

# LEADER

Community-Led Local Development



National Rural Network

## LEADER 2014-2020 NRN CASE STUDY

**Project name:** Coillte Sláintiúil

**Date:** May 2018 to August 2018

**Local Action Group:** Cork South LCDC

**Implementing Partner:** Údarás na Gaeltachta

**Type of Beneficiary:** SME

**Priority & Focus Area:** Theme 1: Rural Economic Development, Enterprise Development and Job Creation/Sub theme: Enterprise Development

**Project Beneficiary:** Coillte Sláintiúil

**Address:** Dronmagrel, Cill na Martra, Maigh Chromtha, Co. Chorcaí

**Further information:** [www.coillteslaintiuil.ie](http://www.coillteslaintiuil.ie)

**Videos:** [Woodland Management](#)

[Preventative Tree Care – The Hidden Costs of Doing Nothing](#)

[Establishing a Wild Bird Habitat in a Dead Oak Tree](#)

### COILLTE SLÁINTIÚIL

#### Summary

Coillte Sláintiúil is a start-up enterprise providing a range of woodland conservation solutions such as containing invasive species and disease. Invasive species are a major threat to woodland biodiversity loss and the need to preserve Ireland's woodlands is both a local and national issue. This project assisted the next phase of development of emerging business Coillte Sláintiúil through providing grant support for equipment purchase. This has resulted in building Coillte Sláintiúil's reputation, networks and capacity to take on more complex conservation projects. This business services unmet, important environmental needs in the woodland context.

#### Context

Founded by Neil Vaughan in 2016, Coillte Sláintiúil provides services to protect and replace woodland habitat of huge environmental and cultural importance that is being lost. This includes habitat preservation and installation; tree pruning, removal and preservation; as well as invasive species and disease management, such as honey fungus and oak dieback. Neil Vaughan initially had a tree surgery business and Coillte Sláintiúil developed as a spin-off business to this. The business is based in the Muscraí area of Cork which is a Gaeltacht region of Ireland. The name 'Coillte Sláintiúil' is Irish for Healthy Forests.

Preserving Ireland's native and semi-natural woodlands is an issue of national and wider European concern. The EU Habitats Directive aims to support the expansion of native woodlands and reduce fragmentation. A National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) publication notes to achieve this



## Coillte Sláintiúil

1



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correct management of Ireland's woodlands is essential, with a first priority the removal of invasive species. NPWS notes that invasive species are one of the most serious threats to Ireland's native woodlands which are fragmented and many are in poor condition. Statistics show that Ireland is one of the least forested countries in Europe. Species composition is dominated by Sitka spruce, with trees such as oak, beech, and birch in much lower proportion.

South Cork Local Development Strategy highlights the region's dependence on agriculture and the need for rural economy diversification. To assist the development of start-up enterprises, and supporting rural job creation and enterprise development, the strategy contains an action to provide capital support for enterprise which Coillte Sláintiúil availed of. Coillte Sláintiúil also strongly supports rural environmental protection aligned with local needs. The strategy also notes the increasing issue of invasive species in rural environments and their removal is needed.

### Objectives

- This project assisted the next phase of development of emerging business Coillte Sláintiúil and developed the capacity of the business to take on new types of woodland conservation projects through providing grant support for purchase of equipment.
- LEADER supported the purchase of a GreenMeck SafeTrak 19 28 Series 2 wood chipper to use in woodland conservation projects suitable for use in all types of terrain and a Cargo Connect 475-4452 trailer for transport.

### Activities

The idea for Coillte Sláintiúil emerged when founder Neil Vaughan worked in Sydney in 2012 and gained experience of novel conservation techniques. For example, this included nest boxes built into a hollowed-out part of an old, dead tree, providing it with a new use. These nest box types are better insulated than external nest boxes and wildlife can eat insects that propagate in the tree. This new arm of arboriculture provides shelter for native wildlife, especially birds, but can also be targeted at specific wildlife species. Neil brought a range of new ideas back home to Ireland and

built a new business with these methods as the initial inspiration.



Image Credit: Coillte Sláintiúil

LEADER provided grant support for the purchase of a GreenMeck SafeTrak 19 28 Series 2 wood chipper to use in woodland conservation projects. A central benefit of this model is its traversing ability and is suitable for use in all types of terrain. This equipment was essential to Coillte Sláintiúil gaining a contract for an approximately 8-month project in an 8-acre private woodland. This project demonstrates the added value of the LEADER funding and the new types of projects that Coillte Sláintiúil has the capacity to deliver because of the new equipment. This 8-month project was the first major project the new equipment was used for and was essential to securing the contract. In around May 2018, phase 1 of this project involved removal of invasive non-native plants such as rhododendron, cherry laurel and Japanese knotweed. They grow forming dense thickets blocking light, impeding growth of native species and the associated habitats they support. Over the first six months of this project, Coillte Sláintiúil worked to remove invasive plants providing an environment where native plants can regenerate.

The chipper was used to break down all the invasive species removed and has been essential to delivering this project. The next steps in the project involve killing off all the remnants of the invasive species. This is specialist work beyond the current capacity of Coillte Sláintiúil. The business is working with specialists from neighbouring county Kerry, the Japanese Knotweed Company, to complete this aspect of the project. Phase 2 is expected to



commence when invasive species have been cleared. Native trees such as oak and ash will be introduced developing a native woodland habitat where native animals can also be supported to thrive.

**“Woodland destruction and conservation is a major issue today. It is a worldwide problem, one acre at a time Coillte Sláintiúil is trying to fix it. Outside of building a business, we wanted to do our bit to help solve the problem. I grew up on a small farm and woodlands were very important for wintering cattle when we didn’t have sheds. The work of Coillte Sláintiúil ties into the ideal of going back to where we were.”**

**Neil Vaughan, Coillte Sláintiúil**

The reputational value of gaining LEADER backing also fed into successfully securing other new project contracts. For example, Coillte Sláintiúil is now also working as a sub-contractor for a forester involved in the Native Woodlands Scheme. This scheme has been developed over a number of years under a partnership involving The Forest Service, Woodlands of Ireland, Dúchas, The Heritage Service, Regional Fisheries Boards, the Heritage Council, Coillte, COFORD and others. Coillte Sláintiúil is providing forest rejuvenation services such as spot thinning, removal of invasive species and re-introducing native trees and plants.



Image Credit: Coillte Sláintiúil

Coillte Sláintiúil is also working to diversify its services and is carrying out research to develop new services in niche areas. In the next five years it is planned to develop a

corporate experience/retreat around woodland conservation. This would involve servicing clients such as the demand from local corporations for staff retreats and collaborating with local hotels and woodland owners to run the experience. This also supports objectives and needs identified in the South Cork Local Development Strategy. For example, under the LEADER Rural Environment theme actions include promotion of community engagement and raising awareness around issues impacting biodiversity issues such as invasive species.

### Results

The results of this project link to three pillars of sustainable development, with current and future expected economic, social and environmental benefits. The business has sustained employment of a team of three employees who already worked with Neil Vaughan Tree Services and Coillte Sláintiúil. Within the next year Coillte Sláintiúil plans to build a dedicated new, additional crew of two full-time employees. Since acquiring the new equipment, Coillte Sláintiúil has up-scaled its operations with at least a 40% increase in output. Coillte Sláintiúil has secured 3 new projects since acquiring the new equipment that would not be possible without it. 1 is completed, 1 has commenced and 1 started in February 2019.

**“Going forward Coillte Sláintiúil will be a much bigger project. It is snowballing. Every month there is some new aspect that develops.”**

**Neil Vaughan, Coillte Sláintiúil**

From the client perspective, woodland conservation projects can be financially self-sustaining. For example, costs paid for conservation services can be regenerated through old timber cleared from sites that can be used as firewood, for fencing or woodchip for agricultural or horticultural uses. For example, one project that Coillte Sláintiúil has worked on removed dead timber that produced enough firewood for two years.

Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems is an EU Rural Development policy priority. In 2018, Coillte Sláintiúil safeguarded approximately 35-40 acres of woodland focusing on control of invasive species. Future results will





also emerge where native plants are revived because of the removal of invasive species.

Future expected impacts of Coillte Sláintiúil will support environmental education. In the next five years, Coillte Sláintiúil plans to develop a corporate retreat around woodland conservation. This will be focused on environmental education, such as native species planting demos or what citizens can do to ensure invasive species don't come into their local area.

**“The LEADER backing we received through Údarás na Gaeltachta has been the most essential part. The fact that they believed in the project and were willing to invest in it. That was the real turn-key on the whole thing.”**

**Neil Vaughan, Coillte Sláintiúil**

More broadly, Coillte Sláintiúil supports a number of EU policies. For example, by providing services to remove invasive species and preserve habitats, it supports the EU Biodiversity Strategy. In 2014, the European Council adopted a Regulation (1143/2014) on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species. No specific funding measures support this Regulation, but EU financing mechanisms such as rural development funds can support its implementation, as this project does.

## Lessons

*New types of rural enterprise can support a transition towards a green, diversified rural economy:* Woodland habitat of huge environmental and cultural importance is being lost in Ireland. Coillte Sláintiúil works to provide services to protect, rejuvenate and replace native woodlands. Given the increasing focus on biodiversity at the EU level and the need created by EC Regulation (1143/2014) on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species, the need for conservation services is expected to grow.

*Successfully gaining LEADER backing, and the new projects it has facilitated, has had strong, positive reputational impacts for Coillte Sláintiúil:* The LEADER funding has supported Coillte Sláintiúil's reputation through work on new projects demonstrating the value of its services, facilitating trust building and supporting new collaborations with other environmental businesses that provide complementary services. For example, it has facilitated working with the Japanese Knotweed Company and enabled Coillte Sláintiúil collaborate with them to deliver more complex woodland conservation projects with stronger long-term benefits. Overall, gaining the funding has helped to position the business more strongly as part of wider networks as a reliable new business that provides high quality services to manage serious woodland environment threats such as invasive species and disease.

*Local collaborations are important to support business development:* Collaboration with landscape gardener and conservationist Peter Dowdall, well known in the region, has been important to the development of Coillte Sláintiúil. The business actively generates audio-visual content with Peter Dowdall to promote the benefits of its woodland regeneration services, the wider importance of woodland management and to demonstrate techniques (see videos listed on page 1).

## Funding

<b>Total project budget (i)+(ii)+(iii) =</b>	<b>€40,695.84</b>
<b>+ (i) Rural Development Programme support (a)+(b)</b>	€20,000
<b>+ (a) EAFRD (EU) contribution</b>	€12,560
<b>+ (b) National / Regional contribution</b>	€7,440
<b>+ (ii) Private / Own funds</b>	€20,695.84
<b>+ (iii) Other funding sources</b>	n/a

## Contact details

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