

Wicklow Mountain Views



A LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

THE NEWSLETTER OF
WICKLOW UPLANDS COUNCIL

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It is a genuine pleasure to serve as Chairperson of the Wicklow Uplands Council. Having been involved with the organisation on and off over the past 15 years, I've seen firsthand its evolution, impact, and the enduring passion that fuels its work.

My own journey began as a full-time sheep farmer on my own family farm, later diversifying into a farm shop and welcoming overnight campervans. Eventually, my path took me into an off-farm role focused on landscape-scale upland restoration and conservation as the Farm Manager with the Luggala Estate, this was both an enjoyable and enlightening experience which prepared me well to take on a national role with Farm Relief Services as Deer Management Programme Manager.

These varied experiences have shaped my understanding of the uplands and reinforced my commitment to representing the many voices that live, work and recreate across this landscape.

In late 2024, WUC commissioned "The Change We Need" to guide the development of our new Strategic Plan for 2026–2030. This has been a valuable process, offering insight and reflection on how we operate, where our priorities lie, and how we need to communicate the work we do. It's also prompted necessary conversations about the evolving needs of our organisation and our uplands and the role we must continue to play in shaping a resilient future.

Over the past year, the Council has embraced a wide range of impactful projects across our key pillars—delivered through collaboration and strong partnerships (Gully planting with East Wicklow Rivers Trust, Dog Control Workshops with Wicklow County Council, Rhododendron Control with WMNP & NPWS and of course the ongoing strong and valuable relationship with 3 local Authorities (South Dublin, Dunlaoghaire-Rathdown & Wicklow) Coillte and NPWS through the PURE project and PURE Mile initiative. Our consensus-based, solution-focused approach remains at the heart of everything we do, and it is encouraging to see this model continues to gain recognition and support.

As has been the case in previous Chair reports, I must again raise the issue of core funding. The annual challenge of securing this support can be a frustrating distraction from the real work at hand. It places pressure on both staff and volunteers, despite their unwavering commitment. However, this issue is not unique to us. With imaginative thinking and a well-defined strategic direction, I'm confident we will continue to overcome it. It is important always to acknowledge our funders, LAWPRO Catchment Support Fund has ensured that through 2025 we can continue to operate, this in the face of the disappointing loss

of Heritage Council funding at the beginning of this year, that support has been the mainstay over the last 25 years.

There are significant opportunities ahead. The Wicklow Uplands are rich in social, natural, and cultural heritage, they are vital to our collective prosperity. Our clean water, our air, soils, forests, woodlands, and iconic landscapes form the natural capital that underpins not just local economies, but the wealth and well-being of the entire nation.

In closing, I would like to sincerely thank all our members for their continued investment, engagement, and passion throughout the year. My gratitude goes to the PURE team (Ian, Alana & Mick) for their continued dedication, to the Board and Executive Committees for their guidance and support, and a special thanks to our exceptional staff, Máire and Lorna, who manage the diverse and demanding operations of the Council with professionalism and care, ensuring the organisation continues to deliver and remain relevant.

With thanks and continued commitment,
Michael Keegan
Chairperson,
Wicklow Uplands Council

The work of Wicklow Uplands Council is funded by:



Comhairle Contae Chill Mhantáin
Wicklow County Council

Sugar Loaf Restoration & Community Engagement

Contributed by Carol Coad, Strategy Activation Officer - Recreation, County Wicklow Partnership



Launch of Sugarloaf trail completion and the Wicklow Trails App May 2025
(image Michael Kelly)

On 21st May, the Great Sugar Loaf Restoration Project and launch of the Wicklow Trails app were officially opened by Cathaoirleach Cllr. Paul O'Brien in the company of councillors, County Wicklow Partnership, trail contractors, and local stakeholders. This initiative, a flagship for Wicklow was funded by the Department of Rural and Community Development's Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS), with matching support from Wicklow County Council, it followed three years of planning to address severe erosion and enhance accessibility.

Construction included hand pitched

stone steps, improved drainage, strategic planting, and durable material air lifted to the mountain's upper slopes. The car park was upgraded with a new surface presently in keeping with the wider landscape, clear boundaries, a refreshed entrance arch, steel gate, and signage to manage the high footfall—estimated to be up to 1,000 visitors weekly. Local contractor Trailbreakers, led by Howie Miller with specialist crews including Matt McConway and Frank McMahon delivered the works, simultaneously building local capacity in traditional path building techniques. In October Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee



Trailbreakers Trail works Crew – Frank, Daithí, & Sean, Cold October 2024

had a field outing supporting knowledge and information sharing to support and contribute to route management planning across Wicklow and for wider informal habitat observation. The engagement helps shape final designs for trails, ensuring it delivers both ecological and recreational benefits. This restoration not only prevents further habitat degradation but makes the mountain safer and more family friendly—complete with landscaped picnic zones and native species planting along the lower slopes.

The Sugar Loaf is also a key link on the Sugar Loaf Way, which now stretches from Bray to the Vartry trails, which due to much storm damage was severely compromised for a number of months. The 6.5km Upper Vartry Loop has been re-opened alongside the wonderful new Adventure Play Trail. Both routes start at Mullinaveigue Car Park, which is maintained and operated by the Wicklow County Council

We are immensely proud of this collaborative achievement. Thanks to ORIS funding, Wicklow County Council, Trailbreakers, WORC members, and Wicklow Uplands Council partners, the Great Sugar Loaf now stands as a leading example of sustainable outdoor recreation infrastructure. Community led, nature inspired, and future proofed—this project reflects our mission to steward Wicklow's trails responsibly and inclusively.

Let's continue working together to protect, enjoy, and connect with Ireland's landscapes—one trail at a time.



Lorna Kelly (Wicklow Uplands Council), Carol Coad (WCP) Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee Meeting on the Sugarloaf, note the stone pitching and how it blends into the landscape.

Mary Tubridy's learning's from Wicklow

About Mary

With a PhD from TCD in mine waste revegetation, Mary has held academic roles at UCD and TCD, where she led EU-funded research on sustainable development in West Offaly. Her work around Clonmacnoise resulted in a major publication and contributed to the area's designation as a Heritage Zone. In the 1990s, she founded a consultancy focused on heritage, planning, and environmental education. Mary is a committed ecologist with expertise in Upland landscapes she is the Research Officer with the Irish Uplands Forum, a board member of the Heritage Council and is now working on urban biodiversity, she collaborates with communities and local authorities to enhance nature in public and private spaces.

How did it start?

My involvement with Wicklow started with the production of the first National Development Plan for the country in the 1980's. This was developed by the government at the request of the EU in order for the country to draw down substantial development funding. I was working at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) as a researcher and lecturer. My boss, Prof. Adrian Phillips, thought that this plan should not solely contain projects put forward by government departments but also include suggestions for research. I was put to preparing a list of research projects including a development plan for the Wicklow Mountains.

While I had little or no knowledge of Wicklow in TCD, I had just finished working on a 6-year EU funded study in rural Offaly, examining local development. This project involved ecologists and economist and sociologist and substantial local consultation. I was good on the theory of what was required. Adrian had some local knowledge. While none of our suggestions found their way into the National Development Plan, our plan for a Wicklow study came to the attention of Wicklow County Council. When a controversy arose

over the development of the National Park, we got a call from them in the early 90's, to assist with the resolution of this controversy. What followed was a report on mountain development (incorporating substantial local consultation) a report on interpretation (with an English consultancy) assistance with the application for a LEADER grant and support for the establishment of Wicklow Uplands Council. Adrian died in 2003, but I have continued to be involved in Wicklow based projects.

What did I learn?

All about Upland sheep farming

I thought I knew about this as my father was brought up on an upland sheep farm. After setting up a successful business he bought land which was regularly stocked with retired sheep from this farm, which we then ate, being told it was lamb!

With Wicklow Uplands Councils valuable help and particularly from Pat Dunne. I learnt about this complicated system of farming; the effort, the low financial returns, the importance of subsidies and also, I became aware of the pride resulting from a long tradition trying to make a living from farming in an area of high amenity and biodiversity value.

Rural development

Ecologists learn nothing about rural development. Through our work in Wicklow, I discovered that farm households were not just involved in farming but there were links with other economic sectors and were subsidised by the government and the EU. What a complicated local economy? How difficult must it be for all types of planning to cope with this?

About local politics and administrative systems

Through seeing the work of many local politicians, I discovered that people generally keep good representatives and say goodbye to bad ones and that almost all administrators try to do a good job. Their efficiency depends on the regulatory system under which they work,



and the information provided to them.

Friendship

Finally, I made lifelong friends who helped and supported our work. Some have sadly passed away John Medlycott and Saive Coffey, but memories will last forever.

What did the county learn from the work of the Wicklow Uplands Council?

Most critically WUC has provided a mechanism for conflict resolution between residents/farmers and the millions of walkers who descend on the region every year.

Most community mobilisation is inspired by a conflict rather than an opportunity, but WUC has shown that a good structure enables you to take advantage of opportunities. With an initial plan, support from the Heritage Council and the local Leader Company, Wicklow Uplands Council took off.

WUC has carried out impressive and unique projects such as involvement in local planning for forestry/woodland and wood processing, recreation planning, provision of heritage interpretation, waste management, environmental education, making new linkages throughout the county and influencing work in other counties nearby and remote.

WUC has made well-informed submissions to the County Development Plan. These types of submissions are

a rare occurrence. A constant issue for strategic planning is the lack of public involvement at this stage.

Major steps have been taken towards the resolution of the conflict between upland biodiversity and farming through the operation of the Sustainable Upland Agri-Environment Scheme (SUAS project).

Finally, what could the country learn from WUC?

The most important lesson is the value of a well-structured, resourced, area-based community organisation which has clear objectives to support sustainable development.

If established all those planning activities which have happened in Wicklow could be replicated in other areas. In regard to farming there would be greater awareness of the value of well-resourced agri-environmental schemes, conservation grazing i.e. the essential need for farmers to manage habitats.

The final lesson is the importance of support from external bodies and the statutory sector i.e. the Heritage Council.

And the future?

The recent good experience of co-operation in biodiversity and upland farming should inform the new NPWS forestry development plan. While focused on state owned land consideration should also be given to woodland on private land.

WUC could consider having members from statutory agencies similar to Community Wetlands Forum. This has been developed as a national umbrella for community-based organisations concerned with wetlands. It has three categories of members, community groups, representatives from stakeholder organisations including Irish Uplands Forum (IUF) and individuals. Bord Na Mona and NPWS send people to their meetings. Part funded by National Parks and Wildlife Service.

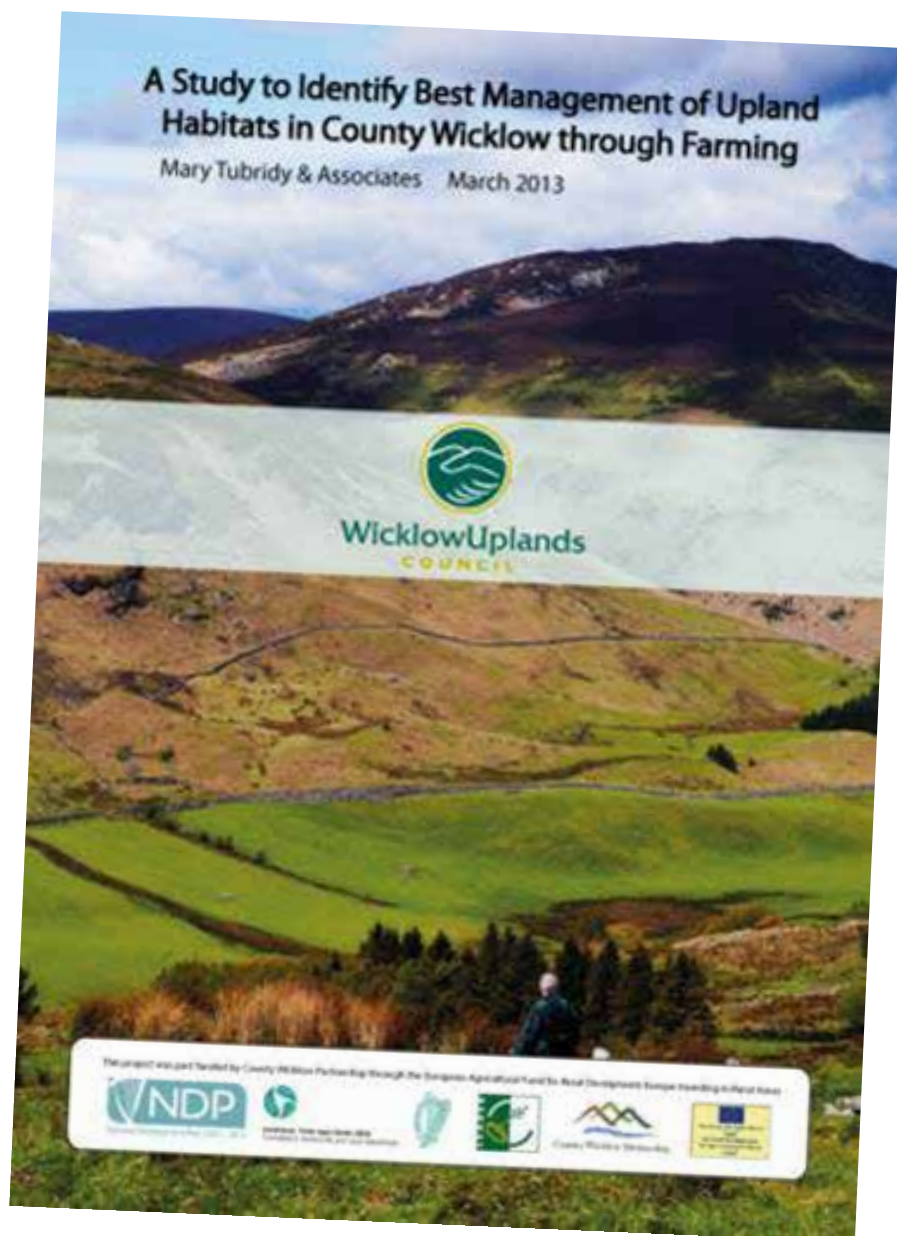
While IUF has highlighted this model, little support has been offered by any government body. A start is being made by a study commissioned in 2024 by the

Heritage Council to examine the work of community-based organisations to manage heritage in high value areas. WUC was interviewed to inform this report.

Compared to the 80's when the notion of community was novel and even considered a threat, all current policies, even research studies in universities have this all over them. After we started work in Wicklow, we were regularly approached by government departments to advise them about "community" "community consultation" and "community development". About which we then knew very little. The downside of this emphasis is that community consultation could exhaust everyone, and I suspect it will unless organisations like WUC get appropriate resources.

Perhaps it is time to resurrect the idea of recognising a type of area within the country which needs this kind of support? In the past IUF sent members to look at different types of protected areas in Europe. WUC along with IUF is a member of The Europarc Federation but has little in common with members. At this stage WUC should set out the structure and resources needed. These structures need support from central government. I expect the Heritage Council study will touch on this at this phase but should be followed up with another for which I will lobby.

So, you have done a lot in Wicklow. The challenge now is to convince the government that this model should be supported by government funding and expanded into other areas.



Aiteann: Fire, Heritage and Art

Shane Finane, Artist in Residence UCD, FireCULT project

The uplands in Ireland can look spongy from a distance, like stones with thick moss that have been magically enlarged into mountains. Look closer, and you can see that mossy surface is scrubland, mostly heather and one other plant. That plant has many names: gorse, furze, whin or aiteann, depending on where in the country you come from. And it is known for its traditions with fire.

Until very recently, large fires were a regular sight on hillsides particularly in the south-east and south-west. The tradition of burning aiteann (furze) goes back to the 16th Century at least. The folklorist and archivist AT Lucas wrote about how it was once a cash crop, valued for its high burn point and sold for use in communal ovens and home hearths. Today, another cash crop, sitka spruce, is also highly flammable, and has been at the centre of several wildfires in Ireland in recent years. From January to March 2025, Shane Finane was artist-in-residence on FIRECULT, an international research project with

partners in Ireland, the UK, Italy, Turkey and the USA. The project is investigating how wildfires affect cultural heritage. Shane was partnered in Ireland with UCD and the Irish Uplands Forum, through which he was introduced to Wicklow Uplands Council. He was brought in to look specifically at the Irish heritage, and in particular at the traditions and intangible cultures around burning aiteann.

In the folk traditions, fire is often both creator and destroyer. Drawing from this idea, Shane used fire as a creative medium. He cut branches from these plants, aiteann and sitka spruce, and created drawing charcoal from them. He then used this charcoal to draw the plants themselves, creating a cycle of destruction and creation, and highlighting the often overlooked flora in the process.

The burning of aiteann became less common around the mid-19th Century, when coal became cheaper and more

widely available. Gradually, aiteann became less and less used, and diminished at a rate similar to the use of the Irish language, until by the 20th Century it was barely used at all. Today, hillsides covered with this crop that was once so valued are considered scrubland. Using drawing, video and installation, Shane's work seeks to introduce an audience to the idea that intangible cultural heritage is never truly destroyed. Our language and traditions may diminish, but they do not disappear.



These are from the research trips. Above in Leitrim where aiteann backs onto forestry, below from Wicklow during our trip up the mountain.



Both images above are from the burn site in Wicklow



Video stills from some gorse burning that I made a video from.



These are the drawings of aiteann and sitka made from the charcoal that I made from them.



A couple of video stills from the process of making the charcoal from aiteann (furze)

Protecting our Wicklow Night Sky Heritage

Brian Espey, Chairperson, Dark Sky Ireland

At this time of year the lengthening day brings welcome changes to the natural world as Spring arrives and summer creeps in after darker winter days. The vast majority of the natural world has accommodated to these daily, monthly and seasonal rhythms of life and it is even hardcoded into us at a basic level, even down to single cells. Now think, on the other hand, how night-time – the other side of the daily cycle – has come to be viewed as somehow less normal than the day and something to be kept at bay with light. This used not to be the case as overcast skies meant that our night-time environment commonly lacked light from either stars or Milky Way. Indeed, people in urban areas tend to be more concerned with unlit areas than rural dwellers for whom it is a part of the natural world. While light has its positive uses, there is an accelerating growth of light worldwide, resulting in a doubling of light emissions every eight years or so

and a resulting spread of light from our houses and towns into the wider natural environment. As a result of this increase in light pollution, currently 80% of the world's population lives under light-polluted skies with over a third not being able to see the Milky Way at all.

Increased light levels have an effect on the natural world around us, leading to changes in the dawn and dusk chorus – shown most obviously by urban robins singing during the night. In addition, there are impacts on insects, bats, and fish which tend to go unnoticed since they happen while most of us are asleep. Even plants react to higher light levels through earlier budburst and later leaf drop and it has even been stated that the environmental impacts of light may be as large as those of climate change. When we consider that two-thirds of Irish mammals are nocturnal, the problem comes closer to home and exposure to

light with blue content has been shown to lead to potential problems for humans as well. While exposure to light in the morning helps us get ready for the day and aligns our circadian clocks such light, exposure during night-time prevents our system from entering its natural rest and recuperation phase. This can lead to health issues such as sleep disruption, obesity, diabetes and even some forms of cancer. Worryingly, since the rapid growth in cheap and bright electrical light and the resulting move to a 24/7 society, we have been conducting a vast uncontrolled experiment on both nature and ourselves which may come with potential perils.

Despite the widespread nature of the problem, there is hope as light pollution is something over which we have direct control and, unlike other forms of pollution, its spread can be controlled with the flick of a switch. In Wicklow we



The striking difference in the visible sky as seen from the same location under light polluted conditions and also during a blackout. Image courtesy of Todd Carlson via Dark Sky International <https://darksky.org>

Images Courtesy of Brian Espey



Light pollution and glare from poorly controlled light sources has an impact not only on the sky but on object visibility and can also cause safety hazards. Better lighting should be directed downward, be warm coloured (think the colour of older bulbs) and have lighting controls to restrict its use to the necessary hours. Image from Dark Sky International <https://darksky.org>

are lucky to have areas where the quality of the night sky can still be a source of wonder as well as relaxation and, as intimated above, it is a resource that we can proudly show those travelling from the US or Europe to find the “real” Ireland from home areas which no longer have natural skies, perhaps even as part of an ecotourism package. Furthermore, while Wicklow suffers from overtourism in some locations, the darkest skies occur during the so-called “shoulder” and off-seasons. Dark skies tourism has been recognised and promoted by Fáilte Ireland and its beneficial effects have been seen in both Kerry and Mayo, both of which contain world class dark sky areas that have been recognised with international awards. Overall, the reduction of light pollution and the preservation and improvement of our dark, natural skies is of benefit to ourselves in health, energy-saving and carbon reduction, while also providing environmental and tourism benefits. Even towns can benefit from improved lighting and Newport in Co. Mayo has also led the way in demonstrating how improvements in lighting can reduce light waste by more than a factor of two while, at the same time, providing a more liveable environment.

Wicklow has an enviable reputation as the Garden of Ireland but we have, until now, only considered half the picture by ignoring our night-time heritage. We need to treat dark skies as a resource to be cherished by applying basic guidance such as avoiding the use of light with blue content, directing it towards the required area, for the minimum time and intensity required. The result will be a more welcoming and sustainable environment for all living things.

Check out our website at <https://www.darksky.ie>



The night sky over Glendalough's Upper Lake.

Invasive Species in Ireland's Uplands:

By Kate Moore, Invasive Species Engagement Officer, National Biodiversity Data Centre

Invasive species are one of the leading drivers of biodiversity loss globally - and Ireland is far from immune. From rivers and lakes to farmland and forests, the creeping impact of non-native species is becoming an ever-greater concern. But there is one habitat often overlooked in discussions of invasive species: our uplands.

These higher, often remote landscapes - iconic for their rugged beauty and ecological value - are increasingly under threat. At Wicklow Uplands Council biodiversity week event titled *Beyond the Bloom*, I had the opportunity to speak about one of the most pressing and symbolic invasive threats facing upland habitats: *Rhododendron ponticum* (*R. ponticum*). We also heard from Dúlra Team ecologist Conor Ryan and practitioner Robbie McDonagh, who presented on their work controlling this species in Connemara. Following the talks the pair delivered an informative practical demonstration of control techniques at a nearby site

R. ponticum, with its showy purple flowers and seemingly impenetrable thickets, may be beautiful to look at, but its impact on biodiversity is anything but. Understanding where it came from, how it spreads, and why urgent action is needed - especially in places like Wicklow - was central to our conversation at the event.

R. ponticum is not native to Ireland. It was introduced in the 18th century as an ornamental plant, prized for its resilience, evergreen foliage, and dramatic floral displays. Large estate gardens and demesnes used rhododendron extensively, unaware of its potential to escape cultivation and thrive in the wild.

Over time, *R. ponticum* began to colonise beyond garden walls. Its ability to flourish in acidic, nutrient-poor soils made Ireland's uplands an ideal habitat. Furthermore, the absence of natural pests and predators, combined with a vigorous reproductive strategy, allowed it to establish rapidly in areas where native flora struggled to compete.

At first glance, it may seem counterintuitive to describe a flowering plant as a threat. But *R. ponticum* is more than just an overgrown shrub. It's a monoculture-forming invader

that can radically alter entire ecosystems.

It forms dense, light-blocking thickets that cast a deep shade over the forest floor and heathlands, preventing the germination and growth of native plants. Its thick leaf litter is slow to decompose and can alter soil chemistry. Worse still, its leaves contain toxins that inhibit fungi vital to native tree seedlings.

The result? A slow-motion ecological collapse beneath its evergreen canopy. In places like Killarney National Park and Connemara, vast areas once rich with biodiversity are now dominated by *R. ponticum*. These dense stands support far fewer species and are difficult - and costly - to reverse.

Thankfully, in County Wicklow, the situation is not yet as dire. The spread of *R. ponticum* in the Wicklow Uplands is patchier and more localised, with some areas still relatively untouched. But that doesn't mean we can afford to be complacent.

R. ponticum spreads via seed and layering (when branches touch the ground and root), and it can colonise new areas

surprisingly quickly. Once established, control becomes labour-intensive and expensive. Manual removal, herbicide application, and follow-up treatments over several years are needed to ensure eradication.

At *Beyond the Bloom*, the message I emphasised was clear: Wicklow is at a critical juncture. We still have a chance to prevent widespread dominance, but that window is closing. Learning from the experiences in Killarney and Connemara, we know that early, strategic intervention is our most effective tool.

While *R. ponticum* is currently one of the most visible threats in upland areas (We are not talking about deer!), it is not the only one. Other invasive species - including Japanese knotweed, Himalayan balsam, and Sitka spruce (when outside commercial forestry) - also pose challenges. Each of these species changes the upland environment in different ways, but they share a common trait: they displace native biodiversity and disrupt natural processes.

Sitka spruce, for example, while valued





in the forestry sector, has been planted widely in upland areas and can self-seed into adjacent habitats, changing the hydrology and shading out heather-dominated heath. Himalayan balsam, with its explosive seed pods and riverside preference, spreads rapidly along upland streams, altering riparian habitats and outcompeting native plants.

The spread of invasives is accelerated by a range of factors - climate change, changes in land use, and increased movement of people and goods. Upland areas, once considered relatively safe due to their remoteness, are now increasingly vulnerable.

Protecting our uplands from invasive species isn't just the work of scientists or land managers. It requires community engagement, local knowledge, and collaborative action.

In Wicklow, the work of local groups, including Wicklow Uplands Council, Tidy Towns volunteers, and hillwalkers and Re-wild Wicklow has already made a difference. Mapping and reporting sightings, joining invasive species control efforts, and raising awareness are all critical contributions.

At the National Biodiversity Data Centre, we've seen the power of community in action through initiatives like the 'Actions on Invasives' portal, where anyone can report the actions they are taking to address invasive species, helping to facilitate co-ordination on action. The public can also submit invasive species sightings to the National Biodiversity Data Centre. These reports are crucial for tracking spread and prioritising action. Public involvement helps build a clearer picture of the scale of the issue - and creates a sense of shared responsibility.

When it comes to invasive species, prevention is always better than cure. That means being vigilant about what we plant, how we manage our gardens, parks, and woodlands, and ensuring that any landscaping choices avoid invasive or potentially invasive species.

For areas already impacted, strategic management is key and best practice approach essential. This includes mapping infestations, prioritising control in high-value habitats or early-stage infestations, and ensuring that appropriate treatment and follow-up treatments are conducted over several years. Restoration planting with native species can also help

ecosystems bounce back after removal efforts.

Finally, monitoring is essential—not just after control work, but continually, as climate change and other pressures may make it easier for new species to establish in upland areas in the future.

Ireland's uplands are not just scenic backdrops; they are living ecosystems, shaped by centuries of interaction between people and nature. They are home to unique flora and fauna, carbon-rich peatlands, and heritage that connects us to the past.

The threat from invasive species like *Rhododendron ponticum* is very real. But so is the opportunity to act now—while we still can. Wicklow has a chance to lead the way in upland protection, showing what can be done when communities, agencies, and individuals work together.



Wicklow Trails App

Aaron Byrne, Rural Recreation Officer,
County Wicklow Partnership

Wicklow trails app was launched in March 2025 after a long process of info gathering and discussion about what the County needed to make people aware of the amenities in Wicklow around Way Marked Trails.

It was thought that maybe there wasn't an easily accessible 'go to' place for all the information, it was decided to make a digital library that could be of use for reference, this was the original plan, but thankfully the Local Sports Partnership (LSP) heard about it at a Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Committee (WORC) meeting and asked if they could join forces !

From there it morphed into a much better resource, adding rewards and latest news and other functions such as issue reporting and the ability to sign up to receive news flashes relating to a trail.

Further developments are on the way having learned so much about the functionality and possibilities, we are able to adapt the current format to add much more information, particularly around heritage sites and flora & fauna.

Currently you can filter trails by type, distance and grade, very easily selecting the trails closest to your location. The system will log a walk you do and it goes

into your "completed trails" section. From there you can target types of walks. For instance all the easy ones or difficult ones, and when you get enough logged we will send you a small gift! It's a token but the hope is that it encourages people. Who doesn't want a free Buff or Beanie ? The aim is to promote exploration and to promote more responsible activity across the county.

The impact is still being understood but the amount of visitors/downloads the App has had has been really promising . At time of print almost 9500 downloads!

Further analysis will tell how many people are using the various functions over time and this of course will drive further development when we get a better idea what people really want from our Wicklow Trails App. Looking forward to release 2, and 3 and many more!

Watch this space!

Many thanks to all involved for a lot of hard work and patience, Gordon Shaw, Claire Byrne, Aishling Hubbard, Carol Coad, Sheena Hubbard, the teams at Evolve Technologies and Lighthouse Design.



Communicating Upland Knowledge Through Art & Expression

A 2025 Reflection

Throughout 2025, Wicklow Uplands Council has been quietly rolling out a new approach to sharing evidence-based, science-led upland landscape knowledge—through the lens of art and creative expression. This initiative has been designed to engage both the head and the heart, helping people connect more deeply with the challenges and opportunities of managing our unique upland environment.

We began the year with a nature walk and floral watercolour workshop led by renowned botanical artist Yanny Petters. This event introduced participants to the subtle richness of Wicklow's upland flora, encouraging observation, conversation, and appreciation of native plant life. By coupling ecological understanding with artistic practice, we offered a different way of experiencing and interpreting the landscape—one rooted in detail and care.

In the early months of the year, artist Shane Finan undertook a residency as part of the FIRECULT programme, which explores fire as both a natural and cultural force in upland areas. Shane developed a body of work that considers the ecological role of fire, its relationship to rural heritage, and the ways we can live with fire responsibly in a time of climate change. His reflections and artistic responses will be presented during Heritage Week in a special event at Roundwood Parish Hall on the evening of August 20th. This presentation will offer a personal, thoughtful account of fire's place in our evolving upland story. Detail of Shanes work can be read in Aiteann earlier in the Newsletter!

This summer and autumn, we are also supporting a new project led by fibre artist Sharon Wells, who is working with wool and local groups to explore the language of bog health. Titled 'Good Bog, Bad Bog', the project invites communities to engage creatively with themes of land use, conservation, and biodiversity through a tactile, collaborative medium. As conversations around peatland restoration grow in urgency, this work seeks to make those themes accessible and grounded in local experience. The work Sharon completes will be exhibited in September as part of Culture Night, venue to be confirmed.

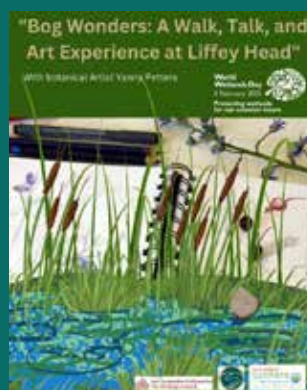
In parallel, we are delighted to announce that we have secured a Community Heritage Grant from the Heritage Council to produce a short film titled 'A New Fleece of Live - Weaving Wicklow's Wool Heritage into a Sustainable Future'. This piece will trace the deep connections between Wicklow's sheep and wool industry, the shaping of the upland landscape, and the rural communities



built around this tradition. It will also explore how wool—now seen as a waste product—may offer new solutions to upland restoration. Pilot projects using wool in peat stabilisation mats, drain blocking, and erosion control are already underway on Barnacullion Ridge and Kippure, as reported by District Conservation Officer Hugh McLindon in Issue 31 of Wicklow Mountains View.

While each of these projects stands on its own, together they form a coherent effort to communicate the complexity of upland management in new and engaging ways. By inviting artists to interpret scientific work, and by involving local people in the process, we are building a more inclusive and imaginative conversation around landscape stewardship. This is not about simplifying the science—but rather about enriching how it is shared, understood, and remembered.

As always, we encourage anyone interested to follow along through our social channels or get in touch directly to learn more about upcoming events and opportunities to get involved.





September 2024, Dry Stone Wall Training Group and the finished wall along the Vartry Trail, Roundwood.

Celebrating Wicklow Dry Stone Wall Heritage

Ken Curran, Dry Stone Wall Association of Ireland (DSWAI)

In September 2024, the village of Roundwood played host to an inspiring training workshop on dry stone walling, coordinated by the Dry Stone Wall Association of Ireland (DSWAI) in collaboration with Wicklow Uplands Council (WUC). The event brought together enthusiastic learners, skilled craftspeople, and curious locals, all eager to explore and preserve one of Ireland's most enduring vernacular traditions.

Dry stone walling, constructing walls entirely without mortar, has shaped the Irish landscape for millennia. In Wicklow, these walls snake across fields and hills,

standing as silent witnesses to generations of agricultural life, land division, and community cooperation. Unfortunately, and sadly most of which are falling into decay as other land boundary practices and fast fix solutions like post and rail and wire fencing become a greater norm. At our September workshop, participants had the chance to learn Dry Stone wall techniques hands-on, reviving skills that are as culturally rich as they are environmentally sustainable.

This workshop was particularly special, coming on the heels of an important cultural initiative led by Wicklow Uplands



Oidhreacht Chultúrtha
Dholáimhsithe in Éirinn
Intangible Cultural Heritage in Ireland

Council. With support from the Heritage Council's Community Heritage Grant Scheme, WUC commissioned the production of a short video that shines a spotlight on the dry stone wall heritage of County Wicklow. The film, available on the Wicklow Uplands Council website and the Wicklow Heritage Portal, captures the deep historical and ecological significance of this age-old practice.

Featuring interviews, field footage, and contributions from heritage experts and wallers alike, the video is both an educational resource and a tribute to the stonemasons of the past.



Ken Curran (DSWAI) mentoring the strong 12 participants of the Dry Stone Wall Training Event, September, 2024



Darren Flynn, WUC Member and Director 2024 at the September 2024 Dry Stone Wall Training Event

Images Courtesy Ken Curran, DSWAI, Darren Flynn WUC Director

The release of this video was timely in that it came close to the culmination of a 7 year process, embarked on by the members of DSWAI to have the practice of dry stone construction recognised as a key element of our Intangible Cultural Heritage with UNESCO.

In 2018, UNESCO inscribed dry stone walling as an element of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognising it across eight countries: Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Spain and Switzerland.

Subsequent to that, members of The Dry Stone Wall Association of Ireland applied successfully to the Irish state body to add Dry Stone Construction to Ireland's Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Since 2019 DSWAI then worked with the state bodies, representatives from the original 8 countries, and the individuals and communities who are the bearers of the practice here in Ireland, to bring an application to UNESCO to expand the community.

Six years later, on 4th December 2024 Ireland (along with Andorra, Austria, Belgium and Luxembourg) was added to the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity inscription for 'The Art of Dry Stone Construction, Knowledge & Techniques'.

This grew the international Intangible Cultural Heritage community of dry stone to thirteen! Ireland's recognition adds our voice to this international community of wallers, artisans, and cultural stewards.

Dry Stone Wall Association of Ireland are proud to contribute to this ongoing legacy. We believe that dry stone walls are not just functional boundaries but living artefacts, repositories of geology, craftsmanship, biodiversity, and rural memory. They deserve both protection and participation.

Learning by doing keeps knowledge alive and active within our communities. Transfer of this knowledge across generations can help keep it alive and

evolving into the future. The members of DSWAI believe (like many of those involved in dry stone construction across the world) that dry stone construction can provide many solutions to environmental issues and land management in the areas of green energy, preservation, climate change mitigation and biodiversity maintenance.

It may be more relevant now than at any time before. Hence, it is vital we hold onto the knowledge.

The recognition by both the state parties and UNESCO (along with our international dry stone community members) brings with it the kinds of supports we have seen from the key funders of these workshops The Heritage Council and The National Build Heritage Service.



Biodiversity Week Event 2024

“Dry Stone Walls: Our Perceptions, Their Ecology”

As part of Heritage Week 2024, Wicklow Uplands Council was delighted to host “Dry Stone Walls: Our Perceptions, Their Ecology”—a special talk and walk event in Annamoe Community Centre featuring Dr. Marcus Collier of Trinity College Dublin.

With an enthusiastic crowd in attendance, Dr. Collier delivered an engaging and thought-provoking presentation,

highlighting the often-overlooked ecological richness of dry stone walls. His insights into the symbiotic relationship between these ancient structures and the biodiversity they support—from mosses and lichens to insects and small mammals—offered a fresh perspective on familiar features of our upland landscape.

Blessed with dry skies, the group then ventured outdoors to explore nearby

walls first-hand, discovering the vibrant life thriving within their crevices.

This event was part of a wider Wicklow Uplands Council project aimed at promoting awareness, education, and training around Wicklow's dry stone wall heritage.



Dr Marcus Collier, presenting Biodiversity Week, 2024, Annamoe Community Centre.



Group in attendance, Biodiversity Week 2024, 'Dry Stone Walls: Our Perceptions, Their Ecology' Walk & Talk with Dr Marcus Collier TCD at Annamoe, Co. Wicklow

2025: The collaboration continues....

Following the success of our Roundwood event, we are excited to again collaborate with Wicklow Uplands Council and announce that another dry stone walling training opportunity will be held in County Wicklow the weekend of August 30th, 2025. While the location is still being finalised, expressions of interest are now open, with priority given to Wicklow Uplands Council members. If you've ever wanted to learn the craft or simply deepen your understanding of our local heritage, this is a fantastic chance to do so.

This has been made possible by the financial support of funding from the National Built Heritage Service (NBHS) as an action of the National Vernacular Strategy an initiative under the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage through the Department of Housing.

The support shown to the delivery of these workshops by NBHS demonstrates yet another action of the state body to help the bearers of the practice of dry stone transfer the

knowledge to individuals and communities within Ireland who are the safe guardians of the tangible elements of the practice of dry stone construction. We are excited to return again to Wicklow and engage with the community members.

Funding in 2025 by



We invite owners of vernacular buildings, farmers, conservationists, community members, and stone enthusiasts to take part. No previous experience is necessary, just a willingness to learn and connect with the landscape in a very hands-on way and then to go on and share their knowledge with others, but importantly practice learnings in an applied way, there are many walls that need attention.

While dry stone construction is deeply rooted in Irish culture, it also connects us to a global tradition. From the terraces of Peru to the crofting walls of Scotland, from the vineyards of France to the sheep enclosures of Sardinia, dry stone techniques appear wherever communities have learned to work in harmony with their environment.

To view the Wicklow Dry Stone Wall Heritage video and explore more about the initiative, visit the Wicklow Uplands Council website www.wicklowuplands.ie or the Wicklow Heritage Portal - <https://wicklowheritage.org/>

For more information on the upcoming training weekend, or to express your interest, please contact the Wicklow Uplands Council directly. Whether you're a newcomer or a seasoned waller, we welcome you to help build the future by preserving the past—one stone at a time!

PURE Project, PURE Mile & Wicklow Uplands Council Sally Gap Clean-Up:



The PURE Mile initiative, launched in 2010 by the PURE (Protecting Uplands & Rural Environments) Project has grown into a truly collaborative model of environmental stewardship.

PURE's strength lies in its unique cross-sectoral partnership, funded by the Department of Climate, Energy & Environment, brings together 3 local authorities (Wicklow County Council (Lead Partner), South Dublin County Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council) the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Coillte (Project Management Chair) and Wicklow Uplands Council (Administrative Partner) and importantly the large number of community stakeholders to deliver coordinated, long-term impact. The unwavering commitment of the PURE team—Ian, Alana, and Mick—deserves particular thanks. Their tireless work supporting volunteers, providing materials, and collecting waste is the backbone of this initiative and the ongoing communications essential to its energy and success.

Over 1,700 bags of litter have already been collected across the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands in 2025 alone, with nearly 900 community clean-ups recorded so far this year. Some groups have removed up to 75

bags of waste in a single outing—an incredible testament to local dedication.

This spring, Wicklow Uplands Council proudly supported the continued success of the PURE Mile initiative, leading our own 'Mountainous Spring Clean' along the Sally Gap—two powerful examples of how community action and partnership can protect and enhance our upland landscapes. We did this in tandem with An Taisce's National Spring Clean on the 5th of April. Volunteers, equipped with litter pickers and bags, removed waste from verges and lay-bys along one of Wicklow's most iconic routes. Our work not only cleared rubbish but also sent a clear message: our uplands matter, and it's up to all of us to care for them.

These initiatives show what's possible when communities, agencies, and organisations work together. They remind us that protecting the uplands is a shared responsibility—and that every bag collected, every mile walked, and every volunteer hour contributes to a cleaner, healthier environment for all.

To everyone who joined us this spring—thank you. Your energy and commitment continue to inspire and we look forward to a larger turn out in 2026!

If you see illegal dumping report it immediately to info@pureproject.ie or by phone to 0402 28662



Team B with the haul from a 1 Km stretch east from the Pier gates car park. All though exciting is very disheartening that such an incredible amount of mindless dumping and littering happens



The High-viz vest everyone should have!

Upland Gully Woodland Planting

A Community Climate Action project being delivered in collaboration with East Wicklow Rivers Trust.

Individual trees, planting on the left using plastic tree guards, discretely in the mid ground to the right are trees planted and protected using rebar mesh which blends into the landscape and allows for the trees to harden more effectively. (Image courtesy Paddy Purser, PTR Ltd)



East Wicklow Rivers Trust

Restoring Nature, Strengthening Resilience

The Upland Gully Woodland Planting project is a collaborative initiative between East Wicklow Rivers Trust and Wicklow Uplands Council, aimed at restoring native woodlands in upland gullies on the East Wicklow sub catchments of the Avonmore and Avonbeg rivers. The project actions are being funded by Wicklow County Council Climate Action Fund, and facilitation, administration and communications being further Funded by Community Foundation Irelands Climate Action Engagement Fund.

This project focuses on enhancing climate resilience, improving water quality, and supporting biodiversity through nature-based solutions. It is building on the work that was started under the SUAS project (2018-2022) and also the work of the National Parks and Wildlife Service, joined up we will see landscape scale action for positive environmental outcomes.

Project Objectives

- **Climate Resilience:**
Planting 'the right tree in the right

place' [in this instance native upland trees like rowan, birch, oak, holly, hawthorn] along our upland gullies helps stabilise stream banks, reduces soil erosion, and mitigates flood risks, contributing to the region's climate adaptation efforts.

- **Biodiversity Enhancement:**
Establishing native upland gully woodlands provides habitats for local flora and fauna, promoting ecological diversity in the uplands and providing ecological connectivity.
- **Water Quality Improvement:**
Vegetation in gullies acts as a natural filter, improving the quality of water flowing into rivers and streams, supporting also the reduction of flow.

Community Engagement

The project emphasises community involvement through volunteer planting days and educational events. Notably, on Earth Day, April 22, 2025, a webinar titled "Right Tree, Right Place - Upland Gully Woodlands for Climate Resilience" was

held to discuss the project's impact and encourage public participation. Access to the recording can be found <https://youtu.be/3TpaMMzf114>.

Looking Ahead

This initiative aligns with the broader goals of Wicklow Uplands Council to support sustainable land use and environmental stewardship in the region. By restoring upland gully woodlands, the project contributes to the long-term health and resilience of Wicklow's natural landscapes.

The importance of collaboration should also be highlighted as this is the strength of this project, thank you to the landowners of the Avonmore and Avonbeg sub catchments for joining us in delivering this project. The National Parks and Wildlife Service - Wicklow Mountain National Park for supporting the movement of materials through difficult and challenging terrain. Thank you to all the volunteers joining in on the work and to the reliability and professionalism and knowledge of our contractors PTR Ltd & Faith Wilson Ecology.



Image courtesy of Hugh McLindon, WMNP.
Gully Planting in the Uplands, Volunteers in early spring.



(Image courtesy Paddy Purser, PTR Ltd) Deer enclosure with a mix of tree species growing successfully.



Wicklow Uplands Council are a County Finalist in the National Lottery Good Causes Awards 2025!

We're absolutely delighted to share some fantastic news—our organisation has been named a County Finalist in the 2025 National Lottery Good Causes Awards in the Heritage category!

This prestigious recognition celebrates the incredible impact of projects and organisations across Ireland, and we are honoured to be counted among them. With hundreds of applications from across the country, being selected as a County Finalist is a true testament to the meaningful work we do and the dedication of our amazing team and community.

What's next? Over the coming weeks, the judging panel will be selecting just 35 organisations to move on to the National Finals, with finalists announced in late July. If selected, (lets remain hopeful) we'll have the opportunity to present our work to the judges in September and attend a Black-Tie Awards Gala in October!

Thank you to everyone who has supported us on this journey—we couldn't have done it without you! Stay tuned for more updates and keep an eye on our social media as we celebrate this milestone. #GoodCausesAwards @NationalLottery



Wicklow Mountain Views



Directors of Wicklow Uplands Council 2024\2025

Farmer & Landowner Panel

Declan O'Neill
Denis Halpin
Joe Morrissey
Mary-Catherine Murphy
Pat Dunne
Sean Malone
Tom Byrne

Environmental and Recreational Panel

Hannah O'Kelly
Darren Flynn
Máire O'Connor
Michael Keegan

Community Panel

Aideen Klauer
Mary Kelly-Quinn
Sean Pierce
Shay Cullen

Economic and Tourism Panel

Sean Byrne
Eugene Stephens
John Fenton
Dairine Nuttall

CoOptions

Philip Maguire
Louis O'Byrne
Donie Anderson
Carmel Kealy
Ann Halpin

Wicklow Uplands Council Team

Lorna Kelly
Coordinator
Máire Dewar
Administration Officer

Statement

The Views and Opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Wicklow Uplands Council.

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Contact

Wicklow Uplands Council, Parish Hall, Main Street, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow,
A98 K7K6, Ireland
Tel: +353 1 2818406 Email: Info@wicklowuplands.ie
Website www.wicklowuplands.ie

FB [WicklowUplandsCouncil](https://www.facebook.com/WicklowUplandsCouncil) Tw: [@WicklowUplands](https://twitter.com/WicklowUplands)
Insta: [@WicklowUplands](https://www.instagram.com/WicklowUplands)

Company Registration Number: 310627 Charity Number: 13346
Vat: 6330627P

Mission

To support the sustainable use of the Wicklow Uplands through consensus and partnership with those who live, work and recreate there.