

Newsletter: Spring 2020

What is the MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP?

The MacGillycuddy Reeks Project is a European Innovation Partnership Project (EIP) funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine (DAFM) as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. There are 23 EIP projects throughout the country. See <https://www.nationalruralnetwork.ie/eip-agri/> for more information on these projects.

South Kerry Development Partnership CLG are the lead partner for the MacGillycuddy Reeks EIP project. They signed a contract with DAFM to manage and administer the project, in April 2018 for a duration of four years. A full time project manager, Trisha Deane was appointed in August 2018, followed by a part-time project ecologist, Mary Toomey, and project administrator Eithne Garvey. The team are supported by an Operational Group with representatives from South Kerry Development Partnership CLG, Farmers from the MacGillycuddy Reeks, The National Parks and Wildlife Service, Institute of Technology Tralee, MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum, Kerry County Council, Crowley Agricultural Consultants, Teagasc, local community group reps and the Kerry Life Project.

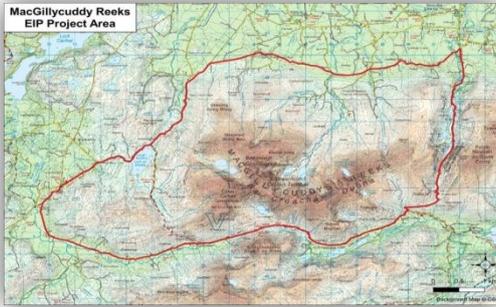


The Reeks EIP Project aims to improve the sustainability and support the economic viability of farming in the MacGillycuddy Reeks, through the development of practical, achievable actions and innovative solutions in order to improve the conditions of the habitats of the Natura 2000 area, in close conjunction with the landowners/farmers in the area. The project was officially launched in December 2019 by Michael Creed, T.D. Minister of Agriculture, Food & the Marine in Cronin's Yard.



Project Location

The EIP project is working with some farmers with farm land within the MacGillycuddy Reeks area. This area stretches from the Gap of Dunloe road in the east, to Glencar, including Lough Acoose in the west (the area inside the third—class road being the boundary), and from the Kerry Way in the south to the third-class roads (known locally as the Board of works road) in the northern foothills of the Reeks.



What does the project involve?

Developing Farm Plans

Our Project Ecologist develops annual farm plans with participant farmers that outline actions which are beneficial to the heath and bog

habitats, which are rare and protected habitats in Europe, after assessing the habitats on the ground. Farmers are encouraged to improve the quality of these habitats and are scored for the ecological and environmental condition of the land parcel. Habitat payments are made according to their scores. Actions undertaken to improve land parcel scores include controlled grazing, bracken treatment and rhododendron treatment.



CONTROLLED GRAZING

Much of the heath and bog habitats across Ireland have been found to be of poor quality. This may be due to over grazing where much of the ground has become eroded and many of the rare plants find it difficult to thrive. It could also be due to under grazing where the habitats begin to dry out due to trees, furze or molinia/fionnán taking over. Controlled grazing helps to restore the balance between over and under grazing. We work with our participant farmers to ensure the optimum number of sheep and cattle graze these areas to create & maintain good quality habitats.

BRACKEN TREATMENT

We are working with participant farmers to control bracken on sites where it has taken over large areas. This is being done through a combination of spraying, cutting and trampling with cattle.

RHODODENDRON TREATMENT

Rhododendron is an invasive alien species and where it occurs it can form dense clumps that take over the heath and bog habitats. We are supporting participant farmers to treat the rhododendron on their land after receiving training. This is done through a combination of stem injection, foliar spraying of regrowth and hand pulling.



We also support landowners through the following actions:

LANDOWNER RANGER SYSTEM

Landowner rangers are in place on some of the main access points to the MacGillycuddy Reeks. The aim of the rangers is to raise the awareness amongst recreational users on the ecology and farming traditions of the area, and also provide guidance on the importance of the following:

- Minimising erosion by staying on existing paths
- The Reeks No Dog Policy
- Leave no Trace
- Permissive access to private lands

The rangers also carry out surveys with recreational users to help us obtain feedback on their experience while visiting the Reeks.

TRAIL MAINTENANCE

We identify and carry out maintenance on paths on some of the main access routes in the Reeks. This is important work to ensure the paths are fit for purpose, continue to be used, thus attempting to limit damage to the vegetation and fragile habitats due to trampling, and further outward spreading of a degraded zone. It encourages walkers to use the existing paths thereby reducing erosion in the surrounding area.

TRAINING

We've facilitated training days for participant farmers and other interested persons in the community to provide them with the skills and knowledge to carry out their actions in their farm plans or contract in others to help as a collective group.

Training completed to date includes:

- Hand Held Pesticide application training
- Rhododendron Treatment
- Manual Handling training
- Landowner Ranger training
- Path Maintenance training

Education and Awareness Raising

We organise talks and events to raise awareness of the local ecology and the nature conservation value of the MacGillycuddy Reeks.

These talks and events are to share information on best practice and are open to all farmers and members of the public. These have included so far:

- Talk on Controlled Burning from Ciaran Nugent, Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine's and Mike Flynn the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, of KCC
- Talk on Rhododendron Treatment with Dr. Therese Higgins, Institute of Technology, Tralee



- A practical demonstration event using a “**Robocut**” – a robot used to cut dense vegetation. This could not have happened without the support of the farmers on the Ballyledder commonage, Kverneland Group Ireland and McConnel.



If you would like the EIP project team to organise a talk on a specific topic please contact us and we will endeavor to help out!

Schools Awareness Programme

We have visited some national schools in the Reeks area giving informal talks to the children on the habitats and species found in the MacGillycuddy Reeks and the environmental benefits of these peatland habitats. The children also get to see first-hand why moss is so important for good water quality and get to make their own bog in a bottle!

Our thanks to the following schools for welcoming us:

- ✚ Glounaguillagh National School
- ✚ Kilgobnet National School
- ✚ Boheshill National School
- ✚ Gap of Dunloe/Blackvalley National School
- ✚ Cullina National School



To find out more about this project please contact us. We would love to hear from you!

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