



## Heritage Week 2021

### Socio-Economic Review of the EU KerryLIFE Project, Iveragh Peninsula, Co.Kerry

Online event - Monday 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

As part of Heritage Week, IUF Board member and Rural Geographer, **Dr. Breandán Ó Caoimh**, and his co-researcher, **Dr. Caroline Crowley**, presented their recent socio-economic review on the EU KerryLIFE agri-environmental project, which was managed by the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS).

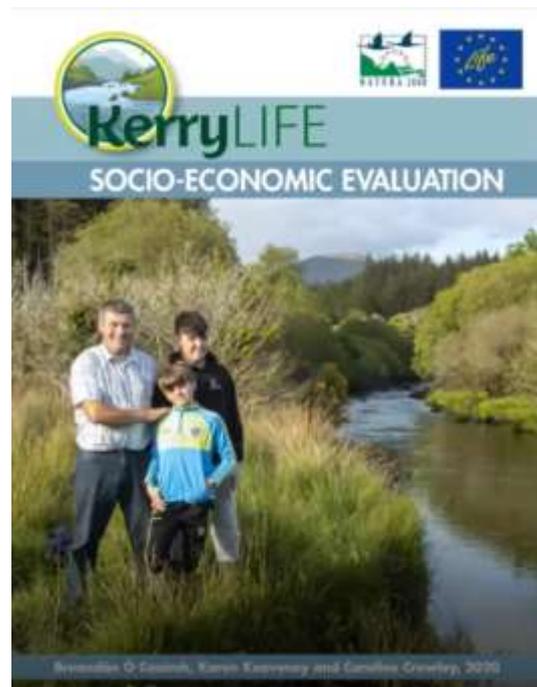
Working with 50 local farm families, the LIFE project was carried out to enhance water quality and riparian habitats of the Caragh and Blackwater catchments in the heart of the Iveragh Peninsula in County Kerry. Much of the project's principal work focused on the physical results of the agri-environmental measures adopted. These included fencing off of riparian zones; tree planting of buffer zones; phased spreading of slurry to lower the nutrient loads on river waters, and so on.

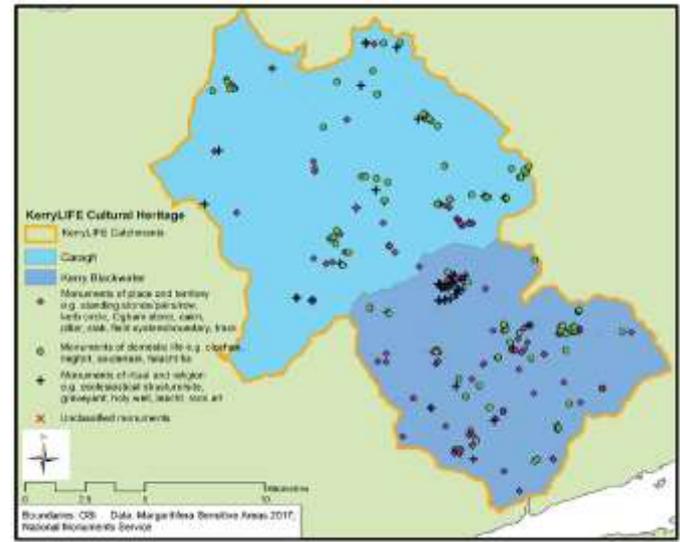
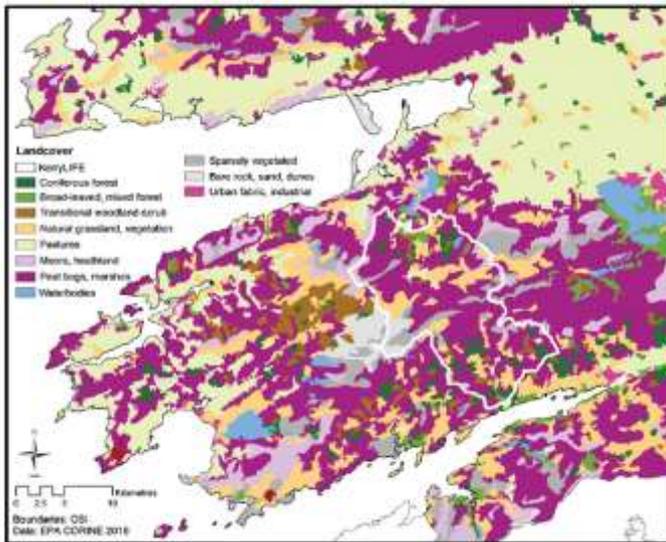
The socio-economic review adopted a more holistic methodology, founded in the people and sense of place, to examine the social and economic impacts on the participating families and the local community. The farmers were motivated by both a means of enhancing their income and a willingness to learn more about how they could contribute to environmental best practices.

The tight-knit communities of the two catchments have suffered catastrophic population decline over the past 100 years. Upland farming of cattle and sheep remains the principal economic activity, with average incomes in the lowest national brackets.

Using Corine satellite data, the researchers mapped current land use, which demonstrated that although the lands are agriculturally marginal, these uplands are home to species rich wet heath and grasslands. Such lands offer significant ecosystems services in terms of water storage, carbon sequestration, and healthy biodiverse habitats.

Mapping of the archaeological heritage demonstrated that these zones have been home to many people for thousands of years. A strong cultural identity with the landscape, place and long-standing farm practices persists to the present.





*The physical and cultural landscape underpin the considerable ecosystems services of the upland farms*

The review demonstrated that the families actively participated in the LIFE project and that the project delivered economic benefits and new learnings, but challenged inherited practices of land drainage and farm improvement. The families appreciated the LIFE project team’s local presence in Glencar and the ensuing trust that was built. On reflection, it was felt that the ‘whole of farm’ approach was positive, but participants would have liked more inputs to the programme design and information sharing. Proactive involvement of women and young people, as part of a household approach would strengthen the programme, while engaging the wider community in developing e.g. recreational amenities and social learning opportunities would increase the long term positive impacts. A clearer focus on developing markets for ‘Farming for Nature’ products (beef, lamb) would be much welcomed to provide sustainable income supports.

The review clearly demonstrated the need for integrated policies for Agriculture, Environment, Rural Planning and Community Development at national level, as conflicting policy objectives create enormous frustration for farm families living in marginal areas. A one-size-fits-all productivist agricultural model is inappropriate in farming areas such as the Iveragh Peninsula. Agri-environmental policies and measures under the new CAP Programme should be developed within an ecosystems services and sustainability framework, resourced effectively and rolled out nationally. Such programmes need to take a catchment-wide approach, encompassing all aspects of sustaining communities living in upland areas of Ireland.

Thanks to Dr. Breandán Ó Caoimh and Dr. Caroline Crowley for their timely and succinct presentation on key issues facing upland communities. Thanks also to the Heritage Council for facilitating this very interesting Irish Uplands Forum event during Heritage Week 2021.

**Irish Uplands Forum  
August 2021**