



**MINUTES OF THE 13th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF
THE IRISH UPLANDS FORUM LIMITED
HELD ONLINE BY ZOOM (*due covid-19 pandemic restrictions*)
TUESDAY 1st JUNE 2021 – 7.30pm**

- Present:** Frank Nugent - Chairman
Dr. Deirdre Lewis – Secretary
Dr. Mary Tubridy – Director, Research
Aisling Gribben – IUF Board/ Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust
John O’Callaghan, Mountaineering Ireland
Prof. Jim Walsh – IUF Board
Nuala Madigan – IUF Board / Irish Peatlands Conservation Council
Micheál McDonnell – IUF Board/ INHFA
Dr. Breandán Ó Caoimh – IUF Board
Helen Lawless, Mountaineering Ireland
Sean Byrne, Wicklow Uplands
Brian Byrne, Wicklow Uplands Council
Padraig Fogarty, Irish Wildlife Trust
Catherine Keena Teagasc (Countryside Management/ Biodiversity)
Brian Dunne, PM, Wicklow Uplands Council
Sineád Cusack
Shaun Roarty
Frank McMahan
Vincent McAlinden
Carol Loftus
Brendan O’Hanrahan
Cóilín
Dr Caroline Crowley – Guest Speaker/ Researcher of IUF ‘Wild Atlantic Nature’ Study
- Apologies:** Tom Byrne – *Treasurer IUF/ Wicklow IFA*; Pat O’Shea – *Director IUF/ Kerry IFA*;
Judith Annett – *Director IUF/ CCGHT*; Georgia MacMillan *IUF volunteer/ Membership*

Meeting Opening:

The Chairman welcomed all attendees to the meeting and thanks them for their attendance via zoom, due to the ongoing covid pandemic restrictions.

1. MINUTES FROM THE LAST AGM

Minutes of the Twelfth (12th) Annual General Meeting, held online 24th June 2020 (due to covid restrictions) were circulated to the membership of IUF in advance. No queries were raised.

Mary Tubridy proposed the Minutes of the 12th AGM; Frank Nugent seconded. The minutes were approved and adopted by the Meeting.

2. SECRETARY’S REPORT

The Secretary’s Report (12th AGM 2020 – Present, June 2021) was read by Deirdre Lewis to the meeting.

The Report was approved and adopted by the Meeting – (attached Appendix 1).

3. CHAIRMAN’S REPORT

The Chairman’s Report was read by Frank Nugent to the meeting. Frank noted that planned networking activities were curtailed by the pandemic, but engagement, advocacy and research continued. He also noted that the website has been upgraded but is malfunctioning currently – so has been taken down on a temporary basis until the glitches are ironed out. Apologies to the membership. However, all referenced documents below will be uploaded as soon as possible.



- **The Heritage Council:** The Chairman thanked the Heritage Council for their continued support of the work of the IUF under Grant assistance for natural heritage measures.
- **IUF Board:** Noted that the Board comprises representatives of the diverse interest ranges of the IUF, including farming, ecology, peatland, landscape, outdoor recreation, geology, sociology, community, academia/ research representatives from the four provinces of the island of Ireland.
- **IUF Statement of Strategy 2021-2026** – was approved by the Board in January 2021. It reflects a range of recent policy measures and plans at international, national and regional level, and aims to refocus our activities in the coming five years.
- **IUF Research:** A number of research projects were supported/ commissioned this year:
 - Two IUF **student bursaries** were awarded this year (see Research section below).
 - **EU LIFE – the Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN) Project:** managed by the NPWS with multiple partners and stakeholders, aims to conserve and restore the Atlantean bogs in 24 SACs along the Atlantic seaboard from Galway to Donegal, over 7 years. Through our links with the Heritage Council, the IUF is participating in the project, providing links to farmers, landowners and communities adjacent to the selected bogs. In late 2020, IUF commissioned Dr Caroline Crowley, following open tender, to conduct research on effective Stakeholder Engagement to provide an integrated approach to landowner & community consultation throughout the WAN project. Results are now finalised and will be presented at tonight’s meeting.
- **Representation/ Advocacy :** The IUF attended a range of meetings during the year:
 - **Comhairle na Tuaithe.** Continued representation on this council. A new *Outdoor Recreation Strategy for Ireland* is underway (currently at public consultation stage) and a *Sustainable Uplands Working Group* has been established to address specific issues pertaining to the uplands. The issue of Insurance for upland farmers allowing access to their lands for recreation has yet to be resolved; by June 2021 a resolution is due to be discussed by C na Tuaithe’ Board.
 - **Upland Path Restoration Network :** Chaired by Helen Lawless of MI> IUF attended this excellent initiative that advocates sensitive restoration using local materials & skills for path maintenance; also using existing organisational structures to move this issue forwards.
 - **The IUF planned EIP Workshop in Ballyhoura/ Kilfinane** had to be cancelled due to covid. Instead the Board conducted EIP research, coordinated by Mary Tubridy, and published this week to identify key learnings to date (see Research section of Minutes below for more details).
 - **Royal Irish Academy:** Mary Tubridy and Tom Byrne represented the IUF at the RIA Symposium on 3/6/21 on themes for research topics on uplands management.
- **IUF Responses to Strategic Consultations**
IUF made two (2) submissions to strategic consultations during the year:
 1. EU Biodiversity Plan
 2. Organisational Review of the National Parks & Wildlife Service (NPWS, Dept of TCAGSM)
- **Acknowledgements:** The Chair congratulated members of the IUF Board on recent appointments:
 - Dr Mary Tubridy has been appointed to the Board of the Heritage Council in recognition of her outstanding work over many years on ecology and natural heritage.
 - Ms. Judith Annett was appointed as Chairperson for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) in Northern Ireland.
 - The Chair thanked all Board members for their time and contributions throughout the year.

The Chairman’s Report was approved and adopted by the Meeting.



4. TREASURER'S REPORT

The Chairman presented the Treasurer's Report for 2020 on behalf of Mr Tom Byrne, Treasurer, who could not be present at the AGM.

Re. **Audited Accounts for 2020**, the IUF reports the following (Accounts attached as pdf):

Income	€6,754.00
Expenditure	€6,113.00
Cash	€6,172.28
PayPal account	€ 861.09
Closing Credit Balance	€7,033.37

- The Chair noted that cash declined by €388 over the year, due to curtailed activities.
- Heritage Council have voted €10,000 for period of 2021, to be expended, reported and drawn down by November 2021 (*based on grant conditions*).
- Thanks to the Heritage Council for their continued support.

The Treasurer's Report was proposed by Mary Tubridy and seconded by John O'Callaghan. It was deemed approved and adopted by the Meeting.

The Chair noted that the IUF need activities to raise funds and increase liquidity. A discussion ensued:

- **Raising of IUF Membership Fees:** it was agreed by the Membership to raise the membership fees, the first rise in many years, as follows:
 - Individual *increase from* €10 to €25
 - Groups €50 to €75
 - Students €10 (remain the same)

Proposed by Breandán O'Chaoimh and seconded by Sean Byrne. The raising of IUF fees at the 13th AGM was agreed by the membership.

- Additionally, it was agreed that the IUF would register two events at Heritage Week (Aug2021) with an evening lecture and a field trip (details to be agreed).
- A fundraiser will be organised in due course.
- The Chairman thanked the auditors for preparing the Accounts (Directors Report and Financial Statement) for year ending 31/12/2020.
- The Accounts will be sent to the CRO and registered online (in accordance with the Companies Act 2014), upon approval of the membership. Form B1 will be submitted following the Election of Officers and sent to the CRO with a copy of the Accounts.

5. RE-APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

It was proposed by the Chairman that the accountancy practice, Gerard T Murphy Co. Ltd., should be re-appointed as Auditors of the Irish Uplands Forum Limited. It was also noted that their charges had been very reasonable and work conducted to a very high standard.

The re-appointment of the Auditors was proposed by Deirdre Lewis and seconded by Mary Tubridy. It was agreed by unanimous approval of the Meeting.



6. ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

One nomination was received from **Sean Byrne** for election to the Board of Directors at AGM 2021. The recent resignation of **Teresa O'Hare** of the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT) for personal reasons was noted, as was the co-option of **Aisling Gribben** (CCGHT) in her place. The Chair thanked Teresa for her contribution throughout her term of office.

Two further co-options during the year were also noted: of **Prof. Jim Walsh** (Emeritus, NUI Maynooth) and **Nuala Madigan** (CEO, Irish Peatlands Conservation Council).

There was unanimous support for the current Board to continue in position.

Following the election of the sole nominee, the following members will comprise the Board of the Irish Uplands Forum for the forthcoming term.

Chairperson:	Frank Nugent
Vice-Chairperson:	Judith Annett
Company Secretary:	Deirdre Lewis
Treasurer:	Tom Byrne (Wicklow Uplands Council/ IFA)
Membership/ web:	Aisling Gribben (NI, Causeway Coast & Glens)
Research:	Mary Tubridy
Regional Members:	Pat O'Shea (Kerry/ IFA) Nuala Madigan (IPCC) Michéal McDonnell (Mayo, INHFA) Dr. Breandán Ó Caoimh (Kerry, Research) John O'Callaghan (Clare/ Mayo, Mountaineering Ireland) Sean Byrne (Wicklow Uplands Council)

This concluded the election to the Board of The Irish Uplands Forum Limited.

It was agreed that the Board may rotate the individual roles to ensure refreshment of responsibilities once they meet for next term (Autumn 2021).

Nomination of the Board was proposed by Helen Lawless and seconded by Breandán Ó Caoimh. It was agreed by unanimous approval of the Meeting.

7. RESEARCH UPDATE

The IUF Director for Research, Dr Mary Tubridy, gave a brief update on key elements of IUF research undertaken during the year.

- **European Forum for Nature Conservation & Pastoralism (EFNCP)** is funded by Heritage Council in Ireland. Trying to influence CAP in favour of conservation measures. MT is hoping to become a member of EFNCP thinktank as a member of Heritage Council Board. Currently, farmers are penalised if have rough ground on their land, the HC is taking up this issue and the need for confluence of Environment and Agriculture policies.
- **EU LIFE Atlantic Bogs:** As the Heritage Council is an 'associate beneficiary', the IUF is involved to mobilise community engagement (with member groups and farmers) and environmental education at local level. The Chair mentioned the recently commissioned research above by Dr Caroline Crowley, which will be presented tonight and also available on the IUF website.
- European Innovation Partnerships (EIPs): we had planned to have an EIP networking event this year but this had to be cancelled due to covid. Thus, IUF Board members conducted direct research with EIP managers and ecologists in late 2020/ early 2021 to examine how the projects were being managed and rolled out; progress on meeting objectives; and, to identify key learnings for other projects. The results were compiled as an **IUF Newsletter**

by MT and are published this week and shared on IUF website (once functioning properly). It is intended to examine how these learnings could be mainstreamed and linked perhaps to the EFNCP (see above). The IUF plans to host an EIP Zoom event aimed at various ecological aspects of the projects (Appropriate Assessment (AA reports), burning, erosion etc) – details to follow in the Autumn 2021.

- **Student research bursaries** (2 x €250 /total €500) were awarded during the year:
 - Martina Calvey: baseline agricultural impacts on upland ecology of Achill
 - Aisling Kennedy: Coillte impacts of forestry on amphibians in the Wicklow Uplands
- **Priorities 2021 will mirror those of 2020:** farmer members of IUF are dissatisfied with the outworkings of the EU Biodiversity Plan and proposed new CAP payments system that does not take cognisance of ecosystems services in the Uplands. Working with EIPs to identify learnings and how they may be mainstreamed. Upland areas are inherently suited to EIP approach given the ecosystems services contained therein.

8. PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH & PROJECT RESULTS

Mary Tubridy introduced Dr Caroline Crowley who conducted research for IUF in relation to the EU LIFE Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN) project and presented the key findings to the membership at AGM.

Note: this session was recorded with permission of attendees.

EU LIFE: Wild Atlantic Nature Integrated Study: preliminary Stakeholder Mapping & Analysis

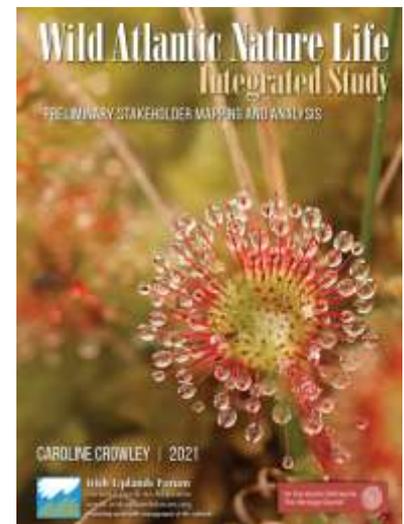
Caroline profiled the communities and families in the catchment of the 24 SACs in Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal. Many are smallholding farm families, with strong cultural, economic and emotional affiliation to the bogs. Patterns of rural out-migration, aging populations, part-time farming, low incomes and reliance on turf for home heating characterise the socio-economy of the region.

There is a strongly identified theme of social justice in respect of consultation and a long memory of poor consultation in the past, particularly with respect to designation of SACs in the 1990s and the prohibition of turf-cutting in the 2010s. There is a perception of inequity in the power balance between state actors and local communities and farmers. This authentic engagement is required, that is meaningful and that people's concerns are actively listened to and acted upon. A place-based approach would work well, adopting the motto of 'nothing about us, without us', with active engagement of people living in these targeted conservation areas. The 'Living Bog' project was exemplary in this regard where turf-cutters became advocates for the project's conservation objectives.

Key recommendations include to position the project within principles of family and social justice. Engage meaningfully with people and work

with local development allies locals to build trust and provide pathways to sustainable strategies. This takes time and resources which must be factored into project planning. Traditional knowledge should be valued in delivery of the project to secure custodianship of the project into the longer term. Legacy engagement issued, as well as monitoring and evaluation of the learnings and outcomes should be factored into the project plan.

Discussion: *It was acknowledged that farmer engagement is key to successful delivery of the WAN, and results must be positive for farmers. A top-down strategy that does not engage with communities from the outset will not work. Some negative publicity has appeared in the media, but this needs to be addressed urgently by project managers. When the original proposal was mooted it was well received by farmers, but state agencies then failed to liaise with farmers subsequently (e.g. not mentioned as partners in publicity). The NPWS Project Manager is working to engage with and address farmers' concerns.*





Aisling Gribben of the Binevenagh & Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership, part of the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust (CCGHT), presented an overview of the work being conducted by the partnership.

Binevenagh & Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership, Northern Ireland

The BCLLP is a programme engaged on delivery of a range of projects, including 5 natural heritage; 4 outdoor recreation; and 4 on community and heritage. It is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund (80%) and other sources of funding.

Aisling gave a short review of a five-year Recreation Project, focused on provision of safe, offroad recreation, to highest standards, with enhanced public access and good connectivity. So far the project has invested £300,000 in various aspects of trail development, signage, conservation and public access. There is also an element of community archaeology, which is a great way to engage local people and knowledge.

Lowlands projects focus on freshwater quality; woodland nursery; and invasive species control, as well as salmon and trout conservation in the Curly Burn catchment. They also work with farmers on farm resilience projects, including conservation & grazing measures. Other projects include Lough Foyle Sculpture Trail; and working with the Magilligan Prison on signage. Student visits are conducted to the Magilligan Fiedl Centre.

There is another project at Altikeeragh Bog (180ha; an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) since 1999) to monitor bog- and landscape changes over time, using cameras in bog pools, working with the Ray Flynn hydrology team at Queens University Belfast. This also involves removal of self-seeding conifers.

9. Any Other Business

The Chairman thanked all attendees for their positive input.

He also thanked Caroline and Aisling for the presentation of their excellent research and project results.

There being no further business, the meeting was duly closed at 09.30pm on 1st June 2021.

Chairman
Mr. Frank Nugent
On behalf of the Board of The Irish Uplands Forum Limited

Date June 2021





The Irish Uplands Forum Limited: 13th AGM SECRETARY'S REPORT

Date: 7.30pm - Tuesday 1st June 2021

AGM 2020

The Twelfth AGM was held by Zoom on **24th June 2020**, as we had to cancel the scheduled meeting at Roundwood, Co. Wicklow due to national pandemic travel restrictions. Nineteen members attended, including five members of the Board of the IUF. Five apologies were received.

- Chairman's Report (Frank Nugent) was accepted.
- Minutes and Secretary's Report (Deirdre Lewis) were accepted.
- Treasurer's (Tom Byrne) report and Accounts were accepted.

Nominations were received for election to the Board of Directors at the AGM. Some of the serving officers had **resigned** for personal reasons and new nominations were sought. The remainder of the existing Board indicated their willingness to continue for the forthcoming term. The following members were elected:

Chairperson:	Frank Nugent
Vice-Chairperson:	Judith Annett , Northern Ireland
Company Secretary:	Deirdre Lewis
Treasurer:	Tom Byrne , WUC, IFA Wicklow
Research:	Mary Tubridy
Regional Members:	Pat O'Shea , IFA, Kerry Michéal McDonnell , INHFA, Mayo Dr. Breandán O'Caomh , Kerry Teresa O'Hare , CCHGT, Northern Ireland John O'Callaghan , Mountaineering Ireland

In the intervening period, we co-opted the following to bolster the reach and skills of the Board.

Emeritus Prof. Jim Walsh, NUIM
Nuala Madigan, IPCC

Unfortunately, Teresa O'Hare had to resign recently for personal reasons, and we thank her for her service. The IUF welcomes her replacement from Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust:

Aisling Gribbin (CCGHT, Northern Ireland)

Thus, there are twelve (12) serving Board members from across the island of Ireland.

Additionally, on a voluntary basis, Georgia continued to assist (ex-Board; for which we are very grateful):

Georgia O'Keeffe (web, membership)

IUF Directors' Meetings

There were ten (10) monthly meetings held since the 2020 AGM, all by 'zoom' to expedite the meetings, which has worked effectively during the national pandemic restriction periods. This has also reduced the carbon travel footprint of the Board of the IUF.

Actions & Achievements

- The Companies Registration Office (CRO) was notified of the composition of the Board and Directorships following the AGM 2020 in June last.
- Company accounts for 2020 were prepared by IUF auditors Gerard T. Murphy Ltd. and will be filed to the Revenue Commissioners. These will be presented at AGM 2021 to the members.
- The IUF is continuing to explore Charitable Status and the requisite registration requirements with the Charities Regulator.
- Preparation of the *IUF Statement of Strategy & Action Plan (2021-2026)*.
- Watching brief on policy measures re. Biodiversity; Carbon Management, Carbon Accounting



- A renewed call for the IUF's small grants for uplands research was issued in early 2021. Research is coordinated by IUF's Research Director (Dr Mary Tubridy) with a focus on issues pertinent to the uplands, such as ecology, landscape, ecosystems services and carbon sequestration.
- Commissioning and publication of IUF research pertaining to stakeholder engagement for our forthcoming involvement in the EU LIFE Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN) through the Heritage Council, in partnership with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). The WAN will address the restoration of Atlantean blanket bogs along the western counties of Ireland from Donegal to Galway in Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). The research was conducted by Dr Caroline Crowley for the IUF and published in early 2021 (available on the new IUF website).
- The holding of our usual networking events has been severely curtailed by the national pandemic restrictions throughout the period since the last AGM, but given that we are now 'opening up' nationally, we are planning to host a few events towards the latter end of 2021.

Representation on National Bodies

- Represented *Comhairle na Tuaithe* by Frank Nugent and Dr Mary Tubridy;
- Micheal McDonnell is a member of INHFA;
- Tom Byrne and Pat O'Shea are active members of the IFA (TB on national council);
- John O'Callaghan is a member of Mountaineering Ireland;
- Tom Byrne is a member of Wicklow Uplands Council and the EU EuroParc grouping;
- Teresa O'Hare/ Aisling Gribben are members of the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust;
- Nuala Madigan is CEO of the Irish Peatlands Conservation Council;
- IUF Research Coordinator, Dr Mary Tubridy, was appointed to the Board of the Heritage Council;
- IUF Vice-Chair, Judith Annett, has been recently appointed to the Chair of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB, Northern Ireland Committee).

Correspondence/ Liaison/ Participation with Agencies:

- Participation with The Heritage Council and the NPWS in the EU LIFE Wild Atlantic Nature (WAN) Western Raised Bogs project for effective community and landowner engagement to promote bog restoration projects (ecosystems, landscape conservation, climate mitigation and education).
- Continued engagement with the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) partners. IUF Board members made direct contacts with the EIPs in late 2020 to explore how projects were proceeding. An IUF e-zine will be circulated this summer to present results and key learnings.
- Divergent policy issues of farming for nature, biodiversity, productivity, ecosystems services and farm payment schemes are continuous topics of concern and debate for the members.
- Ongoing communications with the Department of Rural and Community Development concerning potential supports for the Uplands.
- Liaison with Mountaineering Ireland as a key partner of the IUF.
- Attendance at Burren Winterage e-School October 2020 (remotely)
- Ongoing engagement with research institutions (TCD, DIT, others as arise) and local authorities (Fingal) for collaborative opportunities on research pertaining to the Uplands.
- Various online submissions, including submission of the EU Biodiversity Plan 2030 and a submission on the National Review of the NPWS (March 2021).

Membership Issues

- The IUF website has been updated for improved reference by members – www.irishuplandsforum.org
- Communications are ongoing through email/ web/ social media.

*Dr. Deirdre Lewis, Secretary of The Irish Uplands Forum Limited
1 June 2021*