

NPWS

**Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC
(site code: 000133)**

**Conservation objectives supporting document -
coastal habitats**

Version 1 - supplement 1

April 2026

IMPORTANT: This supplement, published in 2026, includes details relating to the EU habitat **000133 Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC** which was added as a Qualifying Interest for the site after the Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (Version 1) were published. This document should be read in conjunction with the Version 2 Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (NPWS, 2026), and with the Conservation objectives supporting document - Coastal habitats Version 1 (NPWS, 2011). Any references to this habitat in previously published Site-specific Conservation Objectives (SSCO), or SSCO supporting documents, including the mapping, are to be considered **superseded** by these updates.

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Citation: NPWS (2026) Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC (site code 000133) Conservation objectives supporting document - coastal habitats V1 - supplement 1. Conservation Objectives Supporting Document Series. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Dublin, Ireland.

1. Introduction

2170 Dunes with *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (Salicion arenariae) were added as a Qualifying Interest to Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC (site code: 000133) after the Site-Specific Conservation Objectives (Version 1) were published. This document sets out the SSCO(s) for the newly listed Qualifying Interest(s) for the site and acts as a supplement to the original SSCO Supporting Document.

2. Coastal habitats

2.1 2170 Dunes with *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (Salicion arenariae)

2.1.1 Site description of habitat

The Murvagh sand dune system occurs in the inner part of Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC. The peninsula comprises a large sand dune system, fronted by a wide sandy beach on the seaward side with saltmarsh fringing the dunes on the more sheltered eastern side of the peninsula. Dunes with Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*) occur in close association with a conifer plantation and fixed dunes, next to the south-west boundary of the golf course. This area is of ecological interest, as it contains the greatest diversity of species within the sand dune habitat and also due to the presence of the Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*) (Ryle *et al.*, 2009).

2.1.2 Overall objective

The overall objective for '*Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (Salicion arenariae)' in Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC (site code: 000133) is to '*restore the Favourable conservation condition*'.

This objective is based on an assessment of the recorded condition of the habitat(s) under a range of attributes and targets. The assessment is divided into three main headings: (a) Area (b) Range and (c) Structure and Functions.

2.1.3 Area

Habitat area

Coastal habitats are generally dynamic and increase and decrease in area due to natural processes. These natural changes are not taken into account in conservation status assessments. Changes associated with human activities including destruction and restoration do contribute to the assessment of conservation status.

The area of 2170 habitat at Murvagh is calculated at 1.60ha based on the area recorded by Ryle *et al.* (2009). The area was recorded as Unfavourable therefore restoration of the habitat is required (Ryle *et al.*, 2009). It is likely that the presence of the plantation may have inhibited the extent of this habitat due to the closed canopy, but may have also increased the extent of this habitat in more open areas, at the expense of the wet dune slacks (Ryle *et al.*, 2009).

Target: Area stable or increasing, subject to natural processes, including erosion and succession.

2.1.4 Range

Habitat distribution

This habitat occurs in a mosaic with fixed dunes, dune slack and the conifer plantation at Murvagh.

Target: No decline in the distribution of this habitat, unless it is the result of natural processes.

2.1.5 Structure and Functions

Structure and Functions for *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (Salicion arenariae) are assessed on the basis of:

Physical structure: functionality and sediment supply

Target: Natural circulation of sediment and organic matter, absence of any physical obstructions or evidence of sediment extraction from the beach and its environs. Physical obstructions that have been in place and are unchanged since prior to 1994 are excluded from this target, unless they have a current adverse impact on sediment circulation

Disturbance

Target: No more than 20% of the habitat should be subject to disturbance e.g. trampling, vehicle damage, removal of substrate.

Bare sand

Target: Bare sand is present but does not exceed 10% of the habitat, subject to natural processes.

Physical structure: hydrological and flooding regime

Target: Hydrological regime supports typical seasonal fluctuations.

Vegetation composition: typical species (positive indicators)

Target: At least two of the positive species occur with a frequency of more than 40% of stops and another two species occur with a frequency of more than 20% of stops and every stop contains at least two positive species.

Vegetation composition: native negative indicator species

Target: No negative indicator species occurs at a frequency of more than 60% of stops and the total combined cover of all negative indicator species across the habitat is 5% or less and highest % cover of any negative indicator species within any stop is 25% or less.

Vegetation composition: non-native species

Target: No non-native species occurs at a frequency of more than 20% of stops and no evidence that % cover has increased.

Vegetation composition: rank grasses

Target: Total combined cover of *Dactylis glomerata* and *Arrhenatherum elatius* less than 10%.

Vegetation structure: height of *Salix repens*

Target: *Salix repens* height 5-30cm for all stops.

Vegetation composition: trees/scrub other than *Salix repens*

Target: Present at no more than 40% of stops and combined cover across the habitat of 5% or less.

Indicators of local distinctiveness: site-specific target features (including rare and notable species)

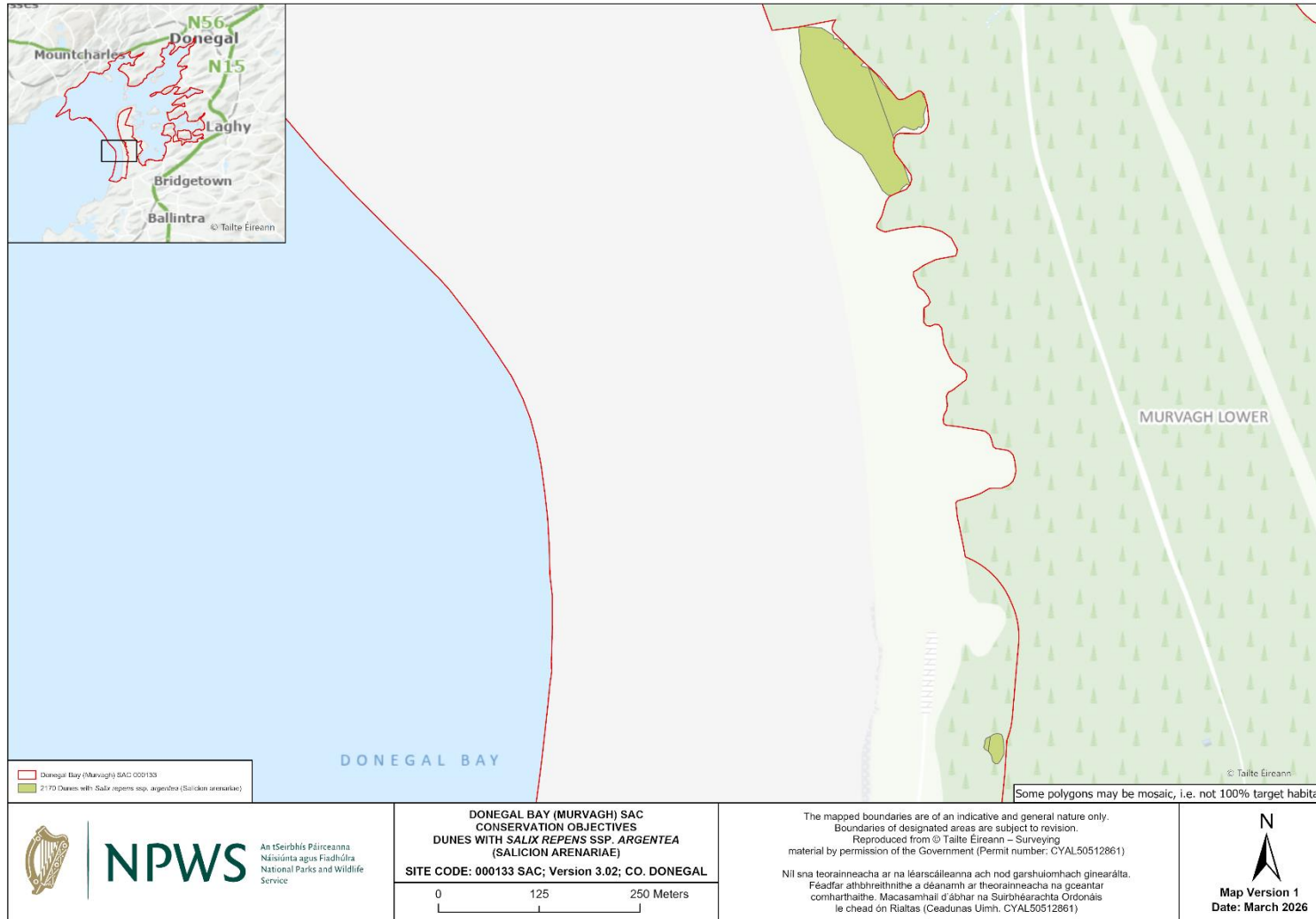
Target: No evidence of decline since designation.

The Structure and Functions were assessed as Favourable but the habitat was threatened due to the lack of conservation management of this habitat and the presence of conifer trees within the 2170 habitat. Round-leaved Wintergreen (*Pyrola rotundifolia*) raises the conservation interest of this habitat. This rare species is considered an indicator of local distinctiveness for this site (Ryle et al., 2009).

3. References

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- Martin, J.R., Daly, O.H. and Devaney F.M. (2017) Survey and assessment of vegetated shingle and associated habitats at 30 coastal sites. Volume 1: Main report. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 98. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, Dublin.
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- Ryle, T., Murray, A., Connolly, K. and Swann, M. (2009) Coastal Monitoring Project 2004-2006. Unpublished report to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Dublin.

Appendix 1 – Distribution map of Dunes with *Salix repens* ssp. *argentea* (Salicion arenariae) in Donegal Bay (Murvagh) SAC (000133)



Map to be read in conjunction with the NPWS Conservation Objectives Document.