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Document Control

Version	Date	Changes	Prep	Rev	Auth
One	14/05/2023		DC		DC
two	15/05/2023	AF			

Proposed National Parks and Wildlife Service Glenasmole Catchment Project

Background

In 2016 lands in the Glenasmole area of South Dublin were acquired by the State from the National Assets Management Agency for inclusion into the Wicklow Mountains National Park (WMNP). These lands amounted to c. 1980 ha, bringing the total size of WMNP to 22,224 hectares. Glenasmole, valley encompasses the townlands of Ballymorefinn, Cunard, Glassavullaun, Glassnamucky Brakes, Glassnamucky Mountain and Piperstown. While the State acquired the fee simple for the entire area, rights are held against the State, predominantly grazing rights. The number of individuals with a right to graze stock in the area is unclear but the amount of farmers actively exercising this right is relatively low, believed to be in the region of ten individuals. The sporting rights over the area were contested by the Dublin Regional Game Council but agreement was reached on the matter and the DRGC are now granted a license to hunt the area on an annual basis.

The majority of the lands acquired are designated as part of the Wicklow Mountains Special Area of Conservation (002122) with a smaller subset also part of the Wicklow Mountains Special Protection Area (004040). The primary habitats in the area include wet heath, dry heath and blanket bog. In relation to the Special Protection Area peregrine falcon and merlin do regularly occur hunting in the area, while merlin may also breed on site.

The Glenasmole valley is the catchment of the River Dodder. It's three large tributaries, the Slade Brook, Cot Brook and Mareen Brook are for most of their length within the WMNP. Importantly the River Dodder feeds the Bohernabreena Reservoirs, originally constructed between 1883 and 1887 the reservoirs are still vital to Dublin's water supply, with millions of litres being pumped daily from Bohernabreena to the Ballyboden water treatment plant.

Inclusion of lands in the Special Area of Conservation allows for funding of works by the NPWS Conservation Measures Unit where these work specifically address the Site Specific Conservation Objectives.

https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO002122.pdf

https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/protected-sites/conservation_objectives/CO004040.pdf

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Project Proposal

An exciting and extensive project for the Glenasmole catchment project is proposed, with all of the recently acquired lands being included, 1,980 hectares in total. See map at Appendix 1. To date conservation projects within the Wicklow Mountains National Park have tended to focus on a specific habitat type or issue e.g. woodland management or bog restoration. This is the first project to be based on a wider geographic area, with a suite of measures addressing multiple habitats and issues. This conservation project will address a number of measures specifically related to the conservation objectives for the site that will ultimately influence the entire catchment, hence the project area is to be considered 1,980 hectares.

While a detailed plan has yet to be completed initial discussions, site visits, review of older and current plans for the National Park have led to a proposed broad suite of measures. It is envisaged that a five year plan will be put in place for the site, with many works ready to start this year.

The suite of measures currently envisaged include:

Establishment/protection of gully woodland

Bog restoration

Environmental clean-up of contaminated areas of the site

Control of invasive species on and immediately adjacent to the site

Vegetation management (heather and bracken)

Restricting unauthorised access

See Appendix 2 for further detail on the proposed measures.

Summary

The Glenasmole project is the first catchment based project in Wicklow Mountains National Park. Through a suite of active management techniques it is proposed to address the specific conservation objectives for this entire sub-site of the Wicklow Uplands SAC. This will lead to habitat restoration, improvement in vegetation management leading to greater ecological diversity and structure. Improvements in diversity will increase biodiversity on site and offer improved grazing and shade for grazing animals on site, thereby delivering benefits for wildlife and livestock. This project will also work to stabilise and revegetate bare peat, prevent further loss of peat and prevent land slips

There will be measurable benefits in terms of carbon storage, reduction in erosion and improved water quality. While the works are targeted at the SAC they will also provide important ecosystem services to the wider catchment, specifically in terms of flood risk alleviation and improvements in water quality in relation to the River Dodder and the Dublin water supply at Bohernabreena.

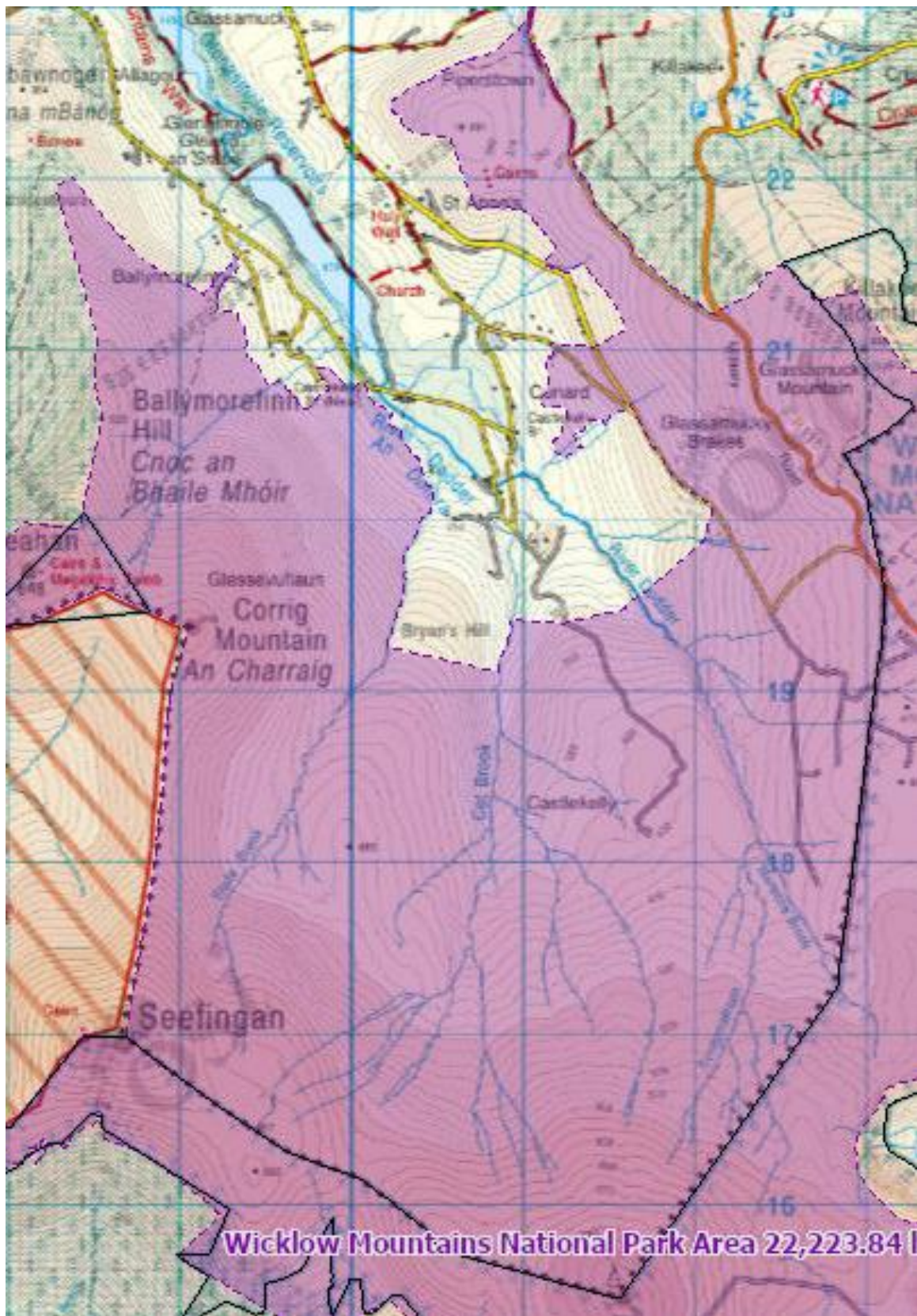
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It is our hope that this broad catchment based approach to management can act as an exemplar to the wide ranging benefits of habitat restoration and ecological engineering.

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Appendix 1

Project area map



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Appendix 2 Specific Measures

Gully Woodland

The primary action for the site, the focus here will be on establishing extensive cover of native tree species in the three main brooks. This will be done through a combination of protection of existing woodland and emerging saplings, tree planting in shelters and fencing to protect planted or existing trees. The gullies amount to c.34km in length and it is estimated c. 60,000 trees could be established on site.



Photo 1. Tree planting in Cot Brook

Bog Restoration

There is an estimated 58ha of bare peat on the upper slopes of the catchment, particularly in the areas of Kippure and Seefingan. Bare peat is a priority for restoration. Works to stabilise these areas include damming of erosion gullies, fencing and reseeded with heather. These techniques have been used elsewhere in WMNP.

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Photo 2 Example of bog restoration works in WMNP. Photo shows, fencing, reseeding and damming.

Environmental clean-up

The area of the “White Road” has in the past been the site of a lot of illegal dumping and burning of waste. While this practice has largely been stopped the remnants of it remain on site. As part of the overall catchment improvement project c. 120 tonnes of contaminated soil will be removed from site and disposed of.

Invasive Species Control

Rhododendron and non-native conifers occur at low densities throughout the site. Denser stands of rhododendron occur just off site and are a threat in terms of them being a source for seeding on site. All invasive species on site will be removed and we will work with neighbouring landowners to control seed sources off site.

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Photo 3. Rhododendron in gully woodland

Vegetation Management

Even aged stands of heather and large swathes of bracken occur across the site. Bracken is of low conservation value and also limited value to grazing animals. Heather value for wildlife can be improved by managing the structure. As an alternative to the more damaging traditional method of burning to control vegetation it is proposed to manage it through a combination of manual cutting and chemical control as appropriate.

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Photo 4 Heather management, WMNP

Access Management

An important consideration is access to the site for those that require it whilst restricting access to those that may damage the site. Hence vehicle access will be restricted, whilst continuing to provide for pedestrian access for hill walkers etc.