



# Developing a Farming Blueprint for the Comeragh Mountains

Catriona Foley  
& Owen Carton



# The Comeragh Mountains & the People





# The Challenges



# The Project -

Comeragh Upland Communities  
EIP project  
July 2021 - 18 Months - €118k



14 Farmers; Catriona Foley & Catherine Keena, Teagasc  
Michael O'Donoghue & Owen Carton

- The DG farmers recruited local external assistance and developed their EIP project **to educate themselves better to manage the upland's natural and cultural capital**

*"I have walked this mountain all my life, but this is the first time I ever looked down on what I was walking on".*



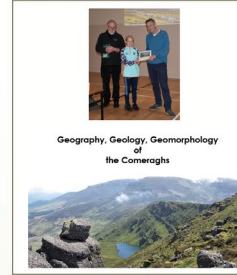
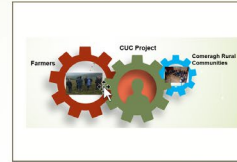
# CUC Project Activities



## Sharing the Education

### Tuesday Tea Talks

Part of the farmer education & shared with the broader community



Geography, Geology, Geomorphology of the Comeraghs

Date	Venue	Speaker	Topic
March 1 <sup>st</sup>	Rathgarnock	Hugh Carey	Archaeological Complex
March 15 <sup>th</sup>	Ballynacorney	Michael Desmond	The story of the Glenwarea cluster village on the Comeraghs
March 29 <sup>th</sup>	Rathgarnock	Sean & Sile Murphy	Some Comeragh folklore
April 12 <sup>th</sup>	Ballynacorney	Frank Igne	Comeragh Fisher - lives & tales



Community Engagement

## Site Visits – opening up to new ideas

- **Glenwherry** – Ecosystem Services – Bryan Irvine & Steve Johnstown
- **Bunclody** – Jim Fitzharris (BFF) & Declan Byrne (SUAS)
- **Pearl Mussel Project & Wid AN** in September

Growing knowledge



Ecosystems Services at E Hill Farm, Glenwherry



Catherine Dunwoody of Kilrossanty national school said "The passion of the farmers for their job and the mountains shone through, their pride in what they do and their interest in keeping it sustainable for future generations was very evident"



Heritage Keepers  
burrenbeo trust  
connecting people and place



- The Discussion Group environment enhanced shared learning.
- The uplands classrooms facilitating learning by doing.
- Biodiversity is part of the natural capital and cultural heritage – not a stand-alone topic
- Avoided a "silo 'ed" approach that focuses on one system element.
- Delivering change not only requires money but also the “hearts and minds of the people” ie knowing you want change, why you want it and how to achieve it
- Integrating the influences of geology, climate, nature, and man.
- Engagement with the broader rural community.
- The power of the Operational Group – balanced bottom-up top down

# The Outcomes

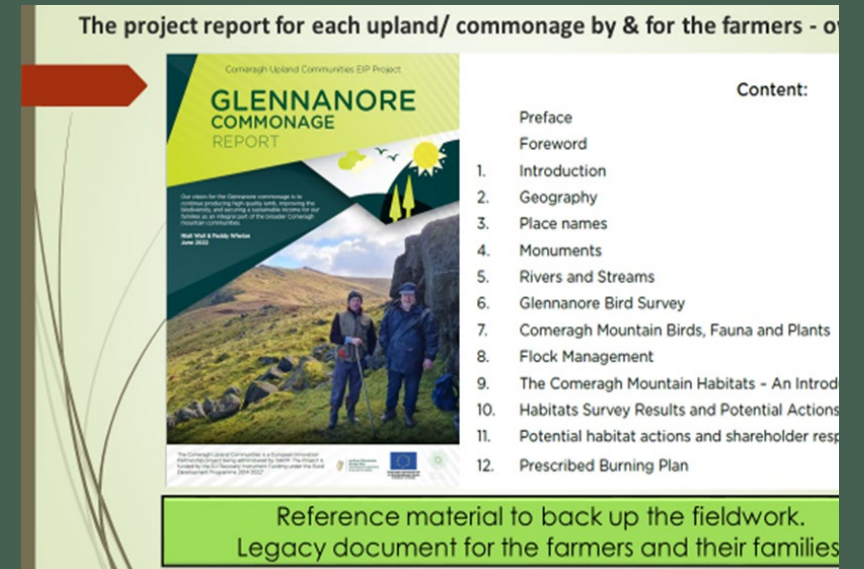
Farmers acquired new knowledge and skills through engaging with external experts, site visits and the wider Comeragh community.

Farmers valued the practical approach of 'learning by doing, particularly co-learning with external experts 'on the mountain'.

Farmers described equitable knowledge exchange between the group and external experts. "they understand where we are coming from, and then we understand where they are coming from."

Empowering the farmers by acknowledging their expertise and critical importance within their community, e.g., through school visits and Tuesday Tea Talks

There will be a long-term impact as generational knowledge about traditions, history, place names, and local farming practices is exchanged and recorded for the future.



The project report for each upland/ commonage by & for the farmers - o



Content:

- Preface
- Foreword
- 1. Introduction
- 2. Geography
- 3. Place names
- 4. Monuments
- 5. Rivers and Streams
- 6. Glennanore Bird Survey
- 7. Comeragh Mountain Birds, Fauna and Plants
- 8. Flock Management
- 9. The Comeragh Mountain Habitats - An Intro
- 10. Habitats Survey Results and Potential Actions
- 11. Potential habitat actions and shareholder resp
- 12. Prescribed Burning Plan

Reference material to back up the fieldwork.  
Legacy document for the farmers and their families



Comeragh Upland Communities EIP Project

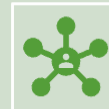
JULY 2021 - SEPTEMBER 2022  
**FINAL PROJECT  
REPORT**



# The Recommendations



Education courses – ecosystem services - more are needed.



Need for a participatory research and knowledge transfer programme – evidenced by all the upland EIPs.



Provide finance for habitat restoration programmes – large scale rewetting, invasive species, peat erosion



Integrate local farmer and non-rural farming communities based on the natural and cultural heritage.





# THE BLUEPRINT

Sets the context to help land  
management deliver multiple  
objectives and safeguard  
natural capital for future  
generations

SEPTEMBER  
2024

# Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU **Agriculture**

A shared prospect for farming and food in Europe

## Vision for European Agri-food Systems (10-15 years)

- Economically, socially, and ecologically balanced system
- Emphasis on **trust** and **cooperation** between all **stakeholders**

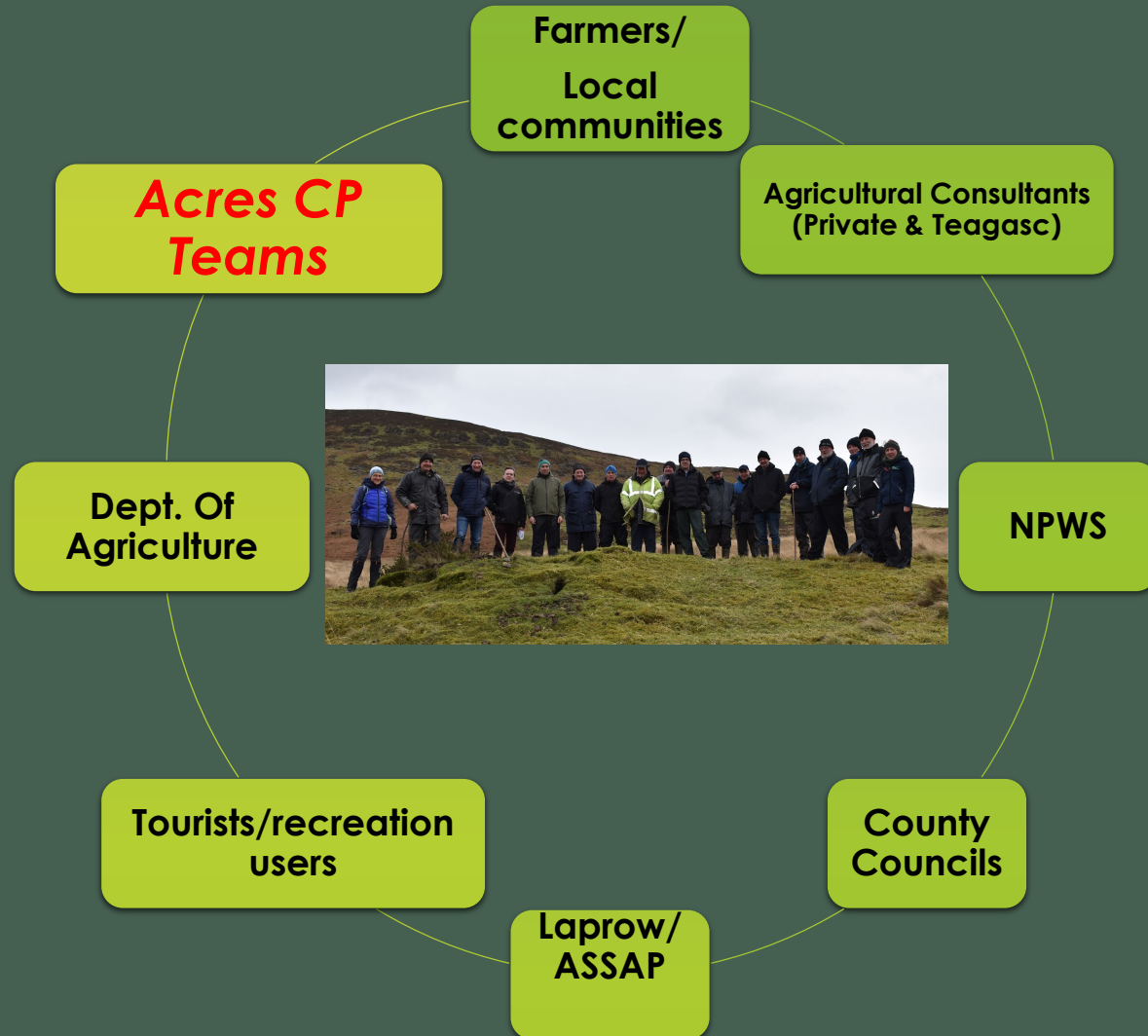
## Blueprint for the Comeragh Upland Communities





# A Collaborative & Integrated Approach

*Built by creating trust*



Over 34 people from a wide range of Departments, institutions, organisations, projects and communities contributed to the project and made it a success for the farmers and rural community

# The 7 Elements of the Blueprint

## Policy Development

- Inform and engage with policy makers to develop policies and regulations .

01

## Knowledge

- ID the knowledge needs of the upland farmers and communities.

02

## Risk Management

- ID potential risks that may arise and develop contingency plans & resilience strategies

03

## Technologies

- ID emerging technologies to support upland management.

04

## Innovation

- Facilitate innovation by farmers and rural

05

## Strategic planning

- Future upland scenarios.

07

## Education

- ID and deliver the education and training needs for the uplands.

06





# Knowledge

- The uplands need to be managed to deliver a diverse mix of ecosystem services that optimise the human, natural, and cultural resources available. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. **New knowledge** is required
- There is a need for upland management systems that maintain the upland farming (managing) tradition and develop a new range of economic, environmental, and socially viable systems that will attract the next generation—**rural development**.



# Education



- Long-term, specific to uplands (education module)
- Targeted locally , in-the field, learning by doing in a positive environment
- 2-year process for farmers to get the Results Based concept but it needs to be repeated and repeated and repeated over years so that other factors like production and improvement which farmers are more exposed to and lean towards, do not overtake it in priority
- Training should be done before or at very start of any scheme. Needs to be significant not just a one day/ one size fits all. Needs to be specific to the uplands
- Use discussion group format – broad range of topics
- Burning cannot be the dirty secret – need meaningful conversation/debate on it



- Farmer (87.5%) participants identified one-to-one interaction with their advisors in their top three most preferred sources of information.
- Similarly, discussion groups were also identified as a preferred source of information with 62.5% of participants identifying them as being in their top three.
- Have an ability to reach non clients/wider audience through publications, radio and events
- Localised and easy reachable – not changing personal year to year
- Advisors need to have the appropriate skills, knowledge and competency to provide suitable advice to farmers on a range interchangeable upland issues.

# The Advisory Role

**'The monetary effects of adjusting farm management techniques and stocking rates to maximise climate and biodiversity ecosystem services in the Comeragh Mountain Uplands'**

Oliver Gill (B.Agr.Sc)  
18463392

A thesis submitted to University College Dublin in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Research Masters

Teagasc/University College Dublin

May 2024

## Research Supervisors

Dr. Catherine Keena (Ph.D.)	Dr. Helen Sheridan (Ph.D.)	Catriona Foley
Kildalton Agricultural College,	School of Agriculture and Food Science,	Shandon,
Kildalton,	Belfield,	Dungarvan,
Co. Kilkenny.	Co. Dublin.	Co. Waterford.



**teagasc**  
AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

- Landscape Actions (Acres) eagerly awaited.
- Mountains need long term continuity
- Upland farmer CANNOT do this alone
- **At the core of Comeragh Blueprint is building trust, integrating ecosystem services and collaboration**



**Less talk  
More action**





# The Comeragh Mountains & its Farmers Present & Future

