

IRELAND

Local development

Location

Dronmagrel

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 40 696

EAFRD 12 560

National/Regional 7 440

Private 20 696

Project duration

2018 – 2018

Project promoter

Coillte Sláintiúil

Contact

nvaughantrees@gmail.com

Website

www.coillteslaintiuil.ie

Helping a new type of rural enterprise that can support a transition towards a green, diversified rural economy. Coillte Sláintiúil provides services to protect, rejuvenate and replace native woodlands.

Summary

Coillte Sláintiúil (the name means ‘healthy forests’) is a start-up enterprise providing a range of woodland conservation solutions, such as containing disease and invasive alien species. Invasives are a major cause of woodland biodiversity loss. The need to preserve Ireland’s woodlands is both a local and national issue.



This project assisted the development of the business, by providing financial support for the purchase of equipment. This helped to build Coillte Sláintiúil’s reputation, network and capacity to take on more complex conservation projects. The business services unmet, important environmental needs in the woodland context.

Results

Since acquiring the new equipment, Coillte Sláintiúil has upscaled its operations with at least a 40% increase in output.

In 2018, Coillte Sláintiúil safeguarded approximately 35-40 acres (14-16 ha) of woodland focusing on the control of invasive alien species.

Coillte Sláintiúil has secured three new projects since acquiring the new equipment.

Context

Coillte Sláintiúil is a start-up enterprise that provides services to protect and replace woodland habitat of huge environmental and cultural importance that is being lost. Businesses providing this type of service are uncommon in rural Ireland. The idea for Coillte Sláintiúil emerged when founder Neil Vaughan worked in Sydney, Australia in 2012 and gained experience of novel conservation techniques.

The South Cork Local Development Strategy (LDS) highlights the region's dependence on agriculture and the need for diversification of the rural economy. The LDS includes funding to assist the development of start-up enterprises, and support rural job creation and enterprise development. Coillte Sláintiúil successfully applied for such support. The new company is committed to rural environmental protection that is aligned with local needs. The LDS also notes the increasing concern about invasive species in rural environments and the need for their removal.

More broadly, preserving Ireland's native and semi-natural woodlands is a national issue. The National Parks and Wildlife Service notes that invasive alien species are one of the most serious threats to Ireland's native woodlands, which are fragmented and often in poor condition. Statistics show that Ireland is one of the least forested countries in Europe, with just over 10% forest cover. This represents 0.8% of total European forest cover and compares with 33.5% for the EU 28 and 30.6% worldwide.

Species composition is dominated by Sitka spruce (54.4%), trees such as oak (2.6%), beech (1.5%), and birch (5.9%) can be found in much lower proportions. Among the actions suggested as part of the Strategy for Native Woodlands in Ireland 2016-2020, is the need to address the threat to native woodlands posed by invasive species. It also highlights the significant threat posed by diseases. Beyond this, woodlands are also a part of Ireland's cultural landscape and heritage, as well as playing a role in climate change mitigation.

Objectives

This project assisted the next phase of development of the emerging business Coillte Sláintiúil and developed its capacity to take on new types of woodland conservation projects.

Activities

The grant support was used by the company to purchase a GreenMeck SafeTrak 19 28 Series 2 wood chipper to use in woodland conservation project in all types of terrain. It also used the support to purchase a Cargo Connect 475-4452 trailer for transport.

This equipment was essential in enabling Coillte Sláintiúil to gain a contract for a project lasting around eight months in an 8-acre (3.2 ha) private woodland. In May 2018, the first phase of the project involved removal of invasive non-native plant species such as rhododendron, cherry laurel and Japanese knotweed. During the first six months of this project, Coillte Sláintiúil removed these invasive species, thereby providing an environment where native plants can regenerate. The chipper was used to break down all the plant matter removed and has been essential to project delivery.

The next phase of the project involved killing off all the remnants of the invasive species. This is specialist work beyond the current capacity of Coillte Sláintiúil. The business is partnering with the Japanese Knotweed Company, a specialist firm from neighbouring county Kerry, to complete this aspect of the project. Phase 2 is due to start in spring 2020 when the invasive species have been cleared. It will see the introduction of native trees such as oak and ash to develop a native woodland habitat where native wildlife can also thrive. The reputational value of gaining LEADER support has helped Coillte Sláintiúil to secure other new contracts. For example, it is now also working as a sub-contractor for a forester involved in the Native Woodlands Scheme. This scheme has been developed over a number of years under a partnership involving the Forest Service, Woodlands of Ireland, Dúchas, the Heritage Service, Regional Fisheries Boards, the Heritage Council, Coillte, COFORD and others.

Coillte Sláintiúil is also working to diversify its services and to develop new services in niche areas over the next five years, such as a corporate experience/retreat around woodland conservation. This also supports objectives and needs identified in the South Cork Local Development Strategy. For example, under the LEADER Rural Environment theme, actions include promotion of community engagement and raising awareness around issues impacting biodiversity.

Main Results

- Sustained a team of three employees who were already working with Neil Vaughan Tree Services and Coillte Sláintiúil. In 2019, Coillte Sláintiúil plans to add a further two full-time employees.
 - Projects can be financially self-sustaining, including through costs paid for conservation services regenerated by old timber cleared from sites and can be used as firewood, for fencing or woodchip for agricultural or horticultural uses. One of the projects that Coillte Sláintiúil has worked on involved removing dead timber that produced enough firewood for two years.
 - Since acquiring the new equipment, Coillte Sláintiúil has upscaled its operations with at least a 40% increase in output.
 - Coillte Sláintiúil has secured three new projects since acquiring the new equipment that would not be possible without it.
 - In 2018, Coillte Sláintiúil safeguarded approximately 35-40 acres of woodland through control of invasive alien species. In 2019, it will reintroduce native tree species to these Irish woodlands.
 - In the next five years, Coillte Sláintiúil plans to develop a corporate retreat around woodland conservation. This will be focused on environmental education, such as native species planting demonstrations, or what citizens can do to prevent invasive alien species from spreading to their local area.
 - Securing LEADER support had a strong, positive reputational impact on Coillte Sláintiúil. This has positioned it more strongly as a reliable new business that provides high quality services to address unmet, environmental needs in the woodland context, for instance by managing serious threats such as invasive alien species and disease.
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- Collaboration with landscape gardener and conservationist Peter Dowdall, well known in the region, was very important to the development of Coillte Sláintiúil. The business actively generates audio-visual content to promote the benefits of its woodland regeneration services, and the wider importance of woodland management and to demonstrate techniques. For example, videos have been produced on 'Preventative Tree Care – The Hidden Costs of Doing Nothing' and 'Establishing a Wild Bird Habitat in a Dead Oak Tree'.
 - The LEADER funding also supported Coillte Sláintiúil's reputation through work on new projects demonstrating the value of its services, facilitating trust building and supporting new collaborations with other environmental businesses that provide complementary services. For example, it has led to a collaboration with the Japanese Knotweed Company on more complex woodland conservation projects with stronger long-term benefits.
 - The services this business provides are highly transferable. Similar enterprises are possible given the increasing focus on biodiversity at EU level and the need created by the EU Regulation on Invasive Alien Species (1143/2014). Coillte Sláintiúil could also expand its services to other European locations facing similar woodland conservation issues. The business was inspired by experience gained in Australia, which could also be further transferred within Europe.

- The project links directly to the EU Rural Development policy priority of restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry, but can also be aligned with other EU policy areas.
- By providing woodland management solutions to remove invasive alien species and preserve habitats, this project supports the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 and the 2014 Regulation on Invasive Alien Species.
- The EU Habitats Directive aims to support the expansion of native woodlands and reduce fragmentation. A National Parks and Wildlife Service publication notes that appropriate management of Ireland's woodlands is essential to this goal, with a first

priority the removal of invasive alien species.

- The project also supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular goal 15 'Life on Land' which seeks to protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss.

“Woodland destruction and conservation is a major issue today. It is a worldwide problem, one acre at a time Coillte Sláintiúil is trying to fix it. Outside of building a business, we wanted to do our bit to help solve the problem. I grew up on a small farm and woodlands were very important for wintering cattle when we didn't have sheds. The work of Coillte Sláintiúil ties into the ideal of going back to where we were.”

Neil Vaughan, Coillte Sláintiúil



Additional sources of information

[Ireland's Woodland Heritage, National Parks and Wildlife Service](#)

[Forest Statistics Ireland 2017](#)

[Peter Dowdall The Irish Gardener](#)

[The Japanese Knotweed Company](#)

Videos

[Woodland Management](#)

[Woodland Restoration and Conservation](#) (to view, enter password: nv-2018)