

The Bog Standard

FarmPEAT Newsletter

Issue 1 | Dec 2021



The FarmPEAT (Farm Payments for Ecological and Agricultural Transitions) Project is developing a locally-led, innovative, results-based farm scheme for farmers who manage lands that surround some of Ireland's finest remaining raised bogs.

Farming with nature in the midland raised bog landscape.

Farmer Training Days

As part of the FarmPEAT Programme, we organized four training days, one each in Clara, Umeras, Clonboley and Daingean. This was a great opportunity for everyone to meet face to face and have a real discussion on the project. The aim of the training day was to further explain the aims and objectives of the project, to demonstrate how the scorecards are used and to get feedback from participating farmers on the FarmPEAT Programme. Each training session ran for half a day and was broken into an indoor and outdoor session.

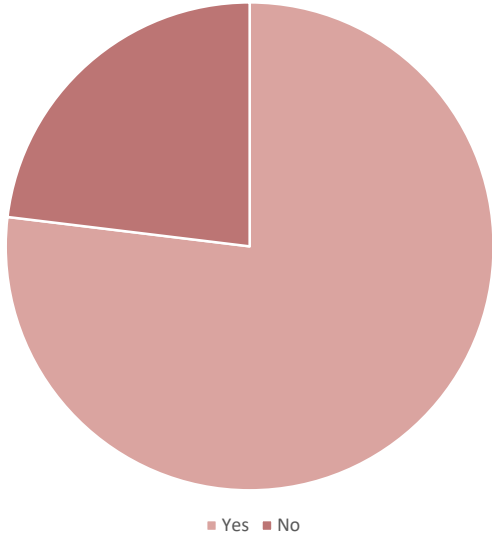


We highlighted the important role that grasslands on peat soils can play in the climate crisis. The outdoor session was held on a participating farm. This allowed us to show the farmers how their fields were being scored. Each farmer took part in a scoring demonstration. Despite the time of year, we had a chance to show everyone some positive indicator species in the hope that it will help farmers identify what they have on their own farm. All in all, the feedback was very positive and helpful making it a very worthwhile activity. Thank you to everyone who hosted a training day and to those who also provided some much-needed refreshments on the day!

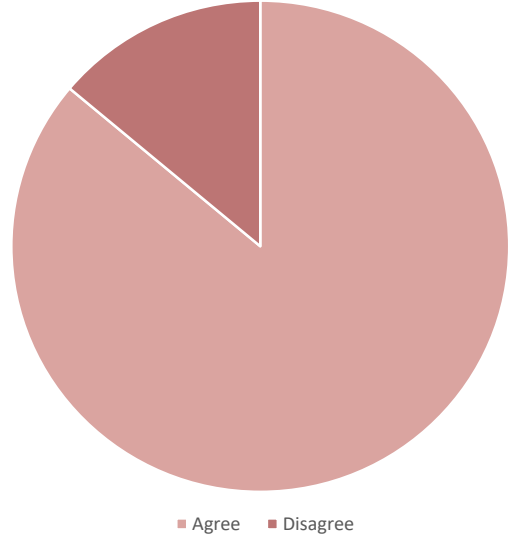


Here's what our farmers had to say!

Do you think it is fair that the ag sector is being asked to play a role in climate change?



Too much responsibility is put on farmers to reduce their carbon footprint compared to other sectors



Launch Day

The official launch of the project took place on 29th July in Clara, Co. Offaly, with Minister Pippa Hackett leading the day's proceedings. There was a great turnout for the event, and for many, marking the first open-air event they attended since lockdown. It was a great opportunity to meet the project farmers face to face. Thank you to everyone who attended.



Farm Scoring

The FarmPEAT Project Team has developed a scoring system which they believe fairly reflects the performance of a farm in relation to:

- carbon sequestration
- biodiversity and
- water quality.

Scorecards were designed, with expert input, for grassland, woodland and peatland habitats, field boundaries (hedgerows, treelines etc.) and the whole farm (whole-farm assessment scorecard). All plots on peat soils were scored. On the mineral parts of the farms semi-natural habitats were scored e.g. species-rich grassland, woodland, scrub, hedgerows etc.

Wet Grassland Scorecard

The scorecard is basically a series of questions which are answered by the surveyor for each field being scored. The result is a rating for the field on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). A large portion of the score is based on the condition of the peat soils. The wetter the peat, the less carbon is emitted and hence, the higher the score. For instance, 50% of the points on the Wet Grassland Scorecard are based on how wet the soil is. If you want to increase the wetness of your peaty plots think about slowing the flow of water off the field.

Points are also awarded for biodiversity – high cover of native meadow species such as meadowsweet, bird's-foot trefoil and common knapweed, will earn you more points.

Points can be lost if threats exist, such as excessive poaching to dumping or scrub encroachment.

Our whole farm assessment aims to capture issues, such as a risk of water pollution, which may be occurring on the farm. Bonus points are available for farms that score top points in the whole farm assessment.



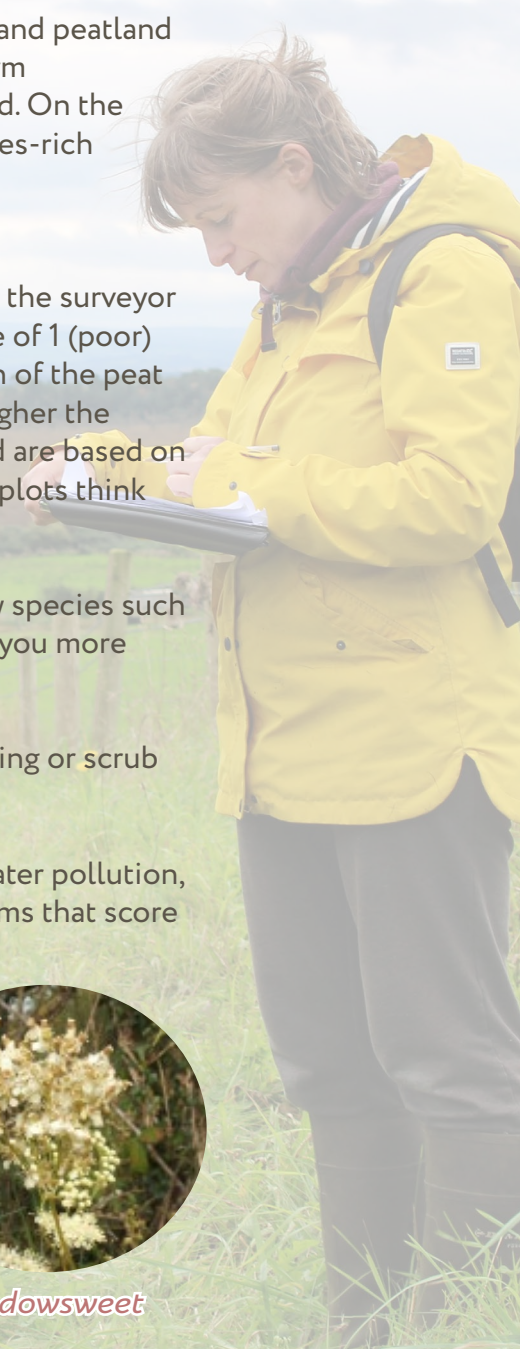
Bird's-foot trefoil



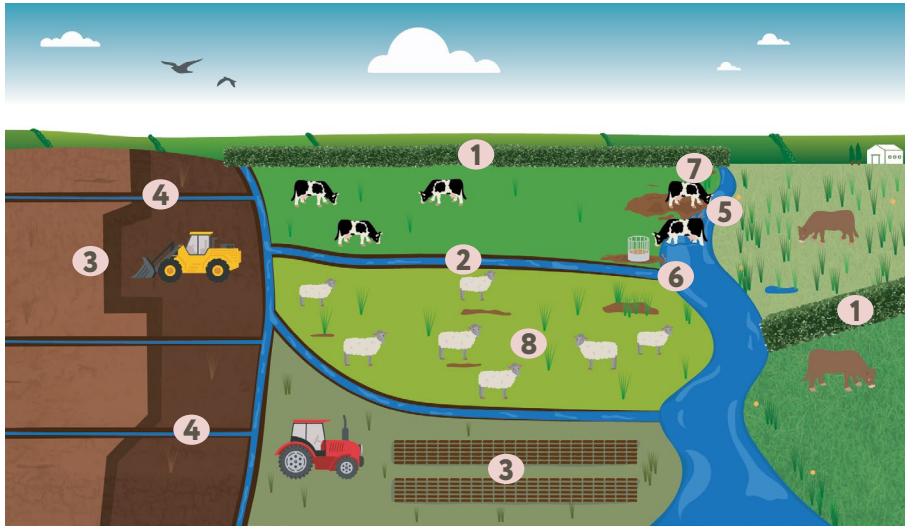
Knapweed



Meadowsweet



Before and After FarmPEAT



Before

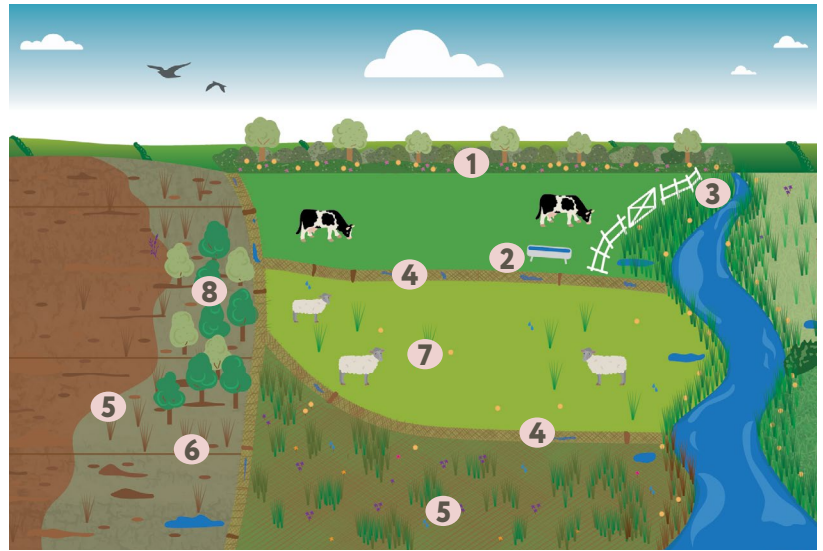
Here are the main forms of human intervention which FarmPEAT aims to address.

(1) Intensive hedgerow cutting reduces biodiversity and carbon sequestration. (2) Free flowing drains are the single biggest contributor of peat soil degradation. (3) Turf cutting increases carbon emissions and destroys unique raised bog habitat. (4) Draining of raised bogs destroys the unique peat bog habitat. (5)(6) Livestock in watercourses and feeding troughs too close to water cause sediment and nutrients to damage river habitat. (7) No buffer zone adjacent to rivers detracts from their ability to act as a resilient ecosystem. (8) Overstocking of peat soils damages their ability to function and causes soil erosion.

After

FarmPEAT's intention is deliver these outcomes.

(1) Appropriate hedge management is better for carbon sequestration and biodiversity. (2) Drinking trough location ensures livestock have access to water without damaging the water course. (3) Buffer zones along rivers will allow natural vegetation to protect from sediments and nutrients (4) Slowing the flow of water from peat soils will allow them to act as carbon stores and will encourage the return of vegetation. (5) The end of turf cutting will help peat soils and raised bogs return to functional carbon stores. (6) Blocking drains on high bogs will give them the opportunity to become carbon sinks again. (7) Appropriate stock levels will help maintain peat soils. (8) A naturalised transition zone through vegetation, drain blocking and appropriate management is positive for biodiversity and carbon sequestration.



Did you know?
with Farmer Pete

Raised Bogs store approximately 13 times more carbon than the Amazon Rainforest at 3,250 tonnes p/ha!

1 hectare agricultural grassland on peat emits the equivalent amount of Carbon that 20 cars do in 1 year.

FarmPEAT's "Love your Wellies" Initiative



The FarmPEAT project is an Agri-EIP designed to support farmers to deliver a more robust and sustainable approach to our peat environment through performance-based payments. As part of an EIP, community engagement and dissemination of information are also core objectives. To fulfil these needs, The FarmPEAT 'Love Your Wellies' Initiative was born.

The Love Your Wellies Initiative is designed to be a link between the farmers and the communities they are a part of. Creating a bridge between the peat landscape, and the communities that live within them. This will be achieved through education and community involvement to energise their appreciation of their peat landscape.

1. Science Week 2021, November

During Science Week 2021, The FarmPEAT team visited 5 schools, both primary and secondary, and delivered a tailor-made program to fit with the school's curriculum and target age groups.

These schools were selected based on their proximity and current engagement with one of our eight project bog locations.



The team hosted presentations, workshops, site visits and field trips, delivering an detailed insight into the bog habitat, climate change, carbon sequestration and much more. A huge thank you to each of the schools who participated and to their wonderful engaging students that made for a very memorable week.

Lullymore

A special thank you to Ray and all at Lullymore, who hosted us for 2 days of interactive workshops at their fantastic on site facilities.

Heritage and Discovery



@FarmPEATproject

2. FarmPEAT's Love Your Wellies Arts competition. January 2022

The flagship project under the Love Your Wellies Initiative is our Arts competition launching in January. This competition is currently under development, but the proposal is to incorporate every age group up to 18 years of age and to be open to most forms of artistic submission. These forms can include: painting, drawing, poems, stories, interviews, models, videos etc. The winners will be selected by a panel of passionate individuals, with the selection process based on engaging with ecology, the environment, farming life, rural communities, or local history. Keep an eye on our website and social media as more information becomes available.



3. Future Plans

In conjunction with the Arts Competition, additional workshops and field trips will be organised with schools participating in the initiative. The goal is helping the students develop their ideas for the LYW competition and further educate them on the importance of the peat landscape and the communities within it.



More plans are in the works, where we hope to interact with the wider communities. If you are interested in working with FarmPEAT as part of this initiative or would like further information regarding the 'Love Your Wellies' Initiative, please contact us at paddymalone@farmpeat.ie.

Project Bogs

Ballynamona Bog

Participant farmers: 4
Size: 60 ha plus large bog woodland in centre.
Conservation status: There are a number of scarce plants and protected birds on this site. It is an Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Ferbane Bog

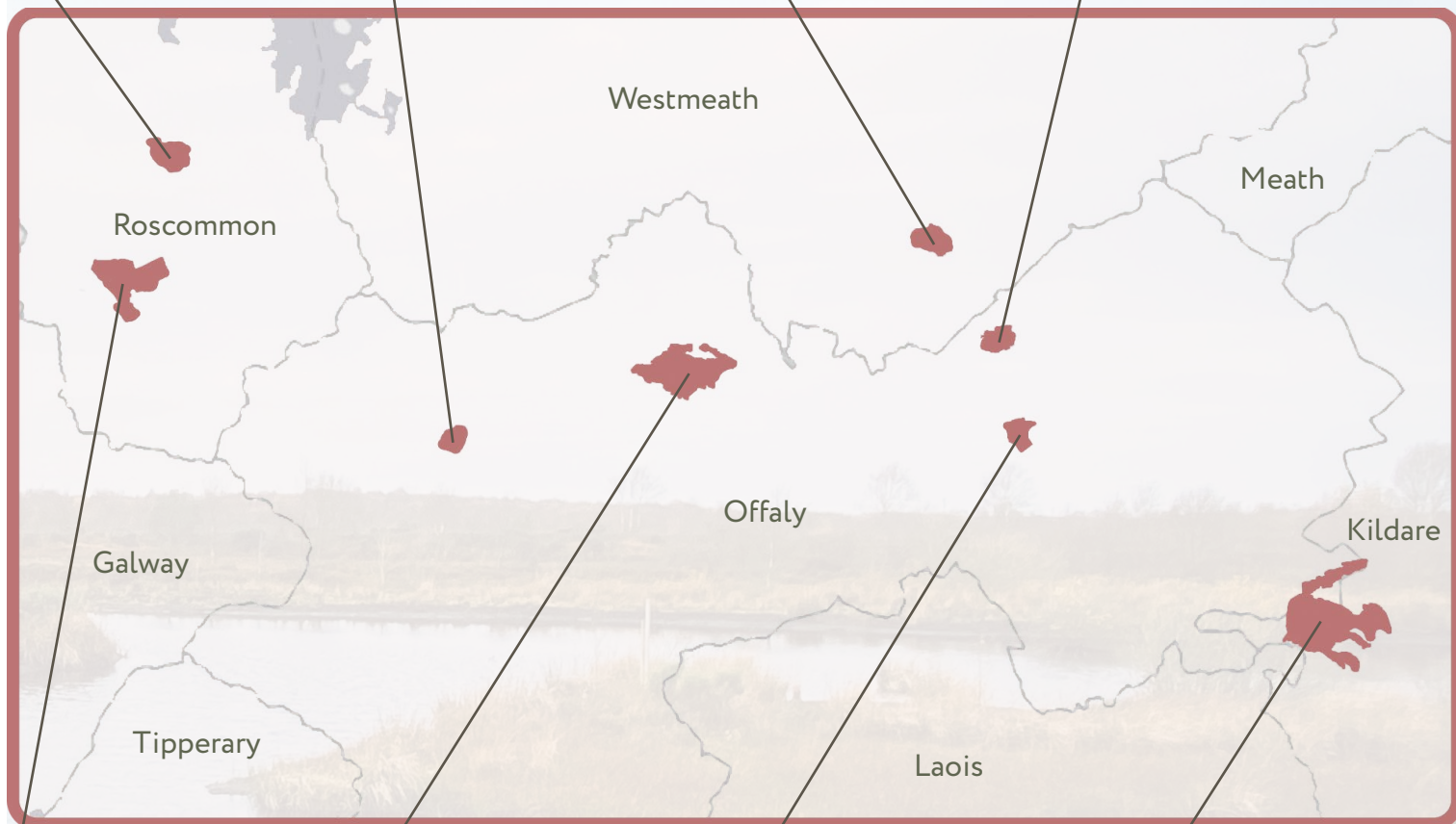
Participant farmers: 1
Size: 153 hectares with 120ha of uncut high bog.
Conservation status: Ferbane Bog is protected as an SAC.

Cloncrow Bog

Participant farmers: 2
Size: 132 ha of high bog remaining
Conservation status: Cloncrow Bog is protected as a Cloncrow Bog (New Forest) Natural Heritage Area (NHA).

Raheenmore Bog

Participant farmers: 4
Size: Over 210 hectares
Conservation status: It is one of the deepest bogs left in Ireland with peat reaching a depth of 15m in places. It is protected as an SAC.



Clonboley Bog

Participating farmers: 7
Size: Comprises of a cluster of bogs.
Conservation status: Largely owned by Bord na Mona with some restoration work. A local community group, The Ballydangan Bog Red Grouse Project is very active on the bog.

Clara Bog

Participating farmers: 10
Size: Clara Bog is the one of the finest remaining examples of a raised bog in Ireland and Europe and covers approximately 840 hectares.
Conservation status: It is an SAC, a Natura 2000 site, a National Nature Reserve, a RAMSAR Wetland Site, and a Natural Heritage Area.

Daingean Bog

Participating farmers: 2
Size: approximately 76ha of high bog and cutover bog.
Conservation status: Daingean Bog is protected as a Natural Heritage Area (NHA).

Umeras Bog

Participating farmers: 6
Size: approximately 240ha
Conservation status: Owned by Bord na Mona, who are working on rewetting the bog. A local community group (Umeras Community Development Group) are also actively promoting the protection of this site.

On The Farm - Hedgerows

FarmPEAT top tips for a high scoring hedgerow on mineral soils.

- Reduce intensity of cutting so that the hedgerow grows wider at the base (>2m)
- Allow the hedge to grow higher
- Consider allowing a margin between the hedgerow and the field where no slurry or fertiliser (if you can get it!) is applied and where wildflowers and grasses are allowed to flower over the summer. Temporary fencing might be needed here which can be taken down at the end of the season and the margin can be grazed or cut.
- Be careful if applying pesticides in fields so that no pesticide reaches the hedgerow or the margin.
- If you have gaps in a hedgerow now is a good time to either plant the gaps with suitable native species or lay the hedge.
- If you have a field boundary with no hedgerow now is also the time of year to plant a new hedge – consider this on your farm but not on peat soils.



Example of good hedgerow



Example of poor hedgerow

Social Media

To stay up to date with the FarmPEAT Project, please follow us on Twitter and Facebook. We are also currently creating videos, documenting the project, the farmers, communities with the peat landscape as well as attempting to capture the history and heritage of this remarkable region.



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Share Your Love!

If you love bogs like us, please share your pictures and stories with the FarmPEAT team and give us the opportunity to spotlight your narrative in future Newsletters or social media posts!

Email: paddymalone@farmpeat.ie



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An Roinn Talmhaíochta,
Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture,
Food and the Marine

