moss species, with active peat accumulation taking place. Bog Woodland is listed as a priority habitat in Annex I of the Habitats Directive. It differs from dry woodland on bog where peat accumulation is not taking place.
BUNDING	An impervious embankment of material (peat or other) that provides a barrier to retain water behind it.
CARBON SEQUESTRATION	The capture and long-term storage of atmospheric carbon dioxide, including that accumulated by a bog or fen.
CATCHMENT	An area of land contributing water that drains to a defined point. The term river catchment refers to the area of land that drains into a particular river system and is synonymous with the term drainage basin or watershed.
CUTOVER	Areas of bog that have been previously cut (by hand or by mechanical means), although not down to the underlying inorganic substrate. Cutover areas normally consist of a mosaic of cut areas, face banks, pools, drainage ditches, uncut areas of peat, scrub, grassland etc.
DEGRADED RAISED BOG (DRB)	The area of high, uncut bog which has been damaged by human activities but which could be restored to active raised bog again through restoration measures within a period of 30 years. It is listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive.
ECOLOGY	The study of the interactions between organisms, and their physical, chemical and biological environment.
ECOSYSTEM SERVICES	Humankind benefits from a multitude of resources and processes that are supplied by ecosystems. Collectively, these benefits are known as ecosystem services and include products like clean drinking water and processes such as the decomposition of wastes.
EROSION	The processes whereby the materials of the earth's crust are dissolved, or worn away and simultaneously moved from one place to another by natural processes which include weathering, solution, corrosion and transportation.

EVAPOTRANSPIRATION	Water loss to the atmosphere from soil and other surfaces (evaporation) and vegetation (transpiration).
FACEBANK	Areas at the edge of the high bog where peat cutting has taken place. This is an ecotope that is highly degraded and absent of typical <i>Sphagnum</i> species.
FAUNA	Animal life.
FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION CONDITION	This is the condition of a habitat or species considered to be favourable at site level. Favourable conservation condition is defined by site-specific conservation objectives (SSCOs). The maintenance of habitats and species within sites at favourable condition will contribute to the maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.
FAVOURABLE CONSERVATION STATUS	According to the Habitats Directive the conservation status of a natural habitat will be taken as "favourable" when: its natural range and areas it covers within that range are stable or increasing, and the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long term maintenance exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.
FLORA	Plant life.
FLOW ATTENUATION	Slowing flow of water out of an area. This is a common method for reducing risk of flood in urban areas whereby diversion channels store water in attenuation ponds. Intact peatlands typically offer natural flow attenuation through slowing flow as a result of higher storage capacity and increased hydraulic roughness, while degraded peatlands are much less effective at attenuating flow as the peat is dried out encouraging overland flow.
HABITAT	Refers to the environment defined by specific abiotic and biotic factors, in which a species lives at any stage of its biological cycle. In general terms it is a species' home.
HABITATS DIRECTIVE	Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora.
HEAD	Hydrological term which is a measure of the height to which water can raise itself above an arbitrary given level or datum.
HIGH BOG	The area of bog which has not previously been cut.
HYDROLOGICAL PROCESSES	The movement of water through a catchment area including freshwater and seawater inputs, water level changes and drainage mechanisms which are all influenced by the underlying geology.
LAGG	A term used to describe the natural habitat that occurs in the transitional zone between the bog and the mineral soil around a raised bog. Few intact lagg

	zones remain around raised bogs in Ireland as they are typically the first location to be damaged by drainage.
LIDAR	A remote sensing technology that measures vertical surface elevation by illuminating a target with a laser and analysing the reflected light usually obtained using a low-flying aeroplane. This provides detailed information on the surface elevations across an area.
LIFE	An EU financial instrument supporting environmental and nature conservation projects throughout the EU.
MARGINAL DRAIN	Drains on the margins of a raised bog typically on cutover for the purpose of draining spread-grounds to facilitate turf-cutting.
MICROTOPOGRAPHY	Variations in elevation at a relatively small scale. Generally the higher points are no more than a metre higher than the low points, and only a couple of metres across. On a high bog this consists of hummocks, hollows, pools, flats and lawns.
MINEROTROPHIC	Refers to soils and vegetation whose water supply comes mainly from streams or springs. This water has flowed over or through rocks or other minerals, often acquiring dissolved chemicals which raise the nutrient levels and reduce the acidity.
NATURAL HERITAGE AREA (NHA)	These are conservation areas designated for protection under The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000. NHAs are considered important for the habitats present or which holds species of plants and animals whose habitat needs protection.
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service.
OMBROTROPHIC	Refers to a type of peatland that receives all of its water and nutrient from precipitation falling directly on its surface.
PIEZOMETER	A piezometer is a device used to measure head. In the case of groundwater a piezometer will provide head at a given point.
PEAT-FORMING HABITAT	These are habitats where peat is actively forming. It includes typical ombrotrophic raised bog vegetation as well as lagg or fen vegetation that indicate that peat is actively forming.
PRIORITY HABITAT	A subset of the habitats listed in Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive. These consist of habitats which are in danger of disappearance and whose natural range mainly falls within the territory of the European Union. These habitats are of the highest conservation status and require measures to ensure that their favourable conservation status is maintained.
RAISED BOG	Rain-fed peatland ecosystems that develop primarily in areas with topographic depressions, where drainage may be impeded by a high groundwater table, or by low permeability of the underlying substrata such as clay. Peat accumulation, over time, elevates the ground surface above surrounding areas to form a raised dome.
RESTORATION ZONE	A specified area within a site where restoration measures have been proposed. Restoration zones have been defined for each raised bog SAC based on factors including hydrological conditions, existing and expected habitats following restoration. This allows restoration measures for each raised bog SAC to be split into manageable units.
SITE-SPECIFIC	

CONSERVATION OBJECTIVE	A site-specific conservation objective aims to define the favourable conservation condition of a habitat or species at site level. The maintenance of habitats and species within sites at favourable condition will contribute to the maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.
SPECIAL AREA OF CONSERVATION	Area designated for the conservation of habitats and/or species under the Habitats Directive.
SPREAD-GROUNDS	Area where turf is spread after cutting to dry out, typically drained cutover bog or agricultural areas adjacent to the high bog.
STATUTORY NATURE RESERVE	A Statutory Nature Reserve is an area of nature conservation interest that has been designated by Ministerial Order under the Wildlife Act, 1976.
SUBSIDENCE	Term referring to the sinking of land resulting from natural activity or human activity. Within peat subsidence occurs due to loss of water for example as a result of drainage.
TILL	Geological term referring to unsorted material deposited by glacial ice and showing no stratification. It is often referred to as boulder clay.
TOPOGRAPHY	The arrangement of the physical features of an area.