

Final Project Report



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine



Final Project Report - December 2022

Project Name: Illaun Farm-Forest EIP
Project Id: [LLOC 5011](#)
Project Manager: Matt Smith

Project Team: Please note any changes to the team members/roles

Name	Title
Matt Smith	Admin and Project Manager
Meadhbh Costigan	Ecologist
Ray Foley	Education and Community Liaison
Sarah Broderick	Reporting

Executive Summary

The objective of the project is to increase on-farm biodiversity in the region of the Glendine Valley in West Clare, by creating, expanding and rehabilitating woodland habitat. We accomplished this through collaborating with 12 local landowners. Woodlands, shelterbelts and riparian's tree buffers were planted on participating farms. Farmers were also actively supported to apply for the Native Woodland Scheme, resulting in a broader increase in native trees in the area.

At the Illaun site, work began to convert the existing spruce plantation into a mixed woodland. Biodiversity in the forest was thoroughly assessed and recommendations were made to improve the

ecological status of the habitats. This site was used for several demonstrations relating to farm woodland creation and management.

Throughout the project duration, we documented these actions and engaged in rich digital storytelling through social media, national radio stations, and by recording high-quality promotional and educational videos.

There was also a significant educational component that involved discussion groups with farmers and demonstration days with experts. Through these initiatives, we gained a better understanding of local attitudes towards biodiversity and promoted innovative approaches to land management in west Clare.

This approach meets the EIP definition of innovation as identified by the EIP-Agri Focus Group on Forest Practices, because we will be; (a) promoting integrated landscape-management, (b) exploring assisted regeneration in forestry, (c) and increasing the use of broadleaf species in regeneration (EIP-AGRI 2019:2).

Brief Project Description

The objectives of the project were to increase on-farm biodiversity in the Glendine River Valley by planting native trees and engaging local landowners on the topic of native woodlands. The project combined work on Hometree owned land in Illaun and neighbouring farms. It took a three-pronged approach

1. Scientific assessment and reporting
2. Creation and protection of woodland habitat through information provision & financial incentive
3. Community engagement through engagement and education

Shelterbelts and small woodlands were planted on the 12 participating farms. Farmers were actively supported to apply for the Native Woodland Scheme resulting in 11 licence applications being made to the forest service totalling over 100 acres of native woodland. Furthermore, works began to convert a spruce plantation into mixed woodland. Biodiversity in the Illaun woodland hub was assessed before and after interventions to establish the changes in the ecological status of these habitats. These actions were documented through digital storytelling across social media sites, national radio stations, and recording high-quality promotional videos for releases. There is also a significant educational component that involves discussion groups with farmers and demonstration days with experts. We sought to promote information exchange within the farming community, this contributed to more positive attitudes towards biodiversity and led to innovative approaches to land management in west Clare.

This approach meets the EIP definition of innovation as identified by the EIP-Agri Focus Group on Forest Practices, because we will be; (a) promoting integrated landscape-management, (b) exploring assisted regeneration in forestry, (c) and increasing the use of broadleaf species in regeneration (EIP-AGRI 2019:2).

Baseline Data

Farm baselines

Satellite imagery and GPS maps provide a woodland habitat baseline on participating farms. Additionally, farms were walked by the ecologist/forester team and maps created documenting existing woodland features and proposed additional woodlands.

Information Baselines

We conducted two surveys covering the durations of the EIP. One was for the general public and another was specifically for the farmers.

Woodland Hub baselines

Project ecologist Meadh Costigan undertook two in depth ecological studies of the hub Woodland at Illaun. These studies measured invertebrate life, plant species and abundance, as well as quantities of deadwood present. These results have been published and are available at hometree.ie These studies, one pre intervention and another post intervention showed an improvement in woodland biodiversity in months after thinning.

Key Performance Indicators

KPI 1: Support farmer to make a licenced native woodland scheme application

Final status: Completed in Full

Through our farmers engagement model, we supported 11 farmers to apply for the native woodland scheme. These plots vary from 1 hectare to 7 hectares, with a total of 41 Hectares of native woodland applied. This will result in an additional 135,000 trees in the Glendine valley.

KPI 2: 30,000 Native Trees planted in Glendine Valley

Final Status: Completed in Full

The Illaun Farm Forest EIP planted 30,000 native trees on local farms in the Glendine Valley through small-scale plantings. Each farm received a visit from the team; the ecologist (Meadhbh Costigan), the Forester (Manus Crowley), and the community liaison (Ray O Foghlú). Following a farm walk and discussion with the land-owner a planting plan was mapped out. These plantings took the form of shelter-belts or small woodlands.

Shelter-belts were a popular choice for participants, unsurprising here on the exposed west coast. These shelter-belts followed a standard formula which was adjusted for each site. The standard formula consisted of a linear strip of trees with three distinct rows. This format created a diverse but functional wooded strip that, once established, will provide a stock proof shelter-belt. Species included were oak, Scots pine, alder, willow, rowan, elm, wild cherry, bird cherry, hazel, downy birch and alder buckthorn.

Some participants opted for a small woodland planting. This planting plan followed the recommendations outlined in the Glás scheme.

KPI 3: A final scientific report

Final Status: Completed in Full

Over 20,000 words were delivered across 4 scientific reports; Ecological Report 2021, Hedgerow Appraisal, Species List, Ecological Report 2022. These reports provided recommendations with regard to land management for conservation purposes. A synopsis of findings is provided below.

In August 2021, the Woodland Ecological Condition survey was used to assess the health of a 20-year-old spruce plantation, called the Illaun Farm-Forest (Costigan 2021). It proved to be a valuable tool for collecting baseline data, while also providing a guide for improving ecosystem health across the site. This report listed seven key recommendations to be completed within a 12-month period.

A follow-up survey carried out in July 2022, concluded that four of these were completed, namely; retain a sub-population of existing native and non-native trees, plant a diversity of native broadleaf trees, plant native shrubs (and herbaceous species), and increase deadwood volume. This resulted in an increase of four points on the biodiversity metric. Overall, the score increased from poor (22/39) to moderate (26/29). This result demonstrates that the short-term conservation objective of the Illaun Farm-Forest has been achieved, namely; to make a significant measurable improvement to woodland ecology and biodiversity in a 12-month period.

The ecological condition of the forest improved across three biodiversity indicators, namely; age distribution of trees, number of native tree species, and woodland regeneration. These improvements can all be attributed to planting a diversity of native saplings in the woodland edges and open spaces. This demonstrates how tree planting can make a significant contribution to ecosystem restoration in spruce plantations.

In conclusion, this project has demonstrated how community-led initiatives such as the Illaun Farm-Forest EIP can demonstrate a measurable improvement in biodiversity over a one-year period. Future efforts at the Illaun Farm-Forest should continue to be guided by the Biodiversity Metric. This will ensure conservation works are targeted and effective. Following this method, it is possible to demonstrate a significant improvement in the ecological condition of spruce plantations undergoing conversion to mixed woodlands in a 12-month period. Moreover, Hometree can use the Biodiversity Metric to guide conservation works at their other sites in order to scientifically demonstrate improvements in biodiversity and ecological status over time.

4. Farmer and Community Engagement and education program

A series of talks, discussion groups and workshops as well as a full schools programme were held over the course of the year. Expert speakers and discussion groups. A workshop was given at each of the following schools; Annagh, Moy, Rockmount, Rineen, Miltown, Spanish Point, Lahinch. Discussion groups, site visits, expert talks happened throughout the duration of the EIP. In short, 37/44 planned events were carried out.

KPI 4.1: One documentary (<20 minutes)

Final status: Complete

A documentary on the project was directed and shot and will be released in 2023 following post-production.

KPI 4.2: Quarterly film releases

Final status: Completed in full

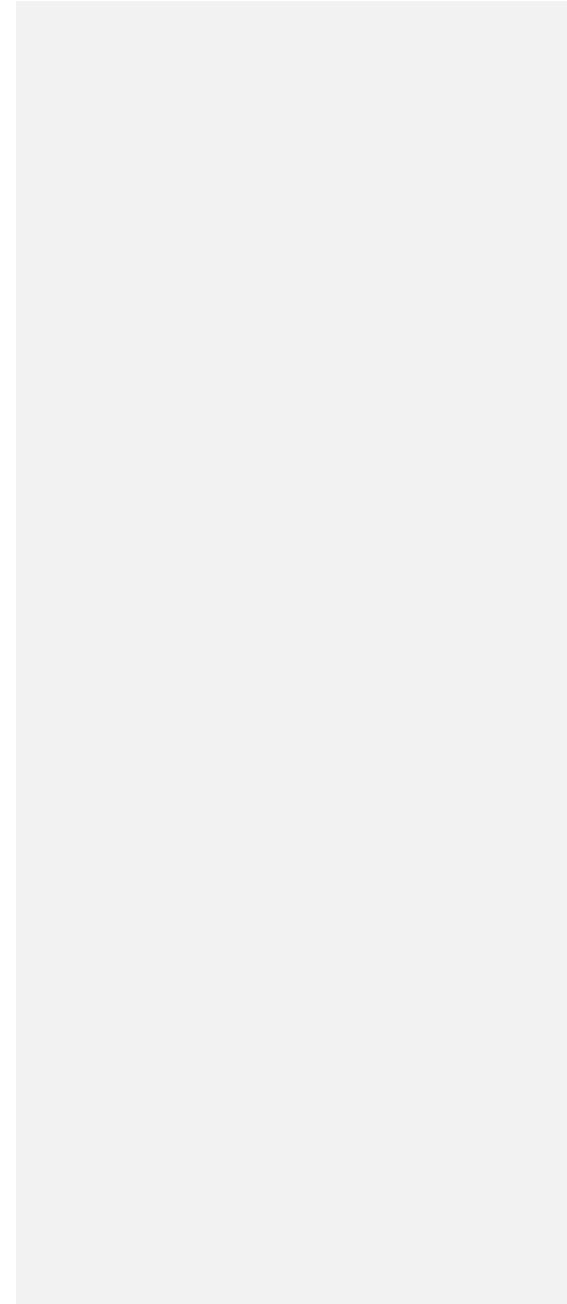
Five educational videos were created and released. They were published on our website and YouTube channels and promoted through our social media platforms.

KPI 4.3: Attitudes survey - A survey investigating landowner engagement assessed participants' attitudes towards the relevant topics (e.g., forestry, biodiversity, and government grants) and also their experience of the project. The results of this informed our lessons learned and project evaluations.

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Table 2. Illaun Farm Forest Community Engagement and Education Events



Theme	Date	Speakers	Location	
Introducing the Farm Forest EIP	June 1st 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú & Meadhbh Costigan	Illaun	2
Future opportunities in Farming & Biodiversity?	June 8th 2022	Catherine Keena & Michael Dillon	Miltown Community Centre	2
Breeding the right Animal for the land	June 15th 2022	Clive Bright - Gerard Walsh (Beltie)	Hometree Ennistymon	2
Forests on Farms	June 22nd 2022	Manus Crowley & James Ham and Olive Leavy	Hometree	3
Grassland for Biodiversity -	June 29th 2022	Donncha O'Cathain & Ray Ó Foghlú	Miltown	2
Farming and Tourism & Old Farm Building Eoin Madigan	July 13th 2022	Pat Sweeney (Doolin Guide) Eoin Madigan (Master Craftsman)	Hometree Ennistymon	2
Water Quality & Farming	July 20th 2022	Ruairi Ó Conchúir & Bill Keane	Hometree Ennistymon Cancelled due to COVID	2
The future of Agri-Env schemes		Thomas Duffy & Patsy Carucan	Glendine Valley	2
Continuous Cover Forestry		Marina Conway & Ciaran Nugent	Illaun Site	2
Woodlands of the Glendine Valley		Rory Hodd & Ray Ó Foghlú	Glendine Valley	2
Annagh National School	February 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú	Annagh National School	1
Moy national school	February 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú	Moy National school	1
Lahinch National School	March 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú	Lahinch National School	1
Annagh National School	March 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú	Annagh National School	1
Rineen National school	April 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú	Rineen National school	1
Liscannor National School	April 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú	Liscannor National School	1
Ennistymon National School	June 2022	Ray Ó Foghlú	Ennistymon National School	1
Discussion Group 1	June 1st 2022	Farmers & Public	Community Centre Miltown	1
Discussion Group 2	June 8th 2022	Farmers & Public	Community Centre Miltown	1

Discussion Group 3	June 15th 2022	Farmers & Public	Community Centre Miltown	1
Discussion Group 4	June 22nd 2022	Farmers & Public	Hometree Ennistymon	1
Discussion Group 5	June 29th 2022	Farmers & Public	Hometree Ennistymon	1
Discussion Group 6	July 13th 2022	Farmers & Public	Glendine Valley	1
Discussion Group 7	July 20th 2022	Farmers & Public	Ilalaun Site	1
Discussion Group 9	June 22nd	Farmers & Public	Glendine Valley	1
Discussion Group 10	June 23rd	Farmers & Public	Hometree Ennistymon	1
Total Events				37

Closing Evaluation

In the view of the project delivery team the EIP represented a genuine success. Significant tangible long-term land use changes occurred as a result of the EIP, and critically they happened with the expressed goodwill of the farming community. This was the result of meaningful farmer engagement. This engagement is undoubtedly the most significant innovation of the EIP. Currently there is a sense that farmers will not engage with licensed forestry. This EIP showed with the right approach (adequate information and support are on hand) farmers who were heretofore uninterested in woodland creation could be successfully engaged.

Value for Money

Aligned with other key government objectives (Native Woodland Scheme) and additional support for the landowners also.

We pitched a multi strand agri-environmental project. This gave us an opportunity to trial different engagement, planning and reporting methods. The project team now has a strong sense of what the most impactful actions are and a template on how best to enact them. Now that this system has been created, streamlining measure which don't undermine efficacy of the process can be found

For us the key take-homes were as follows:

- There is significant value for money for the state to be found in simply communicating existing afforestation schemes better. These schemes have established procedures, incentives and compliance checks. Once a farmer has engaged with these (the cost of which is relatively low) the in-situ system can manage the remainder of the process.
- Our farmer engagement model is evidently an effective mechanism at establishing this interest in existing schemes. Within this process we believe a more streamlined approach is possible.
- Community engagement is a key element of our project, however we found that less is more. Too many workshops/events can overload farmers and the wider community resulting in lower turnout. Cost savings can be found here.
- Works at the spruce woodland at Illaun will have a significantly beneficial impact on local biodiversity, however they are potentially not necessary as incoming forestry schemes have elements of these works included. We believe a greater impact could be had by engaging conifer woodland owners, and making them aware of opportunities.

Lessons Learned

- Farmers are very open to woodland creation, but they require support making what is a very significant decision.
- Our system of farmer engagement works. We facilitated a group of 12 farmers who had no interest in woodland creation through to applying for the native woodland scheme, planting between 1 and 8 hectares.
- The methodology of engagement with farmers can be improved and simplified. Opening the invite to a geographically more dispersed group would likely yield good results, i.e. more interested parties and more habitat creation.
- The engagement and delivery methodology can be scaled with cost saving and improved results.
- Spruce woodlands have the potential to be improved for biodiversity. We showed this using a scientific method.
- There is interest in the matters described above amongst the wider community and in local education settings.

Actions to Carry Forward

The proposing organisation has launched a national woodland creation project and is utilising the landowner engagement and facilitation elements of the Illaun Farm Forest EIP.

An opportunity to speak to the forestry service about our findings may be fruitful. The recent forestry promotion initiatives were certainly well received, but we would suggest a more targeted, outcome-focused approach might also be required.

Hometree hope to apply for another EIP to continue to innovate in terms of farmer and community engagement. This project has shown proof of consent and it has applicability anywhere where a complex of old woodlands exists and has the potential to be connected.

The work of this EIP had created a lot of interest in trees locally. As a charity it is difficult for us to meet this demand with limited resources. We are in the process of seeking private funding to meet this demand and provide assistance to farmers.

Dissemination of Findings

Findings were disseminated through a range of online platforms.

Regular updates were given in video, picture and text formats on twitter, instagram and LinkedIn. These have accumulated tens of thousands of views.

The project featured on a number of national media platforms including Ear to the Ground, EcoEye, The Irish times, The Independent, and Countrywide.

Project coordinators have given talks at third levels institutes including UL & UCC about the project

There has been ongoing liaison with the Forest Service about the scope to implement learnings from the project on broader forest policy.

Financial Expenditure Reported

Please see a breakdown of our financial expenditure which was reported throughout the program.

Expenditures Reported		Funds Received		
Period Cover	Amount	Date received		Invoice Amount
01.10.21-26.11.21	€ 22,662.08	01/11/2021		€ 95,670.00
01.12.21-24.02.22	€ 16,716.33	16/08/2022		€ 42,592.00
01.03.22-31.05.22	€ 31,241.04	09/02/2023		€ 11,553.00
01.06.22-31.08.22	€ 31,479.63	16/02/2023		€ 8,700.00
01.09.22-30.11to.22	€ 18,235.35		Total Received	€ 164,215.00
01.12.2022-28.02.23	€ 14,824.18	August 2023		
01.03.2023 to project end date due	€ 21,782.13		Total Budget	€ 164,215.00
Total Spend	€ 156,940.74			
Farmer Payment	€ 8,700.00			
Total Spend	€ 165,640.74			