



WicklowUplands
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‘Farming in the Wicklow Uplands’

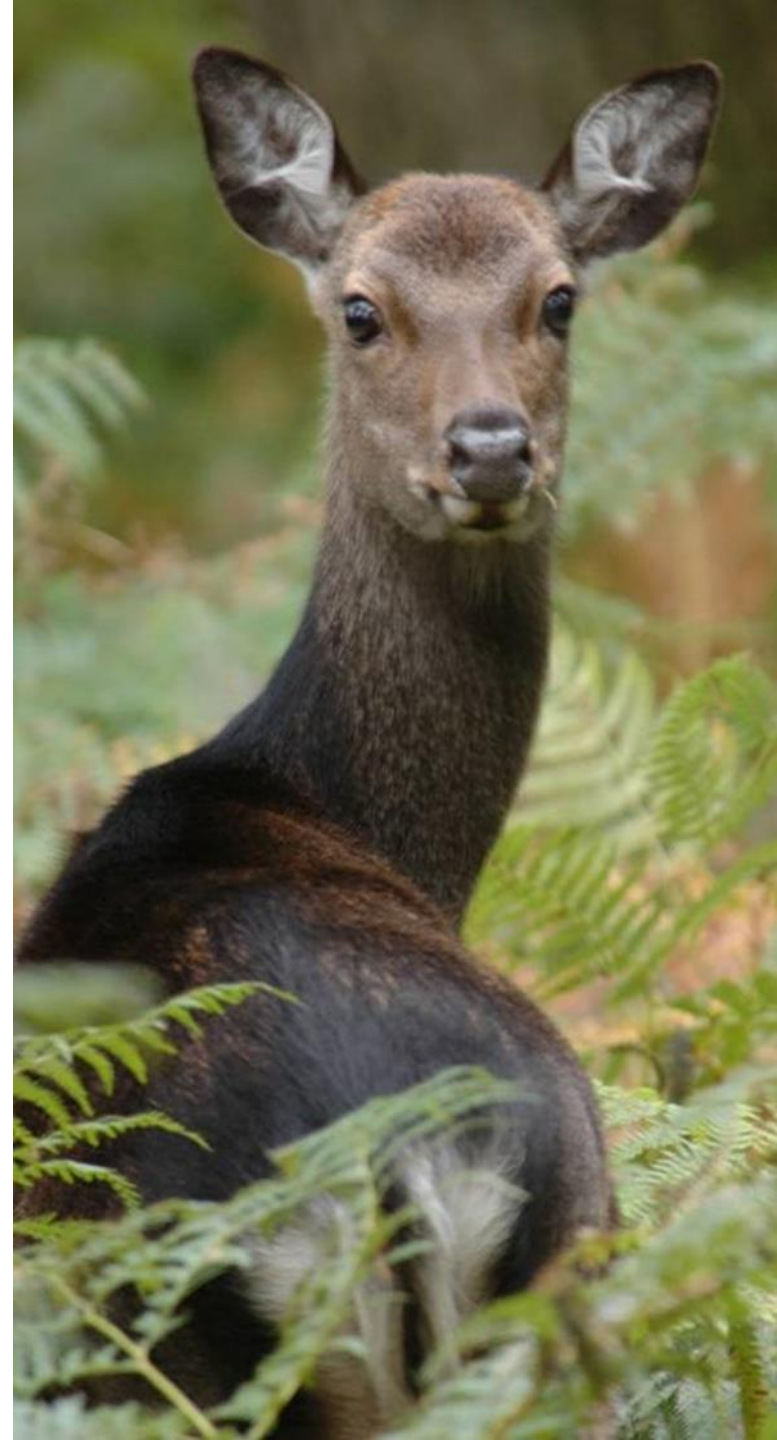
Tom Byrne, Vice Chairman, Wicklow Uplands Council



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Outline...

- ◆ **Wicklow Uplands Council**
 - Role, structure & resources
- ◆ **Farming in Wicklow**
- ◆ **Wicklow Uplands Council support**
- ◆ **The Future**



The Wicklow Uplands



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Mission Statement



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

working for people, places and nature



Representation of shared interests of the uplands

- ◆ **NGO Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status**
- ◆ **Four panel structure represents shared interests of the Wicklow uplands**
- ◆ **27 directors elected annually at the AGM (monthly Board and Executive meetings)**

Farming & Landowning	7 seats
Environment & Recreation	4 seats
Community	4 seats
Economic & Tourism	3 seats
Co-options	9 seats



Projects...

Historic

- ◆ Agreed Access Project
- ◆ Wicklow Sustainable Trails Network
- ◆ Development of Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Strategy
- ◆ Young Observers

Current

- ◆ PURE Project
- ◆ Trail Development
- ◆ Village Interpretative Panels
- ◆ Upland Vegetation Management



Upland Farming in Co Wicklow

- ◆ Hill sheep farming in particular is a key feature of the Wicklow hills
- ◆ The activities of sheep farmers kept hills in good agricultural and environmental condition
- ◆ In the past decade there has been a sharp decline in hill sheep farming
- ◆ This is due in part to changes in legislation and restrictive vegetation management
- ◆ Reduced farming activities in the uplands have resulted in poorer quality habitats

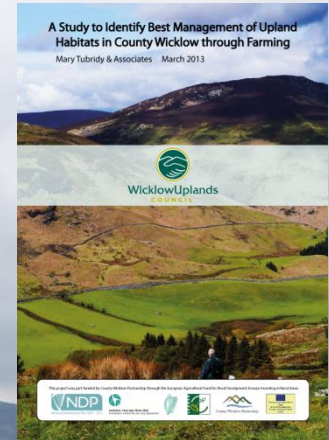


Wicklow Uplands Council – Upland Vegetation Management Project

- **2011 a Working Group was established to tackle the issue of vegetation management in the Wicklow Hills**
- **Grassroots approach built from the ground up working with Uplands Farmers, Recreational Users, Teagasc, NPWS, Wicklow Uplands Council & the Irish Uplands Forum**
- **Strong farmer participation - 11 farmers on the working group**
- **30 meetings over a period of two years (60 hrs) including site visits**
- **The group also liaised with farmers in the Comeragh and Cooley Mountains, the Forest Service, the Heritage Council and Wicklow County Council**

'A Study to Identify Best Management of the Upland Habitats in County Wicklow'

To use good science and collaboration to identify best management of these areas with the optimal balance of farming and biodiversity



Key Recommendations:

- The report highlights the need for targeted support for upland farmers through an Upland Agri-environmental Scheme (output driven)
- The need for the dates for the Irish burning season to be brought back in line with the UK and Northern Ireland and supported through an Uplands Scheme as per our neighbouring countries
- The establishment of local burning management groups
- Research needed on sustainable grazing, socio-economics of upland farming
- Practical trials on management techniques to monitor effect on biodiversity (Study Areas)

‘Farmers attributes, management practices and attitudes associated commonage use’



- An MSc Research Project carried out in 2015 under Teagasc's Walsh Fellowship programme
- Aimed to identify how to keep upland commonages in good agricultural and environmental condition through hill sheep farming
- Found that poor agricultural productivity was a key driver in the decline in hill sheep farming
- Also identified the socio-economic impacts of the decline in upland farming
- Identified farmers as important people in keeping local communities alive

'An Inventory of Biodiversity in the Wicklow/Dublin Uplands'

- To establish a clear baseline of biodiversity for the area
- An indicative habitat map of the study area
- Desk based inventory of records of threatened and protected species
- Identify gaps in existing data
- The full report is available at www.wicklowuplands.ie



An Inventory of Biodiversity in the Wicklow/Dublin Uplands



Report prepared by Dr. Claire Lauder, CL Spatial

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9 November 2015

Influencing and Developing Policy



- Study to Identify Best Management of Upland Habitats launched by Minister Simon Coveney at AGM in June 2013
- Presented to Joint Oireachtas Committee for Agriculture June 2013
- Lobbied for the inclusion of a locally led scheme for upland areas in the Rural Development Plan based on the success of the Burren Farming for Conservation Scheme
- Provision was made for a number of locally led schemes under the new RDP, among the first of their kind in Europe

Locally Led Agri-Environment Scheme (LLAES)



- Based on the Burren Farming for Conservation Scheme, it was realised a one size fits all approach doesn't work for the best management of our habitats
- The schemes take a bottom-up approach. Local knowledge feeds into the development of the scheme
- Currently a LLAES successfully running in the Burren
- Recently two new schemes have been launched for the preservation of Freshwater Pearl Mussel and Hen Harrier.
- A call for applications for an uplands LLAES was issued late December 2016 and Wicklow Uplands Council has prepared an application for the Wicklow, in consultation with stakeholders
- Confident that this application will be successful based on existing research. Currently waiting for the result of that process

Locally Led Agri-Environment Scheme (LLAES)



- The scheme will work by providing farmers payments for services provided
- These payments will sit on top of CAP funding
- Payment will be for tasks carried out which will also promote upland habitats
- A plan is developed with the farmer and a farm planner outlining specific tasks
- It is the farmer who decides what tasks they wish to carry out, they are not forced to participate in the scheme or undertake duties
- There are no penalties involved, if tasks are not completed within the agreed timeframe then there will be no payments
- Tasks include; increased shepherding, temporary fencing, drain and path maintenance etc.

The Future...



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- ◆ **Farmers need to be supported and have input into the decision affecting them**
- ◆ **A bottom-up approach is the best way to achieve long term sustainability**
- ◆ **Wicklow Uplands Council will continue to work to support, engage and build consensus among the diverse interests of the uplands**
- ◆ **If farmers are not engaged and encouraged to remain our locally communities, habitats and landscapes will drastically change....**







