



Pearl Mussel Project

Farming for nature in a vibrant rural economy

Geographical Location	IE 053 South-West; IE 042 West; IE 041 Border Region
Keywords	Farming practice; Landscape management; Fertilisation and nutrients management; Water management; Biodiversity & nature management
Project Leader	Dr Patrick Crushell, The Pearl Mussel Project Ltd. (email: patrick@pmproject.ie)
Project Type	Operational Group
Starting Date	2018
End Date	2023
Project Status	Ongoing
Main Funding Source	Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020
Total Budget	€10,000,000



Project Rationale

The freshwater pearl mussel is a mussel species of clean rivers that is on the verge of extinction in Ireland and western Europe, where populations have declined by 90% over the past century. The primary cause of this decline is related to altered and intensifying land use. The species is on the IUCN Red List, and is one of the 365 most endangered species in the world. It is listed for protected under the EU Habitats Directive. In Ireland, eight river catchments contain 80% of the total Irish freshwater pearl mussel population, and are known as the 'Top eight catchments'. While these rivers support the highest remaining numbers of freshwater pearl mussels in Ireland, these populations are also undergoing a slow decline, and face extinction unless action is taken.

Project Aims & Objectives

The Pearl Mussel Project aims to design and implement a voluntary results-based agri-environmental scheme with farmers that will help protect the endangered freshwater pearl mussel, as well as benefiting the wider environment.

To achieve these goals, the project will pursue the following specific objectives within eight priority fresh-water pearl mussel catchments in Ireland:

- (i) Protect and enhance the conditions of the freshwater pearl mussel rivers and local environment by maintaining & improving natural habitats (such as wetlands, grasslands, and bogs);
- (ii) Deliver an opportunity for farmers in eight priority catchments to earn an additional income from their land. Farmers will receive a score for the delivery of a defined environmental result, with higher scores being rewarded with higher payments;
- (iii) Provide sustainable benefits for biodiversity and river ecosystems, while supporting a vibrant rural economy.

Project Activities

- Develop and implement a results-based agri-environmental scheme which will financially reward farmers for delivering environmental benefits.
- Community outreach to promote environmental awareness amongst local communities in each of the project areas.
- Promote innovative agriculture by supporting novel approaches to land management that are relevant to the aims of the project.
- Develop market opportunities for agricultural producers that complement the project's overall environmental targets
- Support research and development relevant to the aims of the project.

