Ecological Scorecards in the Uplands
**Current Scorecards**

- **Key habitat condition metrics scored**
- **Three sections:**
  - Ecological Integrity
  - Hydrological Integrity
  - Site Integrity
- **Max score: 100**

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**Pearl Mussel Project Habitat Score Card**

**A Ecological Integrity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of plants</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very high</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive indicators</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small patch</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B Hydrological Integrity**

**B1 Contribution to watercourses**

- 0: No natural wet features.
- 5: Natural wet features / vegetation scores discharging to O'Sullivan wateway.
- 10: Positively affects watercourse.

**B2 Surface hydrology and artificial drainage features**

- 0: Not present.
- 5: Negatively affects watercourse.
- 10: Positively affects watercourse.

**C Site Integrity**

**C1 Is there evidence of damage due to burning?**

- High: Evidence of recent extensive burning causing significant damage to plant cover (burned over 50% of plot).
- Medium: Evidence of recent burning but no damage to plant cover (10% - 50% of plot).
- Low: No evidence of recent burning.

**C2 What is the extent of bare soil and erosion?**

- High: Areas of bare soil and erosion cover 40% of the plot.
- Medium: Areas of bare soil and erosion cover 10% - 40% of the plot.
- Low: Bare soil cover less than 10%.

**C3 Is there damage due to supplementary feeding?**

- High: Damage at multiple feeding sites (at least two sites) or damage extending beyond a single feeding site.
- Medium: Damage at additional feeding sites, accounting for <10% of plot and extending <30m from feeding site.
- Low: No damage or no feeding activity.

**C4 Turfcutting**

- High: Most recent cutting activities occurred less than 5 years ago.
- Medium: Most recent cutting activities occurred 5 - 10 years ago.
- Low: No recent cutting activity for >5 years.

**C5 Is there any evidence of damaging activities to vegetation or soil?**

**March 2020**

Source: Pearl Mussel Project
Origins: BurrenLIFE and RBAPS

- The Burren Programme – Farming for Conservation
- The ‘Mothership’ for most EIPs
- Developed scorecards for agricultural landscapes
- Showed success of bottom-up approach and proved scorecards a useful tool
How do they work?

- Rapid assessment methods
- Single site walkover – Structured ‘W’ difficult in uplands
- Key metrics scored by trained assessor
- Division of large areas – scored separately in some EIPs
- Not all EIPs have used them. Full ecological surveys completed instead.
Scorecards – SWOT Analysis

**Strengths**

- Excellent communication tool
- Reduced resource demand
- Directly translates ecological data to management advice
- Flexible

**Weaknesses**

- Trade-off between detail and practicality
- Can only assess vegetation metrics
- Site size can be problematic
- Detection of indicator species depends on area covered and surveyor effort
Effective Communication Tool:

Crannagh: Points Gained

Crannagh: Points Lost
Scorecards – SWOT Analysis

Opportunities

• Quick-form survey could expand monitoring capabilities
• Reduced need for expertise could engage wider community in monitoring
• Low-resolution, high frequency data on restoration efforts

Threats

• ‘Short-cutting’ of ecological assessment
• Assuming project – specific cards are suitable for alternative uses
Where Next?

- Scorecard method becoming popular

- Users are mostly confident in the wider usage of scorecards
  - Complement monitoring programs
  - Citizen Science

- But: Which card? Are they suitable for use outside of results-based programmes?
Critique

Scorecards have been accuracy tested within projects and are suitable for purpose

Different score weightings and thresholds between cards leads to variation in scores

Scorecards used on same site showed average of ~30% variation in scores (Gorman, et. al., 2021. In preparation)

Key Question: Do we need to standardise a card to make it suitable for use outside of results-based schemes?