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Maurus, Sonja

From: Maurus, Sonja
Sent: Thursday 29 August 2024 16:05
To: Fahy, Orla
Subject: Coillte Western Peatlands Project

Hi Orla,

I have recently been in contact with the NPWS (see email exchange below) to try and find out who in the NPWS is dealing with the Coillte Western Peatlands Project. You might be aware that, in 2020, DAFM have given an indication to Coillte that this project will be supported by the Department and I am currently in the process of pulling together relevant information with a view to preparing proposals to Senior Management on what type of supports could be provided.

I am sending this to you because the NPWS have mentioned in their email below that you are part of the Advisory Group (AG) in WP4 of a project the NPWS running (Blanket Bog Restoration Planning Framework Development), which is looking at restoration planning assessment of forestry on peat within and adjacent to blanket bog SACs/NHAs. This seems very connected with what Coillte are doing as part of the Western Peatlands Project and I think it would be really good to get your views in relation to the work we are doing for this project.

Not sure how much you already know about the project, summarising, the project purpose and progress to date is as follows:

- The Western Peatlands Project (the Project) aims to restore and rehabilitate approximately 2,100 hectares of Atlantic blanket bog and heathland that is currently planted with lodgepole pine and Sitka spruce forests.
- Most of the Coillte western forests were established during the 1960s to the 1980s and many have resulted in forests with below average timber production capabilities that are generally unsuitable for commercial forestry, i.e. economically and environmentally unsustainable.
- Peatland restoration is one of the primary nature-based solution to the biodiversity and climate crisis in Ireland, as blanket bogs accumulate and store carbon as well as possessing unique habitats with high biodiversity value. These peatlands also store and filter water, playing a vital role in the management of water catchments.
- The purpose of this project is to restore as much blanket bog habitat as is feasible on afforested peatlands by implementing sustainable forest management, and providing a range of ecosystem services including improved biodiversity, water quality and landscape, but also to mitigate and adapt to climate change by increasing the potential of these peatland systems to sequester, store and reduce GHG emissions.
- In those areas within these plantations that cannot be restored to blanket bog, the project will determine the most suitable redesign options of the forest to maximise positive outcomes for biodiversity and ecosystem services using techniques such as slowing drain flows, riparian buffer zone management, replanting with native pioneer woodland and restructuring conifer forests to mixed environmental woodlands.
- This project will act as an important demonstration area for Coillte and other stakeholders in managing the significant challenges posed by the inappropriate planting of forestry in sensitive western and upland peatland areas and inform how best to manage other similar plantation areas into the future.
- Currently, the majority of these areas are being replanted with lodgepole pine and the opportunity to restore blanket bog and wet heath, and redesign these forests for greater environmental and social enhancement is being lost for at least another forest crop rotation, i.e. 35-40 years.
- **A pilot project at a site in Derryclare, Connemara Co. Galway** comprising approx. 330ha is underway and a management plan has been developed for the site in consultation with stakeholders. Regulatory consents for this pilot project are currently being sought, including the preparation of an EIA

and NIS and planning application to Galway County Council. This is required given the change in land use (forest to bog) and the removal of greater than 70 hectares of conifer, and the cumulative impact of the proposed project. In a recent decision dated 28th March, Galway Co. Co. has refused planning permission for this project. Coillte decided not to appeal this decision but are considering to re-apply to Galway Co. Co. with a new proposal. Meetings between Coillte, the NPWS and Galway Co.Co. took place in Q2 2024. It was agreed to work on future applications in collaboratively. On completion of this process, a felling licence application for the harvest blocks within the project area would need to be submitted to the Department.

- **We have received 4 invoices since 2022** for just over €450k in relation to the project of which we paid the first (€163k) in 2022. Coillte have indicated that total expected project expenditure this year is approx. €1m.

In accordance with project progress reports that I have received from Coillte, the NPWS seem to be strongly involved with preparing new planning application to Galway Co. Co.

I see from your out of office reply that you are currently on leave. Whenever you are back in work and had time to read this email, would be great if you could contact me so that we can have a chat at some stage.

Many thanks,

Regards,

Sonja

From: Andy Bleasdale (Housing) <Andy.Bleasdale@npws.gov.ie>

Sent: Thursday, August 29, 2024 3:41 PM

To: Maurus, Sonja <Sonja.Maurus@agriculture.gov.ie>

Cc: Jenni Roche (Housing) <Jenni.Roche@npws.gov.ie>; Rebecca Jeffrey (Housing) <Rebecca.Jeffrey@npws.gov.ie>;

Deirdre Lynn (Housing) <Deirdre.Lynn@npws.gov.ie>; Fernando Fernandez (Housing)

<Fernando.Fernandez@npws.gov.ie>

Subject: RE: Coillte Western Peatlands Project

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Hi Sonja,

NPWS (and primarily my colleague Fernando) has been engaging with Dermot Tiernan who oversees the Wild Western Peatlands project as part of the wider Coillte Nature work programme. Dermot Tiernan, as well as, Aileen O'Sullivan and Janice Fuller (Coillte Forest) are part of the Advisory Group (AG) in WP4 of a project we are running (*Blanket Bog Restoration Planning Framework Development*), which is looking at restoration planning assessment of forestry on peat within and adjacent to blanket bog SACs/NHAs.

The main purpose of WP4 is to identify top priority conifer plantations on peat within (or within 500m of) blanket bog SACs (55) & NHAs (73) for felling and additional hydrological restoration. This includes both Coillte owned and privately owned plantations and ranking them based on level of restoration potential.

Dr Orla Fahy (DAFM-FS) has confirmed she is willing to attend the next AG meeting.

If it is helpful, I am happy to facilitate an online discussion but it can't be before the 15th of September, as Fernando is away and he would be central to the discussion.

All the best,

Andy

From: Maurus, Sonja <Sonja.Maurus@agriculture.gov.ie>
Sent: Wednesday 28 August 2024 14:03
To: Andy Bleasdale (Housing) <Andy.Bleasdale@npws.gov.ie>
Cc: Jenni Roche (Housing) <Jenni.Roche@npws.gov.ie>; Rebecca Jeffrey (Housing) <Rebecca.Jeffrey@npws.gov.ie>
Subject: RE: Coillte Western Peatlands Project

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Hi Andy,

The Forestry Division in DAFM is currently considering options for supporting the Coillte Western Peatlands Project and we are conscious that the NPWS seems to be involved at different stages in this project, too, in accordance with project progress reports we have received to date. Would you be available for a brief, informal, telephone chat in relation to this project over the next little while?

I would be free for a chat any time tomorrow, on Monday 2nd before 11am, any time Tuesday or Thursday next week.

Best regards,

Sonja

Sonja Maurus
Forestry Division

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara
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From: Rebecca Jeffrey (Housing) <Rebecca.Jeffrey@npws.gov.ie>
Sent: Tuesday, August 27, 2024 2:10 PM
To: Maurus, Sonja <Sonja.Maurus@agriculture.gov.ie>
Cc: Jenni Roche (Housing) <Jenni.Roche@npws.gov.ie>; Andy Bleasdale (Housing) <Andy.Bleasdale@npws.gov.ie>
Subject: RE: Coillte Western Peatlands Project

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Hi Sonja

You can get in touch with my line manager- Andy Bleasdale (cc'ed here) in relation to this.

All the best,

Rebecca

Dr Rebecca Jeffrey

Scientific Advice and Research, National Parks and Wildlife Service

An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtas Áitiúil agus Oidhreacht

Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

An tSeirbhís Páirceanna Náisiúnta agus Fiadhúlra, 90 Sráid an Rí Thuaidh, Margadh na Feirme, Baile Átha Cliath 7, D07 N7CV

National Parks and Wildlife Service, 90 King Street North, Smithfield, Dublin 7, D07 N7CV

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From: Maurus, Sonja <Sonja.Maurus@agriculture.gov.ie>
Sent: Tuesday 27 August 2024 09:44
To: Rebecca Jeffrey (Housing) <Rebecca.Jeffrey@npws.gov.ie>
Cc: Jenni Roche (Housing) <Jenni.Roche@npws.gov.ie>
Subject: RE: Coillte Western Peatlands Project

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Hi Rebecca,

I am contacting you because I received an out of office reply from Jenni's email mentioning to contact you in her absence. Further to my email below to Jenni, would you be able to provide me with a contact in the NPWS for the Coillte Western Peatlands Project please?

Many thanks,

Best regards,

Sonja

Sonja Maurus

Forestry Division

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Sonja.Maurus@agriculture.gov.ie, www.agriculture.gov.ie

From: Maurus, Sonja

Sent: Tuesday, August 27, 2024 9:29 AM

To: 'jenni.roche@housing.gov.ie' <jenni.roche@housing.gov.ie>

Subject: Coillte Western Peatlands Project

Hi Jenny,

I hope you are well and had a nice summer – despite the not so summery weather.

We have recently received a project progress update from Coillte in relation to their Western Peatlands Project and the NPWS was mentioned a few times in this update. Would you be involved in this or would you know who in the NPWS is dealing with this project?

I would be very interested in having a chat about this to ensure that DAFM's involvement is complementary to what the NPWS is doing in relation to this project already.

Best regards,

Sonja

Sonja Maurus

Forestry Division

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