



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine

# Upland Improvement through the results-based payment scheme, ACRES

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# Setting The Scene



- Growing pressure for greater sustainability
- Environmental Pressure increasing internationally
- New CSP 2023 – 2027
  - *Protect and Improve 1000 waterbodies*
  - *30% of agricultural habitats to demonstrate improving trends*
  - *Reduction of up to 1.3MT in agricultural emissions*

# ACRES – Flagship €1.5bn Pillar 2 scheme

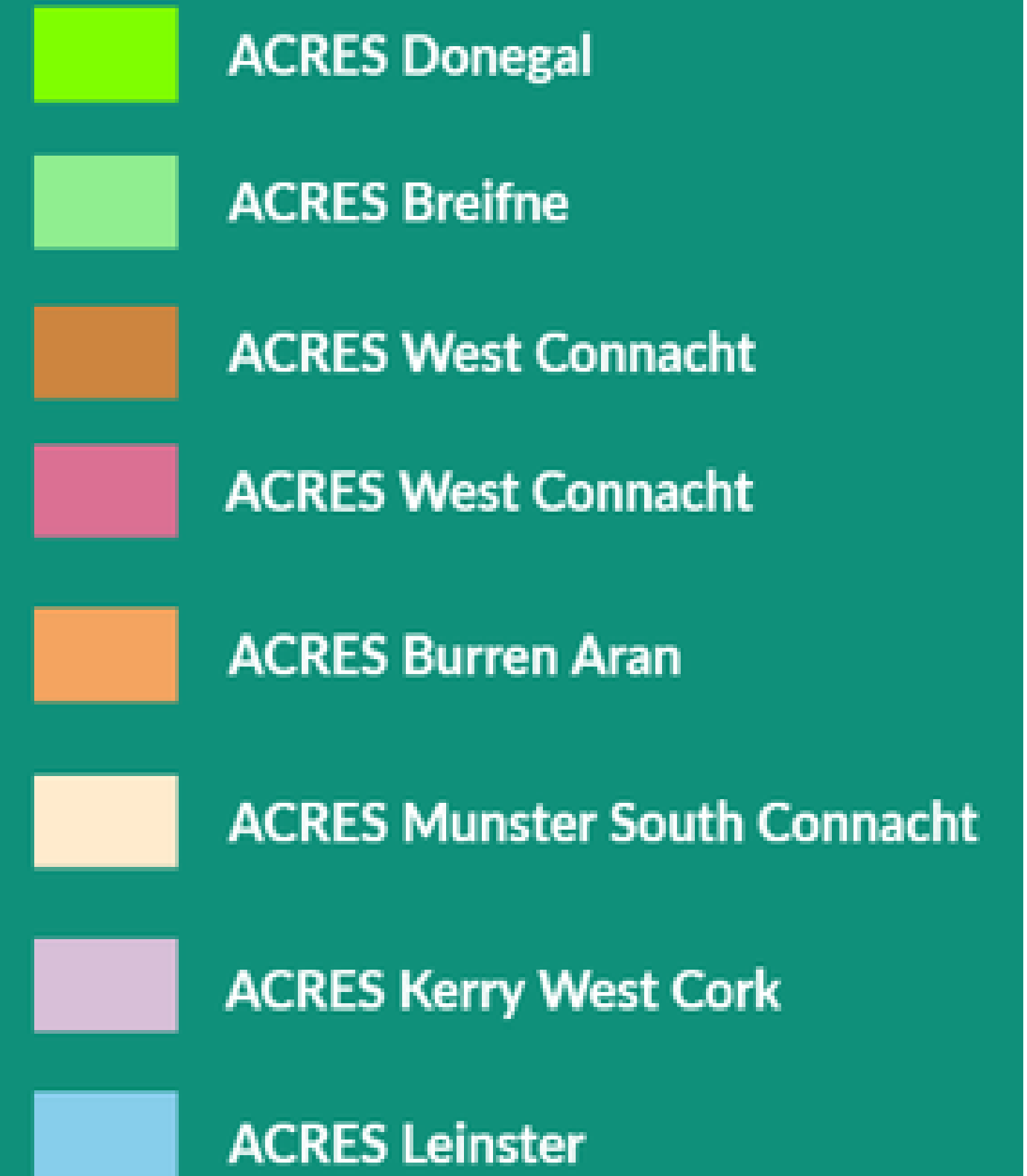
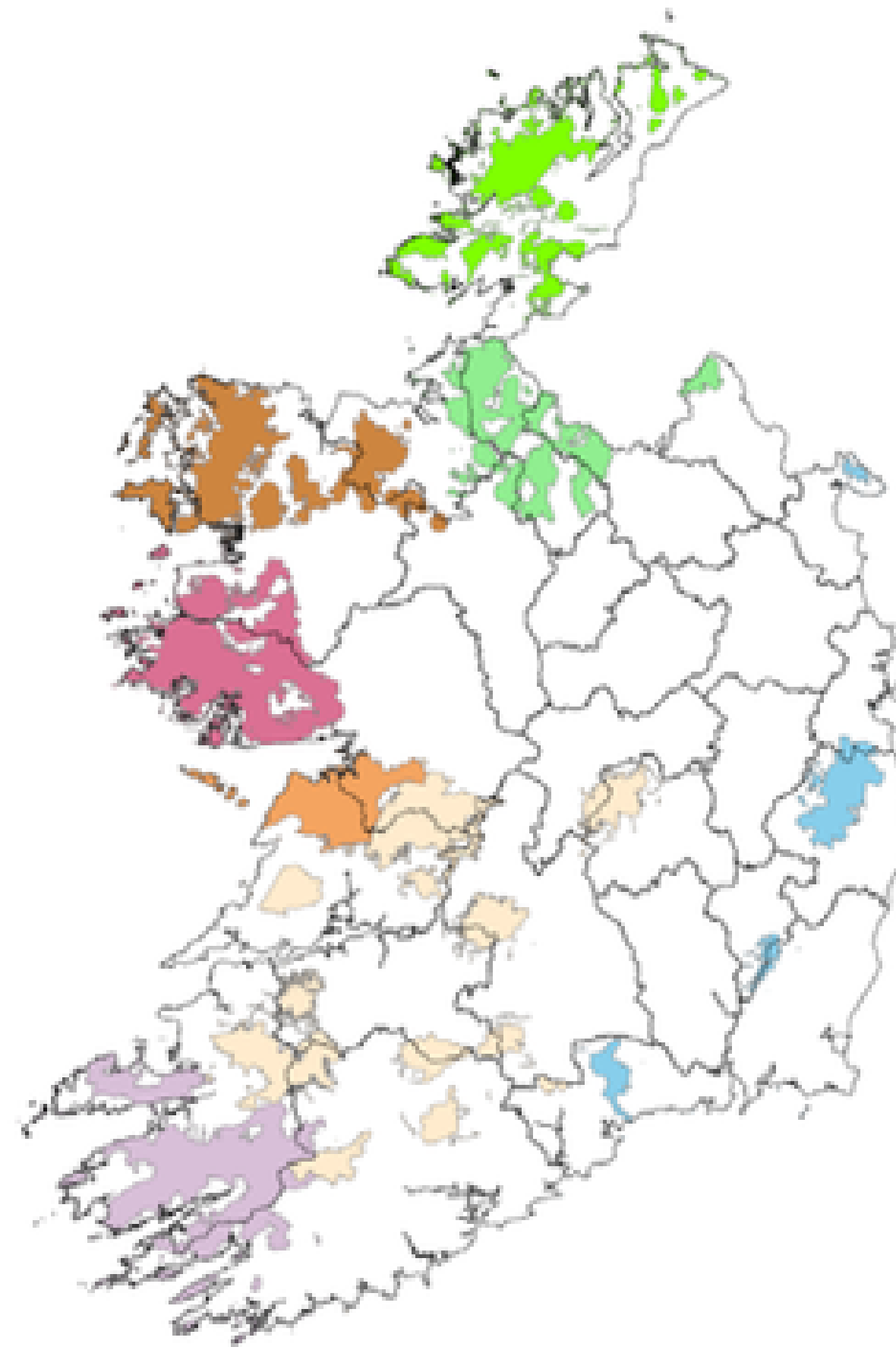


ACRES Co-operation - zones identified on basis of certain environmental criteria

ACRES General - available nationally outside zones

Prescription actions like GLAS, where set payment was made for satisfactory completion of task(s)

Results-based actions – where rate of payment will depend on score achieved



# EU protected Habitats and Species, and Water quality – CP Zones



Table: Approx. proportion of various land categories (does not include non-farmed habitats e.g. lakes) covered by the 8 ACRES CP zones

Regulatory Protection Category	Proportion of CP Zones
Special Areas of Conservation	~50%
Special Protection Areas	~62%
Blue dot Catchments	~74%



# ACRES – The Numbers

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€1.5 bn

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5 CP Teams

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840 ACRES Advisors

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55,000 participants

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1.5 mha

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1.1 mha results based

# ACRES – The Numbers 2



Description	T1	T2	Total	Units
<b>Area of Prescription actions</b>	312,156.49	60,420.65	372,577.13	hectares
<b>Area of commonage</b>	266,280.20	28,547.45	294,827.65	hectares
<b>Area of results based actions (LIG/LIPG)</b>	105,393.98	31,345.05	136,739.03	Hectares
<b>Area of ACRES CP results based actions</b>	457,615.57	Est 60,000	517,615	Hectares
<b>Total Area</b>	1,292,533	151,765	1,504,298	hectares
<b>Total trees</b>	496,774.00	82,863.00	579,637.00	trees
<b>Total coppicing and laying</b>	1,209.08	223.97	1,433.06	km
<b>Total hedge management</b>	3,221.09	610.01	3,831.10	km
<b>Watercourse buffer</b>	5,361.99	955.68	6,317.66	km
<b>Extensively Grazed Pasture</b>	178,279.94	38,349.26	216,629.20	hectares
<b>Wild Bird Food</b>	4962.70	507.78	5470.48	hectares
<b>Catch Crops</b>	20,432.93	2,270.02	22,702.95	hectares
<b>Field Margins (incl Unharvested)</b>	815.22	113.89	929.11	km
<b>Barn owl Boxes</b>	11,321.00	2,702.00	14,023.00	boxes



# CP Scorecards returned (End 2023)



Scorecard Type	Conservation Target	Area of Private land	no of scorecards	Area of commonage	No of commonage scorecards
Breeding Wader	Snipe, Curlew, Redshank and Lapwing	3,081.22	815	493	15
Burren Winterage	Dry calcareous grassland on winterage sites	18,160.83	1,349	2,129	42
Chough	Cliff habitats, chough	8,313.32	3,520	3,707	116
Coastal Grassland	Coastal habitats such as dunes and saltmarshes	4,795.35	1,260	4,015	207
Corn Crane	Corncrake, hay meadows	652.34	494		
Grassland	Semi-natural grassland habitats, Pollinators	193,432.26	97,902	9,576	604
Low Input Peat Grassland	Wet grassland habitats	1,420.39	511	107	8
Peatland	Peatland habitats, upland birds	166,541.29	17,422	394,836	6,695
Rough Grazing	Hen harrier, Barn owl, small birds and mammals	53,426.80	27,390	765	91
Woodland/Scrubland	Woodland, scrub habitats	7,791.77	5,630	1,739	259
Total		457,615.57	156,293	417,367	8,037

# Extent of Scoring in 2024 (October 2024)



Table: This table shows the sum of all submitted scorecard areas for each herd by plan type. The average and median area scored has then been calculated.

<b>Farm Plan type</b>	<b>Area Submitted (ha)</b>	<b>Ave per applic (ha)</b>	<b>Median per applic (ha)</b>
CP Farm Plan T1	150,215.2	29.7	19.7
CP Farm Plan T2	58,619.8	27.4	17.8
FSP – T1	28,418.2	7.7	8.1
FSP - T2	32,172.5	8.0	8.7
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>269,425.7</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>10.2</b>



# Structure of ACRES CP



**Core Payment:** based on Results-based payments and General actions(if applicable):

- 10 scorecard types - Results based payment depends on the habitat quality scores for land.

**Non-productive investments (NPI):** Gives scope to farmer to improve the habitat quality score of their land through extra actions at farm level.

**Landscape actions:** Extra actions for Higher level actions that may be carried out on a landscape-scale.

# Results Based Payment: Scoring Criteria



## Ecological Integrity

- Positive indicator species (plants)
- Negative indicator species
- Structural diversity

## Hydrological integrity

- Wetland indicator species
- Artificial drainage

## Threats and Pressures – Future Prospects

- Evidence of damaging activities
- Bare soil and erosion
- Non-native invasive species
- Spread of bracken



# Uplands and Commonages



Commonage areas (many hosting upland habitats and associated species) overlap considerably with Natura 2000 designations.

All commonages (inside and outside Natura) are assessed by CP teams using a results-based habitat scorecard to assess their ecological condition and identify any threats to the integrity of the habitat.

A significant area of commonage (est. 420,000ha scored) under ACRES of which 85% of all commonages in Ireland, will be managed under ACRES CP, with access to additional habitat and species recovery tools (non-productive investments and landscape actions).

Privately owned land with peatland scorecard est at 166,500ha



# Peatland Scorecard – Importance for Uplands



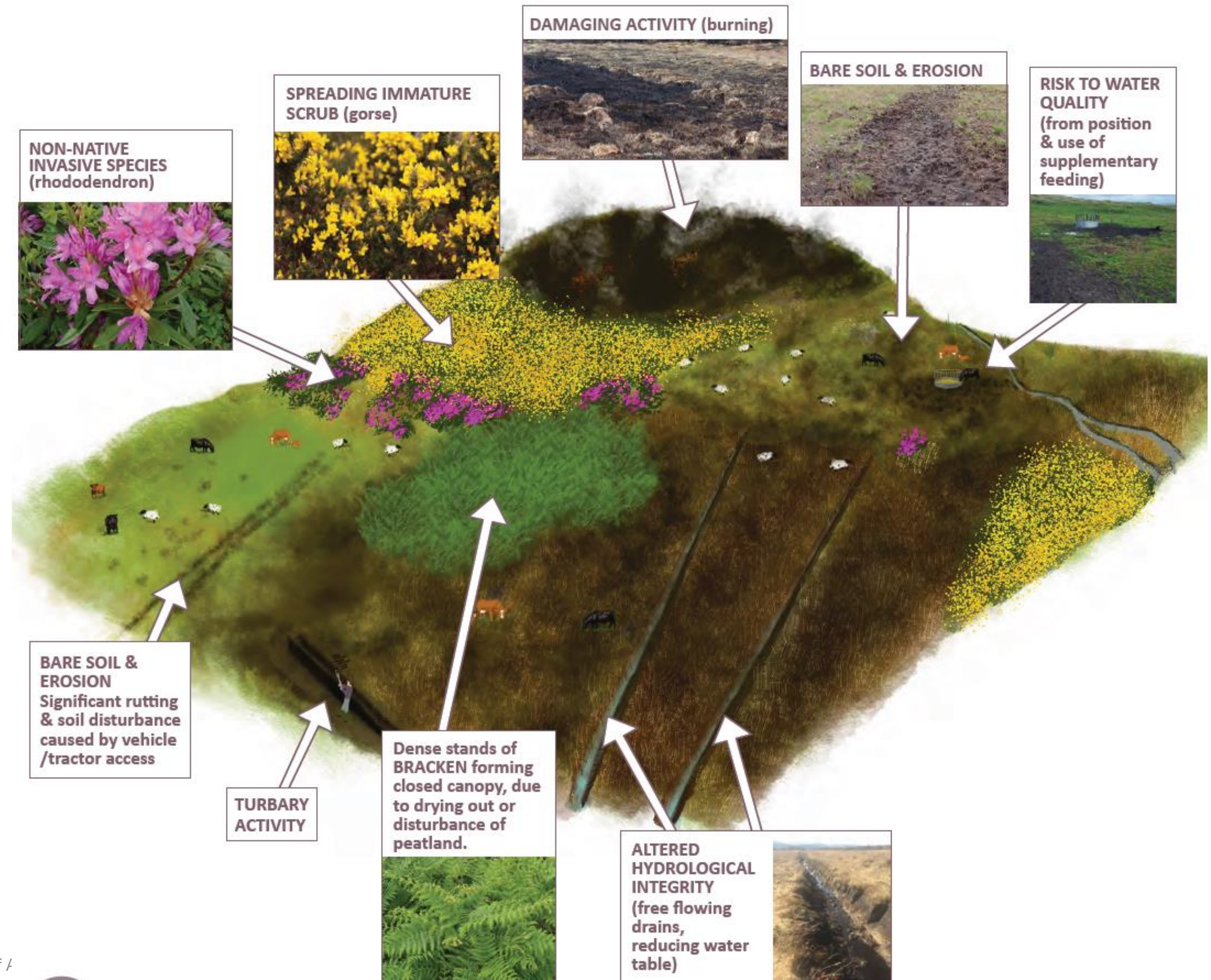
Designed to be used on all of the following common upland habitat types: dry heath, wet heath, blanket bog, mosaic of heath and bog and grassland/heath mosaic.

The scorecard assesses the ecological integrity of the habitat and threats and pressures to the habitat.





# Peatland Scorecard – Threats & Pressures



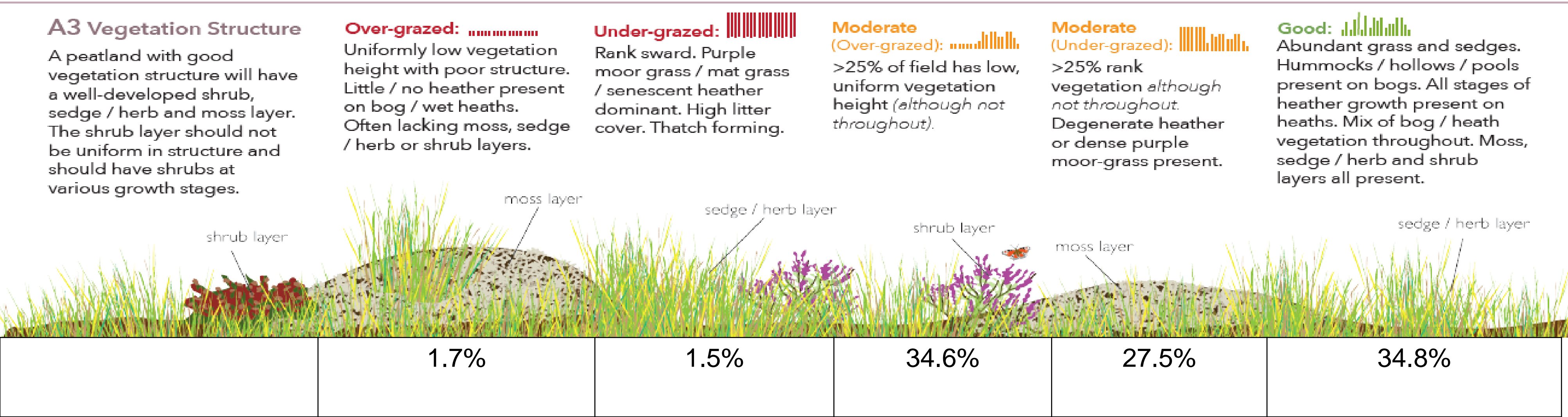


# Commonage Scorecards – National View



## Dominant scorecard: Peatland

Overall Area	Ave	Median	Min	Max
395,000ha	59	20	0.02	2400



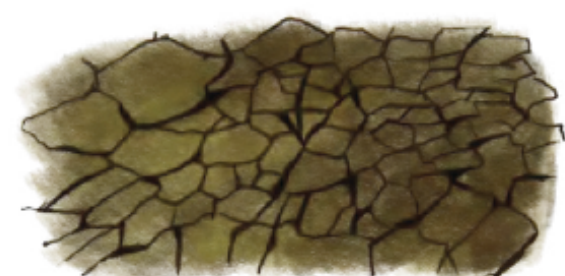


# Peatland Scorecard – Management tips



**Consider type & number of livestock** along with the **timing of the grazing** on the peatland.

**Do not spread slurry, farmyard manure, chemical fertilisers or herbicides on peatland habitat.**



**Avoid creating new drains** on peatlands as they will dry out the bog. Peat needs to be consistently wet for optimal function.

**Allow existing drains to revegetate** where possible to assist with water filtration & storage. Apply to project team for peatland restoration as a landscape action.



Supplementary feeding with **silage can add unwelcome nutrients and weeds to the soil.** If necessary to supplementary feed, use concentrates, mineral buckets or hay and move feeding points regularly to minimise damage.



**Minimise disturbance near watercourses** and consider establishing riparian zones which can help improve water quality and biodiversity.



# CP Teams roles



Development of local action plans

Capacity to engage locally with farmers to better support farmers deliver environmental goods in these sensitive landscapes

Monitor and evaluate quality of farm plans, habitat scoring and screening of NPIs

Development and implementation of Landscape Actions



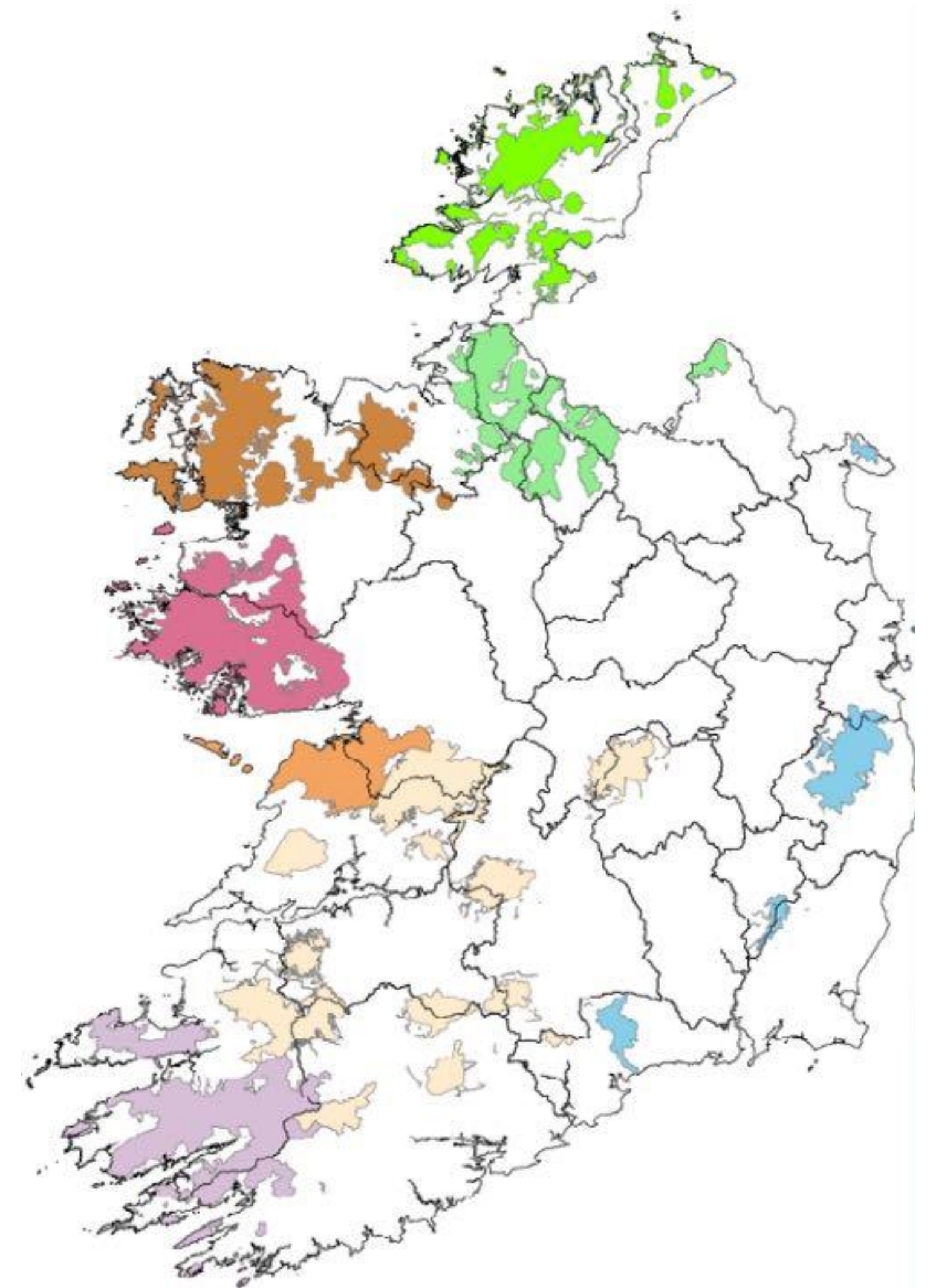


# Role of CP Teams in NPIs

Worked with the Department to develop the list of NPI actions available

Provide advisors and farmers with local, detailed, expert advice on how to maintain and improve habitats at farm and landscape level by way of Non-Productive Investments and Landscape Actions

Screen NPI Annual Works Plan (AWP)



8 CP Zones  
5 CP Teams



# NPI categories



- Habitat and Wildlife Support



- Farm Infrastructure



- Scrub/Track – Burren/Aran CP zone only





# Uptake of NPI Actions - 2023



<b>NPI action ranking 1-12</b>	<b>Count</b>
NPI Installation of Gates	<b>7,273</b>
NPI Barn Owl/Kestrel Nest Box	<b>6,794</b>
NPI Water Troughs	<b>3,696</b>
NPI Bat Boxes	<b>3,032</b>
NPI Fencing Permanent Electric	<b>2,837</b>
NPI Fencing Sheep Wire	<b>2,459</b>
NPI Planting Trees	<b>2,091</b>
NPI Repair of Trad Stone Wall 2 sides	<b>1,947</b>
NPI Rodenticide Free Rodent Control	<b>1,801</b>
NPI Fencing Barbed Wire	<b>1,680</b>
NPI Culverts	<b>1,252</b>
NPI Planting New Hedgerows	<b>1,171</b>

<b>NPI Action ranking 13-24</b>	<b>Count</b>
NPI Riparian Margin	<b>854</b>
NPI Solar Electric Fencer Unit	<b>843</b>
NPI Repair of Trad Stone Wall 1 side	<b>676</b>
NPI Mobile Feed Storage Bins	<b>625</b>
NPI Planting Trad Orchard 10 trees	<b>624</b>
NPI Swallow Boxes	<b>508</b>
NPI Solar Pumps	<b>431</b>
NPI Swift Boxes	<b>360</b>
NPI Bracken Strimming	<b>330</b>
NPI Hedge Rejuvenation	<b>330</b>
NPI Cultural Heritage Sites on Grassland	<b>314</b>
NPI Riparian Margin (Sheep fencing)	<b>251</b>

# Selection of Landscape Actions in Development



Invasive Species Control	Targeted Grazing by Bovines, Goats, Equines
Construction of Lesser Horseshoe Bat Summer Roosts	Check Dam Stone/wood
Corncrake Early and Late Cover Crop	Ditch/Peat Reprofilng
Delayed Mowing/Grazing for corncrake or waders	Drain Blocking Peat Plug/timber dam/coir rolls
Decommissioning of Old Sheep Dipping Stations	Engineered Ditches
Permanent Vegetation Change 0.05Ha or 0.09ha	Swales
Predator Proof Fencing at Wader Nest Sites	Wildlife Ponds-Lined/unlined



# Looking Ahead...



**Issuing of the decision letters on the NPI applications**

**2023 NPI applications - scheduled to commence by end 2024.**

**2024 NPI applications – target April/May 2025**

**NPI Claims and Payments system to follow**

**The specifications for Landscape Actions (LAs) are being developed and costed, with a 2025 rollout foreseen. Go to ACRES webpage for more information on Landscape Actions [gov.ie - Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme \(ACRES\)](https://gov.ie - Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES))**

**The Landscape (High Achievement) Bonus proposal – which is a financial reward aimed at encouraging farmers with large land holdings to deliver high scores across their entire holding – is being developed, with a target rollout in 2025.**

**Scoring 2025**



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# Thank you