



Scohaboy Bog SAC

Study Visit

Site & trail details

- Scohaboy Bog is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- It is located in Sopwell, Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary
- The site is around 1000 acres in size and ownership of the bog rests with both state and private landowners. NPWS and Coillte manage the state-owned parts of the bog
- Cloughjordan Community Development Association (CCDA) have been involved with the development of trails through the bog and woodland.
- The Loop of Laghile and Loughaun National trail is 5.75km long and also acts a spur walk off the local section of the Beara-Breifne National Heritage Trail.



Story of Scohaboy Bog

Following an Integrated Village Plan process and in partnership with Coillte Forest the CCDA developed three looped trails in Knockanacree Woodlands on the village edge. The success of this collaboration led in 2013 to community support for the first restoration intervention at Scohaboy by Coillte Forest on their holdings as part of EU/LIFE-Nature conservation project – LIFE09 NAT/IE/000222.

Designated a national demonstration site, a boardwalk and a viewing platform were installed as part of the project. In 2019 with the support of Coillte and 19 private landowners, the boardwalk was extended by 1000 meters, connecting into existing bog and forestry roads to create the Loop of Laghile & Loughaun National Trail.

A second restoration project took place in Autumn 2021 on state lands at the Southern end of the bog, this was undertaken by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and funded under the National Raised Bog Special Areas of Conservation Management Plan 2017 – 2022. A third large-scale restoration works intervention took place at end of 2022 along the Southern, Eastern & Western cutover areas by NPWS to bring the majority of the site under conservation & rehabilitation.

In an area with no history of peatland conservation, with dedicated community support, Scohaboy has transitioned from a place of burning and cutting to conservation, and all achieved without conflict. Today the restoration programme at Scohaboy is an award-winning example of how local community groups, state agencies, and nearly fifty local landowners have collaborated successfully in the restoration and conservation of this precious natural heritage asset and the public good.

Cloughjordan Community Development Association

Local people (and group members) had long and indeed generational involvement with Scohaboy Bog by way of turbary rights and traditional turf extraction. The CCDA became involved at the beginning of the formal restoration programme proposals in 2011.

As a designated site (though with active cutting and extraction taking place), there was high awareness of the natural heritage value of the location and many locals/members had a deep and positive personal attachment to the site. With the key support of Cloughjordan Heritage Group, the initial public information meeting for the EU/LIFE-Nature conservation project focused on the important role Scohaboy played in local traditional practices and culture as well as the need to plan the future conservation of this irreplaceable and internationally important natural heritage.

The CCDA have collaborated with a unique stakeholder mix. In the beginning, active cutting/extraction was an issue. Local community groups brought personal connection and local informational context, this included in the early days, key (and quiet) conversations with landowners to explain and reassure concerning the nature of the proposed restoration programme. Agencies such as the NPWS, Coillte, Bord Na Mona brought professional assessment and conservation/rehabilitation expertise and financing. Looped walk infrastructure was developed with the support of the Outdoor Recreation Investment Scheme, North and South Tipperary Development Companies and Sports Ireland. Membership of the CWF and RAMSAR Ireland brings additional national context and community supports.



About the project

Scohaboy has become one of Ireland's leading community-supported climate action and biodiversity conservation projects, facilitating important climate action and nature conservations locally and raising awareness of the need for detailed adaptation and mitigation strategies.

The main focus at Scohaboy is conservation: the protection of a key nature value asset for future generations. Through good planning, additional (and complimentary) values include Scohaboy as an important amenity resource where visitors can use quality walking infrastructure to learn more about peatland values, restoration importance as well as engaging in healthy lifestyle pursuit, well-being, and nature contact and contribute economically to the local area.

The project successfully developed forest walks and a national looped walking trail. As part of this CCDA collaborated with Coillte Forestry and Recreation teams to develop visitor and interpretative infrastructure, including boardwalks, a viewing platform, and interpretative signage along their trails. This has allowed visitors to access the bog safely and experience the restoration area first-hand.

Throughout the past decade many community events have taken place at Scohaboy Bog, including heritage, cultural and educational events. By utilising established annual events such as Heritage Week and Biodiversity Week and through funding from the Heritage Office of Tipperary County Council, organised community events have taken place at Scohaboy. This has also been made possible because of site infrastructure.

CCDA have built a strong association with local schools. Primary school students take part in organised events at the site, the most recent being World Wetlands Day celebrations in February 2023. Through contact and conversations with local school representatives, over the years visits to both the Knockanacree Woodlands and Scohaboy Bog sites have become important parts of annual school event planning.

Key features

- In an area with no history of peatland conservation, the transition of Scohaboy Bog from a place of burning and cutting peat to one of conservation, and achieved without conflict, has been a defining feature of the community-supported conservation success story so far.
- Through the generosity and commitment of key agency personnel along the way it has been possible to maintain open and positive communication lines.
- Focusing on the restoration programme as a way to protect this key local natural heritage asset for future generations helped ensure wide community “buy-in” and allowed local people to celebrate their deeply personal (and family) connections to the site.
- Helping facilitate three major restoration works projects and creating a culture of beneficial collaboration has been a top achievement

Impact on the wider community

The impacts have been overwhelmingly positive:

- Installing walking infrastructure has provided locals and visitors with safe walking routes for recreational and well-being pursuits where there were none before.
- Increase in a strong sense of personal/ community feeling of ownership
- Buy-in with regard to conservation conversations and addressing issues that arise
- Development of the Cloughjordan Sustainable Energy Community programme by the CCDA to inform and assist with practical solutions regarding energy use, fuel source, retrofitting and financial saving

Key challenges

There are significant challenges to maintaining the asset investment to date.

Though the CCDA and the wider community are at the heart of the restoration programme and are the one grouping with access to all stakeholder conversations, they are also the least equipped professionally and financially. Simply put, without the generous and committed volunteer support of the community group, there would be no restoration programme at Scohaboy today and quite probably cutting/extraction would be continuing with detrimental ecological impacts. There is a need for greater agency support and resource allocation especially concerning project funding opportunities that support and enhance the restoration aims. The community groups are involved entirely as volunteers to protect their local heritage yet have to continuously navigate professionalised agency systems. It's appropriate for organisations and paid staff to relate to one another by way of professional language however it is not appropriate to continually expect community volunteers to do likewise. This is a barrier.



Scohaboy has different identities – a Coillte landholding with remit, a NPWS landholding with remit, and multiple private landowners. These stakeholders may or may not converse much with one another. Incongruences in policy within agencies can also be a barrier to the conservation and restoration of the bog.

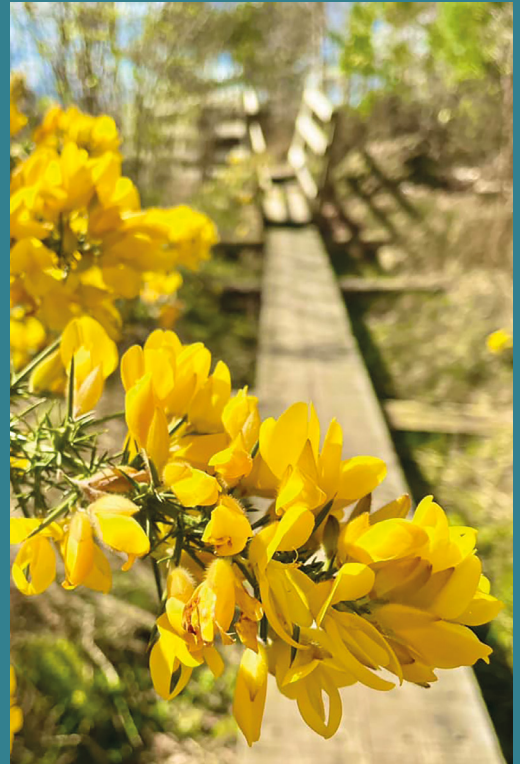
What's Next?



As a result of restoration interventions, the next five years will bring increased ecological enhancement and benefits. The CCDA's vision is for additional (and selective) walkway infrastructure for Scohaboy to play an increased role as a natural heritage attraction that will return an increased economic dividend to Cloughjordan and the surrounding area as per the National Peatlands Strategy objectives.

"The raised bog restoration programme at Scohaboy is a community development led and supported achievement and an excellent example of 'ordinary people doing extraordinary things'"

GEARÓID Ó FOIGHI



Information

<https://www.coillte.ie/site/sopwell-and-scohaboy-bog/>
<https://www.npws.ie/protected-sites/sac/002206>
<https://www.facebook.com/scohaboybogcloughjordan>
<https://twitter.com/scohaboy>

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