



Irish Uplands Forum

Statement of Strategy 2021-26

A Strategy to Support Natural and Cultural Heritage in Ireland

2021-2026



January 2021

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A Strategy to Support Ireland’s Natural and Cultural Heritage

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What is the Irish Uplands Forum?

The Irish Upland Forum (IUF) is a voluntary body, established in 1995, to assist upland communities to face the many economic, social and environmental issues and opportunities arising in upland districts across the island of Ireland. Its members include farmers, recreational users, ecologists, tourism and other countryside service providers who represent those who live, work and/or recreate in the Irish Uplands. The IUF pursues and advocates a partnership approach to sustainable management of upland areas, and supports upland community groups to address local challenges, enhance local assets and promote sustainable development objectives.

Achievements of the IUF

Since 1995, IUF has raised public awareness of the importance of the uplands, supported upland partnership communities to organise locally, supported pilot projects, conducted national research, and organised national conferences, workshops and exchanges on a range of upland issues and challenges. For a short history and full list of IUF research documents, achievements, proceedings and submissions see: www.irishuplandsforum.org The work of the IUF Board is guided by its Vision Statement, Guiding Principles and its role as an integrated voice for upland stakeholders as stated below.

Vision of the IUF

The Forum will be a collective voice advocating, with state bodies, the sustainable management of the uplands of Ireland and Northern Ireland, and providing informed support to partnership-based groups that share this aim, so as to build a vibrant network that will contribute to the realisation of the full potential of upland people and places.

IUF Guiding Principles

Uplands provide society with a range of priceless eco-services - including being sources of clean drinking water, significant carbon stores, traditional livestock farming, home to a unique mosaic of biodiversity and wild landscapes, while also providing outstanding recreational and cultural experiences. The sustainable management of these services is guided by the following principles:

- Respect for the special natural and cultural heritage of Ireland’s uplands;
- Recognition of diverse interests and the importance of ensuring all voices are heard;
- Fostering authentic and meaningful engagements in developing sustainable partnerships; in developing local capacity; and fostering appropriate enterprises;
- Ensuring transparency and respectful communications;
- Enhancing the quality of life of residents and visitors;
- Recognition of the role of hill-farmers that are farming these unique environments; and
- Adherence to *Leave No Trace* guidelines in all outdoor activities.

Voice

IUF communications will inform national and EU policy by providing an integrated stakeholder response to discussions and proposals regarding upland issues and communities. The IUF will also put forward proposals based on our research and stakeholder experiences.

Preamble

Irish uplands are living landscapes, home to people who, for generations, have shaped their essential qualities, while often coping with remoteness and poor services. This distinctive landscape, much of which is of Natura quality, has been shaped by centuries of traditional and extensive farming activity. It contains large areas of blanket bogs and wet heath, which are huge carbon stores, and its watercourses provide much of Ireland's clean drinking water. Some of the best-preserved examples of our archaeological heritage can be found there. Mountain landscapes provide high-quality places for passive and active recreational activities, which bring mental and physical health benefits to residents, visitors and tourists.

The local issues and challenges which many upland communities face include a decline in hill-farming activity, falling rural populations and reductions in community resources. Yet, there are growing needs in respect of responding to, *inter alia*, the loss and poor condition of natural habitats, invasive vegetational species, unsustainable deer populations, inadequate car parking, trail development, trail and path restoration and maintenance to meet an increasing demand from recreational users and tourists. Dumping and fly-tipping is an additional problem in the Wicklow and Dublin mountains and other upland areas.

Many of these challenges and issues provide opportunities for innovation in upland farming and agri-environmental payment systems, as well as for improved provision of services for communities, outdoor recreation and tourists.

Current Policy Influences

The IUF strategy, for the next five years, is strongly influenced by the IUF-commissioned and Heritage Council funded report "**A Profile of Ireland's Uplands – All-Island Study Highlighting Their Strategic Importance**" (O'Keeffe & Crowley, 2019). The report identified uplands as the main provider of high nature value (HNV) farmlands, in Ireland, that enhance biodiversity and provide mosaics of habitats. Managing these valuable upland assets in climate mitigation efforts provides an opportunity for upland land managers and communities to engage with state agencies to redress the deterioration of areas of blanket bog as a result of peat cutting, reclamation and drainage, through actions which will restore their water-holding ability. The IUF, as stated in its previous strategy and action plan 2016-20, is committed to supporting the Heritage Council in fulfilling a role in community engagement and public awareness in connection with the EU Wild Atlantic Way LIFE project, which is being managed by the National Parks and Wildlife Service. In Northern Ireland, the IUF is engaging with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) to promote integrated upland management to balance carbon, nature and resilience of upland farms and communities.

The IUF fully embraces the Heritage Council' Strategy *Heritage at the Heart* 2018-2022, which underpins the value and importance of landscape, sense of belonging, inclusiveness and custodianship, and the need for local and national social cohesion in nurturing, protecting and enjoying our heritage assets.

The IUF has long identified the need to move to farm payment systems in high nature value farmlands that rewards efforts to improve biodiversity and climate change mitigation. The IUF is also supportive of the establishment, through Comhairle na Tuaithe, and rollout of a national uplands management and permissive access scheme, for recreational users, which provides indemnity to landowners and builds local capacity for the management of walking trails (including maintenance and repair work to mountain pathways arising from increased visitor impact erosion). This aims to provide much-needed alternative economic, recreational and tourism activity and income to support upland communities. Apart from IUF's own research and previous experience, the Strategy also takes into account, and is aligned with, key policies and strategy documents at European, Ireland, Northern Ireland and regional levels. The most relevant include the following (with fuller details presented in Appendix 1).

Global & European Policies & Strategies

UN Sustainable Development Goals
Paris Climate Agreement
The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
Farm to Fork Strategy
European Green Deal 2020
EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030
EU Territorial Agenda 2030: A Future for all Places

Irish Policies & Strategies

Heritage at Heart - Heritage Council Strategy 2018-2022
Heritage Ireland 2030
Ireland and the CAP - Agri-environmental measures
Teagasc Education Vision (2019)
National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040)
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) for the three Regional Assembly Areas
Realising our Potential National Action Plan for Rural Development 2017
Ireland's National Energy and Climate Action Plan 2021 -2030
National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2025
National Landscape Strategy for Ireland 2015-2025
National Peatlands Strategy 2015
Culture 2025 - Éire Ildánach 2025
People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025

Northern Irish Policies & Strategies

Environmental Strategy for Northern Ireland – DAERA (Discussion Document, 2020)
DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020 - 2025 - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Jan. 2020)
Delivering Our Future, Valuing Our Soils Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy (2016) - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Oct. 2016)
Valuing Nature: Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 - DAERA, July 2015
Policy Statement on Peatlands for Northern Ireland - DAERA

Other Influential Policies, Strategies & Initiatives

A Profile of Ireland's Uplands –All-Island Study highlighting their Strategic Importance (research commissioned by Irish Uplands Forum 2019, supported by The Heritage Council)
Climate Change policies (EU, IE): consequences for upland ecology, farming & communities, conserving & restoring eco-system services
EU Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE Blanket Bog project (NPWS)
Comhairle na Tuaithe initiatives
IUF Statement of Strategy 2016-2020

These documents will influence the work of the IUF in implementing the five-year action plan. This list refers to relevant policy areas at this point in time (January 2021). The IUF recognises that other policies and frameworks will come on stream over the coming years - to which we will contribute, and to which we will give effect in our work.

2021-2026 : IUF Action Plan

The actions to implement the IUF's vision and strategy are presented under six headings:

1. **Advocacy**
2. **Organisation**
3. **Research**
4. **Communication and Education**
5. **Community Partnerships support**
6. **Working with Others**

1. **Advocacy of Economic, Social and Ecological Sustainability in the Uplands**

- 1.1 Continue its close relationship with the Heritage Council, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Marine and other state agencies responsible for natural heritage, rural environment, waterways, community partnership support, tourism and outdoor recreational development;
- 1.2 Continue representation and advocacy of upland issues on ROI/ NI national bodies:
 - Comhairle na Tuaithe, managed by the Department of Community of Rural and Community Development
 - Upland Partnership Network, hosted by Heritage Council;
- 1.3 Make submissions on relevant EU, national (ROI and NI) and regional policy calls, and anticipate policy issues and opportunities;
- 1.4 Seek meetings with relevant ministers and government departments, as relevant¹;
- 1.5 Develop relationships with NI upland stakeholders and environmental and outdoor recreation sector bodies including:
 - DAERA stakeholder groups
 - Northern Ireland Environmental Agency (NIEA)
 - Northern Ireland Protected Areas Network (NIPAN)
 - National Outdoor Recreation Forum (NORF); and
- 1.6 Engage with cross border upland communities and projects with a view to maximising cooperation and landscape/ land use policy alignment between the two jurisdictions on upland development.

2. **Membership, Organisation and Administration**

- 2.1 Expand the membership and widen the representation and efficacy of the IUF Board;
- 2.2 Complete IUF registration as a charity;
- 2.3 Seek new nominations for the board to ensure a diverse membership in terms of geography/ age/ gender / interests and skills - through nominations at AGM and co-options;

¹ Subject to Government rules on Lobbying

- 2.4 Update of administrative systems;
- 2.5 Renew the handbook for Board members;
- 2.6 Continue to expand membership through network activity and effective use of media;
- 2.7 Employ a part or full-time Upland Heritage Educator, to co-ordinate and provide public-awareness education in support of local partnerships;
- 2.8 Participate in International partnerships e.g. EuroParc and EuroMontana; and
- 2.9 Strengthen partnerships with other like-minded bodies on key issues of mutual concern.

3. Communications and Education

- 3.1 Refresh the IUF website, and include a profile and on-line links to all member groups;
- 3.2 Regularly update the IUF on-line presentation of role, mission and objectives;
- 3.3 Periodically distribute an online e-zine to membership to inform them of progress; and
- 3.4 Disseminate research outputs to influence policy and practice.

4. Research

- 4.1 Commission research on issues of concern to the uplands: e.g. socio-economic development; carbon mapping & uplands ecosystems services / balancing C sequestration / carbon accounting / natural-capital accounting;
- 4.2 Act on recommendations of the 2019 socio-economic study of island-wide upland communities;
- 4.3 Provide 2-3 student bursary grants, targeted at areas of interest to uplands;
- 4.4 Host research workshops in regional institutions;
- 4.5 Continue to liaise with researchers interested in carrying out projects in the uplands;
- 4.6 Develop a research strategy for discussion among interested individuals and agencies;
- 4.7 Continue to liaise with EIP Agri-Environment groups, and document research outcomes;
- 4.8 Support research on agricultural supports to upland farmers, pending implications of extended Natura designations under EU *Biodiversity Strategy 2030*;
- 4.9 Develop an upland community partnership project to reduce impact of peat damage or other pressures on water quality; and
Monitor learning opportunities of individual resilience plans for upland farms from experience of Northern Ireland IUF members, who are working on a project with the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust².

5. Community Partnership Support

- 5.1 In conjunction with the upland partners, conduct national network events/workshops for upland groups on the island of Ireland, based on identified member needs - to support local groups engaged in sustainable development and maintenance. Planned workshops and capacity building may include: blanket bog restoration techniques/ "agri-environmental projects (EIPs)"/ upland biodiversity enhancement, with particular reference to priority species/ successful upland enterprises/ climate action in the uplands / upland woodlands / path repairs and maintenance / partnership management planning / and others as may arise;

² The NI project involves seventy farms: starting with carbon sampling of each farm area; then devising ways which will benefit the business through planting shelter, re wetting bogs, reviewing farm livestock and operations etc. in an agreed plan. Return testing visits in five years will measure carbon levels. The overall project outcome is the development of an environmental group farm scheme.

- 5.2 Proactively support upland communities to establish, upgrade and maintain local organisations interested in the sustainable development of their local area, through information dissemination, action research and supports for inter-community networking;
- 5.3 Proactively support all upland agri-environmental projects (EIPs) to maximise the learning from these pilot projects, to improve the prospects of the scheme being mainstreamed by governments and the EU; and
- 5.4 Proactively support groups engaging with the Mountain Access Project; *Leave No Trace*; *Helping the Hills*, and similar sustainable countryside initiatives.

6. Working directly with Statutory bodies or NGO groups on major projects

- 6.1 Continue engagement with relevant departments / ministries and upland stakeholders on pilot EIP – Agri-Projects; and
- 6.2 Engage with statutory partners and NGOs (ROI/ NI), sports governing bodies and upland communities in the development and delivery of IUF initiatives.



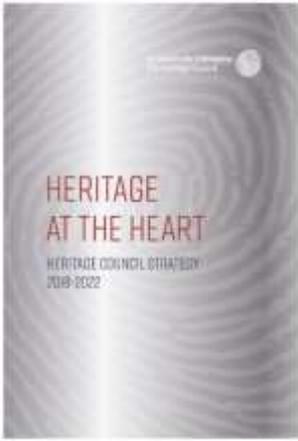
APPENDIX 1: KEY POLICY DOCUMENTS

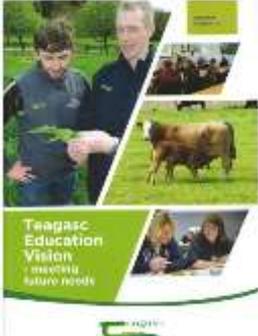
Global & European Policies	
<p>United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals</p> 	<p><u>The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</u>, adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, is a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for the planet. At its heart are seventeen (17) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with an urgent call for action by all countries in a global partnership. The SDGs recognise that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth –while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.</p> <p>The SDGs address issues of water, energy, climate, oceans, urbanization, transport, science and technology. In order to make the 2030 Agenda a reality, broad ownership of the SDGs must translate into a strong commitment by all stakeholders to implement the global goals at national, regional and local level.</p>  <p>https://sdgs.un.org/goals</p> <p>The IUF is working in partnership with other stakeholders to address elements of the SDGs at regional and local level, advocating support for upland farming, habitats, water and carbon storage, and resilient communities.</p>
<p>Paris Climate Agreement (2016)</p> 	<p>Climate change is a global emergency that requires coordinated solutions at all levels and international cooperation to help countries move toward a low-carbon economy. To tackle climate change and its negative impacts, 197 countries adopted the <u>Paris Agreement</u> at the <u>COP21 in Paris</u> on 12 December 2015. The agreement, which entered into force in 2016, aims to achieve three key elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Substantially reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and to limit the global temperature increase in this century to 2 degrees Celcius (2°C) while pursuing means to limit the increase even further to 1.5 degrees (1.5°C). (ii) The Paris Agreement includes commitments from all countries to reduce their emissions and work together to adapt to the impacts of climate change; it also calls on countries to strengthen their commitments over time. The Agreement provides a pathway for developed nations to assist developing nations in their climate mitigation and adaptation efforts while creating a framework for the transparent monitoring and reporting of countries' climate goals. (iii) The Paris Agreement provides a durable framework guiding the global effort and to raise countries' climate ambition over time. To promote this, the agreement establishes two review processes, each on a five-year cycle. <p>The Paris Agreement marks the beginning of a shift towards a low-carbon world. Its implementation is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (see above) as it provides a roadmap for climate actions that will reduce emissions and build climate resilience.</p>

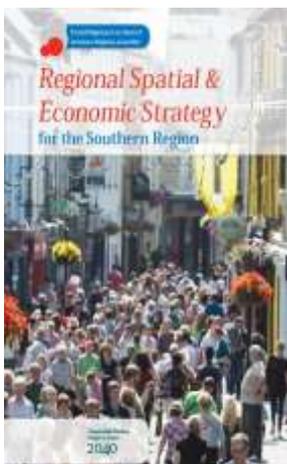
<p>The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)</p> <p>Policy areas</p> <hr/> <p><u>Biodiversity</u> Measures to protect our fragile ecosystem</p> <hr/> <p><u>From Farm to Fork</u> Ways to ensure more sustainable food sy</p> <hr/> <p><u>Sustainable agriculture</u> Sustainability in EU agriculture and rural ; policy (CAP)</p> <hr/> <p><u>Clean energy</u> Clean energy</p> <hr/> <p><u>Sustainable industry</u> Ways to ensure more sustainable, more e</p> <hr/> <p><u>Building and renovating</u> The need for a cleaner construction sectc</p> <hr/> <p><u>Sustainable mobility</u> Promoting more sustainable means of tra</p> <hr/> <p><u>Eliminating pollution</u> Measures to cut pollution rapidly and effi</p> <hr/> <p><u>Climate action</u> Making the EU climate neutral by 2050</p>	<p>The CAP is a key foundation policy of the EU and continues to be one of the most significant areas of European intervention in the economies of the member states. On 1 June 2018, the European Commission presented legislative proposals on the common agricultural policy (CAP) for the period 2021-27. The proposals aim to ensure that the CAP can continue to provide strong support for European farming, enabling prosperous rural areas and the production of high-quality food. The proposals will also allow the CAP to make a significant contribution to the European Green Deal, especially with regard to the Farm To Fork Strategy – for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system and Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 (see below).</p> <p>The Commission's proposals focus on: (a) securing a fair deal and a stable economic future for farmers; (b) setting higher ambitions for environmental and climate action; and (c) safeguarding agriculture's position at the heart of Europe's society. For the period 2021-27, the European Commission proposes that the common agricultural policy (CAP) be built around nine key objective that include climate change action, environmental care, preservation of landscapes and biodiversity, and vibrant rural areas. The general approach proposed by the Commission was endorsed by the European Council and the European Parliament in October 2020. Further discussions will be required to secure a trilateral agreement on the details of the proposals.</p> <p>The main features of the new CAP Framework from January 2023 will be a consolidation of the current Pillars 1 and 2 into a single strategy, an increased level of environmental ambition, and more emphasis on performance indicators linked to outcomes with strict adherence to targets.</p> <p>The implementation of the CAP and monitoring of its effectiveness will be supported by a <i>Green Architecture</i> that will entail baseline surveys and quantification of expected levels of additionality, and new eco-schemes that will be applicable to all types of farming - for which 20% of the CAP budget will be ring-fenced. The approach of each member state will be expressed through a CAP Strategic Plan that will be agreed with the EU Commission. The new approach will also enable greater flexibility for each member state to implement interventions that are tailored to respond to its particular needs and ambitions.</p>
<p>Farm to Fork Strategy</p> 	<p><i>Farm to Fork – for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system</i> is at the heart of the <i>European Green Deal</i>. It aims to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally friendly. It aims are to accelerate the transition to a sustainable food system that should: (a) have a neutral or positive environmental impact, (b) help to mitigate climate change and adapt to its impacts, (c) reverse the loss of biodiversity, (d) ensure food security, nutrition and public health, making sure that everyone has access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, sustainable food, and (f) preserve affordability of food while generating fairer economic returns, fostering competitiveness of the EU supply sector and promoting fair trade.</p> <p>The European Council meeting of October 2020 adopted a set of conclusions on the Farm to Fork strategy, endorsing the goal of developing a European sustainable food system, from production to consumption. The conclusions entail a two-fold political message from the member states: ensure sufficient and affordable food while contributing to EU climate neutrality by 2050 and ensuring a fair income and strong support for primary producers.</p>

<p>European Green Deal</p>	<p>The core objective of the <i>European Green Deal</i> is to make make the EU's economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities, and making the transition just and inclusive for all. The expected outcomes will be (a) no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, (b) economic growth will be decoupled from resource use, and (c) no person and no place will be left behind.</p> <p>https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1576150542719&uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN</p> <p><i>The Action Plan for the Green Deal</i> includes some initiatives that are particularly relevant to the IUF: (a) the <i>EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030</i> and supporting measures to address the main drivers of biodiversity loss, and (b) <i>Greening the Common Agricultural Policy</i> through adoption of the <i>Farm to Fork Strategy</i> and additional measures, including legislative, to significantly reduce the use and risk of chemical pesticides, as well as the use of fertilizers and antibiotics.</p>
<p>EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030</p> 	<p>The European Commission adopted the new EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and an associated Action Plan (annex) - a comprehensive, ambitious, long-term plan for protecting nature and reversing the degradation of ecosystems.</p> <p>It aims to put Europe's biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 with benefits for people, the climate and the planet. It underpins the EU's contribution to international negotiations on the global post-2020 biodiversity framework. The Biodiversity Strategy aims to build our societies' resilience to future threats such as climate change impacts, forest fires, food insecurity or disease outbreaks, including by protecting wildlife and fighting illegal wildlife trade. The Strategy contains specific commitments by 2030, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing a larger EU-wide network of protected areas on land and at sea, building upon existing Natura 2000 areas, with strict protection for areas of very high biodiversity and climate value. • An EU Nature Restoration Plan - concrete commitments and actions to restore degraded ecosystems across the EU by 2030, and manage them sustainably, addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss. • Measures to enable necessary transformative change: strengthened governance framework to ensure better implementation and track progress, improving knowledge, financing and investments and better respecting nature in public and business decision-making. • Measures to tackle the global biodiversity challenge, where the EU will lead towards the successful adoption of an ambitious global biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.
<p>EU Territorial Agenda 2030: <i>A Future for all Places</i></p>	<p>The <i>EU Territorial Agenda 2030</i> was adopted at an informal meeting of the Council of Ministers responsible for Spatial Planning and Territorial Development, in December 2020, under the German Presidency. It builds upon the Green Deal and constitutes a high level commitment to principles of place-based sustainable development and territorial cohesion. In furtherance of developing the Green Europe agenda, the Territorial Agenda strategy includes the following priority:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To ensure the functioning of resilient, enhanced and accessible ecosystems; support integrated management and the development of nature-based solutions; mitigate the risk posed by climate change and biodiversity loss to livelihoods; promote the resilience of all places impacted by climate change and develop place-based mitigation and adaptation strategies; and protect and manage natural and cultural heritage through community empowerment and integrated local and territorial development.
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Ireland Policies	
<p>Heritage at the Heart Heritage Council Strategy 2018-2022</p> 	<p><i>Heritage at the Heart</i> underpins the value and importance of landscape, sense of belonging, inclusiveness and custodianship, and the need for local and national social cohesion in nurturing, protecting and enjoying our heritage assets. The strategy identifies that heritage:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> encompasses not just buildings, monuments and museum pieces, but also Ireland’s distinctive landscape, native wildlife and woodlands, literature, folklore and crafts. is passed on to us in all forms from previous generations, it defines who we are in the present, and our efforts to protect and interpret it today, will be our legacy of the future...a touchstone for identity in a world of accelerating change, heritage fosters a sense of belonging and supports social cohesion at a local and national level. simultaneously crosses borders and transcends difference to connect people through shared values, history and traditions. <p>The IUF shares the Heritage Council commitment to advance national heritage priorities including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing leadership in delivering evidence-based policy advice in areas such as landscape, biodiversity and urban regeneration. Supporting the development of programmes that monitor change to heritage and care for natural, built and cultural heritage in Ireland. Developing policies and programmes that promote the sustainability of rural communities and the landscape they inhabit. Contributing to National Landscape Strategy by investing in landscape partnerships and by encouraging new collaborations
<p>Heritage Ireland 2030 Dept. Housing, Local Government & Heritage (Nov 2018 draft)</p> 	<p><i>Heritage Ireland 2030</i> will be Ireland’s new national heritage plan, providing a coherent, comprehensive and inspiring framework of values, principles, strategic priorities and actions to guide and inform the heritage sector over the coming decade. Heritage Ireland 2030 will be published in the coming months.</p> <p>The heritage plan proposes that ‘<i>Ireland’s heritage is valued, protected and enjoyed for future generations</i>’ (Heritage Ireland 2030 public consultation, 2018, p.6). The IUF Strategy 2021-26 is totally consistent in support of the three proposed themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> national leadership and heritage, heritage partnerships and communities and heritage, respectively.

<p>Ireland and the CAP Agri-environmental measures</p>	<p>Ireland is well positioned to respond to the new CAP framework. The evaluations of the GLAS programme, including the Burren Farming measure, have identified many examples of good practices including the implementation of the results-based approach. The GLAS evaluation (undertaken by ADAS Consultancy for the DAFM, 2017) found that there was a high level of uptake of measures to enhance biodiversity, but there is scope for further take-up of high-value biodiversity actions in relation to farmland habitats, birds and traditional hay meadows. There is also a need for greater attention to after-care, when financial supports end on farms that have participated in the schemes. The evaluations consistently emphasise the importance of education, training and appropriate advisory support.</p>
<p>Teagasc Education Vision (2019)</p> 	<p>The <i>Teagasc Education Vision 2019</i> includes a commitment to support sustainable farming through the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) embed sustainable farming principles and technologies in future land sector curricula and (b) prepare a bio-diversity plan for each agricultural college (p.61). <p>The lessons from the Burren Programme and other initiatives, such as the EIP-Agri pilots, provide a basis for achieving higher levels of environmental ambition in the next phase of the CAP.</p>
<p>National Planning Framework (Project Ireland 2040)</p> 	<p><i>Project Ireland 2040</i> will influence the future direction of outdoor recreation, as well as potential supports to landowners as custodians of our vital landscapes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tourism and agriculture are inextricably linked in rural areas, given that agriculture, in many places, creates and maintains the landscapes upon which tourism trades. The maintenance of access to our landscapes and the creation of new accesses are dependent on maintaining good links with the agricultural sector (NPF, p. 77);</i> • <i>Ireland’s landscape offers a wealth of natural and cultural assets which support our quality of life and our visitor economy. We have a duty to future generations to use these assets responsibly whilst making our existing infrastructure work harder to deliver more benefits. The protection, management and planning of the landscape is also interconnected with the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland, and a national landscape character assessment, which, when finalised, will provide consistency in how we characterise and connect with the landscape (NPF, p. 127).</i>
<p>Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) <i>The objectives and actions contained in the NPF are developed in more detail in the RSES for each of the three Regional Assembly Areas.</i></p>	<p>The RSES for the Eastern and Midland Region is aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the EU thematic objectives and national policy including the NPF’s National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs). The RSES seeks to achieve sixteen strategic outcomes for the region including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Enhanced Green Infrastructure by actions to identify, protect and enhance Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services in the Region and promote the sustainable management of strategic natural assets such as our coastlines, farmlands, peatlands, uplands, woodlands and wetlands, and (b) Biodiversity and Natural Heritage through actions to promote co-ordinated spatial planning to conserve and enhance the biodiversity of our



protected habitats and species including landscape and heritage protection (p.25). Chapter 7 provides a detailed discussion and broad range of proposals in relation to climate and the regional environment. Biodiversity-supporting sites in the Region (which may contain designated sites within their area) include national parks (Wicklow Mountains) and UNESCO biosphere reserves (Dublin Bay), where environmental conservation is combined with visitor management strategies to support the development of unique educational, cultural and recreational opportunities.

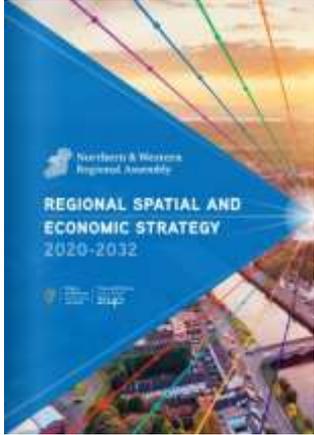
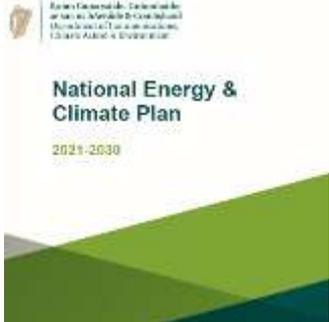
The RSES includes a particular emphasis on **ecosystem services**, which are defined as the direct and indirect contributions of ecosystems to human wellbeing. There are four main types; provisioning, regulating, supporting and cultural services. Provisioning services are the products obtained from ecosystems such as food, fresh water, wood, fibre, genetic resources and medicines. Regulating services are defined as the benefits obtained from the regulation of ecosystem processes, such as climate regulation, natural hazard regulation, water purification and waste management, pollination or pest control. Support services highlight the importance of ecosystems to providing habitats for migratory species and to maintaining the viability of gene-pools. Cultural services include non-material benefits that people obtain from ecosystems, such as spiritual enrichment, intellectual development, recreation and aesthetic values.

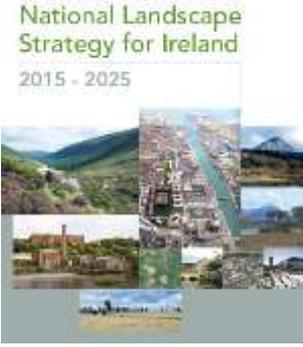
The incorporation and consideration of an ecosystem services approach can lead to significant enhancements in relation to planning policy as well as at project stages, and is recommended to be used by local authorities in the preparation of development plans and other statutory land use plans. A key policy objective is that local authorities shall promote an ecosystem services approach in the preparation of statutory land use plans (p.163).

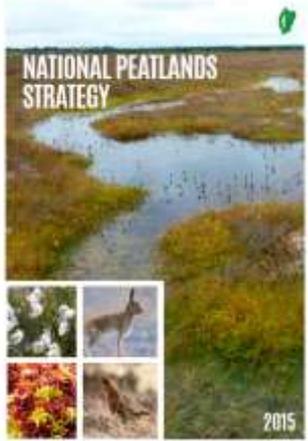
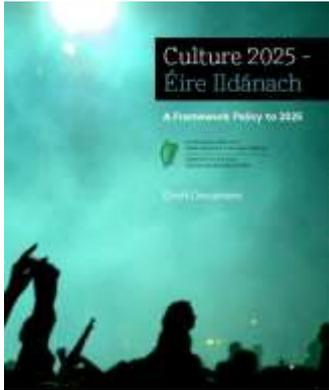
The **RSES for the Southern Region** seeks to integrate sustainable economic and social development with the protection and enhancement of the natural environment. It is a regional objective to promote the concept of connecting corridors for the movement of wildlife and encourage the retention and creation of features of biodiversity value, ecological corridors and networks that connect areas of high conservation value such as woodlands, hedgerows, earth banks, watercourses and wetlands.

The RSES recognises the necessity of protecting such corridors and encouraging the management of features of the landscape that support the Natura 2000 network. It is an objective to promote the concept of connecting corridors for the movement of wildlife and to encourage the retention and creation of features of biodiversity value, ecological corridors and networks that connect areas of high conservation value such as woodlands, hedgerows, earth banks, watercourses and wetlands.

The Region's more sensitive habitats and species are protected by European or national legislation – including Special Area of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Area (SPAs) and Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs). However, biodiversity is not restricted to rare or threatened species; it includes the whole of the natural world. Natural features such as waterways, trees and hedgerows play important roles in supporting biodiversity at a local level. The Region also has many mountain ranges, which add to its biodiversity by supporting habitats such as blanket bog, heath and upland grasslands.

	<p>Rural uses, with varying geological influences, have created a diversity of agricultural landscapes. Initiatives such as Ireland’s European Innovation Partnerships (EIP) administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine under the Rural Development Programme 2014-20 have significant potential to bring about innovative solutions and practical implementation of new ways to achieve viability in the agriculture and food sector and to improve biodiversity (p.148).</p> <p>The RSES for the Northern and Western Region is grounded in the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and in the EU Green Deal. The policy objectives for tourism include:</p> <p>(a) to support working with relevant landholders and recreational/tourism agencies to increase access to the Countryside and our Coastal areas, and to ensure maintenance and access to the existing network of trails, paths, etc. and</p> <p>(b) to support the maintenance of, and enhanced access to state lands, such as national parks, forest parks, waterways together with monuments and historic properties, for recreation and tourism purposes. A key element of the tourism strategy will be activity tourism, particularly in rural areas, national parks, uplands, coasts and rivers.</p> <p>Other relevant topics addressed in the RSES include renewable energy sources, landscape (5.3), natural heritage (5.4), natural assets (5.5) and nature networks including greenways, bogs and peatways (5.8)</p>
<p>Ireland’s National Energy and Climate Plan (2021-2030)</p> 	<p><i>Ireland’s National Energy & Climate Plan</i> (NECP) 2021-2030 addresses, <i>inter alia</i>, our energy and climate policies; levels of demographic and economic growth identified in Project 2040; and all of the climate and energy measures set out in the National Development Plan 2018-2027.</p> <p>The NECP was prepared to incorporate measures which will collectively deliver a 30% reduction by 2030 in non-ETS greenhouse gas emissions (from 2005 levels). The NECP was drafted in line with the current EU effort-sharing approach, but Ireland intends to integrate the revision of the NECP into the process which will be required for increasing overall EU contribution under the Paris Agreement.</p>
<p>National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017 - 2021 <i>Dept. Culture, heritage e& The Gaeltacht</i></p> 	<p>The <i>National Biodiversity Action Plan</i> (NBAP) 2017-2021 sets out actions through which a range of government, civil and private sectors will undertake to achieve Ireland’s ‘Vision for Biodiversity’. It was developed in line with the EU and International Biodiversity strategies and policies.</p> <p>The Plan sets out Ireland’s vision for biodiversity: <i>“that biodiversity and ecosystems in Ireland are conserved and restored, delivering benefits essential for all sectors of society and that Ireland contributes to efforts to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems in the EU and globally.”</i></p> <p>The Action Plan sets out seven key objectives, underpinned by 119 targeted actions. The objectives lay out a clear framework for Ireland’s national approach to biodiversity, ensuring that efforts and achievements of the past</p>

	<p>are built upon, while looking ahead to what can be achieved over the five year timeframe of the Plan and beyond.</p>  <p>OBJECTIVE 1 Mainstream biodiversity into decision-making across all sectors OBJECTIVE 2 Strengthen the knowledge base for conservation, management, and sustainable use of biodiversity OBJECTIVE 3 Increase awareness and appreciation of biodiversity and ecosystem services OBJECTIVE 4 Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the wider countryside OBJECTIVE 5 Conserve and restore biodiversity and ecosystem services in the marine environment OBJECTIVE 6 Expand and improve management of protected areas and species OBJECTIVE 7 Strengthen international governance for biodiversity and ecosystem services</p> <p>The IUF Strategy fully supports the these objectives and our work will complement many of the defined actions, working in partnership with statutory agencies, and farmers and communities in the uplands.</p>
<p>'Realising our Potential' National Action Plan for Rural Development (Dept. Culture, Heritage & The Gaeltacht, 2017)</p>  <p>(under review, 2020)</p>	<p>The National Action Plan for Rural Development commits to delivering funding for recreational infrastructure, training and jobs creation, using our natural assets.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It identified a number of pillars to promote rural development. Pillar 3 focused on 'Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreational Potential', with a specific recommendation to promote the development of greenways and blueways, and other recreational opportunities, and to support sustainable rural jobs through targeted tourism initiatives. • Action 176 commits to "agree and implement a scheme to indemnify private landowners with regard to recreational users of their lands" with the national State Claims Agency. • Action 202 commits to "develop dedicated actions that assist in the promotion and development of Ireland's natural landscape characteristics with regard to management, employment, tourism and innovation pilots".
<p>National Landscape Strategy for Ireland (2015-2025) Dept. Arts, Heritage & The Gaeltacht</p> 	<p>The <i>National Landscape Strategy</i> (NLS) obliges Ireland to implement policy changes and objectives concerning the management, protection and planning of the landscape. The NLS is used to ensure compliance with the European Landscape Strategy and to establish principles for protecting and enhancing our landscapes while positively managing its change. The NLS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaborates a high level policy framework to achieve balance between the protection, management and planning of the landscape by way of supporting actions; • Sets out specific measures to integrate and embed landscape considerations in all sectors which influence landscape and enhance the quality of decision-making by those who have an impact on it; • Aims to inform and assist in the resolution of challenges arising from competing priorities in the landscape e.g. infrastructural provision versus landscape protection, or local versus national objectives; and • Aims to improve the decision making process to support a living landscape, and strengthen community identity by understanding landscape and its dynamic interactive characteristics.
<p>National Peatlands Strategy (2015)</p>	<p>The <i>National Peatlands Strategy</i> was prepared in 2015 to guide the national approach to peatlands management and conservation, underpinned by the following considerations:</p> <p>1. Land management</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. the role of land purchase, by the State, to aid in conservation b. other management agreements or approaches,

	<p>2. Peatlands conservation & restoration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. differentiated approaches to SACs and NHAs b. a clearly resourced and prioritised schedule of restoration works to be undertaken for the 53 raised bog SACs c. potential for landowners to take ownership of bog restoration with State guidance and potential for EU rural development supports to assist <p>3. Regulatory Regimes which govern extraction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. planning and IPPC systems b. regulation of modern extractive machinery in the context of EIA and habitats directives and national regulations governing these activities. c. appropriate management of activities in raised bogs and blanket bogs designated as SACs or NHA; role and implementation of management plans d. The use of peatlands in the context of broader EU Law including the EIA, Water Framework and Floods Directives <p>4. National Code of Environmental Practice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. potential for agreed national code of environmental practice to include a re-examination of the position regarding raised bog Natural Heritage Areas <p>5. National and Community Benefits of Peatland Conservation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the tourism potential of Ireland’s peatlands b. community, voluntary and LA participation in conservation resource. c. carbon accounting and the potential of offsetting national emissions through re-wetting peatlands, d. the role of peatlands in the regulation of water and flood/ drought <p>6. Financing and Funding Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Funding for National and Local Projects (restoration) b. Compensation
<p>Culture 2025 Éire Ildánach 2025 Dept. Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural & Gaeltacht Affairs</p> 	<p><i>Culture 2025</i> sets out an overarching vision and framework for the future and outlines the priorities for action over the coming years. Through this policy framework, the Government seeks to nurture creativity, boost citizen participation, help more people to follow a sustainable career in the cultural sector, promote Ireland’s cultural wealth and ensure a cultural contribution to wider social and economic goals.</p> <p>The arts have always been an integral part of Irish life. It is the objective of this Department to provide an appropriate resource, policy and legislative framework to support the stimulation and development of the Arts in Ireland, such that the economic returns and employment, and access to and participation in the arts by all sections of Irish society, are maximised.</p> <p>The strategy document notes the importance of natural and built heritage in framing cultural identity, and it contends that investment in natural heritage sites promotes heritage, health and economic benefits at local and national levels</p>
<p>‘People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025’</p> <p>Dept. Transport, Tourism and Sport</p>	<p>This document reflected that while the focus of tourism development should be to optimise the export value of tourism through increased international visitors to Ireland, we must <i>“protect the invaluable assets that are our natural, cultural and built heritage”</i>.</p>

NORTHERN IRELAND POLICIES

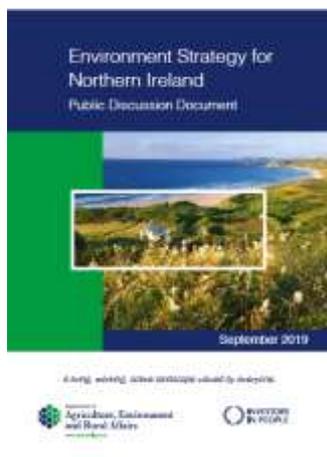
The IUF is a network for those groups that have emerged, in different ways, to provide a coordinated mechanism for actions to benefit uplands and their communities. It operates north and south of the political border, and has the following members from Northern Ireland:

- *Causeway Coast and Glens Trust* (Glens of Antrim AONB, Causeway Coast AONB, Binevenagh AONB) [AONB: Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty]
- *Belfast Hills Partnership* (uplands north and west of Belfast)
- *Mourne Heritage Trust* (Mourne Heritage Trust)

Each of the groups has a range of members including farming, tourism, heritage, local community and biodiversity interests.

Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland – Public Discussion Document

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Sept. 2019)



The IUF responded to the discussion document ‘*Environment Strategy for Northern Ireland*’ produced by DAERA as follows:

The IUF supports the vision of the Department (DAERA – NI) in the consultative document i.e. “a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone”, and supports the four strategic outcomes of the strategy:

- Sustainable agri-food, fisheries, forestry and industrial sectors;
- Clean healthy environment, benefitting people, nature and the economy;
- Thriving rural economy, contribution to prosperity and wellbeing;
- Well-led high-performing organisation focused on outcomes.

The IUF has concerns that the document did not make it clear that agriculture, agri-environment and agri-food lay within the objectives and programmes of the forthcoming strategy. This in light of the fact that agricultural activity influences around 75% of land use in Northern Ireland, and is, therefore, one of the key tools available in changing the state of the environment; and the agricultural workforce is key to maintaining and restoring particular upland habitats to their full capacity to provide water management, climate benefits, habitats for species of conservation concern and recreation and well being benefits for people.

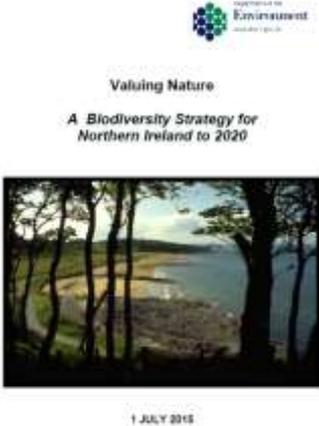
The IUF recent seminal socio-economic report on the upland areas of Ireland, north and south, identifies an agricultural industry in crisis in upland areas and will require an integrated approach between agriculture, environment and economy to solve this. It is the IUF view that an environmental strategy should set the context for the development of all industry and land uses, and particularly for agriculture, forestry, waste, marine and for industries with large land take, emissions or other impacts on land or water.

The vision and objectives do not clarify the importance of landscape and particularly the importance of lands that are not designated as a key part of countryside biodiversity. NI uplands are not routinely designated for nature conservation, and yet they provide many ecosystem services important to climate mitigation and well being of people. IUF would like to see more elaboration on landscape in NI, and in particular its vision for those areas it has designated as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the upland landscapes that provide key benefits to people in urban areas.

DAERA Innovation Strategy 2020- 2025

DAERA - NI has a vision for a living, working, active landscape. This will be a science and data-based strategy, investing c.25% of its annual budget on scientific surveillance, testing and research & development (R&D). These will inform policy development to meet statutory obligations, measure

<p>Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Jan. 2020)</p> 	<p>outcomes and manage risks to society, the environment and support rural affairs through innovation. DAERA is currently implementing a Science Transformation Programme (STP) in the wake of BREXIT. DAERA has identified key areas of innovation and likely benefits relevant to the sustainable development of the agri-food, environment, marine and fisheries, forestry and rural communities to achieve economic, environmental and social benefits across Northern Ireland. Methods of obtaining baseline data, with evidence of progress for each of the defined benefits, are included. A DAERA innovation report will be produced at the mid and end points of strategy implementation and will include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An evaluation of progress against goals and objectives to ensure timely delivery and that necessary adjustments can be made; - An assessment of innovation performance within agri-food, environment, marine and fisheries, forestry and rural communities; - Recommendations for future actions and policy direction. - A retrospective evaluation will also be carried out on the Innovation Strategy at the end of its term (2025) to inform its successor.
<p>Delivering Our Future, Valuing Our Soils Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy (2016) With annex on Ammonia, entitled "Making Ammonia Visible" (Dec. 2017)</p> <p>Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (Oct. 2016)</p> 	<p><i>Delivering Our Future, Valuing Our Soils: A Sustainable Agricultural Land Management Strategy for Northern Ireland</i> was produced for DAERA by an independent Expert Working Group on Sustainable Land Management. The group's aim was to outline how the ambition of the Agri Food Strategy Board's 'Going for Growth' could be achieved in a way which improves farm incomes and environmental performance simultaneously. Although mainly targeted at lowland farms, many of the recommendation would support upland farmers through a catchment approach.</p> <p>Recommendations included systematic soil sampling across Northern Ireland; LiDAR surveying and real time frequency water quality sampling to assist farmers to manage their lands to attain and maintain good quality soil and water health. Recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an enhanced regime of water quality monitoring on 60-80 of NI's 450 river catchments; • Create a Sustainable Land Management Decision Support Tool for farmers, supported by a comprehensive database on soil, water, biodiversity and land use for the provision of information for each farm in Northern Ireland; • Manage soils more effectively - through more efficient use of fertilizers, better grass and crop quality and increased productivity; • Manage disposal of slurry – through proactive tools; • Provide mentoring to match Nutrient Application to Crop need; • Promote better grass and sward management; increased measurement and utilisation; and • Target water quality interventions on at least 4,000 ha of land by establishing woody riparian strips in overland flow pathways. <p>Specifically, in relation to the Uplands, the report notes that hill farmers play a vital role in protecting and enhancing biodiversity as well as providing essential ecosystem services in the uplands. Policy must recognise that productive agriculture in the uplands can be positive for the environment, when properly managed. However, the economics of maintaining profitable livestock enterprises in upland areas often require direct financial support.</p>

	<p>Innovative approaches to land management, such as the Pontbren Project, show that the best way to achieve both environmental and production benefits is to allow land managers the flexibility to design targeted site-specific, collaborative environmental initiatives. The key principle must be that grazing should be managed at levels which are appropriate for each particular site, taking into account the need to protect and enhance environmental features, and also to provide a sustainable income for the farmers. Such initiatives should work positively with local environmental interests, such as Landscape Partnerships to develop site specific plans for mutual benefit. Upland farmers should be rewarded for their input into devising the plans and for subsequent delivery of their individual plan, with opportunities for higher payments for delivery of additional benefits, such as rewetting of peatland or providing flood relief areas. Strategically planted trees can also enable extended grazing seasons by providing higher soil temperatures through their sheltering effect, a lower water table due to the increased porosity of the soils beneath them, and direct protection for livestock from wind and rain, while also reconnecting disparate biodiversity habitats.</p> <p>Implementing site-specific management plans in the uplands will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide hill farmers with a sustainable income; • Ensure that biodiversity thrives in the uplands; • Provide public benefits including flood control, water purification, carbon sequestration and recreation; and • Allow a flexible and interactive approach at local level. <p>Recommendation: Ensure that sustainable and flexible management plans are in place for upland areas which recognise the importance of achieving stocking levels which benefit both the farmer and the environment simultaneously and receive appropriate financial support.</p>
<p>Valuing Nature: Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020 DAERA, July 2015</p> 	<p><i>Valuing Nature: Biodiversity Strategy for Northern Ireland to 2020</i> aims to meet NI's international obligations and local targets to protect biodiversity and ensure that the environment can continue to support people and the economy. The strategy notes that reductions in biodiversity impact on the availability of complex natural systems to function and to deliver goods and services. Higher levels of biodiversity tend to lead to greater system stability and resistance in the face of changes, such as climate variability and plant and animal diseases.</p> <p>This strategy builds upon the first NI Biodiversity Strategy (2002), but adopts the internationally agreed approach that emphasises the management of biological systems to deliver the materials and services upon which people depend – the ecosystem services approach. The thrust of the Strategy is to manage natural and human-modified systems to deliver a multitude of outputs which support society and the economy, as well as protection of individual species and habitats. However, recognition of the interconnectedness and complexity of biological systems enables a more coherent approach.</p> <p>Mountains, Moors and Heaths</p> <p>Of particular relevance to the Uplands, the strategy notes the critical ecosystems services provided by mountains, moors and heaths:</p>

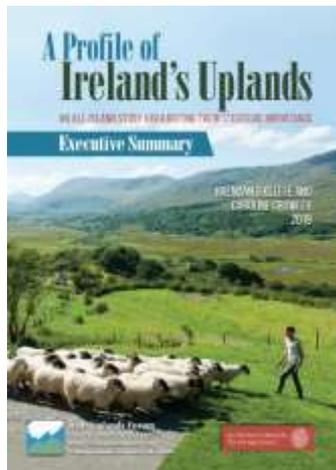
	<div data-bbox="758 219 1316 436" style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 15px; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">Ecosystem services provided by mountains, moorlands and heaths</p> <table style="width: 100%; font-size: x-small;"> <tr> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> Provisioning Food Fibre Fuel Fresh water </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> Regulating Climate regulation Flood regulation Water quality regulation Erosion control </td> <td style="vertical-align: top;"> Cultural Recreation Tourism Aesthetic values Cultural heritage Spiritual values Education Sense of place Health benefits </td> </tr> </table> </div> <p>Peaty soils cover almost 15% (206,400 hectares) of NI land, including most of the uplands. Of this, 165,000 hectares consists of either semi-natural blanket bog, lowland raised bog or fen vegetation each with a high biodiversity value. Overall, it is one of the most significant groups of habitats in a European context. The economic value of Northern Ireland’s peatlands is viewed as increasingly significant in terms of their natural resources. Historically, peatlands have been valued primarily for grazing, fuel or horticultural peat, but are now highly valued for ecosystem services such as clean water supply, carbon storage and recreation. Many current land management practices could compromise these services e.g. land drainage, over-grazing, intensive agriculture, forestry, peat-cutting and wind farm development. The importance of peatlands is recognised through the (IUCN) UK Peatlands Programme, set up in 2009, to promote peatland restoration in the UK. In Northern Ireland, the approach to peatlands is guided by the Department’s Policy Statement, <i>Conserving Peatland in Northern Ireland</i>. The Government encourages the sustainable use of peatlands. Agri-environment schemes provide incentives to manage peatlands (around 38,000 hectares) and peat-cutting and wind farms are regulated by planning policies.</p> <p>The value of peatland soils and vegetation as a carbon store is very high and their value in sequestering carbon may become a particularly economically advantageous characteristic as carbon accounting becomes more important.</p>	Provisioning Food Fibre Fuel Fresh water	Regulating Climate regulation Flood regulation Water quality regulation Erosion control	Cultural Recreation Tourism Aesthetic values Cultural heritage Spiritual values Education Sense of place Health benefits
Provisioning Food Fibre Fuel Fresh water	Regulating Climate regulation Flood regulation Water quality regulation Erosion control	Cultural Recreation Tourism Aesthetic values Cultural heritage Spiritual values Education Sense of place Health benefits		
<p>Policy Statement on Peatlands for Northern Ireland DAERA</p>	<p>DAERA’s statement on peatlands for Northern Ireland states that conservation of peatlands is important for biodiversity, archaeology, carbon and water storage and also because of their landscape value. It notes that peatlands are sensitive habitats that are easily affected by both natural and human factors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protective measures: A number of measures including government policy, legislation, protected sites and education are currently utilised as part of a strategy for the protection and conservation of peatlands. • Peatland Policy: Peatland is the only habitat for which Government has produced a policy statement in Northern Ireland. • Legislation: No laws have been introduced which are specifically designed to protect peatlands but all legislation that protects landscapes, habitats, species and certain archaeological sites also assists in the conservation of peatlands • Protecting peatlands: Some peatland sites are designated and legally protected as a result of European, national and local legislation • Biodiversity strategy: The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy seeks to contribute to global biodiversity by conserving and enhancing the biological diversity of all habitats, including peatlands, across Northern Ireland • Agri-environment schemes: The majority of peatlands in Northern Ireland are in private ownership and their conservation is dependant on the adoption of good management practices by their owners 			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education: Education and public awareness is an essential element of peatland conservation • Community action and grant aid: Local communities are playing an increasingly important role in the conservation of peatlands. Peatland conservation projects can apply to NIEA for grant-aid • Peat cutting: can be carried out for milling (horticultural use, usually on a commercial basis and consequently requiring planning permission) or for fuel. Peat extracted for fuel can take place for both commercial and domestic purposes.
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ADDITIONAL INFLUENCES ON IUF STRATEGY

A Profile of Ireland’s Uplands –All-Island Study Highlighting Their Strategic Importance

Irish Uplands Forum (2019)



by Brendan O’Keeffe and Caroline Crowley, 2019
 supported by
 The Heritage Council

IUF’s recent research has indicated that uplands perform vital ecological services that are essential to the wellbeing of our wider society. These include water storage and flood attenuation. Uplands are also important natural habitats, and the preservation of upland landscapes is essential in maintaining and promoting biodiversity. Europe’s uplands, and those on the island of Ireland in particular, are associated with high nature-value farmland. Uplands’ abilities to deliver ecosystem services are, however, under threat from climate change and land abandonment. Maintaining vibrant upland farming communities is important, not just in socio-economic terms, but also in respect of conservation and biodiversity. Moreover, it is necessary to link landscape conservation to community development, as articulated in the *European Landscape Convention*, and to promote synergies between upland and lowland communities. The linkages between uplands and lowlands are manifest in the multiple roles uplands play in supplying public goods to all. These include, inter alia, the provision of recreational spaces, and in Ireland, traditional hill-farming has been integral to the supply and maintenance of the landscapes, ecology and cultural heritage that attract visitors. Family farming and farmers’ participation in walks’ schemes are positively associated with keeping Ireland’s countryside attractive and open. Maintaining the maximum number of family farms in Ireland’s uplands has to be integral to public policy. The rollout of green infrastructure, and its embeddedness within spatial planning, as articulated in the *National Planning Framework (2018)* represent supportive mechanisms for the benefit of upland communities and visitors alike.

Over one-in-five upland households in the ROI is headed by a farmer. Uplands in the ROI have an older than average age profile and more farmers and fewer commuters than the rest of the State. Over a quarter of all houses are either unoccupied or a holiday home. One third of residents do not have a broadband connection.

The report found in Northern Ireland, the levels of economic activity in the uplands are on a par with the average for the six counties, over 60% of the workforce is in the services sector and 9% of all workers in NI uplands work on the land.

Climate Change policies: consequences for upland ecology, farming &

IUF’s *Profile of Ireland’s Uplands 2019* research indicates that climate change and its consequences for society provide new challenges and opportunities for upland ecology, particularly the climate change importance of peatlands. The role of managing upland assets in climate mitigation efforts provides an

communities, conserving & restoring eco-system services	opportunity for upland land managers and communities to engage with state agencies to redress the deterioration of areas of blanket bog as a result of peat cutting, reclamation and drainage through actions which will restore their water holding ability.
EU Wild Atlantic Way LIFE blanket Bog project	Two specific EU LIFE projects, one to address poor water quality and the other to address deteriorated blanket bog conditions, have been launched in Ireland. <i>The IUF will participate, in partnership with the Heritage Council, in the EU Wild Atlantic Way LIFE Blanket Bog project.</i>
Comhairle na Tuaithe initiatives	Comhairle na Tuaithe: the IUF will work with the newly structured Comhairle to enable broad stakeholder engagement, including state bodies, to discuss sustainable outdoor recreation policy dialogue in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - bring about certainty to upland recreational access; - develop of a new Outdoor Recreational Strategy which includes capacity building and funding to maintain and restore paths on private lands; - support the development of sustainable upland recreational asset; and - ensure observation of <i>Leave No Trace</i> principles in the outdoors.
IUF Statement of Strategy 2016-2020	Continued issues and challenges, particularly the need for a paid National Coordinator to support a huge voluntary effort and/or project worker to deliver upland community partnership elements of LIFE projects, partnership events or exchanges.

The work of the Irish Uplands Forum is supported by The Heritage Council.



The content of this Strategy is solely the responsibility of the Irish Uplands Forum and does not necessarily represent the official views of The Heritage Council.