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ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

Appropriate Assessment Screening

**Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-
2030**

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1 Introduction

Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants have been commissioned by Monaghan County Council to produce this report comprising information in support of screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) in line with the requirements of Article 6[3] of the EU Habitats Directive (EC 92/43/EEC) on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora; the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act 2010; and the European Union (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 as amended, in respect of the proposed Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030.

This screening exercise aims to determine whether the proposed plan has the potential to significantly impact upon the conservation objectives and overall integrity of any Natura 2000 sites. This assessment is based upon a desk study carried out by suitably qualified ecologists.

The following definitions are used for the terms, “impact” and “effect”:

Impact – Actions resulting in changes to an ecological feature, e.g., the construction activities of a development removing a hedgerow.

Effect – Outcome to an ecological feature from an impact, e.g., the effects on an animal population from loss of a hedgerow.

The Competent Authority, in this case Monaghan County Council, is obliged to examine the likely significant effects individually or in combination, of the proposed development on European Designated Sites in light of their specific Qualifying Interests (QIs) and Conservation Objectives (COs). If AA screening determines that there is likely to be significant effects on one or more of these sites, or the impacts are uncertain, then full AA must be carried out for the proposed development, including the compilation of a Natura Impact Statement to inform the decision making.

For the purposes of this assessment, a “significant effect” is:

“...an effect that either supports or undermines biodiversity conservation objectives for ‘important ecological features’ ... or for biodiversity in general. Conservation objectives may be specific (e.g., for a designated site) or broad (e.g., national/local nature conservation policy) or more wide-ranging (enhancement of biodiversity).

Effects can be considered significant at a wide range of scales from international to local. A significant effect is an effect that is sufficiently important to require assessment and reporting so that the decision maker is adequately informed of the environmental consequences of permitting a project.

In broad terms, significant effects encompass impacts on structure and function of defined sites, habitats or ecosystems and the conservation status of habitats and species (including extent, abundance and distribution).”

- CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland (2018)

Sections 4 and 5 of the report comprises the AA Screening that specifically focuses on the potential for impacts on Natura 2000 sites deemed to be at risk from the proposed development.

1.1 Statement of Authority

This screening for Appropriate Assessment has been carried out by Meabh Convery in collaboration with Dr Deborah McCormick from Flynn Furney Environmental Consultants. Meabh Convery has a BSc (Hons) in Sustainability with Environmental Science from University College Dublin. Deborah has a BSc (Hons) in Zoology and a PhD in Ecology from University College Cork; she has over 15 years of consultancy experience, specialising in freshwater habitat assessment and fisheries surveying, as well as Appropriate Assessment and Ecological Impact Assessment.

2 Background to Screening for Appropriate Assessment

2.1 European Designated Sites

Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are prime wildlife conservation areas in the country, considered to be important on a European as well as Irish level. SPAs and SACs are designated under EU Birds and Habitats Directives, transposed into Irish law by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011), as amended. Together these two designated site types for the Natura 2000 network; it is these sites that are of relevance to the Appropriate Assessment process.

All European Designated Sites (henceforth simply referred to as “Designated Sites”) that are connected to the proposed development were considered during the desktop study in order to assess the potential for significant effects upon their QIs and COs. This stage of the process is used to determine whether any of the Designated Sites can be regarded as not being relevant to the process of Appropriate Assessment of the project, having no potential to be significantly affected.

2.2 Legislative Context

The methodology for this screening statement is clearly set out in a document prepared for the Environment DG of the European Commission entitled ‘Assessment of plans and projects significantly affecting Natura 2000 sites: Methodological guidance on the provisions of Article 6 paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC’ (Oxford Brookes University, 2001). This report and contributory fieldwork were carried out in accordance with guidelines given by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009, amended February 2010).

The assessment process is given in Articles 6[3] and 6[4] of the Habitats Directive and is commonly referred to as “Appropriate Assessment” or AA.

Article 6 of the Habitats Directive sets out provisions which govern the conservation and management of Natura 2000 sites. Article 6[3] and 6[4] of the Habitats Directive set out the decision-making tests for plans and projects likely to affect Natura 2000 sites (Annex 1.1). Article 6[3] establishes the requirement for Appropriate Assessment:

“Any plan or project not directly connected with or necessary to the management of the [Natura 2000] site but likely to have a significant effect thereon, either individually or in combination with other plans and projects, shall be subjected to appropriate assessment of its implications for the site in view of the site’s conservation objectives. In light of the conclusions of the assessment of the implication for the site and subject to the provisions of paragraph 4, the competent national authorities shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned and, if appropriate, after having obtained the opinion of the general public.”

Article 6[4] continues:

“If, in spite of a negative assessment of the implications for the site and in the absence of alternative solutions, a plan or project must nevertheless be carried out for imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature, the Member State shall take all compensatory measures necessary to ensure that the overall coherence of Natura 2000 is protected. It shall inform the Commission of the compensatory measures adopted. Where the site concerned hosts a priority natural habitat type and/or a priority species the only considerations which may be raised are those relating to human health or public safety, to beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment or, further to an opinion from the Commission, to other imperative reasons of overriding public interest.

It is the responsibility of the proponent of the plan or project to provide the relevant information (ecological surveys, research, analysis etc.) for submission to the ‘competent national authority’. If satisfied that the information is complete and objective, the competent authority will use this information to screen the project, i.e. to determine if an AA is required and to carry out the AA, if one is deemed necessary. The competent authority shall agree to the plan or project only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned.”

The appropriate assessment process has four stages. Each stage determines whether a further stage in the process is required. If, for example, the conclusions at the end of Stage One are that there will be no

significant impacts on the Natura 2000 site, there is no requirement to proceed further. The four stages are:

1. Screening to determine if an appropriate assessment is required.
2. Appropriate Assessment
3. Consideration of alternative solutions
4. Imperative reasons of overriding public interest/derogation.

Stage 1: Screening for AA

This report provides a stage one Screening for Appropriate Assessment. It aims to establish whether the plan or project is directly connected with or necessary to the management of Designated Sites; or in view of best scientific knowledge, if the plan or project, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, is likely to have a significant effect on a Designated Site. This is done by examining the proposed plan or project and the COs of any Designated Sites that might potentially be affected.

The study is based on a preliminary impact assessment using both publicly available data and data collected during site surveys. This is followed by a determination of whether there is a risk that the effects identified could significantly impact any Natura 2000 sites, and if so an Appropriate Assessment (AA) is required. The need to apply the precautionary principle in making any key decisions in relation to the tests of AA has been confirmed by European Court of Justice case law. Therefore, where significant effects are likely, possible or uncertain at screening stage, a stage two AA will be required.

2.3 Relevant Case Law

The European Court of Justice has a considerable body of case law relating to the application of Articles 6(3) and 6(4) of the Directive; Table 1 below provides some of the rulings relevant to the current assessment.

Table 1. Relevant case-law from the European Court of Justice

Case	Ruling
People Over Wind and Sweetman v Coillte Teoranta (C-323/17)	The ruling of the CJEU in this case requires that any conclusion of ‘no Likely Significant Effect’ on a European site must be made prior to any consideration of measures to avoid or reduce harm to the European site. The determination of Likely Significant Effects should not, in the opinion of the CJEU, constitute an attempt at detailed technical analyses. This should be conducted as part of the AA.
Waddenzee (C-127/02)	The ruling in this case clarified that AA must be conducted using best scientific knowledge, and that there must be no reasonable scientific doubt in the conclusions drawn.

	<p>The Waddenzee ruling also provided clarity on the definition of ‘significant effect’, which would be any effect from a plan or project which is likely to undermine the conservation objectives of any European site.</p>
<p>Holohan and Others v An Bord Pleanála (C-461/17)</p>	<p>The conclusions of the Court in this case were that consideration must be given during AA to:</p> <p><i>effects on qualifying habitats and/or species of a SAC or SPA, even when occurring outside of the boundary of a European site, if these are relevant to the site meeting its conservation objectives;</i></p> <p><i>and,</i></p> <p>effects on non-qualifying habitats and/or species on which the qualifying habitats and/or species depend, and which could result in adverse effects on the integrity of the European site.</p>
<p>T.C Briels and Others v Minister van Infrastructuur en Milieu (C-521/12)</p>	<p>The ruling of the ECJ in this case determined that compensatory measures cannot be used to support a conclusion of no adverse effect on site integrity.</p>
<p>Eco Advocay CLG v An Bord Pleanála (C-721/21)</p>	<p>The ruling (preliminary) of the ECJ in this case related to a number of questions, regarding the requirement of the state to transparently state its reasoning when screening a project out at Stage 1, and importantly also the ability to consider mitigation that was built-in to the design of a project, i.e., ‘best practice’ to be considered at Stage 1 screening of a project.</p>

3 Methodology

3.1 Desk Study

A desktop study was carried out as part of this screening process to gain an understanding of the surrounding human and natural environments. This included a review of available data from a range of sources on the site and its immediate environs.

The following sources of data were employed:

- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Appropriate Assessment Tool.
- EPA Maps (to identify watercourses, hydrology and Natura 2000 site boundaries).
- NPWS protected species database and online mapping.
- The Geological Survey of Ireland hydrological and lidar data and map viewer
- The National Biodiversity Data Centre
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- An Bord Pleanála's online database

3.2 SPR Model

This assessment was carried out using the source-pathway-receptor (SPR) approach, a standard tool in environmental assessment. The SPR concept in ecological impact assessment relates to the idea that for the risk of an impact to occur, a source is needed (e.g., a development site); an environmental receptor is present (a lake); and finally, there must be a pathway between the source and the receptor (a watercourse linking the development site to the lake). Even though there might be a risk of an impact occurring, it does not necessarily mean that it will occur, and in the event that it does occur, it may not have significant effects on the receiving environment. Identification of a risk means that there is a possibility of ecological or environmental damage occurring, with the level and significance of the impact depending upon the nature and exposure to the risk and the characteristics of the receptor.

In this instance, the most relevant receptors are any relevant Natura 2000 sites with connectivity of the proposed works. These were considered during the desktop study stage of this screening assessment in order to assess the potential for significant effects upon their QIs and COs.

Establishment of the Zone of Influence of the project was evaluated following guidelines from the National Roads Authority (NRA, 2009) and CIEEM (2019). During the initial scoping of this report, a 15 km ZoI was applied for impact assessment. A conservative approach has been used, which minimises the risk of overlooking distant or obscure effect pathways, while also avoiding reliance on buffer zones within which all European sites should be considered. This approach assesses the complete list of all QIs/SCIs of European sites in Ireland (i.e., potential receptors), instead of listing European sites within buffer zones. This follows Irish departmental guidance on AA (DEHLG, 2010) which states:

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'For projects, the distance could be much less than 15 km, and in some cases less than 100m, but this must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis with reference to the nature, size and location of the project, and the sensitivities of the ecological receptors, and the potential for in combination effects.'

3.3 Screening Methodology

As discussed in Section 2.2, the methodology for this screening statement followed guidelines published by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (2009, amended February 2010) in the document *Appropriate Assessment of Plans and Projects in Ireland – Guidance for Planning Authorities*.

4 Screening of Designated Sites

4.1 Monaghan's Natural Heritage

NATURAL HERITAGE

County Monaghan has a rich natural heritage, particularly in relation to its wide range of natural and semi-natural habitats including wetland, woodland, hedgerow, lake, river and upland habitats that support a wide range of plant and animal species. These areas are in the main extremely sensitive and are susceptible to any change that affects the ecological balance.

As well as its intrinsic value, Monaghan's natural heritage or biodiversity provides services to the people of Monaghan, by providing water filtration (through wetlands), buffering of floods (floodplains along rivers, and wetlands acting as sponges and stores), soil fertility, and resources for angling and tourism. It also contributes to our landscape character.

In Co Monaghan there are 75 proposed Natural Heritage Areas comprising mainly of wetland habitats, lakes, rivers, marshes, fens, bogs and woodland. These are recognised by Monaghan County Council as important conservation areas, and are included in the County Development Plan.

The largest site in Monaghan is Eshbrack bog on Slieve Beagh, and known to many as Bragan, and the main habitat there is blanket bog. This site has recently been designated as a Natural Heritage Area, which provides it with full legal protection, against any adverse impacts. It is also been considered as a Special Protection Area (SPA) for birds because of the population of Hen Harriers that occur there. It is also important for the Greenland White-fronted goose which use it as a wintering ground, and for the Red Grouse, one of our native game species. Curlew, snipe, golden plover and the buzzard is a common sight hunting over the moor.

Kilrooskey Lough, just north of Clones is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) under the Habitats Directive solely for the protection of the White-clawed Crayfish, an invertebrate species, whose survival relies on

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unpolluted water. The quality of the water in Co Monaghan does pose a challenge to all concerned. It should be recognised that water is a habitat in its own right for a lot of species.

Monaghan is one of Ireland's premier angling locations and this is reflected in its reputation for coarse and pike fishing, its fine game angling river stretches and its wild brown trout populations. The fisheries of County Monaghan comprise of many major river systems and their associated lakes.

The Erne catchment, comprising the Dromore River, the Finn River and the Bunnoe River systems dominate the north of the county. To the east lies the Blackwater system and to the south, the Fane and Glyde system can be found. The Ulster Blackwater and its tributaries the Monaghan Blackwater and Mountain Water Rivers contain good stocks of Brown Trout. It is also worth noting that these rivers also contain native white clawed crayfish, an internationally protected species. The Rivers Fane and Glyde contain Brown Trout and Salmon in County Monaghan. Both rivers also have good numbers of Sea Trout in their lower reaches in County Louth. The Bragan Mountain lakes, Lough More and Lough Emy contain good numbers of Brown Trout. The lamprey, a species dating back to our glacial past is also present in many lakes and rivers. This is also an internationally important and protected species. Most lakes and rivers have good stocks of bream, roach, rudd, perch and pike. Eels are present in all waters in the county.

Like all freshwater surface water in Ireland, Monaghan's lakes and rivers are under threat from multiple sources – agricultural and industrial pollution continues to play a huge part in the continuing deterioration of water quality in the county. Loss of vital wetland habitat and increased pressure from construction developments are also critical factors.

Monaghan has a rich network of natural heritage sites including rivers, wetlands, woodlands, lakes, and bogs which support a diversity of habitat types and provide homes and niches for many wildlife species. It is important to consider natural heritage as all around us and not confined to a few protected sites. In order to remain healthy, nature needs to be treated sensitively and considered in land use decisions both within and outside "nature sites". This is because nature operates within a connected system. Lakes can be connected to each other or to wetlands via groundwater or surface streams. Woodland sites may depend on connections and corridors linked through hedgerows.

WETLANDS

County Monaghan contains a wide range of wetlands and their associated species, of high international and national importance. Due to the varying topography, hydrology, climate and soils present Monaghan has wetland habitats ranging from degraded cutover raised bogs, blanket bogs, fens, marshes, large riverine systems, an abundance and variety of lakes, springs, wet woodlands and many more. Monaghan contains some of the finest examples of transition mire fens and mesotrophic inter drumlin lakes that occur in Ireland.

4.2 Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030

The Action Plan for Outdoor Recreation in County Monaghan was informed by and mandated under the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy, *Embracing Ireland's Outdoors 2023-2027*. The priority for outdoor recreation in County Monaghan over the next five years is to develop sustainable, local and inclusive experiences through community involvement and stakeholder collaboration. The goals of the Plan will be realised through 42 actions set out in six strategic pillars:

- Leadership and Collaboration
- Environment and Heritage
- Access and Infrastructure
- Awareness
- Opportunities
- Expertise

4.2.1 Pillar One: Leadership and Collaboration

Our ambition is to ensure that those involved directly or indirectly in outdoor recreation work together in a supportive and collaborative way to provide a seamless approach across the county to outdoor recreation.

Table 2. Actions under Pillar One: Leadership and Collaboration

No.	Action
1.1	Secure the funding to appoint a County Outdoor Recreation Officer (CORO) to lead and coordinate the County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) and Stakeholder Forum and drive forward the implementation of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP). In the absence of a dedicated post in the short term, this responsibility will of necessity be spread among relevant council staff, with oversight from the Tourism Unit.
1.2	Expand the membership of the current CORP's Steering Group i.e. sub-group of the Council's Tourism and Recreation Forum, to deliver the role of the County Outdoor Recreation Committee (CORC) and ensure a coordinated approach to the management and development of outdoor recreation going forward.
1.3	Establish a Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Stakeholder Forum to allow wider stakeholder representation in decision-making
1.4	Appoint a full time Rural Recreation Officer (RRO) to manage the Walks Scheme and develop future walking opportunities.
1.5	Develop a facilities database which feeds the proposed digital interactive map resource and includes detailed information on all outdoor recreation sites across the county including; land ownership, infrastructure, visitor services, organisation responsible for the on-going management and maintenance etc. Review and update annually as a minimum to ensure information is complete and accurate.
1.6	Maximise knowledge of and access to all possible funding opportunities.

1.7	Undertake a mid-term review of the County Outdoor Recreation Plan to assess whether actions require modification, given the dynamic nature of outdoor recreation.
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4.2.2 Pillar Two: Environment and Heritage

To ensure the integrity of Monaghan's environment and heritage is not compromised moving forward, environment and biodiversity considerations will be woven into the fabric of all future recreation development.

Table 3. Actions under Pillar Two: Environment and Heritage

No.	Action
2.1	Deliver on the environmental recommendations within the Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024) which included upgrades to existing trails to manage erosion as well as biodiversity enhancements on new and existing trails such as restoration of upland blanket bog through peat dams, red squirrel boxes etc.
2.2	Incorporate sustainability, environmental education and biodiversity enhancements into all future recreation projects where possible e.g.. planting native trees, interpretation on flora and fauna, installation of bird boxes etc.
2.3	Identify gaps in the public transport provision to enhance connectivity and accessibility to key outdoor recreation sites and ensure public transport information is provided when new sites are being developed and promoted.
2.4	Continue to carry out water quality testing of 'non-designated bathing waters' and disseminate the results along with education and responsible use messaging through the appropriate channels. Scope the potential to develop one key site as a 'designated bathing water'.

4.2.3 Pillar Three: Access and Infrastructure

Our ambition is to deliver high quality, accessible, enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences across the county, supported by visitor servicing facilities where appropriate, for both local people and visitors.

Table 4. Actions under Pillar Three: Access and Infrastructure

No.	Action
3.1	Establish Sliabh Beagh as an eco-tourism destination by delivering the outdoor recreation recommendations included within the Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024).
3.2	Continue to support the development of the visitor experience at Rossmore Forest Park.
3.3	Implement the relevant outdoor recreation recommendations within the Lough Muckno

	Masterplan currently under preparation (2025-2026).
3.4	Develop the Convent Lands in Monaghan town as a recreational hub.
3.5	Review existing outdoor recreation provision and carry out an Analysis and Opportunities Study for Hollywood Park, looking at the site holistically with a focus on delivering quality recreational facilities, accessibility and connections into local communities and settlements.
3.6	Support the on-going development of the Ulster Canal navigation and towpath between Clones and Castle Saunderson to provide water recreation opportunities and a safe and accessible off-road path suitable for walkers, cyclists and those with limited mobility, visual impairment etc.
3.7	Support the on-going development of the Ulster Canal Greenway from Clones to the county Armagh border and through this process identify the potential to develop links between communities and green or blue spaces.
3.8	Pilot the Rothar Road or 'quiet road' between Ballinode and Scotstown to provide safe walking and cycling provision and if deemed successful, replicate the concept across the county to connect communities to green or blues spaces where appropriate.
3.9	Encourage and support communities to identify, develop, manage and maintain outdoor recreation facilities in their locality, focusing on those with poor access to off-road walking opportunities.
3.10	Agree land transfer and deliver on the recommendations within the Annaghmakerrig Masterplan to develop parking, trail around lake perimeter and angling stands
3.11	Complete the development of Gallows Hill Greenspace Masterplan, Creevy Lough Recreational Masterplan, and the Convent Lands Landscape Concept Masterplan and subsequently, subject to securing necessary funding, implement the interventions identified in these Plans.
3.12	Identify opportunities for developing a 'family cycling trail' within Dartrey Forest which utilises the existing forest roads and complements the existing recreation provision.
3.13	Develop an Analysis and Opportunities Plan for Castleshane Forest which considers parking, trails, signage, interpretation, waymarking and trail animation and implement the recommendations of this Plan.
3.14	Develop a concept design for a 'blue grade flow mountain bike trail and pump track' within Mullaghmatt Forest outside Monaghan town which supports off-road skill progression and introduces people of all ages and abilities to mountain biking.
3.15	Carry out a Scoping Study to explore taking the Monaghan Way from Castleblayney to Mullash offroad and developing local looped walks.
3.16	Secure planning permission for the development/enhancement of the necessary access/egress points required to develop the Dromore River Blueway. Once established, promote and activate through MSP programmes, activity providers, equipment hire etc. and consider linkages with existing and newly developed trails in the vicinity.

3.17	Develop an Analysis and Opportunities Plan for key water recreation sites including ‘nondesignated bathing waters’, rivers and lakes used for outdoor swimming paddlesports, and ‘species specific’ premier coarse fisheries. Deliver on the recommendations within this Plan to maximise the potential for water recreation across the county for both locals and visitors.
3.18	Ensure future outdoor recreation projects, where possible, meet accessibility standards for all, giving due consideration to national guidance documents.

4.2.4 Pillar Four: Awareness

Our ambition is to create a coordinated and consistent approach to marketing and promoting all the recreation opportunities that Monaghan has to offer.

Table 5. Actions under Pillar Four: Awareness

No.	Action
4.1	Develop an interactive digital map detailing all recreation sites and trails across the county and embed within the Monaghan Tourism website to make it easier for locals and visitors to orientate themselves and support the continued development of the Get Ireland Active national digital database as an action in the National Sports Policy.
4.2	Increase the promotion and marketing of all outdoor recreation opportunities to both locals and visitors on appropriate platforms including targeted social media campaigns.
4.3	Seek Sport Ireland accreditation for all walking, cycling and water trails to allow inclusion and promotion on the Sport Ireland National Trails Register and Get Ireland Active Database.
4.4	Support the roll out of the national ‘Responsible Use of the Outdoors’ campaign at a local level and integrate national messaging into all relevant communication.

4.2.5 Pillar Five: Opportunities

Our ambition is to ensure that as many local people as possible across Monaghan have the opportunity to enjoy its outdoor spaces and avail of the many benefits from doing so. We want to encourage and increase participation from those local groups that are currently under-represented.

Table 6. Actions under Pillar Five: Opportunities

No.	Action
5.1	Through leadership and skills-based education and training in walking, cycling, outdoor swimming and orienteering etc. increase the capacity within communities to deliver and participate in outdoor recreation.
5.2	Facilitate community participation in outdoor recreation for all including under-represented groups such as ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older adults, unemployed, women

	and girls and young people through the delivery of local programming and national initiatives such as 'HER Outdoors' etc.
5.3	Engage young children in nature through natural play and adventure and support national initiatives such 'National Play Day'.
5.4	Support national participation programmes and initiatives such as the Women in Sport programme, Urban Outdoor Adventure Initiative, and the Get Ireland Walking, Get Ireland Cycling, Get Ireland Running and Get Ireland Swimming Initiatives and, subject to funding, give due consideration to the recruitment of Activation / Development Officers associated with these strategies.
5.5	Subject to funding for cross-border "Walking for All" project, recruit a WFA officer and roll out the 3-year programme.
5.6	Support and facilitate initiatives that focus on improved mental health and wellbeing as a result of physical activity in 'green' spaces and outdoor areas e.g. Woodlands for Health and other nature based programmes.
5.7	Support town teams, businesses and the community to develop outdoor recreation opportunities and supporting visitor services e.g. community trails, equipment hire, accommodation, motorhome/camping facilities etc.

4.2.6 Pillar Six: Expertise

The development of this Plan presents an opportunity to improve skills and knowledge in planning, developing and maintaining trails and outdoor recreation facilities to ensure sustainable recreation opportunities are developed.

Table 7. Actions under Pillar Six: Expertise

No.	Action
6.1	Include visitor monitoring as part of all future outdoor recreation development to understand usage, help target promotion and support funding of development and maintenance costs and share this information with the County Outdoor Recreation Committee.
6.2	Follow national guidelines and best practice in relation to sustainable outdoor recreation development and management, implementing Sustainable Development Goals and availing of training led by Sport Ireland and other experts in the field.

4.3 Natura 2000 Sites

All European sites within or adjacent to the boundaries of Co. Monaghan were considered as part of this screening exercise. Following the methodology given above in Section 3.2, the relevant sites are listed below in Figure 1 and Table 8.

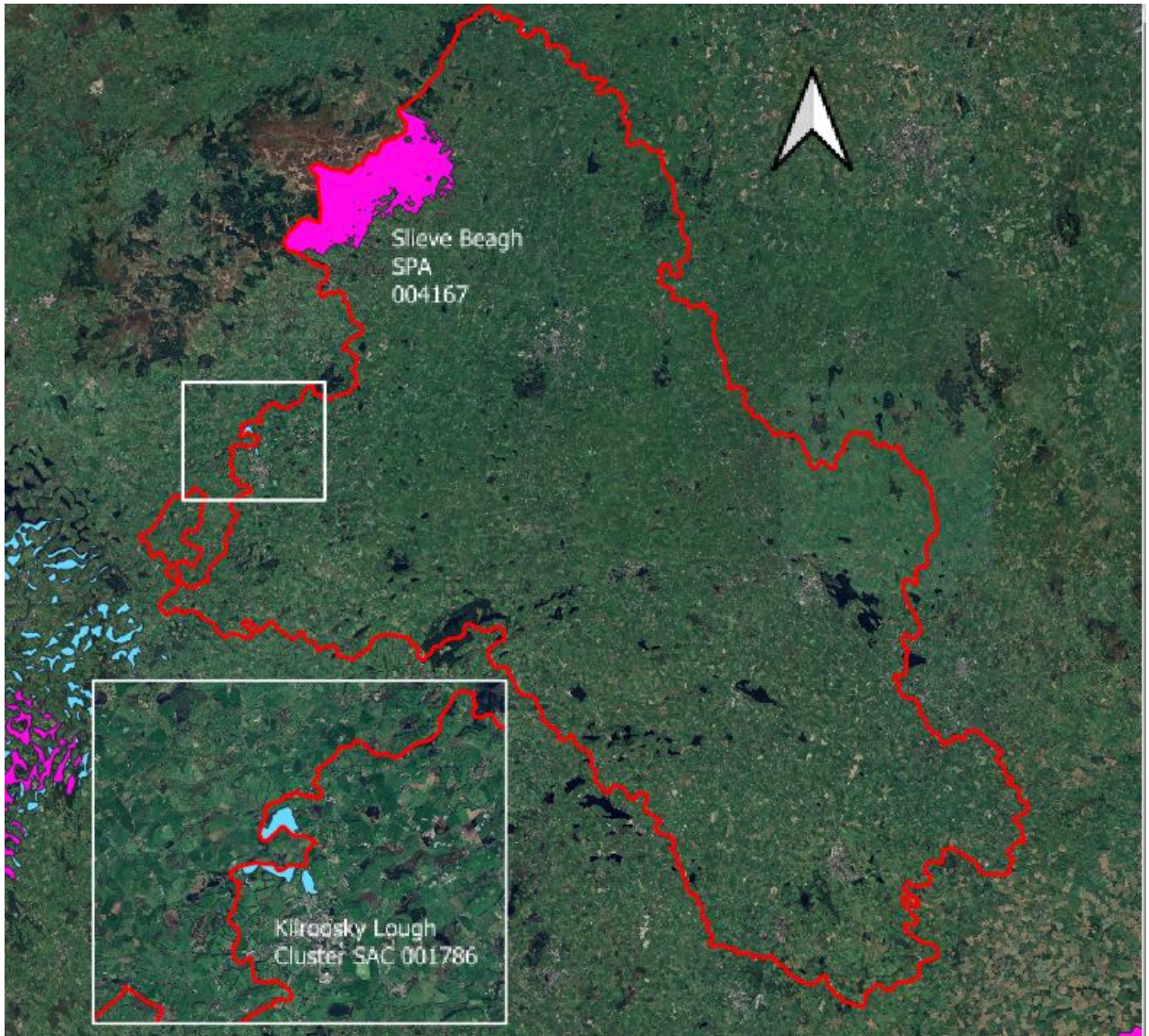


Figure 1. European Sites in County Monaghan

Table 8. Assessment of Natura 2000 sites within the zone of influence of the proposed works.

Site	Qualifying Interests	Screening Assessment	Potential for significant impact
Slieve Beagh SPA 004167	Hen Harrier (Circus cyaneus) [A082]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many of the proposed actions involve strategic management, capacity-building, funding, and auditing of existing infrastructure, all of which could be considered to have a neutral effect on the environment. 	No
Kilroosky Lough Cluster SAC 001786	Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp. [3140] Calcareous fens with Cladium mariscus and species of the Caricion davallianae [7210] Alkaline fens [7230] Austropotamo bius pallipes (White-clawed Crayfish) [1092]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actions 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 promote awareness of and centre the environment in future development considerations, which will have a positive/neutral impact on the use of the natural heritage of the county. • The actions under Pillar 3 and Pillar 4 in promoting the use of the outdoors and outdoor recreations sites may intensify the use of these areas into the future. With the exception of the <i>Kilroosky Lough Cluster SAC</i>, these activities do not take place within the zone of influence of any European Site. There is unlikely to be a significant negative interaction between watersports activities that are currently undertaken or may be undertaken in the future on the Kilroosky Loughs and the European Site, given the nature and scale of those activities and the nature of the qualifying interests of the Site, particularly in light of the actions under Pillar Two. • Actions 2.1 and 3.1 refer to the implementation of Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024) which required an NIS wherein possible mitigation measures were identified and deemed suitable, therefore if these measures are incorporated, these actions will not have a significant impact. • In order to be realised, any Projects explored in this Plan will have to comply with the requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, where necessary, that form part of the statutory decision-making and consent framework, of which this Plan is not part and does not contribute towards. Therefore, this Plan does not introduce any additional sources for effects which have not already been considered by the existing planning framework and associated Appropriate Assessment processes. 	No

5 Article 6(3) Screening Assessment

This section of the report focuses solely on the potential for the proposed works to impact upon Natura 2000 sites. The European Commission has set guidelines for the assessment of a project’s potential to impact on a designated site (EC, 2001). The consideration of this project in this context is detailed below. The following sites are under consideration in this statement:

- *Slieve Beagh SPA 004167*
- *Kilroosky Lough Cluster SAC 001786*

5.1 Article 6(3) Assessment Criteria

5.1.1 Description of the individual elements of the Plan likely to give rise to impacts on the Natura 2000 sites.

Many of the proposed actions involve strategic management, capacity-building, funding, and auditing of existing infrastructure, all of which could be considered to have a neutral effect on the environment.

Actions 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4 promote awareness of and centre the environment in future development considerations, which will have a positive/neutral impact on the use of the natural heritage of the county.

The actions under Pillar 3 and Pillar 4 in promoting the use of the outdoors and outdoor recreations sites may intensify the use of these areas into the future. With the exception of the *Kilroosky Lough Cluster SAC*, these activities do not take place within the zone of influence of any European Site. There is unlikely to be a significant negative interaction between watersports activities that are currently undertaken or may be undertaken in the future on the Kilroosky Loughs and the European Site, given the nature and scale of those activities and the nature of the qualifying interests of the Site, particularly in light of the actions under Pillar Two.

Actions 2.1 and 3.1 refer to the implementation of Sliabh Beagh Ecotourism Feasibility Study Report (2024) which required a NIS wherein possible mitigation measures were identified and deemed suitable, therefore if these measures are incorporated, these actions will not have a significant impact.

In order to be realised, any Projects explored in this Plan will have to comply with the requirements for lower-tier Appropriate Assessment, where necessary, that form part of the statutory decision-making and consent framework, of which this Plan is not part and does not contribute towards. Therefore, this Plan

does not introduce any additional sources for effects which have not already been considered by the existing planning framework and associated Appropriate Assessment processes.

5.1.2 Description of any likely direct, indirect, or secondary impacts of the project on the Natura2000 sites

Any likely direct, indirect or secondary impacts of the proposal, both alone and in-combination with other plans or projects, on the designated sites by virtue of the following criteria: size and scale, land take, distance from the Natura 2000 site or key feature thereof, resource requirements, emissions, excavation requirements, transportation requirements and duration of construction, operational and decommissioning phases of the works are detailed in the table below (Table 9).

Table 9. Assessment of likely impacts on any European Site.

Assessment of Likely Impacts	
Size and scale	Projects will be dispersed throughout the county and will be small of scale relative to any relevant European Site.
Land take	No framework is provided for any infrastructural development within this Plan.
Distance from Natura 2000 site or key features of the site	Various; projects will be dispersed throughout the county.
Resource requirements	No materials for construction will be sourced from within any Natura 2000 site. No water will be abstracted from the site during the construction or operation of the site.
Emissions	No framework is provided for any infrastructural development within this Plan.
Excavation requirements	No excavation of material or landscaping will take place within the boundary of any European site.
Transportation requirements	No access requirements are necessary for the proposed projects that will impact upon any Natura 2000 site.
Duration of construction, operation, decommissioning	Not known at time of writing.
Timing of works	Not known at time of writing.
Cumulative or In-combination Impacts with other Projects and Plans	The majority of the actions laid out in the Plan will result in neutral impacts on the environment. No framework for infrastructural development is laid out in the Plan. Any increase in activities within the boundary of the European Site are not expected to

	<p>result in any negative effects, given the nature of the activities and the nature of the relevant qualifying interests. Wherein possible plans are seen to impact European Sites a prior NIS of the specific has been carried out and mitigation measures have been identified. No in-combination effects that might result from the adoption of this Plan are considered to be likely.</p>
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5.1.3 Description of any Likely Changes to the Natura 2000 sites

Any likely changes to the Natura 2000 sites are described in the table below (Table 10) with reference to the following criteria: reduction of habitat area, disturbance to key species, habitat or species fragmentation, reduction in species density, changes in key indicators of conservation value and climate change.

Table 10. Likely changes to any European Site

Assessment of Likely Changes	
Reduction of habitat area	No works take place within any European Site.
Disturbance of key species	No species associated with any European site will be disturbed by the proposed works.
Habitat or species fragmentation	No habitat within any European site, or that any species associated with any European site will be fragmented.
Reduction in species density	No reduction in the density of any species associated with any European site will be reduced.
Changes in key indicators of conservation value	No impact on any key indicators of value associated with any Natura 2000 site is considered likely.
Climate change	No damage to any Natura 2000 site as a result of or in combination with enhanced climate change is predicted as a result of the proposed development.

5.1.4 Likelihood of interference with the key relationships that define the structure and functions of the Natura 2000 site as a whole.

It is considered that there will be no interference with the key relationships that define the structure and functions of any Natura 2000 site. As noted above, no changes in water quality or habitat that could impact any European Site are considered likely.

5.1.5 Indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects

Indicators of significance as a result of the identification of effects are set out below in terms of loss, fragmentation, disruption, disturbance and changes to the key elements of the site (Table 11).

Table 11. Indicators of significance of impact to any European Site

Indicators of Significance	
Loss	No habitat will be lost as a result of the proposed works.
Fragmentation	No habitat fragmentation to any Natura 2000 sites is predicted.
Disruption	No risk of disruption to any Natura 2000 site is predicted, due to the nature and scale of the proposed works.
Disturbance	No risk of disturbance to any Natura 2000 site is predicted, due to the nature and scale of the proposed works.
Change to key elements of site (e.g., water quality etc.)	No potential for change to the key elements of any European site exists due to the scale, nature of, connectivity or distance to any European Site

5.1.6 Description of any likely significant impacts or indeterminate impacts of the plan on the Natura 2000 site

Based on a consideration of the likely or potential impacts arising from the proposed works and a review of their significance in terms of the conservation interests of the European Sites named above, it is considered that the project does not have the potential to impact any European site significantly negatively.

6 Screening Conclusions

This report presents the information for the relevant authority, Monaghan County Council, to carry out a screening for AA. A recommendation that a stage II is/is not required is made below, based on the findings of this assessment. It is for the relevant authority to reach one of the following conclusions:

- (i) A stage II AA of the proposed development is required if it *cannot* be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European Designated Sites.
- (ii) A stage II AA of the proposed development is not required if it *can* be excluded, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not have a significant effect on any European Designated Sites.

Name of project or plan: Monaghan Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2030

Name and location of Natura 2000 sites:

- *Slieve Beagh SPA 004167*
- *Kilroosky Lough Cluster SAC 001786*

Description of project or plan: A proposal of 42 actions which are aimed at promoting, maintaining and sustaining outdoor recreational activities within County Monaghan

Is the project or plan directly connected with or necessary for the management of the site? The plan is not directly connected with or necessary for the management of any Natura 2000 sites.

Are there other projects or plans that together with the project or plan being assessed could affect the site (provide details)? The majority of the 42 actions laid out in the Plan will result in neutral or slightly positive impacts on the environment. No infrastructural development is mandated by the Plan; potential projects that are explored under the Plan will not take place within the boundary of any European Site. No in-combination effects that might result from the adoption of this Plan are considered to be likely.

Describe how the project or plan (alone or in combination) is likely to affect the Natura 2000 site:
No negative impacts on any Natura 2000 site are predicted.

In conclusion, no impacts are likely as a result of the proposal on the conservation objectives or overall integrity of the above-named European Sites due to the scale and nature of the works, lack of connectivity or distance to any European site.

It is therefore recommended that at this stage of the proposal that Stage 2 Appropriate Assessment is not required, and the project is screened out.

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Monaghan County Council

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