



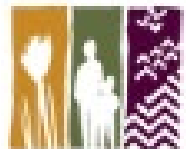
04/11/2024

## CAREERS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SENSITIVE LANDSCAPES

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**AT CONNEMARA NATIONAL PARK**



WILD ATLANTIC  
NATURE LIFE



NPWS

An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta  
Aidmanta agus Faoilte  
National Parks and Wildlife  
Service





# Agenda

1. FORUM Connemara
2. Background to Dúlra Project
3. Dúlra Overview
4. Next steps

Q&A Session



An Roinn Tithíochta,  
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oldhreachta  
Department of Housing,  
Local Government and Heritage



WILD ATLANTIC  
NATURE LIFE



# FORUM Connemara

## **Who We Are:**

FORUM Connemara CLG is a local development company and registered charity focused on fostering economic growth, social inclusion and protection of biodiversity in the Connemara area.

**Funding:** we fund the work through a combination of sources, including government & EU grants, fundraising activities, and social enterprise.



# Challenges faced in Connemara

**Rural Depopulation:**

Increasing out-migration, especially among younger generations.

**Geographic Isolation:**

The remote location limits access to services and opportunities.

**Limited Connectivity:**

Lack of reliable broadband and transport networks hampers growth.

**Narrow Economic Base:**

Heavy reliance on traditional industries with limited diversification. No major industries in north and west Connemara.

**High Reliance on Seasonal Employment:**

Employment opportunities are often tied to seasonal tourism, creating income instability.



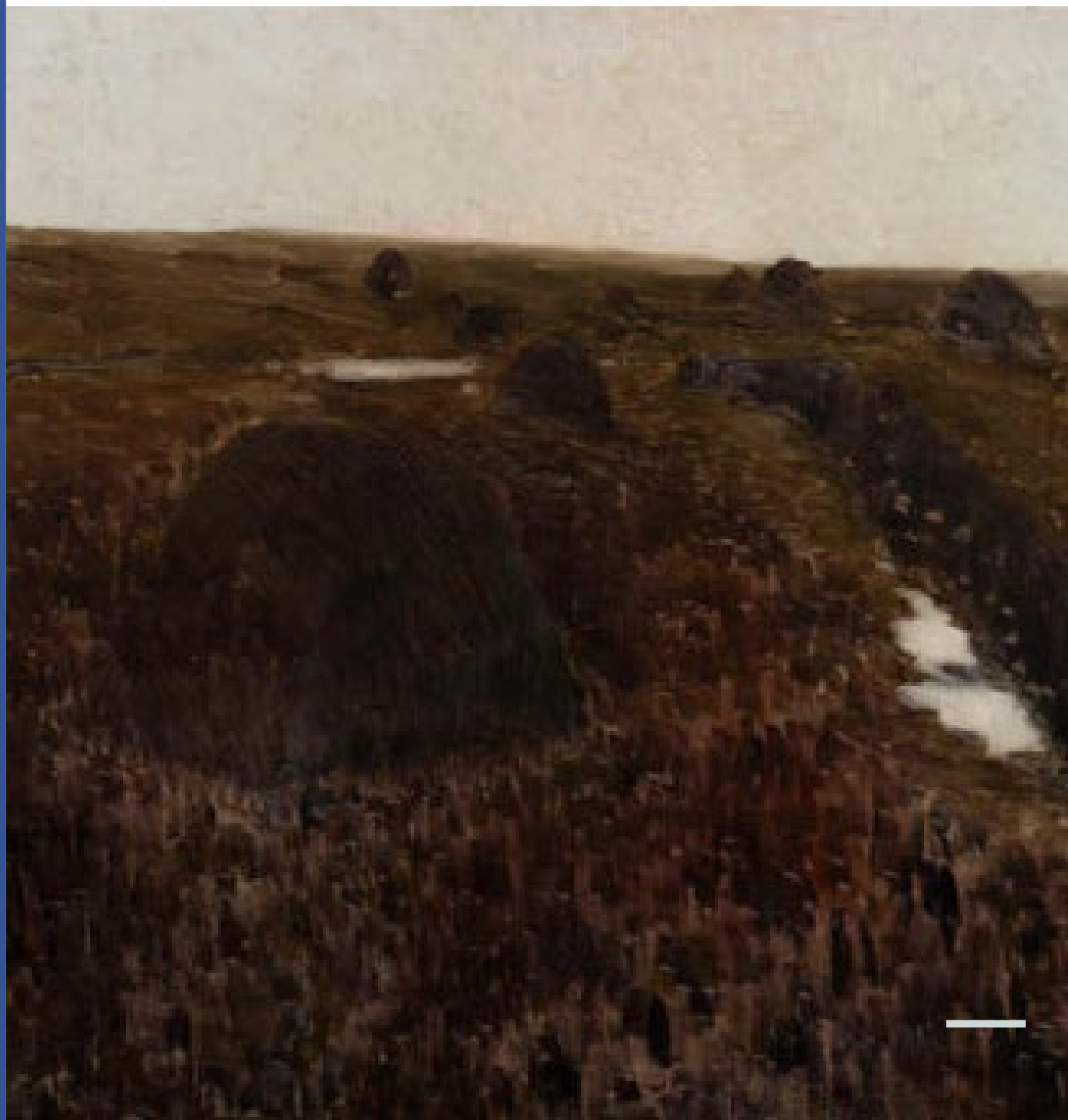
# Opportunities

## **Natural Assets and Community Spirit:**

Most of Connemara is in an environmentally sensitive landscape, has a wealth of natural beauty and strong community links.

## **FORUM Connemara's Role:**

- Supporting employment initiatives that are sustainable
- Supporting local businesses and startups including social enterprises
- Empowering residents through training and educational programmes







# Background to rhododendron (ponticum) control initiatives

In response to local environmental needs identified through community consultation, FORUM Connemara secured European Innovation Partnership (EIP) funding in 2018 for the Connemara Uplands, focusing on invasive species control among other initiatives.

## **2019 - 2022 North Connemara Locally Led EIP Scheme:**

Of 10,000 hectares surveyed in 2020, 1,500 hectares were affected by invasive species. The scheme incentivised farmers to control these species, resulting in 125 hectares of Rhododendron managed by 32 farmers by December 2021.

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Parallel and separate to FORUM Connemara's EIP:  
**2022 - 2023 - Leenane Development Association (LDA)** led by Martin Gavin, received funding from the Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP to deliver the Bundorragha Catchment Rhododendron Control Project (BCRCP). This project piloted a community-based approach to Rhododendron control by training and employing a locally based control team and using best practice Rhododendron mapping techniques.

**2022 - 2023 NCLLAES EIP:** in Nov 2022 after discussions with the LDA the NCLLAES EIP scheme hired 5 of the BCRCP team along with an additional 5 workers. The new team worked to control rhododendron with farmers on the scheme for the final 6 months.

**EIP finished in March '23.**

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# Establishment of the Dúlra project



In March '23, a tender was launched by the Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP programme, using funds provided by the Conservation Measures Unit of National Parks and Wildlife:

*To coordinate a pilot community-led peatland restoration programme with a particular focus on Rhododendron relating to Mweelrea/Sheeffry/Erriff Complex, Twelve Bens/Garraun Complex and the Connemara Bog Complex Special Areas of Conservation in Counties Mayo and Galway.*

**FORUM Connemara** in cooperation with the **Leenane Development Association** were successful in this tender.

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# Establishment of the Dúlra project

- **2023 Dúlra Phase 1:** The project started in May 2023. The Project team of 9 operatives, field operation manager, ecologist on contract and a project facilitator supported by the CEO & COO, worked on SAC areas in South Mayo and Connemara.

Next tender was launched in March 2024 & Dúlra was successful again:

- **2024 Dúlra Phase 2:** Grown to 19 operatives inc. supervisors, field operations manager, ecologist on contract, project manager, project facilitator and project financial administrator, The phase has expanded into South Connemara and will be expanding further Mayo areas shortly.
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# Dúlra

How does it work?

## Community

Building the capacity of communities to undertake conservation actions through events and education & training.

## Special Areas of Conservation

**The team primarily works in the vicinity of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) which are part of the EU Natura 2000 network**

## Funding

The project is funded through the Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE IP programme, using funds provided by the Conservation Measures Unit of National Parks and Wildlife.

## Partnerships

**We partner and cooperate with other Natura Communities and other groups who have a similar mission.**

## Ancillary Projects

We also secured additional funding for ancillary projects from SSE Galway Wind Park, Coillte Nature, NPWS, Connemara National Park and Coillte.

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# Creating a career in landscape management

- Structured Training Programmes:** Providing targeted training to develop technical skills and knowledge relevant to fieldwork and environmental management.
- Certification and Qualifications:** Offering opportunities for field operatives to earn certifications that enhance their professional credentials and open doors to advanced roles – working with the Galway Roscommon Education & Training Board e.g. micro-credentials.
- Mentorship and Guidance:** Implementing mentorship to connect new operatives with experienced staff, supporting skill development and career growth.





# Creating a career in landscape management

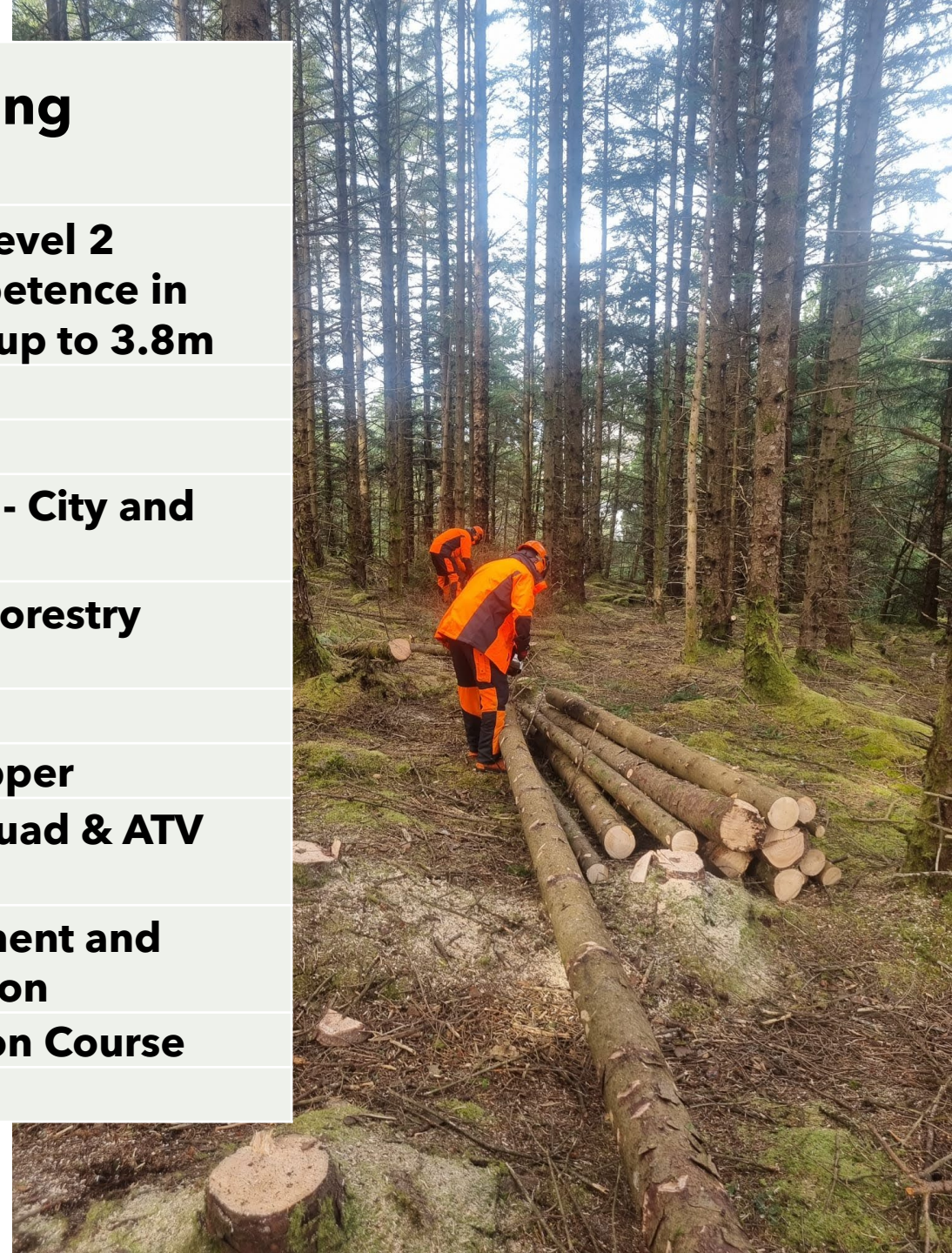
- Clear Advancement Pathways:** Defining clear career steps within the organisation, enabling operatives to progress to supervisory or specialist roles over time e.g. habitat mapping.
- Commitment to Health, Safety, and Professionalism:** Providing comprehensive health and safety training, enforcing strict on-site safety protocols, promoting a culture of professionalism, and continuously updating standards through regular audits and feedback to ensure a secure and respectful workplace.
- The staff contribute a diverse range of talents, interests, skills, and expertise to enrich the project.





## Operative Training Courses

- **City and Guilds - Level 2 certificate of competence in felling small trees up to 3.8m**
- **Manual Handling**
- **Safe Pass**
- **Herbicide training - City and Guilds PA1, PA6**
- **Lantra First Aid + Forestry Elective**
- **Fencing**
- **LANTRA woodchipper**
- **AA International quad & ATV course**
- **Coillte Risk assesment and Hazard Identification**
- **Peatland restoration Course**
- **Tree Planting**





# Innovation



- Innovation is an important component of building local community capacity and community resilience in peripheral regions.
- Innovation is achieved through reviewing and building on best practice as observed in other exemplar projects, both domestically and abroad (e.g. Scotland).
- Examples of innovative practice within the project include the development of a direct labour and training model, biochar making, peatland restoration, wool research, glyphosate research.



# Questions?





[www.forumconnemara.ie/dulra](http://www.forumconnemara.ie/dulra)

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