



AN
FÓRAM
UISCE

Rewetting peatlands could provide a quick win for water quality, biodiversity enhancement and climate mitigation.

The adverse impacts of draining peatlands for agriculture, forestry and peat extraction can be mitigated by rewetting combined with other restoration techniques, one of the country's leading peatland experts said today (Friday).

Professor Florence Renou-Wilson from UCD, speaking at An Fóram Uisce -The Water Forum's webinar stated that fully functional, healthy peatlands are wet enough to allow plants to grow but decomposition is slowed to allow for carbon storage and the accumulation of peat over thousands of years. Drainage allows oxygen to enter the soil, leading to microbial decomposition of the peat and breakdown of the stored carbon leading to emissions of large amounts of CO₂ and N₂O, and leaching of organic matter and nutrients to waterways. This negatively impacts on water quality and biodiversity in rivers and lakes downstream.

Nearly 82% of Ireland's peatlands are degraded or drained. Properly functioning peatlands provide a range of 'ecosystem services' such as clean water, climate regulation, flood and erosion control, wildfire hazard control, unique biodiversity and species, but they also provide a cultural landscape with heritage, recreation, wilderness and tourism potential.

Kate Flood, from NUI Galway, reports that communities living beside peatlands are moving away from the economic and utilitarian values of peatlands and valuing the more cultural 'ecosystem services' provided by them. Abbeyleix bog is the perfect example of community action to protect local bogs and raise their social value, stated Chris Uys at the webinar. Abbeyleix bog has increasing visitor numbers every year, with over 600 visitors recorded in one day in April.

The new framework for the EU's Common Agricultural Policy provides an opportunity to incentivise a change in behaviour that could provide a quick win for water quality, climate and biodiversity. Working with farmers is key to delivering better ecosystem services from peatlands through rewarding good practice but also incentivising actions for improvements where ecosystem services are poor according to Derek McLoughlin of the Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE project.

Minister Noonan stated 'Incentives for reducing GHG emissions, nutrient retention, water quality and flood regulation could provide a quick win considering that 21% of Ireland's land area is formed of peat soils and bogs.'

Dr Tom Collins, Chair of the Water Forum, commented that farmers and landowners are the guardians of the landscape. Landscape management practice has the potential to provide a wide range of environmental and public benefits such as good soil health, good quality reasonably priced food, flood mitigation, climate change mitigation, biodiversity enhancement and the protection of our water resources. But the farmers need support in this endeavour. The templates are all in place it is a matter of being ambitious enough to deliver the future our next generations deserve.

We would like to thank Minister Noonan, the research team for their reports and recommendations and the speakers for their contributions today.

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[Research Report](#) is also available on An Fóram Uisce website

[Synthesis report](#) is available on An Fóram Uisce website

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The webinar presentations will be made available online in the coming weeks.

Note to editors

An Fóram Uisce - The Water Forum was established as a statutory body in June 2018 to facilitate stakeholder engagement and debate on issues relating to water as a resource, water quality, rural water concerns, issues affecting customers of Irish Water and issues associated with the implementation of the Water Framework Directive.

The Forum consists of 26 representatives from a wide range of organisations with direct connections to issues relating to water quality. These include consumer, community and water sports groups, business and trade unions, environmental sector, Irish Water consumers, the group water scheme sector and a range of other sectors including education, agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The Forum is chaired by Dr Tom Collins.

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