



FRESH WATER PEARL MUSSEL PROJECT

OCTOBER 2011 NEWSLETTER

A Gold Medal Flagship Species

We take great pride in our beautiful unspoilt countryside with its pristine rivers and lakes. The image of a green and unspoilt land brings many tourists and helps to sell our produce abroad. It is our heritage and we should guard it jealously. Crystal clear rivers with unspoilt animal and plant communities are part of that heritage, and one animal in particular (the freshwater pearl mussel) tells us that the rivers in which it lives are of the very highest quality.

You may never have seen a pearl mussel, but then you may never have seen a golden eagle or a blue whale either. Yet all enrich our heritage and say something of the way we live and care for our surroundings. The pearl mussel is a flagship species that tells us about our environment.



Atlantic Salmon



Fresh Water Pearl Mussel



Golden Eagle

It is our reassurance that we are managing our affairs in a sustainable way. Unfortunately this sensitive animal has been lost throughout much of its European range and this island of ours is one of its last remaining strongholds. Although we are faring better than many other countries, all is not perfect and our own best rivers with their pearl mussel populations are under pressure.



Coillte forestry workers showing FPM team members buffer strips used to protect the pearl mussel in the Glaskeelan River, Co. Donegal.



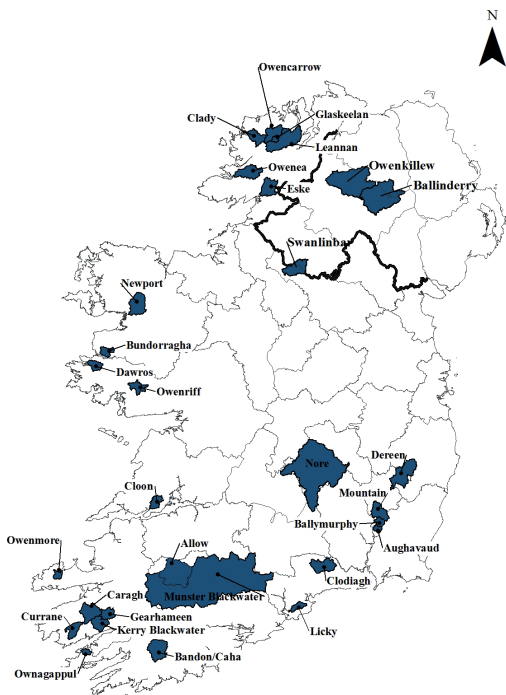
Bankside fencing erected by farmers in the Owenkillew catchment, Co. Tyrone that prevents cattle trampling mussels.



Pearl Mussel Rivers

Freshwater Pearl Mussels have lived in our rivers for thousands of years. They are slow growing animals, but very long-lived and can be up to 120 years old and 14cm in length. Previously it was widespread throughout Europe and lived in our cleanest rivers. Unfortunately, its populations have been in dramatic decline in recent years. The species is now critically endangered and is on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

The island of Ireland supports a significant proportion of the Pearl Mussel populations remaining in Europe. There are some 12 million adult mussels in our rivers, most of them (80%) in about 8 catchments. Virtually all these populations are in decline and in recent decades juvenile mussels are failing to survive to adulthood. Unless we act now to ensure successful breeding and survival of juveniles, the existing populations will become extinct as the adult mussels die off.



Pearl Mussel Rivers on the island of Ireland

Threats to Survival

The pearl mussel lives in rivers and needs a high quality environment to survive. It also relies on healthy salmon and trout populations to successfully complete its own breeding cycle, and must have clean river gravels to live in, especially for the young mussels. Some catchment activities can result in problems for the mussels. If additional nutrients are allowed to enter rivers they act as fertilisers, causing excessive weed growth that blankets the river bed and smothers mussels. Other activities release silt into the river that chokes the gravel bed and smothers mussels, especially the young ones.



New EU Funded Project to help save the Freshwater Pearl Mussel



Donegal County Council, in partnership with Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), has been awarded €2.3 million in funding under the European Union's European Regional Development Fund for a project aimed at helping to save the Freshwater Pearl Mussel. The FPM Project is grant aided under the European Union's INTERREG IVA Programme, as part of the Environment strand, under Priority 2.2.

NIEA and Donegal County Council have collaborated successfully on numerous environmental projects over many years to address common challenges. This current project will help to secure the future of a critically endangered species on this island, the Freshwater Pearl Mussel.



Cross Border EU Funded Project Launched in Donegal

The FPM Project was launched in Lifford, County Donegal earlier this year by Cllr. Cora Harvey, then Mayor of County Donegal. Other speakers at the launch included Donegal County Manager, Séamus Neely, and Mr Gabriel Nelson of NIEA. All referred to the importance of saving this remarkable species which they pointed out is an indicator of pristine waters and whose conservation will have many wide ranging benefits. Welcoming the FPM project, Pat Colgan, Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body said: "The European Union is extremely committed to promoting environmental sustainability and bio-diversity. This is reflected in the EU's priorities for Europe 2020 and I am delighted to welcome this challenging project which is testament to that commitment."



Project Aims

The ultimate aim of the FPM Project is to help save the pearl mussel. However, no project, authority or government agency can achieve this without the support of the real custodians of the land and the water, we the users. Therefore, the project will consult closely with all stakeholders to keep you informed of activities on the ground and progress being made. This Newsletter is one method of informing you and updates will be published at intervals.

Further detailed information is available through our website www.freshwaterpearlmussel.com where you may also wish to leave a comment or request information. You may also contact us through the Project Coordinator, Tony McNally – full contact details are given on the back page.

In the near future we will arrange public meetings so that we can have an opportunity to speak together, and in particular for us to listen to your views. We welcome any input you may wish to make at any stage.



FURTHER INFORMATION / CONTACT DETAILS

The project is scheduled for completion in March 2014. Donegal County Council is the lead partner, and is overseeing delivery of the project through a full time project coordinator and consultancy services provided by RPS.

Further information is available at www.donegalcdb.ie, or by contacting the Project Coordinator:

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The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body and is responsible for managing the INTERREG IV programme. For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu

What will the project do?

The project has three main tasks:-

1. Preparation of management plans for a number of pearl mussel catchments. Draft Plans have already been prepared for many pearl mussel catchments in Ireland and can be viewed at www.wfdireland.ie. In this project similar plans will be prepared for additional mussel populations in three catchments; the Upper Ballinderry River, and the Owenkillew River, both in County Tyrone, and the Claddagh (Swanlinbar) River in County Fermanagh. The plans will identify any issues and propose realistic solutions.



Freshwater Pearl Mussel Rivers in Study Area

2. Testing of Measures that are designed to protect mussel populations. This will establish what actions are likely to be effective and cost efficient. Agriculture, forestry and septic tank systems are key areas for consideration. A number of catchments will be selected in which to carry out these pilot studies.

3. Preparation of Guidelines for various sectors to allow for a sustainable approach that prevents impact on the mussel's survival. Such detailed technical guidelines are required to assist agencies, local authorities, public authorities and key stakeholders in relation to proposed developments, works and activities within freshwater pearl mussel catchments. The following areas will be covered:

Road, water and sewerage infrastructure	Housing and Industrial development
Wind Farm development	Water Abstractions & Physical modifications and impoundments
Agricultural practices and farm planning & Forestry practices	Peat Extraction, Quarrying and Mining practices