MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum

Dr Stewart Stephens
Chairman

Presentation

MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Project

- What is the MAP?
- MacGillycuddy Reeks Forum
  - Issues
  - Outputs
  - Learnings
- Future
  - Uplands
  - Rural society

Mountain Access Project

- Recreational access to uplands
  - Private landowners vs recreational users
  - Sustainable development
  - NB - Permissive access – private land
    - Alternative? CPO?
  - Long term viability
- Comhairle na Tuaithe – 2 pilot areas
  - MacGillycuddy Reeks
  - Binn Sléibhe (Galway)
- Assessment 2013 SLR Consulting
  - South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd
  - Dept Environment, Community & Local Govt
  - Failte Ireland

Recommendations

- Forum
  - Interim chair (6-12 months)
  - Representative, participative
  - Evolve organically
  - Integrated management plan
  - Conservation plan
  - Adequate resources (public partners)
  - Meet landowner expectations
  - Roll out model to other upland areas

Mountain Access Project

- National strategy for upland access
- Expand to other upland destinations
- *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023 – 2027*
  - Ireland's Outdoor Recreation Strategy

- 3 new MAPs 2026
  - Mount Errigal Co Donegal
  - Comeraghs Co Waterford
  - Croagh Patrick Co Mayo

Mountain Access Project

- DRCDG
- Defined upland areas
- 400m + peaks
- Local stakeholder group
- Landowner buyin

MacGillycuddy Reeks

- Irelands 7 highest peaks
- 100 sq km
- ~ 40km of paths
- 130 landowners

MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum

- Composition
  - Chair 1
  - Landowners 7
  - Community 3
  - SME/Enterprise 1
  - SME/Guides 1
  - SKDP NB – RRO/reeks officer 1
  - DRCD 1
  - Failte Ireland 1
  - NPWS 1
  - Killarney Chamber 1
  - KCC 1
  - Recreational users 2
  - KCC Elected Representative 1
  - Total 21

MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum

First meeting May 27th 2014.

- Unity of purpose – agree vision and objectives. Continuing series of small wins.
- Clear agreed approach to achieving these
- Informal, comfortable, relaxed

MacGillycuddy Reeks Mountain Access Forum

MAIN CONCERNS

- Lack of knowledge that the Reeks are **privately owned**
- Liability?
- no control by landowners over recreational or commercial access to the lands.
- **Uncontrolled dogs** & a general lack of respect
- **No Conservation Plan** for the designated SAC.
- **Charity and challenge events** attracting large numbers of high impact groups
- **Commercial guides** are operating without agreements to private lands.

Vision

More visitors, less impact, more spend

1. Set up a management forum where concerns can be raised and issues resolved
2. Establish permissive access model – awareness of and respect for private land.
3. Agree and implement a sustainable management plan for the Reeks area
4. Be able to promote the Reeks as the No. 1 upland recreation destination in the country

Learnings

- Goodwill and engagement
- Local issues can be solved locally
- *Laissez Faire* not an option
- Natural heritage - Uplands – “free” asset

Evolution

- Self funding
- ongoing investment and management – Reeks officer
- Landowner concerns – insurance
- Landowner viability
  - EIP project 2019
  - ACRES
  - upland walks scheme
- Path management and repair
- Access management – sustainability

Key issues

- No real upside for landowners in allowing access
- “Everyone benefits except us”
- Broader economic value vs investment
  - €20-30m vs ???

Key issues

Future of upland farming

- Production based farming (no of sheep)

  Vs

- Farming for nature – habitat restoration
- Ecosystem services – water, carbon, energy
- Farming for recreation – Uplands Walks Scheme
  - Pilot in Reeks MAP 2026
  - Landowner input
  - Funding from DRCDG
  - Similar to existing walks scheme
  - Landowners get payment for specific actions
    - » Visitor engagement
    - » Path monitoring and maintenance
    - » Individual workplans

  - Uplands – more complex
    - » Access
    - » No built infrastructure or pathways

Take a minute……







Philosophy

Diarmaid Ferriter: *The Revelation of Ireland 1995 – 2020*

"Niamh Breathnach minister for education 1992.

Dick Spring: make equality the spine of your departmental effort.

And she went in the first day and asked them: what's your philosophy of education?

And they said:

"we don't do philosophy""

Big Picture

Vision

Policy

What’s our uplands philosophy?

- Uplands – managed landscape, not wilderness
- What's the vision?
  - Unmanaged - Ancient – native flora and fauna – deer? Beaver? Wolves?
  - Too late
    - Invasives
    - Have to manage our wild places




Gaddagh River

Fuel load



Landscape management

Upland farming

- viability

- Last generation?
  - Who benefits?
    - Economic
    - Social
    - Environmental
  - Who pays?

Rural Vibrancy in North West Europe

- The Case of South Kerry

Brendan O'Keeffe 2015

- OECD 2012
  - "Rural regions make a vital contribution to national and European growth"
  - "With proper investment and institutional support, rural regions have generally outperformed urban regions in recent years"
- ..not (seen as) just subordinate hinterlands of towns and cities
  - Co-ordinated policy and interventions
  - Integrated development strategies
- Human capital

Show me the money……

Former secretary-general at the Department of Finance, John Moran Irish Independent 8/5/2015

- “strongly criticised the membership of the new Dail for refusing to engage in a "mature debate" on the future of rural Ireland - and warned that the country can no longer afford to subsidise the personal choices that people make, when they elect to live in the countryside”.
- “the State's future investment would be concentrated on the growth of regional cities - as opposed to the preservation of rural living”.
- "This is not an easy message for rural Ireland, and there will be casualties in terms of life as we have known it”.

So..

- Need a vision for (rural) society
  - Articulate alternatives
- Radical mindset change
- What value does society put on healthy rural regions and communities?
- Need clear, coherent, consistent, rural voice
- Leadership

Aldo Leopold
1887-1948

Conservationist, philosopher

- Its not about the land. It always comes down to personal relationships and getting people to work together.
- Conservation will ultimately boil down to rewarding the private landowner who conserves the public interest. (1938)

“We shall never achieve harmony with the land, any more than we shall achieve justice or liberty for all people. In these higher aspirations, the important thing is not to achieve, but to strive.”

Aldo Leopold.

“Don’t tell me what you value. Show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value”. – Joe Biden

Thank You