



MID PROJECT REPORT

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Connecting Communities with Peatlands

Mid-Project Report

Introduction

Connecting Communities with Peatlands (CCWP) is a Just Transition Funded project led by Irish Rural Link (IRL) and the Community Wetlands Forum (CWF) that aims to provide community transitioning supports to community groups across Ireland's Midlands. The project remit spans eight counties: Kildare, Westmeath, Laois, Offaly, Longford, Roscommon, North Tipperary, and East Galway.



Figure 1 Project remit

There were initial delays to the project due to Covid-19 and other administrative challenges. Therefore, the project plan is behind by six months. A project coordinator was hired in July 2021. The project was officially launched in October 2021 by the Just Transition Commissioner Kieran Mulvey in Pollagh, Co. Offaly. The project coordinator held training needs assessment workshops across the wider Midlands to identify the training needs of peatland community groups. The 'Training Needs Assessment Workshops: evaluation and findings' report has acted as a guideline for the delivery of capacity-building

training for communities in 2022 thus far.

This document is an overview of the work completed to date of the Connecting Communities with Peatlands project, covering quarters one and two of 2022.



Launch Connecting Communities with Peatlands, Pollagh, Co. Offaly

Targets

As mentioned in the introduction, the project was delayed until the project coordinator was hired in July 2021. The project coordinator has been working to meet the targets of the project but remains

six months behind the initial agreed project plan. The table below portrays the original project plan deliverables and target dates alongside the date that this target was actually met.

| Deliverables 2021 | Project Plan Target Date | Actual date |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Launch event | 1st Week February 2021 | 18 October 2021 |
| JT Project Action Plan for 2nd Semester 2021 | 30 June 2021 | 31 August 2021 |
| Report/summary document on engaged communities and respective needs | 31 May 2021 | 30 December 2021 |
| 8 Regional Information/Events | 31 May 2021 | 30 December 2021 |
| Deliverables 2022 | | |
| 8 regional/ cluster or individual community workshops | 31 November 2021 | 30 June 2022 |
| 3 General training/capacity-building workshops | 30 November 2021 | 30 June 2022 |
| 2-3 Clusters of community groups | 30 November 2021 | 30 June 2022 |
| JT Project Review Report 2021 | 31 December 2021 | 31 August 2022 |
| JT Action Plan for 1st Semester 2022 | 31 December 2021 | 30 June 2022 |
| Capacity-building/Training Plan for 2022 | 31 December 2021 | 31 August 2022 |

Table 1

The project is due to be complete by year end 2023 however the delays to the commencement of the project must be factored into the feasibility of achieving time-bound targets. As the delays occurred through no fault of the project partners or coordinator, we hope that a time extension in 2024 will be granted to ensure that the project can be delivered in its entirety.

Further details of the events, trainings and workshops are described in this report.

Community Engagement/membership

Engagement

The project has successfully engaged with a number of community groups inside and outside of the CWF, as well as other stakeholders mentioned in the section 'Connections and Collaborations'. We continue to engage with community groups who are not members of the CWF and meet with them to give them advice on their peatland journey. We have a dedicated mailing list for the project to keep communities, individuals and other stakeholders up to date on our events, trainings and information.

The number of individuals that have engaged with the project is estimated from registration numbers for training and workshop events, the number of groups who applied to the PCES, the number of views of the Build Your Bog Knowledge webinar series on YouTube, and the number of people on our mailing list.

| <i>Training/workshop</i> | <i>Numbers registered</i> |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Launch Connecting Communities with Peatlands | 65 |
| Empowering Communities to Connect with Peatlands training needs assessment workshops | 73 |
| Conflict Resolution Training | 8 |
| Leave No Trace Certified Awareness Course | 5 |
| Build Your Bog Knowledge Webinar Series | 323 |
| Plant Identification Field Trip | 12 |
| Ideas Generation workshops | 58 |
| Mentors training | 5 |
| Pilot Mentoring Programme Participants | 5 |
| <i>Mailing List</i> | 134 |
| <i>Peatland Community Engagement Scheme</i> | <i>Number of Applicants</i> |
| Successful applications to PCES | 3 |
| <i>Build Your Bog Knowledge Series</i> | <i>Number of YouTube Views</i> |
| Total views of five webinars | 398 |
| TOTAL | 1,089 |

Table 2

Membership

Membership of the CWF has increased since the launch of the project. Eight community groups from inside the Just Transition remit have joined the network since 2021, from counties Kildare, Laois, Offaly, and Westmeath.

A number of stakeholders have expressed interest in joining the CWF. Leave No Trace is the most recent stakeholder join and a number of Heritage Officers have expressed an interest in joining the CWF formally.

Capacity Building training/workshops

The project has met its targets by delivering three capacity building trainings in person and online, a five-part training in the form of an online webinar series, and one workshop on funding access.



Leave Not Trace training, Scohaboy Bog, Co. Tipperary. Credit: Leave No Trace

Leave No Trace Certified Awareness Course

The project collaborated with Leave No Trace, an environmental non-governmental organisation, to educate participants on responsible outdoor recreation on the bogs. Bogs are home to many protected plant and animal species and must be protected to ensure that the bogs are conserved to ensure this protection. Bogs are beginning to become recreational spaces for people and communities – and it is important to community leaders how they can protect the bog while enjoying its unique beauty. This

training falls under stream one of the Training Framework.

Leave No Trace delivered their Leave No Trace awareness course on Scohaboy bog on 2nd April. Nine people registered for the training and five participated in the training and were awarded certificates of completion.

Conflict Resolution training

A conflict resolution training programme was designed and delivered by Arc Mediation. Arc Mediation is a mediation service that works with families, workplaces, communities and businesses.

The project coordinator worked closely with Arc Mediation to develop a relevant conflict resolution training programme for peatland community groups. The training took place online over four half days. Participants learned the theory of conflict resolution and put it into practice with role plays based on real scenarios. In the last session, a guest speaker was invited to tell their story of developing the Waterford Greenway. Participants could ask questions and learn from the speaker's experience and get advice on how to manage conflict in a large project such as that.

Nine people registered for the training and eight participated. Participants said that they found the training useful,

Having been involved in community organisations for over 30 years I think this training should be available wider and deeper to those involved in groups.

Four people responded to the feedback survey. The majority said that the training exceeded their expectations and rated the training 4.5 stars out of 5.

Participants found the approach of the facilitators and role-play to be the most beneficial aspect of the training programme,

The constructive critique on the role play...was invaluable.

The approach taken suited my learning style (learn by doing). The scenarios put me outside my comfort zone which greatly enhanced the learning for me.

Participants also feel more empowered to handle conflicts that may arise in their community,

It has given me a little more confidence to tackle the thorny issues

Even in a voluntary capacity it is good to reflect on how we manage meetings especially as chairpersons in situations where conflict is involved. The importance of active listening to all sides of the story was emphasised and how to work towards resolution was well explored

The overwhelming positive feedback to the conflict resolution training indicates to us that the training should be provided again for more participants to avail of it.

Build Your Bog Knowledge Webinar Series

We delivered Stream One of the training framework via a webinar series titled 'Build Your Bog Knowledge'.

Each webinar had a different theme with three contributors who presented for fifteen minutes each, followed by a Q&A session at the end for answering audience questions and discussing further. The aim of the webinar series was to make learning about the bog in terms of ecology, biodiversity, heritage and community engagement accessible to community groups, and empower them with knowledge.

Our contributors were experienced people in their field. We had speakers from Irish Peatlands Conservation Council (IPCC), National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Wetland Surveys Ireland, FarmPeat, as well as ecologists, community leaders, artists, and archaeologists.

The webinars subjects were:

- What is a bog?
- Plants and animals of the bog
- Peatlands and Culture
- Rejuvenating the bogs
- People and the bogs



Animals of the bog presentation by Denise O'Meara

The webinars were recorded and are available on the CCWP YouTube channel as an online information resource. 323 people registered for the webinar series, and attendance was between 30-40 people at each webinar.

19 people responded to our feedback survey and rated the webinar series 4.6/5 stars. Participants enjoyed the series and would like for another one to be developed on other bog related topics,

Probably the best series of webinars I have ever attended. Extremely well done, brilliant speakers, well-illustrated, very informative & fulfilled their role both as education & interest talks covering such diverse & relevant topics. Really, really look forward to the next series.

Participants found the webinar accessible as well,

I liked the depth of the presentations. It wasn't 'dumbed down' but remained accessible. Overall very good series.

Participants also expressed how the webinar has empowered them to do more for their local bog,

I absolutely loved this series. I learned so much that will help me in being able to do right by the whole ecosystem of bogs.

Participants indicated that they would like another webinar series. In the feedback form topics were listed and respondents chose what topics they would like to have in another series. This will inform the content of the next webinar.

Plant Identification field trip

The plant identification field trip was an add-on to the Build Your Bog Knowledge webinar series so as to include an in-person, practical element to Stream One.

Dr. George Smith, a botanist who contributed to webinar two of the series, facilitated the field trip on Cloncrow Bog, Tyrellspass. Dr. Smith guided a group of fifteen participants through the high and cutover bog, identifying plant species along the way which also help to indicate the ecological status of the bog.

Participants found the field trip interesting, and said it helped to build their ability to identify plants on the bog, and to understand why and where certain species grow and thrive.



Plant identification training, Cloncrow Bog, Co. Westmeath. Credit: Eugene Dunbar

Many of the participants were from communities in the midlands that the project had not engaged with before. It helped us to connect with groups new to engaging with peatlands, and it also let them network with other members of community groups who have more experience.

PCES information webinar

The project hosted an information webinar on the Peatland Community Engagement Scheme (PCES) with NPWS and CWF members

Susanne McNally from NPWS presented the PCES information and application process to the audience, followed by presentations from Community Wetlands Forum members who had successful applications last year.

The webinar empowered and encouraged community groups that we started to engage with through CCWP to apply for PCES funding. Four community groups applied for PCES funding and were successful, though one group is outside of the project area remit.

Milltownpass Tidy Towns have received funding to install bat boxes on Milltownpass bog and the Carbury Bog Trust Committee have received funding for community tours and walks on Knockcurr bog. The Clara Bog and Heritage Society were also granted funding for a community Solstice event on Clara Bog.

This webinar also allowed for community groups to network and learn from one another. The presentations from previous successful applicants inspired community groups, and showed them what is possible for their bogs and communities.

Pilot Mentoring Programme

Mentoring was not included in the original project action plan. Alterations were made to the plan with the permission of the Department of Environment, Climate Action and Communication. The pilot mentoring programme has allowed the programme to deliver capacity building training to mentors. It is also hoped that it will lead mentees to carry out feasibility studies.

The possibility of a pilot mentoring programme was explored in January 2022 to build on the peer-peer learning championed by the CWF. Community groups within the CWF already share knowledge, expertise, skills, research, and best practice with one another, however some community groups that are more recently engaging with their local peatland need more formalised guidance to achieve their goals and outcomes.

Office Training Solutions (OTS) was approached in February to give advice regarding the establishment of a mentor programme and with their professional experience aided in the design of the pilot.

The pilot was initially limited to six mentors and six mentees, however that is now reduced to five as one mentor could not commit to the process for personal reasons. The mentoring programme will run for six months.

A call for mentors was put out to the more established groups of the CWF. Mentors completed a short application form and questionnaire. Mentors were selected based on their knowledge, skill set, and community experience.

In June, the mentors participated in a one-day mentor training with OTS. The training was designed around the participants' experiences and questionnaire responses.

In the same month, a call was put out for mentees for the programme. Mentees are required to complete an application form. Mentees must have a goal or outcome they want to achieve. They are then selected and choose their mentor in order of preference using a mentor profile document. Mentees are then matched with a mentor based on their needs. At the time of writing, three applications have been received and two community groups have expressed an interest.

In July, mentees and mentors will be matched and the mentoring programme will officially begin. Mentors are required to meet with their mentees at least twice over the six-month period. They will receive a €120 stipend to cover travel and expenditure for each meeting. It is up to mentors and mentees to establish communication or meetings outside of this. The mentor's role is to help the mentee to achieve a goal or outcome relating to their local bog.

Regional Events

Ideas Generation workshops

Ideas generation workshops were organised for community groups in each county of the project remit. Ice-cream Architecture, a design thinking company based in Scotland, was hired to facilitate the workshops. Ice-cream Architecture have a reputation in Ireland for working with community groups and peatland communities through the Innovating Communities project and in the development of the Monaghan Wetlands Network.

Transition projects can be an overwhelming challenge for local communities and often communities lack cohesion and imagination to develop a project in this space. Using Design Thinking in the Connecting Communities with Peatlands programme will teach and support learners in the design-thinking process which is used by the most successful companies in the world including Apple, Netflix and Google. Design thinking is for everyone and is ideal for collaborative community development. It lays out a clear path for people to follow and encourages a positive mind set so people can learn about each other and their needs.

Workshops were held online to facilitate easier access and to reduce time and travel commitment of participants. The workshops aimed to support community groups to develop project ideas relating to their bogs.

Eight ideas generation workshops took place over the month of June with varied uptake and participation from each county. A summary document was completed by the facilitator at the end of each workshop which was circulated to participants and those who registered but could not attend.

At the end of the series of workshops, Ice-cream Architecture compiled a summary of ideas and themes that developed over the course of the workshops (Figure 2).

The results of the workshops have had many benefits:

- It has helped us to identify community groups that are not already engaged with the project or the CWF
- It has allowed people/communities in the same county to network with one another
- It has provided the project coordinator with an insight into communities' needs, and their feelings toward the Just Transition process
- It has helped to identify community barriers to action
- Numerous project ideas to support communities with or to follow up on with community groups



Plant identification training, Cloncrow Bog, Co. Westmeath. Credit: Eugene Dunbar

For example, interactive mapping was raised in most of the workshops. Communities are interested in telling their stories, sharing artefacts, and raising the profile of their peatland through interactive mapping. We have begun to explore this, and have found an already existing interactive map for community groups (Know your 5k). We intend to explore the potential of this map further with the creators and support communities to engage with it which will lead to more regional events.



Figure 2 Report Credit: Ice-Cream Architecture

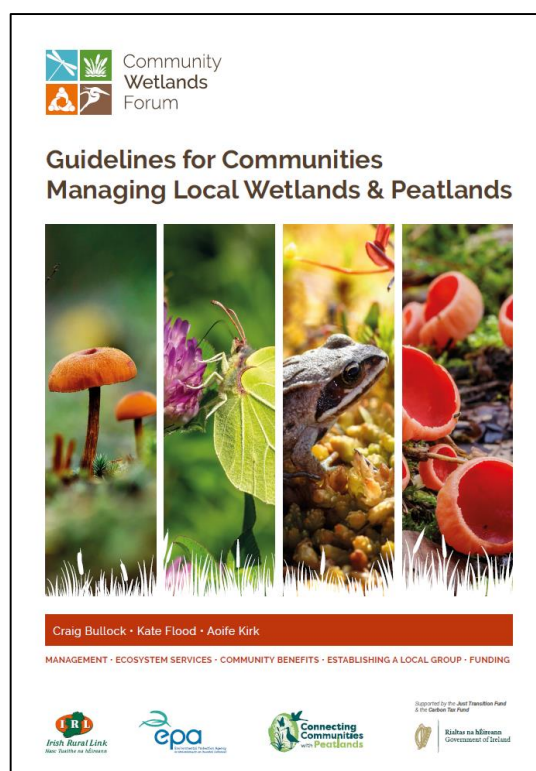
Resources

Guidelines for Communities Managing Local Wetlands and Peatlands Handbook

In 2021, the content of the handbook was updated and published online. In 2022, the handbook was redesigned with new graphics and digital and printed copies are now available for community groups. It is [free to download](#) from the CWF website.

The handbook is a useful resource for community groups engaging with their local bog. It defines what wetlands are; national and EU policies; provides local case studies; explains the benefits of peatlands restoration for the environment and community; how to establish a community group; access and recreation on bogs; and funding.

The Guidelines handbook is comprehensive and informative and has received much positive feedback from community groups.



Front cover Guidelines handbook

Build Your Bog Knowledge Webinar Series

The webinar series comprising topics from Stream One of the training framework was recorded and videos were uploaded onto the [CCWP YouTube Channel](#).

The videos are public and available to anyone, are free, and are not time limited. They are a beneficial educational resource for those interested in learning about the topics covered in the webinar. It is also a useful resource for communities to share with their members and others.

Connections & Collaborations

Climate Action Regional Office (CARO)

We have made connections with CARO who have secured Just Transition funding to deliver training and mentoring to communities.

They are currently doing research to identify the needs of community groups and we have engaged with their researchers to support them in their work.

Our work is of a similar nature however CCWP is more focused on communities that are engaging with peatlands directly, whereas their project aims to encompass communities on a wider basis.

We have shared our insights and learning with them to help them to develop a successful project. We have agreed to collaborate with one another when our expertise, knowledge, or skillset is needed for communities engaging with our projects.

Ireland's Hidden Heartlands (Fáilte Ireland)

We spoke with the coordinator of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and their team early in 2022. We have since collaborated with them to share information on bog walks and trails of CWF members. These trails are to be included in Hidden Heartlands literature and on their website – putting peatland communities on the map.

There are some bog walks and trails that are currently under development or require a carpark to be included on the Hidden Heartlands map. Communities are working to progress their trails and will have an opportunity in 2023 to be included on the Hidden Heartlands map.

Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT)

The project coordinator was invited to sit on Working Group 4 of the MRTT to represent peatland community groups and the CWF. The working group meets quarterly and receives an update from the Just Transition Commissioner's office and hears from projects that are categorised into the working group's remit of social enterprise and community

The project coordinator has been to one meeting of Working Group 4. The project coordinator has found that the project's inclusion in the Working Group is of benefit to the project and the communities in the Just Transition region, as the project coordinator can communicate vital information to communities about Just Transition, other Just Transition Projects and can represent the interests of peatland communities.

Social Media

We have had a steady social media presence and following since the project was launched in October 2021. The majority of our interaction happens on Twitter and Facebook. We have fewer interactions on Instagram as few CWF members and organisations have a presence on Instagram. Twitter and Facebook are optimal for engagement and sharing information widely.

| Twitter | MAY 2022 SUMMARY |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Tweets 41 | Tweet impressions 18.8K |
| Profile visits 2,129 | Mentions 60 |
| New followers 60 | Total follows 472 |

Table 3

| Facebook | June Summary |
|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Facebook Page Reach 5,501 | Page visits 29 |
| Page New Likes 49 | Paid Reach 3,569 |
| Paid impressions 6,066 | |

Table 4

| Instagram | 2021-2022 |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Total Posts 54 | Followers 362 |

Table 5

| YouTube | 2021-2022 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Subscribers 30 | Webinar Series View Total 398 |
| Most views 112 | |

Table 6

Conclusion

In summary, CCWP is on track to meet the project deliverables and targets if the project receives an extension of six months into 2024. The delay in project commencement should be considered by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications to allow for project completion as the cause of delay does not lie with the project partners or project coordinator.

The project coordinator has identified opportunities to engage with community groups on a more targeted basis via the pilot mentoring programme, which if successful in relation to the outcomes and feedback will be expanded and continue into 2023. The project coordinator is optimistic that community groups participating in the mentoring programme will be encouraged to carry out feasibility studies which are necessary for reaching targets in quarters one and two of 2023.

We will continue to deliver capacity-building training based on the feedback on training needs from community groups that were carried out in late 2021, to host regional events, and to develop the CWF membership. We are also responding to the training needs of community groups as needs arise where feasible.