



## DEFENDING IRELAND'S PROTECTED RAISED BOGS FROM ILLEGAL EXTRACTION

**A report by Friends of the Irish Environment on the continuing destruction of Ireland's priority habitat Natura 2000 raised bogs**

*This report should be read in conjunction with our [May 2011 report](#) and our [petition](#) to the European Parliament*

**3 JUNE 2012**



*29 May 2012: Monivea bog, near Athenry, Co. Galway. A priority habitat Natura 2000 site: one of the EU's most important peatland sites. Decimated by machine cutting on the weekend of 26/27 May 2012 – more than 50 plots were cut. NPWS rangers and the Gardaí [reportedly](#) "monitored" the cutting but did not intervene.*

## INTRODUCTION

Almost a year ago to the day, we released a [report](#) revealing the ongoing destruction of Ireland's protected raised bogs as a result of mechanised turf cutting (peat extraction for fuel), following unannounced site visits to 33 of Ireland's 53 raised bog Natura 2000 sites. The report recorded widespread turf cutting on protected raised bogs on a scale which had not been reported by Irish authorities to the European Commission.

Legal proceedings are ongoing in respect of this issue, with the European Commission having finally commenced proceedings against the Irish government in January 2011, almost 19 years after the Habitats Directive was adopted. Following our May 2011 report, the European Commission accelerated these proceedings, issuing a Reasoned Opinion in June 2011 and, unusually, giving the Irish government only one month to respond.

The European Commission has since made it clear<sup>1</sup> that it may seek an injunction from the European Court of Justice to require Ireland to take effective action to prevent damage to the raised bog Natura 2000 sites in 2012. With this in mind, we set out to test the effectiveness of the government's response to date. There have been many reports in the media of aerial monitoring of the bogs by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), supported by the Gardaí; the possibility of turf cutting farmers' CAP payments being affected if they cut turf illegally from protected bogs; and the preparation of prosecutions, etc.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, NGOs including Friends of the Irish Environment (FIE) and An Taisce have questioned the effectiveness of the government's response.<sup>3</sup> So what is the situation on the ground? Are the bogs still being destroyed by cutting and drainage? Or is the government's enforcement strategy acting as an effective deterrent?

Having requested and been denied access to the NPWS's monitoring records regarding the protected bogs, in March 2012 we visited some of the bogs on foot, but our site visits turned out to be too early owing to bad weather (turf cutting is a seasonal activity: cut when the weather is good enough in spring, allow the turf to dry over summer, collect in autumn for burning in winter).

Following several reports of confrontations on the protected bogs later in the spring between turf cutters and the NPWS/Gardaí, we decided to come up with an alternative plan for further site visits in 2012.



*A sign at Barroughter bog, Co. Galway, warns Friends of the Irish Environment (FIE) not to visit.*

<sup>1</sup> Cullen, P. (2011) EU threatens court action over illegal turfcutting. Irish Times, 17 June 2011: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2011/0617/1224299072082.html>

<sup>2</sup> Irish Times (2012) Turf-cutters could face prosecution. 31 May 2012: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0531/1224316989515.html>

<sup>3</sup> McDonald, F. (2012) Turf-cutters defy EU law, say monitors. Irish Times, 29 May 2012: <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0529/1224316867975.html>

Having read of the NPWS's aerial monitoring of the protected bogs, we decided to carry out a similar survey. We weighed up the environmental pros and cons of an aerial survey, and decided that the balance tipped in favour of proceeding.<sup>4</sup> We planned a



route that would take in 22 protected raised bogs, and carried out our survey on 29 May 2012. The route took four and a half hours to complete in a four-seater Cessna 172, travelling at heights of around 700 feet to 1500 feet.

*The Cessna 172 used for our aerial survey.*

## SUMMARY OF OUR FINDINGS

In summary, we found that a staggering **17 of the 22 protected bogs surveyed have been cut this year**. This represents **32% of Ireland's total number of active raised bog Natura 2000 sites** (17 of 53 sites) and 77% of the sites we surveyed. The actual figure is even higher: e.g. we are reliably informed that Moanveanlagh bog in County Kerry<sup>5</sup> and Coolrain bog in County Laois have also been cut this year,<sup>6</sup> though we did not cover these sites as part of our aerial survey. Eight of the 17 sites we found cut this year have in the past received EU LIFE funding for bog restoration (Coolrain similarly benefited from an EU LIFE-funded restoration project). Tellingly for Ireland's enforcement strategy, over the past month there has been a rapid increase in the number of protected bogs cut, and the heaviest cutting so far took place on the weekend of 26/27 May.<sup>7</sup>

On 1 May 2012 Minister Deenihan told the Dáil that "To date, there has been one significant incidence of cutting on one protected bog, with more minor incidences on four others."<sup>8</sup> Only four weeks later the number of sites has almost quadrupled, from five to at least nineteen (the 17 we found plus Moanveanlagh and Coolrain). It is therefore clear that the government's enforcement strategy is an abject failure, and that the European Commission's softly-softly approach is failing to protect some of Europe's most important and most threatened protected areas. The Turf Cutters and Contractors Association's (TCCA) campaign and the government's apparent inaction have evidently emboldened the cutters. As Shannonside reported recently, according to the

<sup>4</sup> The main alternative would be driving two cars all over the country for perhaps three full days, and some sites would be very difficult or impossible to access in this way. On the pro side of the argument, the aim of our aerial survey is to have 53 raised bog sites properly protected, which, if successful, would be hugely beneficial in climate change and biodiversity terms.

<sup>5</sup> Members of Minister Deenihan's family have cut turf in the past on this bog:

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/turf-deal-better-than-giving-9m-a-year-to-europe-185180.html>.

<sup>6</sup> In respect of Coolrain, see Leinster Express (2012) Coolrain turfcutters defy EU. 1 June 2012:

<http://www.leinsterexpress.ie/news/local/coolrain-turfcutters-defy-eu-1-3910140>

<sup>7</sup> At Monivea bog, near Athenry in Co. Galway, and at Coolrain bog, near Borris-in-Ossory, Co. Laois.

Regarding Monivea, see Irish Times (2012) Turf-cutters defying ban warned of prosecutions. 1 June 2012:

<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/ireland/2012/0601/1224317058294.html>. And see our full photographic record for Monivea – link later in this report and in the table at the end. Regarding Coolrain, see note 6 above.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2012/05/01/00010.asp#N4>

Chairperson of the Kiltewan Corbo bog in Roscommon, "the campaign led by the Turf-Cutters and Contractors Association has encouraged SAC bog-owners to continue to cut turf despite a ban on the practice... if it wasn't for them, many bog-owners would be too afraid to continue cutting."<sup>9</sup> (In passing, we would like to put on the record that, in spite of claims to the contrary by the TCCA's Luke Flanagan TD, environmentalists do not generally (or indeed perhaps at all) support the TCCA's proposal to allow cutting to continue on certain protected raised bogs in exchange for the designation of areas of other, uncontroversial, bogs (i.e. bogs selected on the basis that they are not currently being cut, rather than on the basis of their ecological value). The TCCA do not appear to appreciate that Ireland will be required to designate additional raised bogs as Natura 2000 sites *anyway*, to compensate for the damage done by turf cutters over the past years.)

An effective enforcement strategy would have stopped the cutting in its tracks from the outset. The Dáil passed legislation in 2011 to allow turf cutting machinery to be confiscated on the protected bogs.<sup>10</sup> Why were these powers not used when cutting was first detected this year? Why have they not been used since? On the day of our survey we witnessed and photographed machinery out cutting and spreading on two protected bogs: Lough Ree (Co. Roscommon) and Moneybeg (Co. Westmeath/Meath). The NPWS was already aware of earlier illegal cutting at the former site, so why did the cutters feel at liberty to continue on the day we were there? Why was no-one present to stop the cutters? And what of all the people we saw out footing illegally-cut turf? Are they to be allowed to collect this turf? If so, what sort of message does this send to people who chose to comply with the law this year? If not, why is the government allowing people to foot turf in the erroneous belief that they will be able to take it home at the end of the year? The implications for the government's enforcement strategy are clear.

The following report from the Leinster Express of 1 June 2012 gives an idea of the reality on the ground: "Gardaí stood by and watched last weekend as turf was cut in Coolrain bog, despite it being designated a Special Area of Conservation by the government. Nearly 100 local men, women and children came out to support a contractor who cut turf for about one third of the plot owners over three days, in what was reported to be a party atmosphere, with enough food donated by the community "to feed an army." On Friday evening, May 25 turfcutters blocked the lane into the bog, and machine cutting began at 5am on Saturday morning, continuing until 10.30pm that night, the same on Sunday, and from 4am to 8am on Monday. A representative from the National Parks and Wildlife Service was barred by men from entering the bog, but after speaking to the group of men for some time, a Garda Inspector was allowed access to walk the bog and speak with the machine driver. Last week helicopters circled over Coolrain to check if turf was being cut, on behalf of the National Parks and Wildlife Service."<sup>11</sup> We have heard and read similar reports from other protected bogs across the country, including Monivea, which is featured on the cover of this report.

We appreciate that many NPWS rangers are doing their best in very difficult circumstances, and we commend them for their bravery. It should be highlighted,

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<sup>9</sup> Shannonside (2012) Shannonside turfcutters says TCCA has allayed fears on illegal turf-cutting. 29 May 2012: <http://www.shannonside.ie/news-details.php?nid=12400>

<sup>10</sup> See regulation 35 of the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (SI No 477/2011): <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2011/en/si/0477.html>

<sup>11</sup> See Leinster Express (2012) Coolrain turfcutters defy EU. 1 June 2012: <http://www.leinsterexpress.ie/news/local/coolrain-turfcutters-defy-eu-1-3910140>

however, that the task is reportedly made immeasurably more difficult by a lack of political support. Be in no doubt: what we are witnessing on the protected bogs this summer is the natural heritage equivalent of allowing Newgrange to be disassembled stone by stone. It is nothing short of heritage vandalism. The impacts reach far beyond environmental protection: e.g. does the rule of law – a central principle of democracy – mean nothing in modern Ireland? Can the law simply be flouted without consequence? And what sort of a precedent does this set for other environmental conflicts in Europe? As the EU celebrates 20 years of EU nature protection,<sup>12</sup> will the European Commission simply stand by while at least nineteen *priority habitat* Natura 2000 sites are destroyed? To the Commission, our question is: “If not now, when?”

A full breakdown of our findings is contained in the table at the end of this report, together with links to online albums containing the full photographic record for each bog. (Alternatively, all of the albums can be found here: [https://picasaweb.google.com/105919722829010212847?authkey=Gv1sRqCJ7dkcbE\\_9imJg](https://picasaweb.google.com/105919722829010212847?authkey=Gv1sRqCJ7dkcbE_9imJg).) We have gone to great lengths to verify the precise locations of photos, and we have tagged the locations on the online albums. Thus, the locations of photos can be viewed on Google Maps or Google Earth in the right-hand pane of the online albums. The best view for checking these locations online is ‘satellite’. (In some cases the image of the relevant bog is blurry on Google Maps; in these cases we tagged the location as accurately as we could on Google Maps, and the precise location can then be cross-verified using aerial images from Ordnance Survey Ireland’s online map viewer.) To check the boundaries of the relevant Natura 2000 sites, please see <http://maps.biodiversityireland.ie/#>. This will allow readers to verify for themselves that the cutting shown in our aerial photos is indeed inside the relevant Natura 2000 site (we have indicated in captions where cutting pictured is outside the relevant site boundary).

## WHAT WE ASK

We are sending this report simultaneously to the government, the European Commission and the Petitions Committee of the European Parliament. We ask:

- **The government** to take serious steps to prevent Ireland’s natural heritage being destroyed. Style over substance steps - such as regular aerial surveys with no effective follow-up - are simply not good enough.
- **The European Commission** to bring an action for interim measures to require the government to take effective action to stop the damage.
- **The Petitions Committee of the European Parliament** to bring pressure to bear on the European Commission to perform its function as guardian of the Treaties and enforcer of EU law. To that end, we ask the Petitions Committee to consider this issue at its next meeting, and to request the European Commission to attend this meeting to explain its position publicly. Further, we repeat our request for the Petitions Committee to carry out an urgent fact-finding mission to Ireland, and subsequently to issue a Committee report containing its detailed observations and recommendations.

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<sup>12</sup> See ‘Environment: Celebrating 20 years of EU nature protection (IP/12/488)’, 21 May 2012: <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/12/488&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&uiLanguage=en>

## BACKGROUND

As we noted in the introduction to our May 2011 report, Ireland has failed, generally and persistently, to apply EU law in respect of peat extraction.

Ireland's behaviour represents a direct challenge to the rule of law in the EU. To date, no effective action has been taken, either at the EU or national levels, to protect Ireland's peatlands, notwithstanding the designation for protection of raised and blanket bogs under the Habitats Directive, legal proceedings brought by the European Commission, and adverse judgments of the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

Active raised bog and active blanket bog are *priority* habitats under Annex I of the Habitats Directive. As such, they are amongst the most threatened habitats in the EU, and must be protected by the designation and protection of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

In February 1998, Síle de Valera, then Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, announced that she would seek to phase out turf cutting in blanket bog SACs over 5–10 years, and that a ban on turf cutting should apply immediately in respect of raised bog SACs.<sup>13</sup> However, by February 1999 - just one year later - following "a series of consultations...with representatives of the farm organisations and turf cutters",<sup>14</sup> the government's position had changed fundamentally. Minister de Valera announced a self-awarded, unlawful 'derogation' of up to 10 years for 'domestic cutting' in raised bogs and a 'derogation' of indefinite duration for cutting in blanket bog SACs. The results have been devastating, and cutting continues to this day, notwithstanding the expiry of the unlawful 'derogation'.

In their 2006 Report, "Assessment of impacts of turf cutting on designated raised bogs",<sup>15</sup> Valverde *et al.* record "the reduction in the original raised bog area [in Ireland] from 311,000ha to [the] current area of around 18,000ha [a reduction of over 94%]." Ireland's 2007 Article 17 report to the European Commission under the Habitats Directive recorded a further decrease of 36% in active raised bog extent from 1994-2005.<sup>16</sup> Most recently, Ireland's 4<sup>th</sup> National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity, released in May 2010, stated that "It is estimated that there has been a 99% loss of the original area of actively growing raised bog in Ireland, and one-third of the remaining 1% has been lost in the last 10 years."<sup>17</sup>

It is important to highlight the nature of the activities involved. Turf cutting is sometimes characterised as 'traditional', conjuring images of men and women, sleán in hand, cutting small quantities of turf for personal use. In fact, as Valverde *et al.* recorded in

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<sup>13</sup> See Adjournment Debate, Special Areas of Conservation, 10 February 1998: <http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/D/0486/D.0486.199802100021.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Síle de Valera, Written Answers, Turf-cutting Rights, 3 February 1999: <http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/D/0499/D.0499.199902030069.html>.

<sup>15</sup> Valverde *et al.* (2006) Assessment of impacts of turf cutting on designated raised bogs. A report to the research section of the National Parks & Wildlife Service: [http://www.npws.ie/publications/Valverde\\_et\\_al\\_2006\\_Turf\\_cutting\\_assessment\\_Vol\\_1\\_-\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.npws.ie/publications/Valverde_et_al_2006_Turf_cutting_assessment_Vol_1_-_Summary.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> See [http://www.npws.ie/publications/euconservationstatus/NPWS\\_2007\\_Conservation\\_Status\\_Report.pdf](http://www.npws.ie/publications/euconservationstatus/NPWS_2007_Conservation_Status_Report.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.cbd.int/doc/world/ie/ie-nr-04-en.pdf> (p13).

their 2006 report, hand cutting "is not likely to be a significant activity on any designated raised bogs now or in the future."<sup>18</sup>

This comment is supported by our 2011 site visits and by our 2012 aerial survey, which found no evidence of hand cutting.<sup>19</sup> While some of the ancillary work involved is done by hand because it cannot be mechanised (e.g. footing (stacking) the turf to allow it to dry), the cutting itself is typically done by diggers – typically operating from the cutaway area - and the turf is then spread out into rows by the hopper (sometimes a standalone machine, other times a tractor with a spreading mechanism).

The Turf Development Act 1981 kick-started the mechanisation of turf extraction in Ireland by providing a grant aid scheme for access roads and drainage as well as the purchasing, leasing, or hiring of turf development equipment. In short, what we are dealing with here is not traditional turf cutting. It is large-scale, mechanised and intensive cutting of a priority habitat.

This report is composed of sample photographs illustrating the damage recorded during our aerial survey, plus a summary table at the end, which provides brief details together with links to the full photographic record for each bog – more than 500 photographs in total.

As Valverde *et al.* concluded in 2006: "Turf cutting has broken the link between the peat body and local topography, climate and local hydrology.... The long term conservation of raised bogs requires that this link be re-established as far as possible. After the cessation of turf cutting it is essential to proceed to restore the hydrology of the bog. Unless urgent steps are taken to prevent further deterioration of the remaining examples of this priority habitat, Ireland is in danger of losing these invaluable habitats in the next few decades."<sup>20</sup>



*A tiny island of bog is all that remains amidst a sea of cutting on Moannakeeba West, an undesignated bog near Lough Derg, Co. Galway. While the cutting pictured here is not on a designated bog, and hence is not in breach of the Habitats Directive, unless urgent action is taken Ireland's remaining raised bogs face a similar fate: lost forever to 'domestic' peat extraction. Moannakeeba West serves to show what could happen if protection is not properly enforced, and what is currently happening to the unprotected raised bogs of Ireland.*

<sup>18</sup> See [http://www.npws.ie/publications/archive/Valverde\\_et\\_al\\_2006\\_Turf\\_cutting\\_assessment\\_Vol\\_1\\_-\\_Summary-5.pdf](http://www.npws.ie/publications/archive/Valverde_et_al_2006_Turf_cutting_assessment_Vol_1_-_Summary-5.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> We have been informed that a family of hand cutters still operates on Mouds bog in Co. Kildare (in addition to all the machine cutting). There may be isolated others on other Natura 2000 sites.

<sup>20</sup> See [http://www.npws.ie/publications/archive/Valverde\\_et\\_al\\_2006\\_Turf\\_cutting\\_assessment\\_Vol\\_1\\_-\\_Summary-5.pdf](http://www.npws.ie/publications/archive/Valverde_et_al_2006_Turf_cutting_assessment_Vol_1_-_Summary-5.pdf), at point 7 of the Executive Summary.



*Monivea bog, near Athenry in Co. Galway. Note the dark, spread turf in the plots. On the weekend of 26/27 May 2012, machine cutters working here were [reportedly](#) 'protected' by supporters from Offaly and Roscommon. More than 50 plots have been cut here so far this year.*

## **Monivea bog, Co. Galway**

See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)





## Mouds bog, Co. Kildare

See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)

*Note the vehicle tracks (below) across the high bog at Mouds, near Newbridge in Co. Kildare. This is ecologically damaging and would not be possible on a healthy raised bog. About 20 plots have been cut so far this year.*





## **Ardgraique, Co. Galway**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**

*About 20 plots have been cut so far this year at Ardgraique, near Killimor in Co. Galway. Note the evident impacts of turf cutting on the bog in the photo below.*





*At least 20 plots have been cut so far this year at Lough Ree bog, between Roscommon and Lough Ree. Note the digger and spreader above, which were working on the day of our survey.*

## **Lough Ree, Co. Roscommon**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





## Lough Corrib, Co. Galway

See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)

*At least 20 plots have been cut so far this year at Lough Corrib bog, located at the south-eastern edge of the lough.*





*Around 15 plots have been cut so far this year at Barroughter bog, located on the north-western shores of Lough Derg, Co. Galway*

## **Barroughter bog, Co. Galway**

See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)





*About 15 plots have been cut so far this year at the Lough Lurgeen bog complex, located south-east of Glenamaddy in Co. Galway*

## **Lough Lurgeen, Co. Galway**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*More than ten plots have been cut so far this year at Cloonmoylan bog, located near the north-western shores of Lough Derg, Co. Galway*

## **Cloonmoylan, Co. Galway**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*Five or six plots have been cut so far this year at Corbo bog, located 7 km west of Lanesborough in Co. Roscommon*

## **Corbo bog, Co. Roscommon**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*About five plots have been cut so far this year at Moneybeg bog, located on the southern shores of Lough Sheelin in Co. Westmeath/Meath. The digger and spreader were working on the day of our survey. Note the enormous spreading area below, comprising turf from several plots.*

# **Moneybeg bog, Co. Westmeath/Meath**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*Four plots have been cut so far this year at Camderry bog, about 9 km south-east of Glenamaddy in Co. Galway. The striped area to the right of the picture above is an EU LIFE-funded restoration site, adjacent to some of this year's cutting.*

## **Camderry bog, Co. Galway**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





## Kilsallagh, Co. Galway

See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)

*Four plots have been cut so far this year at Kilsallagh bog, about 7 km north of Glenamaddy in Co. Galway. An individual with a tractor was footing illegally-cut turf on the day of our survey (above).*





*Turf has been cut from 3 plots within the Natura 2000 site at Bellanagare bog so far this year (above and below), about 6 km north-north-east of Castlerea, Co. Roscommon. In addition, there is a lot of cutting just outside the northern boundary of the site, which may not have been properly assessed or approved, despite its potential impacts on the Natura 2000 site.*

## **Bellanagare, Co. Roscommon**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*Two or three plots have been cut so far this year at Luke Flanagan TD's bog, Cloonchambers, about 6 km west of Castlerea, Co. Roscommon.*

## **Cloonchambers, Co. Roscommon**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*Two or three plots have been cut so far this year at Curraghlehanagh, about 6 km north of Mountbellew, Co. Galway. Note the concentric circles behind the plots below – a clear indication of a drained, cracked, damaged bog.*

## **Curraghlehanagh, Co. Galway**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*The two cut plots above are within the Natura 2000 site at Corliskea, about 5 km south of Castlerea, Co. Roscommon. Below, the area above the road is within the Natura 2000 site, while the heavily-cut area below the road is outside the protected area. This is all one bog – has the cutting below the road been approved or assessed for impacts on the protected area (or otherwise)?*

## **Corliskea, Co. Roscommon/Galway**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**





*A single plot has been cut so far this year at Lisnageeragh bog, about 3 km north-east of Glenamaddy in Co. Galway. An individual was present footing the turf on the day of our survey (above).*

## **Lisnageeragh, Co. Galway**

**See the full photographic record and locations [here](#)**



## Summary findings

In addition to the sites recorded below, we have reliable reports of cutting in Moanveanlagh bog (Co. Kerry) and Coolrain bog (Co. Laois).

	Site code	Name	Number of plots we found cut this year	Other notes	Links to photos + precise locations
1	002352	Monivea, Co. Galway	At least 50 plots	See <a href="#">news report</a> EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE09 NAT/IE/000222	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
2	002331	Mouds bog, Co. Kildare	About 20 plots		<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
3	002356	Ardgraique bog, Co. Galway	About 20 plots	Individuals on site footing turf on the day of our survey	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>

	<b>Site code</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of plots we found cut this year</b>	<b>Other notes</b>	<b>Links to photos + precise locations</b>
4	000440	Lough Ree, Co. Roscommon	At least 20 plots	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121 and LIFE09 NAT/IE/000222  Digger and spreader working during our survey. Individuals present footing turf on the day of our survey.	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
5	000297	Lough Corrib, Co. Galway	At least 20 plots	Individuals on site footing turf on the day of our survey	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
6	000231	Barroughter, Co. Galway	At least 20 plots	Signs on site warning off FIE and NPWS rangers	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
7	000301	Lough Lurgen, Co. Galway	About 15 plots	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
8	000248	Cloonmoylan, Co. Galway	More than 10 plots		<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>

	<b>Site code</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of plots we found cut this year</b>	<b>Other notes</b>	<b>Links to photos + precise locations</b>
9	002349	Corbo, Co. Roscommon	About 6 plots		<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
10	002340	Moneybeg and Clareisland, Co. Westmeath/Meath	About 5 plots (two spreading areas - one of which is a very large spreading area using turf from four separate plots)	Digger and spreader working on site during our survey EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE09 NAT/IE/000222	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
11	002347	Camderry, Co. Galway	4 plots	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
12	000285	Kilsallagh, Co. Galway	4 plots	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121 Individual on site footing turf during our survey	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
13	000592	Bellanagare, Co. Roscommon	3 plots		<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
14	000600	Cloonchambers, Co.	2 or 3 plots		<a href="#">See 2012 photos and</a>

	Site code	Name	Number of plots we found cut this year	Other notes	Links to photos + precise locations
		Roscommon			<a href="#">locations here</a>
15	002350	Curraglehanagh, Co. Galway	2 or 3 plots	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121 and LIFE09 NAT/IE/000222	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
16	002110	Corliskea, Co. Roscommon/Galway	2 plots		<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
17	000296	Lisnageeragh, Co. Galway	1 plots	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121  Individual on site footing turf during our survey	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
18	002337	Crosswood, Co. Westmeath	None	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
19	002336	Carn Park, Co. Westmeath	None	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>

	<b>Site code</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Number of plots we found cut this year</b>	<b>Other notes</b>	<b>Links to photos + precise locations</b>
20	002353	Redwood, Co. Tipperary	None	Extensively burnt this year.	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and location here</a>
21	002338	Drumalough, Co. Roscommon	None	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>
22	002342	Mount Hevey, Co. Westmeath/Meath	None	EU LIFE funding provided for bog restoration: LIFE04 NAT/IE/000121	<a href="#">See 2012 photos and locations here</a>

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We are very grateful to the Patagonia Environmental Grants Fund of the Tides Foundation for supporting this project.

## **USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS**

The aerial photographs featured in this report, as well as the photographs contained in the [full photographic record](#) of our aerial survey, may be reproduced free of charge, provided photographs are attributed to Friends of the Irish Environment. If you would like a high resolution copy of any of the photographs, please contact us via our website.

## **OUR WIDER WORK ON UNDESIGNATED PEATLANDS**

This report on turf cutting in Natura 2000 sites forms part of a wider FIE project on Irish peatlands, designated and undesignated. Over the past four years, FIE has undertaken site visits and provided information to the Irish authorities, the European Commission's Directorate-General for the Environment and to the President of the European Parliament (through a Petition) demonstrating the continuing widespread, unlicensed industrial-scale extraction of peat by private operators on undesignated bogs. While these activities are not taking place on designated bogs, they have huge climate change, biodiversity, water quality and human health impacts.

Almost none of these commercial operations have planning permission and consequently no environmental impact assessments have been done. With the exception of Bord na Móna's operations, none of these activities, which include sites of more than 100 hectares, are licensed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We have been very active in campaigning on this subject. Recent work includes: lobbying to have unlicensed extraction (by Bulrush, Westland and others) in Co. Westmeath brought within development control (planning permission and EPA licensing); a case before the High Court in respect of this extraction in Co. Westmeath; site visits to a large horticultural extraction site in Co. Tipperary; challenging inaction by local authorities and the EPA in terms of completing the [Extractive Industries Register](#); an appeal to the Commissioner for Environmental Information regarding Bord na Móna's insistence that it is exempt from access to information legislation; calling celebrity gardener and Chelsea Flower Show award-winner Diarmuid Gavin to account for accepting sponsorship from Westland (a company which is devastating Co. Westmeath's bogs for horticultural use) while at the same time spearheading a campaign to phase out peat use in domestic gardening. Some site reports, submissions and supporting research are available from [our website](#).

## **SUPPORT OUR WORK**

Friends of the Irish Environment (FIE) is an independent environmental campaigning organisation structured as a non-profit company (Company No. 326985) limited by guarantee and registered in Ireland. It is a member of the European Environmental Bureau and the Irish Environmental Network. FIE comprises a network of environmentalists working largely as volunteers. If you would like to support our work, please visit <http://www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.net/>