



# North Connemara Locally Led Agri-environmental Scheme

<b>Geographical Location</b>	IE 042 West Region
<b>Keywords</b>	Natura 2000, Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area, Innovation, Upland Habitats, Peatlands, Social Farming, HNV Farming, Commonage
<b>Project Leader</b>	Forum Connemara CLG (email: <a href="mailto:info@forumconnemara.ie">info@forumconnemara.ie</a> / <a href="mailto:b.omalley@forumconnemara.ie">b.omalley@forumconnemara.ie</a> )
<b>Project Type</b>	Operational Group
<b>Starting Date</b>	2019
<b>End Date</b>	2023
<b>Project Status</b>	Ongoing
<b>Main Funding Source</b>	Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020
<b>Total Budget</b>	€1,424,284

## Project Rationale

The landowners in the Twelve Bens/Maumturks area face increasingly difficult challenges farming this vast upland landscape due to land abandonment brought about by decreasing economic viability, decrease in the numbers of traditional grazers, encroachment of *Rhododendron ponticum* and labour-intensive practices required to continue farming these upland habitats. Further pressures are brought about by increased recreational use of this unique upland area.

## Project Aims & Objectives

This project aims to ensure the long-term economic viability of hill farming in the Twelve Bens/Maumturks area through the development of sustainable and innovative agricultural management practices to restore, preserve and enhance the biodiversity of this unique Natura 2000 area.

To achieve this goal, the project will pursue the following specific objectives over a four-year pilot locally led agri environmental scheme targeting 2500ha of HNV upland habitats:

- (i) Develop a landscape-based approach to recapture the historical tradition of governing local commonage through locally-led farm group management practices;
- (ii) Establish a common set of agronomic, economic, social and environmental indicators using innovative technologies (livestock stock tracking, GIS, drones, digital media, trail counters), to monitor impacts regarding grazing management, biodiversity, landscape and walking initiatives;
- (iii) Provide a mechanism to create a positive outreach programme to include a social farming initiative;
- (iv) Prevent further habitat damage through the formation of management groups to manage the habitats on a landscape scale &
- (v) Improve the conservation status of Annex I Heath and Bog Habitats in the Twelve Bens/Maumturks area.



Brendan O'Malley, Forum Connemara

## Project Activities

- Formulate farmer-led management groups to manage the uplands sustainably.
  - Develop an incentive system for improving agricultural management of upland heaths and peatlands.
  - Run training events and implementation programmes for scheme participants in the use of modern technology such as drones and virtual fencing to mitigate against uneconomical and extensive labour practices.
  - Targeted scrub removal of *rhododendron* encroachment by non-chemical methods to enable the restoration of peatland and grassland habitats.
  - Develop a social farming programme through the Forum Connemara ABILITY Programme.
- Develop a Twelve Bens/Maumturks blackface sheep initiative, whereby the indigenous blackface sheep bred in the Twelve Bens/Maumturks will be maintained and enhanced to produce an animal for sustainable management of upland habitats through extensive grazing regimes.
- Reintroduce suitable cattle breeds to manage upland peatlands and grasslands.
  - Manage the impact of recreational use in the Twelve Bens/Maumturks through trail definition and maintenance works.
  - Develop school education programmes and public outreach.