National Parks and Wildlife Service

Conservation Objectives Series

Lough Lene SAC 002121



An Roinn Tithíochta, Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage,

90 King Street North, Dublin 7, D07 N7CV, Ireland.

Web: www.npws.ie E-mail: natureconservation@housing.gov.ie

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Introduction

The overall aim of the Habitats Directive is to maintain or restore the favourable conservation status of habitats and species of community interest. These habitats and species are listed in the Habitats and Birds Directives and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated to afford protection to the most vulnerable of them. These two designations are collectively known as the Natura 2000 network.

European and national legislation places a collective obligation on Ireland and its citizens to maintain habitats and species in the Natura 2000 network at favourable conservation condition. The Government and its agencies are responsible for the implementation and enforcement of regulations that will ensure the ecological integrity of these sites.

A site-specific conservation objective aims to define favourable conservation condition for a particular habitat or species at that site.

The maintenance of habitats and species within Natura 2000 sites at favourable conservation condition will contribute to the overall maintenance of favourable conservation status of those habitats and species at a national level.

Favourable conservation status of a habitat is achieved when:

- its natural range, and area it covers within that range, are stable or increasing, and
- the specific structure and functions which are necessary for its long-term maintenance
- exist and are likely to continue to exist for the foreseeable future, and
- the conservation status of its typical species is favourable.

The favourable conservation status of a species is achieved when:

• population dynamics data on the species concerned indicate that it is maintaining itself on a long-term basis as a viable component of its natural habitats, and

• the natural range of the species is neither being reduced nor is likely to be reduced for the foreseeable future, and

• there is, and will probably continue to be, a sufficiently large habitat to maintain its populations on a long-term basis.

Notes/Guidelines:

1. The targets given in these conservation objectives are based on best available information at the time of writing. As more information becomes available, targets for attributes may change. These will be updated periodically, as necessary.

2. An appropriate assessment based on these conservation objectives will remain valid even if the targets are subsequently updated, providing they were the most recent objectives available when the assessment was carried out. It is essential that the date and version are included when objectives are cited.

3. Assessments cannot consider an attribute in isolation from the others listed for that habitat or species, or for other habitats and species listed for that site. A plan or project with an apparently small impact on one attribute may have a significant impact on another.

4. Please note that the maps included in this document do not necessarily show the entire extent of the habitats and species for which the site is listed. This should be borne in mind when appropriate assessments are being carried out.

5. When using these objectives, it is essential that the relevant backing/supporting documents are consulted, particularly where instructed in the targets or notes for a particular attribute.

Qualifying Interests

* indicates a priority habitat under the Habitats Directive			
002121	Lough Lene SAC		
1092	White-clawed Crayfish Austropotamobius pallipes		

3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp.

Supporting documents, relevant reports & publications

Supporting documents, NPWS reports and publications are available for download from: www.npws.ie/Publications

NPWS Documents

Year :	2013			
Title :	A survey of the benthic macrophytes of three hard-water lakes: Lough Bunny, Lough Carra and Lough Owel			
Author :	Roden, C.; Murphy, P.			
Series :	Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 70			
Year :	2013			
Title :	The status of EU protected habitats and species in Ireland. Volume 2. Habitats assessments			
Author :	NPWS			
Series :	Conservation assessments			
Year :	2015			
Title :	Habitats Directive Annex I lake habitats: a working interpretation for the purposes of site- specific conservation objectives and Article 17 reporting			
Author :	O Connor, Á.			
Series :	Unpublished document by NPWS			
Year :	2016			
Title :	Ireland Red List No. 10: Vascular Plants			
Author :	Wyse Jackson, M.; FitzPatrick, Ú.; Cole, E.; Jebb, M.; McFerran, D.; Sheehy Skeffington, M.; Wright, M.			
Series :	Ireland Red Lists series, NPWS			
Year :	2019			
Title :	The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland. Volume 2: Habitat Assessments			
Author :	NPWS			
Author : Series :	NPWS Conservation assessments			
Author : Series : Year :	NPWS Conservation assessments 2020			
Author : Series : Year : Title :	NPWS Conservation assessments 2020 Marl Lake (Habitat 3140) Survey and Assessment Methods Manual			
Author : Series : Year : Title : Author :	NPWS Conservation assessments 2020 Marl Lake (Habitat 3140) Survey and Assessment Methods Manual Roden, C.; Murphy, P.; Ryan, J.; Doddy, P.			
Author : Series : Year : Title : Author : Series :	NPWS Conservation assessments 2020 Marl Lake (Habitat 3140) Survey and Assessment Methods Manual Roden, C.; Murphy, P.; Ryan, J.; Doddy, P. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 125			
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Other References

Year :	1982			
Title :	Eutrophication of waters. Monitoring assessment and control			
Author :	OECD			
Series :	OECD, Paris			
Year :	2006			
Title :	A reference-based typology and ecological assessment system for Irish lakes. Preliminary investigations. Final report. Project 2000-FS-1-M1 Ecological assessment of lakes pilot study to establish monitoring methodologies EU (WFD)			
Author :	Free, G.; Little, R.; Tierney, D.; Donnelly, K.; Coroni, R.			
Series :	Environmental Protection Agency, Wexford			
Year :	2008			
Title :	Water Quality in Ireland 2004-2006			
Author :	Clabby, K.J.; Bradley, C.; Craig, M.; Daly, D.; Lucey, J.; McGarrigle, M.; O'Boyle, S.; Tierney, D.; Bowman, J.			
Series :	Environmental Protection Agency, Wexford			
Year :	2008			
Title :	The effect of excessive water abstraction on the vegetation and conservation status of Lough Bane, County Meath/Westmeath. Special Area of Conservation no 002120. Updated October 2008			
Author :	Roden, C.			
Series :	Report to Meath County Council			
Year :	2009			
Title :	The marl lakes of the British Isles			
Author :	Pentecost, A.			
Series :	Freshwater Reviews, 2(1): 167-197			
Year :	2010			
Title :	Water Quality in Ireland 2007-2009			
Author :	McGarrigle, M.; Lucey, J.; Ó Cinnéide, M.			
Series :	Environmental Protection Agency, Wexford			
Year :	2015			
Title :	Water Quality in Ireland 2010-2012			
Author :	Bradley, C.; Byrne, C.; Craig, M.; Free, G.; Gallagher, T.; Kennedy, B.; Little, R.; Lucey, J.; Mannix, A.; McCreesh, P.; McDermott, G.; McGarrigle, M.; Ní Longphuirt, S.; O'Boyle, S.; Plant, C.; Tierney, D.; Trodd, W.; Webster, P.; Wilkes, R.; Wynne, C.			
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Spatial data sources			
Year :	2021		
Title :	OSi Prime 2 water polygon file		
GIS Operations :	WaterPolygons feature class clipped to the SAC boundary. Expert opinion used to identify Annex I habitat and to resolve any issues arising		
Used For :	3140 (map 2)		

Conservation Objectives for : Lough Lene SAC [002121]

1

3140 Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of Chara spp.

To maintain the favourable conservation condition of Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of *Chara* spp. in Lough Lene SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Habitat area	Hectares	Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes	The SAC contains Lough Lene, a marl lake with habitat 3140. Lough Lene was assessed as in good conservation condition in 2012 (Roden et al., 2020). It has been classified as mesotrophic in the past owing to mean chlorophyll <i>a</i> and total phosphorus concentrations (Clabby et al., 2008), and is still threatened by nutrient enrichment. The area of the lake may have been impacted by the Boyne Drainage Scheme 1969-1980. The surface area of the lake is the simplest measure of extent and should be stable or increasing. It may also be possible to estimate the area of the vegetation communities/zones that typify the habitat. Further information relating to all attributes is provided in Roden et al. (2020) and O Connor (2015). See also Pentecost (2009) and Roden et al. (2020) for an overview of marl lakes in Britain and Ireland
Habitat distribution	Occurrence	No decline, subject to natural processes	As noted above, habitat 3140 is found in Lough Lene and was surveyed in 2007 (Roden, 2008) and 2012 (Roden et al., 2020). It is also a Water Framework Directive (WFD) monitoring lake. See map 2
Vegetation composition: typical species	Occurrence	Typical species present, in good condition, and demonstrating typical abundances and distribution	See Roden et al. (2020) for records of characteristic marl lake species in Lough Lene including cyanophyte crust and five charophyte taxa: <i>Chara curta, C. contraria, C. virgata, C. rudis</i> and the rare <i>Chara denudata</i> . Angiosperms, including stands of large floating species such as <i>Potamogeton lucens</i> and <i>P. perfoliatus</i> are more widespread and abundant in Lough Lene than is typical for Irish marl lakes, possibly a result of nutrient enrichment. For lists of typical species for lake habitat 3140 (cyanobacteria, algae, higher plants and water beetles), see the habitat 3140 Article 17 assessments (NPWS, 2013, 2019) and O Connor (2015). Roden et al. (2020) list species. Roden et al. (2020) highlighted that the small population of zebra mussel (<i>Dreissena polymorpha</i>) in Lough Lene may indicate that the animal can only flourish in eutrophic conditions
Vegetation composition: characteristic zonation	Occurrence	Maintain characteristic charophyte and crust zones	Roden et al. (2020) described the 2012 Lough Lene zonation: well-developed crust; charophyte zones; <i>Potamogeton perfoliatus</i> and <i>Elodea canadensis</i> to 6-7m. The 2007 transect had cyanophyte crust (with <i>Chara contraria</i>) to 1m, <i>C. curta</i> zone to 2m (with <i>Ophrydium versatile, P. gramineus</i>), <i>P. lucens</i> zone (understory of <i>C. globularis</i>) 2-3m, <i>C. rudis</i> zone to 4m, macrophyte zone (<i>P. lucens, P. perfoliatus, E. canadensis</i>) to 6m, then occasional <i>P. perfoliatus</i> (Roden, 2008). The characteristic zonation of 3140 in marl lakes was described in Roden and Murphy (2013) and updated by Roden et al. (2020). Marl lakes in good condition have four or more characteristic vegetation zones present (see Roden et al., 2020). Roden et al. (2020) also give cyanophyte crust methods (3 metrics) and a novel indicator (C&K score) of good structure and function

Vegetation distribution: maximum depth	Metres	Maintain maximum depth of vegetation (euphotic depth), subject to natural processes	Maximum depth of vegetation was 7m in Lough Lene in 2012, similar to the value recorded in 2007 (Roden et al., 2020; Roden, 2008). It differs to other marl lakes in good condition in that <i>Potamogeton perfoliatus</i> and <i>Elodea canadensis</i> occur from 6-7m, below the charophyte zones. This replacement of deep water charophytes by angiosperms may indicate a degree of eutrophication, but given the deep euphotic zone, the lake was classified as good (Roden et al., 2020). Roden (2008) suggested that shading by pondweeds may have been responsible for the occurrence of an understory of <i>C. globularis</i> at shallower depths than in nearby Loughs White and Bane. The target for maximum depth of vegetation colonisation (euphotic depth) in marl lakes is >7m (Roden et al., 2020). Euphotic depth is considered to be a key measure of the structure and functions of marl lake vegetation and has been found to exceed 10m in some Irish marl lakes (Roden et al., 2020)
Hydrological regime: water level fluctuations	Metres	Maintain appropriate hydrological regime necessary to support the habitat	Water level is monitored at Lough Lene for the Castlepollard Regional Water Supply Scheme (see Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) HydroNet) and appears to fluctuate by over 1m in most years. Lene is also within the Boyne Drainage Scheme. Fluctuations in lake water level can be amplified by activities such as abstraction and drainage. In undisturbed marl lakes, fluctuations follow predictable seasonal trends and relationships exist with the vegetation zones (Roden et al., 2020). In summer, more than 90% of the crust zone should be covered and water level should never be lower than the top of the <i>Chara curta</i> zone; in winter, all zones should be submerged (Roden et al., 2020). Groundwater normally exerts a strong influence on the hydrology of marl lakes. Increased water level fluctuations can increase wave action, up-root vegetation, increase turbidity, alter the substratum and lead to release of nutrients from the sediment
Lake substratum quality	Various	Maintain appropriate substratum type, extent and chemistry to support the vegetation	Roden et al. (2020) recorded marl sand at Lough Lene. Much of the shoreline is stony. In general, marl lakes are dominated by limestone bedrock, calcareous silt and sand, and loose stones (Roden et al., 2020). Deposited peat may indicate excessive sediment inputs and sediment can accumulate phosphorus and release it into the water column (Roden et al., 2020). Further research into acceptable sediment phosphorus concentrations and other aspects of substratum quality in marl lakes would be beneficial
pH and Alkalinity	pH units, mg/l	Maintain appropriate water and sediment pH, alkalinity and cation concentrations to support the habitat, subject to natural processes	Free et al. (2006) reported alkalinity of 104.9mg/l and pH of 8.46 in Lough Lene. Average alkalinity of 94-97mg/l was recorded 2007-2015. The lower alkalinity boundary may lie between 80 and 100mg/l; however, alkalinity is far higher in most Irish marl lakes, exceeding 200mg/l in some cases (Roden et al., 2020). Acidification is not considered a threat to habitat 3140; however, eutrophication can lead to at least temporary increases in pH to toxic levels (>9/9.5 pH units). Maximum pH should be <9.0 pH units, in line with the surface water standards (The European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) (Amendment) Regulations 2019). Further study of the sediment pH, alkalinity and cation concentration may assist in understanding of nutrient cycling

Nutrients	mg/l P; mg/l N	Maintain/restore the concentration of nutrients in the water column to sufficiently low levels to support the habitat and its typical species	The EPA reported good total phosphorus status (TP) in Lough Lene, with averages of 0.014, 0.015 and 0.011mg/l in 2007-09, 2010-12 and 2013-15 respectively. Roden et al. (2020) found that most marl lakes in good condition have TP \leq 0.01mg/l. While vegetation attributes determine the habitat's conservation condition and some good condition marl lakes have higher TP concentrations, \leq 0.01mg/l is the target for good condition proposed by Roden et al. (2020). The \leq 0.01mg/l TP target is equivalent to oligotrophic (OECD, 1982) and WFD High Status (The European Communities Environmental Objectives (Surface Waters) (Amendment) Regulations 2019). WFD High Status targets for total ammonia (annual average \leq 0.04mg/l N and annual 95th percentile \leq 0.09mg/l N) may also be appropriate. Lough Lene had High ammonia status 2007-2015. See also Free et al. (2016), McGarrigle et al. (2017)
Water colour	mg/l PtCo	Maintain appropriate water colour to support the habitat	Water colour in Lough Lene was 5mg/l PtCo in 2007 (Roden, 2008). Free et al. (2006) reported colour of 4mg/l PtCo in Lene in 2001-02. Roden et al. (2020) found that water colour (dissolved light-absorbing compounds) is negatively correlated with euphotic depth, charophyte species richness and cover, and positively correlated with vascular plant cover in marl lakes. Roden et al. (2020) set good condition at <15mg/l PtCo; however, it should be noted that the most important Irish marl lakes have very clear waters with colour of <5mg/l PtCo. Roden et al. (2020) also set a TP×Colour Index with a target of <0.1 for good. Increased colour decreases light penetration and reduces the area of macrophyte habitat, particularly at the lower euphotic depths. The primary source of increased colour in Ireland is peatland disturbance
Dissolved organic carbon (DOC)	mg/l	Maintain appropriate organic carbon levels to support the habitat	Dissolved organic carbon (DOC) in the water column is linked to water colour. It can provide a substrate (food source) for heterotrophic organisms, which can impact directly (e.g. shading) and indirectly (e.g. nutrient release) on the characteristic lake communities. Damage and degradation of peatland, leading to decomposition of peat is likely to be the predominant source of dissolved and particulate organic carbon in Ireland
Turbidity	Nephelometric turbidity units/ mg/l SS/ other appropriate unit	Maintain appropriate turbidity to support the habitat	Lough Lene is a clear marl lake (Roden et al., 2020). Turbidity can significantly affect the quantity and quality of light reaching rooted and attached vegetation and can, therefore, impact on lake habitats. The settlement of higher loads of inorganic or organic material on lake vegetation communities may also have impacts on sensitive, delicate species. Turbidity can increase as a result of re-suspension of material within the lake, higher loads entering the lake, or eutrophication. Turbidity measurement and interpretation is challenging. As a result, it is likely to be difficult to set habitat-specific targets for turbidity in lakes

Transparency	Metres	Maintain/restore appropriate Secchi transparency. There should be no decline in Secchi depth/transparency	Lough Lene had Secchi depths of 4.8m in 2001-02 (Free et al., 2006), 4.1-4.8m in 2004-06 (Clabby et al., 2008) and 5m in 2012 (Roden et al., 2020). Transparency relates to light penetration and, hence, to the depth of colonisation of vegetation. Roden et al. (2020) advised it is preferable to measure euphotic depth directly by observation, but noted that a decreasing trend in Secchi depth indicates declining water quality. Transparency can be affected by phytoplankton blooms, water colour and turbidity. Secchi depth in marl lakes in Good condition is generally >6m. The OECD fixed boundary system set transparency targets for oligotrophic lakes of \geq 6m annual mean Secchi disk depth and \geq 3m annual minimum Secchi disk depth
Attached algal biomass	Algal cover	Maintain trace/absent attached algal biomass (<5% cover)	No filamentous algae were noted in Lough Lene in 2012 (Roden et al., 2020). Nutrient enrichment can favour epiphytic and epipelic algae that can out-compete the submerged vegetation. Roden et al. (2020) noted that occasional blooms of filamentous algae occur in marl lakes in the absence of excess nutrients, especially species of the orders Zygnematales or Oedogoniales. Drifting masses of <i>Cladophora</i> species may indicate a decline in water quality. In general, the cover abundance of attached algae in marl lakes (3140) should be trace/absent (<5% cover)
Fringing habitat: area and condition	Hectares	Maintain/restore the area and condition of fringing habitats necessary to support the natural structure and functioning of habitat 3140	Much of the lake edge is re-seeded, fertilised grassland. A narrow fringe of emergents <i>Phragmites</i> <i>australis</i> and <i>Schoenoplectus (Scirpus) lacustris</i> occurs along some shores, and there are areas of fen, swamp and freshwater marsh. Wet woodland also occurs, including alder carr and bog woodland on cutover bog. <i>Pyrola rotundifolia</i> subsp. <i>rotundifolia</i> (Near Threatened; Wyse Jackson et al., 2016) was recorded in 2006 within fen carr/ wet willow-alder-ash woodland on the edge of the lake (NPWS internal files). The fringing habitats along lake shorelines intergrade with and support the structure and functions of the lake habitat. Equally, fringing habitats are dependent on the lake, particularly its water levels, and support wetland communities and species of conservation concern. Many of the fringing wetland habitats support higher invertebrate and plant species richness than the lake habitats themselves. See also Mainstone et al. (2016)

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Conservation Objectives for : Lough Lene SAC [002121]

1092 White-clawed Crayfish *Austropotamobius pallipes*

To restore the favourable conservation condition of White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*) in Lough Lene SAC, which is defined by the following list of attributes and targets:

Attribute	Measure	Target	Notes
Distribution	Number of occupied 1km squares	Restore presence in lake	White-clawed crayfish (<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>) was known from Lough Lene but the species disappeared from it in the 1980s. None were found in the lake by Gammell et al. (in prep.). Further work is required before a more specific target can be set
Negative indicator species	Occurrence	No non-indigenous crayfish species	Non-indigenous crayfish species (NICS) are identified as a major direct threat to the white- clawed crayfish (<i>Austropotamobius pallipes</i>) and as a disease vector, in particular crayfish plague (<i>Aphanomyces astaci</i>), which is fatal to white- clawed crayfish. The possession, import and intentional release of five species of invasive alien crayfish is banned by Statutory Instrument No. 354/2018. Should these become established in this SAC, then reintroduction of the species will probably be impossible
Disease	Occurrence	No instances of disease	Crayfish plague, caused by the water-borne mould <i>Aphanomyces astaci</i> , is identified as major threat to the species in Ireland. Instances of crayfish plague have occurred in Ireland since 2015 causing local extinctions. The extinction of white-clawed crayfish from Lough Lene is considered to have been caused by plague
Water quality	Water chemistry measures	Maintain appropriate water quality, particularly pH and nutrient levels, to support the natural structure and functioning of the habitat	White-clawed crayfish is not considered very sensitive of water quality but the species is intolerant of low pH and poorest water quality and lack of calcareous influence. There should be no decline in the water quality as defined by the targets for Hard oligo-mesotrophic waters with benthic vegetation of <i>Chara</i> spp. (Annex I habitat 3140) as these are more stringent than white-clawed crayfish requires. See the conservation objective for habitat 3140 in this volume for further details
Habitat quality: heterogeneity	Occurrence of positive habitat features	No decline from the baseline	White-clawed crayfish need high habitat heterogeneity. Larger crayfish must have stones to hide under, or an earthen bank in which to burrow. Hatchlings shelter in vegetation, gravel and among fine tree roots. Smaller crayfish are typically found among weed and debris in shallow water. Larger juveniles in particular may also be found among cobbles and detritus such as leaf litter. These conditions and habitat features must be available on the whole length of occupied habitat. Gammell et al. (in prep.) scored the habitat heterogeneity for Lough Lene and following this methodology, a baseline score of 0.48 is set







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