

**Corraun Plateau SAC (site code 0485)**  
**Conservation objectives supporting document**  
**- upland habitats**

**NPWS**

**Version 1**

**July 2016**

## Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
1.1	Corraun Plateau SAC .....	1
1.2	NSUH mapping methodology .....	2
1.3	Potential for habitat restoration.....	3
2	Conservation objectives.....	3
3	Area.....	4
4	Range .....	4
5	Structure and functions .....	4
5.1	Ecosystem function .....	5
5.1.1	Ecosystem function: soil nutrients .....	5
5.2	Community diversity .....	5
5.2.1	Community diversity data for 4010 Wet heaths .....	5
5.2.2	Community diversity data for 4030 Dry heaths .....	5
5.2.3	Community diversity data for 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths .....	6
5.3	Vegetation composition .....	6
5.3.1	Vegetation composition: positive indicator species.....	6
5.3.2	Vegetation composition: other desirable species.....	7
5.3.3	Vegetation composition: negative indicator species .....	7
5.3.4	Vegetation composition: non-native species.....	8
5.3.5	Vegetation composition: undesirable native species.....	8
5.4	Vegetation structure .....	9
5.4.1	Browsing and grazing.....	9
5.4.2	Burning.....	9
5.4.3	<i>Sphagnum</i> condition.....	9
5.4.4	Growth phases of ling.....	10
5.4.5	Senescent ling .....	10
5.5	Physical structure.....	10
5.5.1	Disturbed bare ground .....	10
5.5.2	Drainage.....	10
5.6	Indicators of local distinctiveness .....	10
6	References.....	12

## **List of Maps**

Map 1 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 4010 Wet Heaths

Map 2 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 4030 Dry Heaths

Map 3 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 4060 Alpine and Boreal Heaths

Map 4 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 8110 Siliceous Screes

Map 5 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 8220 Siliceous Rocky Slopes

## 1 Introduction

Achieving Favourable Conservation Status (FCS) is the overall objective to be reached for all Annex I habitat types and Annex II species of European Community interest listed in the Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC. It is defined in positive terms, such that a habitat type or species must be prospering and have good prospects of continuing to do so.

Almost 19% of Ireland can be considered to support upland habitats (Perrin *et al.*, 2009). The importance of these areas for biodiversity conservation is unquestionable, with numerous upland habitat types listed under Annex I of the EU Habitats Directive and many rare and threatened bird and other animal species being associated with these habitats. This is reflected in the fact that over 40% of the total terrestrial area currently selected for designation as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) in Ireland lies above 150m in altitude.

The Scoping Study and Pilot Survey of Upland Habitats (Perrin *et al.*, 2009) was commissioned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) with the primary remit of devising an appropriate strategy and methodologies for conducting a National Survey of Upland Habitats (NSUH). Four phases of the NSUH have subsequently been conducted between 2010 and 2014. The Annex I habitats that are the primary focus of the NSUH are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Annex I habitats that occur in Irish uplands and which are primary focus habitats for the NSUH. Habitats in bold are those that are listed as Qualifying Interests for Corraun Plateau SAC.

Habitat code	Habitat name
<b>4010</b>	<b>Northern Atlantic wet heaths with <i>Erica tetralix</i></b>
<b>4030</b>	<b>European dry heaths</b>
<b>4060</b>	<b>Alpine and Boreal heaths</b>
6230	Species-rich <i>Nardus</i> grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas, in Continental Europe)*
7130	Blanket bogs (* if active)
7140	Transition mires and quaking bogs
7150	Depressions on peat substrates of the Rhynchosporion
7230	Alkaline fens
<b>8110</b>	<b>Siliceous screes of the montane to snow levels (<i>Androsacetalia alpinae</i> and <i>Galeopsietalia ladani</i>)</b>
8120	Calcareous and calcshist screes of the montane to alpine levels ( <i>Thlaspietea rotundifolii</i> )
8210	Calcareous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation
<b>8220</b>	<b>Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation</b>

\* Denotes a priority habitat under the EU Habitats Directive

### 1.1 Corraun Plateau SAC

Corraun Plateau SAC was surveyed as part of the NSUH between April and July 2009. The results of the survey are reported in Roche *et al.* (2014).

It is a relatively small upland SAC, being 38.9 km<sup>2</sup> in extent and is located on the Corraun Peninsula, south-east of Achill Island. It stretches from the southern shoreline as far north as Lough Gall, and from the eastern shoreline at Bellacragher Bay as far west as the local road between Corraun and

Pollranny (O.S. Discovery Series map 30). The main peaks are an un-named summit on the plateau (alt. 541 m) and Corraun Hill (alt. 524 m). The geology is varied but is predominantly composed of Dalradian schist and quartzite. There are several corries on the northern side of the massif containing a number of lakes.

## **1.2 NSUH mapping methodology**

A brief description of the methodology used to map habitats by the NSUH is presented here to elucidate how area was calculated for each of the habitats and to explain how the graduated distribution maps were produced. For full details, see Perrin *et al.* (2014).

The local topography of most upland areas consists of intricate patterns of hollows, rocky outcrops, flushes and terraces. The mosaics of vegetation that have developed on this varying topography is often far too complex to map as individual habitats in the manner possible for more uniform landscapes. Hence the approach adopted by the NSUH was to map units (referred to as polygons) that reflect homogeneous mosaics of vegetation and topography. Attempting to map smaller polygons representing single habitats would have greatly increased the amount of time spent mapping and the number of polygons mapped, and would not ultimately have eliminated the need for recording mosaics at smaller scales. All the habitats and non-vegetated substrates present in each polygon and the approximate percentage of the polygon they occupy were recorded. As the total area of each polygon is known from digitisation, data on the approximate extent of each habitat can be readily calculated. A provisional vegetation classification of upland vegetation types was developed to allow more detailed recording of plant communities than would be possible using a habitat classification scheme such as Fossitt (2000).

It is important to note that the NSUH classified and assessed habitats according to the flora and vegetation communities currently present rather than that which may previously have occurred. For example, on an area of drained deep wet blanket peat the current plant communities may be more akin to wet heath than blanket bog as species sensitive to desiccation may have disappeared after drainage. Such an area would therefore have been mapped as wet heath (current vegetation) rather than drained blanket bog.

Note that the NSUH used the most up to date SAC boundary dataset available at the time of survey. For Corraun Plateau SAC this was the boundary available in early 2009, which was based on the Ordnance Survey six-inch map base. Any areas calculated and presented here are based on this boundary version.

### 1.3 Potential for habitat restoration

There are areas of non-Annex I upland grassland within Corraun Plateau SAC, particularly along the northern slopes and the western flank of Corraun Hill (Roche *et al.*, 2014). The majority of the grassland has probably been formed by long-term degradation of 4010 Wet heaths and 4030 Dry heaths due to overgrazing and/or burning. Therefore, within this expanse there are potential areas for restoration of these habitats.

## 2 Conservation objectives

A site-specific conservation objective aims to define the favourable conservation conditions of a habitat or species at site level. The maintenance of habitats and species within sites at favourable condition will contribute to the maintenance of favourable conservation status (FCS) of those habitats and species at a national level.

Conservation objectives are defined using attributes and targets that are based on parameters as set out in the Habitats Directive for defining favourable status, namely area, range, and structure and functions.

The *Guidelines for a national survey and conservation assessment of upland vegetation and habitats in Ireland* (Perrin *et al.*, 2014) have been used as a basis for setting most site-specific attributes and targets for uplands habitats. Attributes and targets may change/become more refined as further information becomes available.

Objectives for habitats have been set with reference to the assessment of those habitats in Roche *et al.* (2014). If area and structure and functions were both assessed as “Favourable” the objective for that habitat is to maintain favourable conservation condition. If either parameter was assessed as “Unfavourable – Inadequate” or “Unfavourable – Bad” the objective for that habitat is to restore favourable conservation condition.

This document provides supporting information for the attributes of the conservation objectives of upland habitats, given in the main conservation objectives document for the SAC. The two documents should be read in conjunction with each other.

The conservation objective for each of the Annex I habitats dealt with in this supporting document are as follows:

- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Northern Atlantic wet heaths with *Erica tetralix* in Corraun Plateau SAC.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of European dry heaths in Corraun Plateau SAC.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Alpine and Boreal heaths in Corraun Plateau SAC.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Siliceous screes of the montane to snow levels (*Androsacetalia alpinae* and *Galeopsietalia ladani*) in Corraun Plateau SAC.
- To restore the favourable conservation condition of Siliceous rocky slopes with chasmophytic vegetation in Corraun Plateau SAC.

### 3 Area

Habitat extent is a basic attribute to be assessed when determining the condition of a particular habitat. The target is to maintain or increase the extent from the baseline which was established by Roche *et al.* (2014) and these areas are reproduced in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Mapped extent of Annex I habitats that are listed as Qualifying Interests for Corraun Plateau SAC.  
\*denotes priority habitat.

<b>Annex I code</b>	<b>Habitat</b>	<b>Area (ha)</b>	<b>% of SAC</b>
4010	Wet heaths	2082.4	53.57
4030	Dry heaths	207.9	5.35
4060	Alpine and Boreal heaths	278.3	7.16
8110	Siliceous screes	30.3	0.78
8220	Siliceous rocky slopes	15.0	0.39

Loss of area since 1995 was investigated as part of the NSUH through a comparison of contemporary and past aerial photographs (Roche *et al.*, 2014). Changes in areas that can be detected through this method are limited to obvious habitat changes such as mechanised turf-cutting, agricultural improvement, afforestation, the development of windfarms, roads or tracks, and large-scale discrete erosion events due to bog bursts or land slips. Where obvious anthropogenic losses have been identified, these are included in the area target.

### 4 Range

A habitat's range at site level, in the form of habitat distribution, has been recorded through the mapping carried out through the NSUH and these are reproduced (see maps 1-5). The target is that there should be no decline from the current distribution.

### 5 Structure and functions

Structure and functions relates to the physical components of a habitat ("structure") and the ecological processes that drive it ("functions"). For upland habitats these include a range of aspects such as soil chemistry, vegetation composition, hydrological regime, community diversity, habitat quality, species occurrence, indicators of local distinctiveness, disturbed ground, evidence of burning and negative species occurrence. These structure and functions are expanded on in the sections below.

At Corraun Plateau SAC the structure and functions of 4010 Wet heaths were assessed as Unfavourable – Bad. Reasons for failure included poor species composition with inadequate cover of bryophytes and lichens, ericoids and positive indicator species. Excessive grazing levels and disturbed bare ground were also recorded.

4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths were also assessed as Unfavourable – Bad. Reasons for failure included inadequate cover of positive indicator species and bryophyte or lichen species. The cover of negative indicator species was excessive in places and excessive cover of disturbed bare ground was recorded. The vegetation structure was good with no failures being recorded under the relevant criteria.

The structure and functions of the following habitats, 4030 Dry heaths and 8110 Siliceous screes,

were assessed as Favourable. Assessment criteria for 8220 Siliceous rocky slopes had not been developed at the time of survey so this habitat was not assessed.

## 5.1 Ecosystem function

Ecosystem function is assessed primarily through consideration of soil nutrient levels.

### 5.1.1 Ecosystem function: soil nutrients

An attribute to assess the soil nutrients is common to each of the upland habitats with a view to maintain the soil nutrient status within natural range suited to the habitat. Relevant nutrients and natural ranges have yet to be defined. Nitrogen deposition and associated acidification are noted as being relevant to all upland habitats in NPWS (2013). The target for each habitat is to maintain the soil nutrients status within the natural range.

## 5.2 Community diversity

Roche *et al.* (2014) recorded habitat information based on a provisional list of vegetation communities which is detailed in the NSUH manual (Perrin *et al.*, 2014). Data is presented in the following tables on the abundance of the various communities that comprise Qualifying Interest habitats at Corraun Plateau SAC together with the area of each of these communities and the percentage of the SAC that these communities cover (hepatic mats associated with Qualifying Interests are considered under the indicators of local distinctiveness attribute). Some upland habitats, including the rocky Annex I habitats 8110 and 8220, are each defined by just one provisional vegetation community; therefore the community diversity attribute is not applied to these habitats.

The target is to maintain the variety of vegetation communities subject to natural processes.

### 5.2.1 Community diversity data for 4010 Wet heaths

NSUH code	NSUH community	Area (ha)	% of SAC
WH1	<i>Schoenus nigricans</i> – <i>Erica tetralix</i> wet heath	1063.6	27.36
WH2	<i>Trichophorum germanicum</i> – <i>Cladonia</i> spp. – <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> wet heath	563.2	14.49
WH3	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> – <i>Molinia caerulea</i> – <i>Sphagnum capillifolium</i> wet/damp heath	247.2	6.36
WH4	<i>Trichophorum germanicum</i> – <i>Eriophorum angustifolium</i> wet heath	128.1	3.29
WH5	<i>Trichophorum germanicum</i> – <i>Nardus stricta</i> – <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> montane wet heath	77.8	2.00

### 5.2.2 Community diversity data for 4030 Dry heaths

NSUH code	NSUH community	Area (ha)	% of SAC
DH2	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> – <i>Erica Erigena</i> – <i>Molinia caerulea</i> dry heath	3.8	0.10
DH3	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> – <i>Erica cinerea</i> dry heath	113.7	2.93
DH4	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> – <i>Sphagnum capillifolium</i> dry /damp heath	88.1	2.27

### 5.2.3 Community diversity data for 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths

NSUH code	NSUH community	Area (ha)	% of SAC
MH1	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> – <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> montane heath	125.5	3.23
MH2	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i> – <i>Racomitrium lanuginosum</i> – <i>Herbertus aduncus</i> montane heath	6.1	0.16
MH4	<i>Calluna vulgaris</i> – <i>Juniperus communis</i> montane heath	139.8	3.60

## 5.3 Vegetation composition

Vegetation composition is assessed through a range of attributes tailored to each of the habitats. In general terms they establish minimum thresholds for the occurrence, or cover, of desirable species and maximum thresholds for undesirable species.

### 5.3.1 Vegetation composition: positive indicator species

An attribute for positive indicator species is common to each of the upland Annex I habitats and habitat-specific lists of the positive indicator species are presented in the NSUH manual (Perrin *et al.* 2014). A positive species criterion is set to ensure that vegetation remains representative of the habitat and is not degrading or succeeding to a different habitat. The target by which this attribute is measured varies between habitats. Descriptions of these habitats can be found in the NSUH manual (Perrin *et al.*, 2014).

For some habitats a certain number of positive indicator species are required. At least seven positive indicator species are required for 8220 Siliceous rocky slopes at least one positive indicator is required. For 8110 Siliceous screes, the positive indicator attribute is only applied to block scree; examples of shaley, small structure screes are not assessed under this attribute. At least one positive indicator species is required. The positive indicator list is the same as for 8220 Siliceous rocky slopes.

For some other habitats a percentage threshold is set. At least 50% cover of positive indicators is required for 4010 Wet heaths and at least 66% cover for 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths.

4030 Dry heaths are assessed through the number of positive indicator species present and through the percentage cover of these. The positive indicator list is composed of dwarf shrub species. Only two species are required to meet the number of positive indicator species target as dry heaths are not necessarily rich in these species. However, vegetation supporting and possibly dominated by only one dwarf shrub species is not desirable. Low cover of dwarf shrubs would indicate that the habitat is transitional, usually to grassland. A maximum cover of dwarf shrubs is applied for calcareous heath, which was not recorded at this site, due to the characteristically greater forb (broad-leaved herb) component.

### **5.3.2 Vegetation composition: other desirable species**

Other elements of vegetation composition which can collectively be regarded as being desirable are also established with a range of habitat specific targets set.

#### **Lichens and bryophytes**

Minimum thresholds for cover of lichens and bryophytes are set for habitats where a plentiful lichen/moss layer is characteristic: for 4010 Wet heaths, 4030 Dry heaths, 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths and 8110 Siliceous screes. The latter habitats are not necessarily rich in lichen and bryophyte species, but a minimum amount should still be present. Within the habitat specific targets for these attributes the specific species, or groups of species which are required, are listed together with any exclusions (e.g. *Campylopus* and *Polytrichum* mosses are excluded from 4030 Dry heaths as they can be indicative of disturbed conditions).

#### **Dwarf shrub cover**

A minimum threshold cover for dwarf shrubs is set for 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths. A relatively low threshold of at least 10% is set as loose rock and *Racomitrium lanuginosum* are characteristic elements and often abundant. A lower cover of dwarf shrubs could indicate that the habitat is transitional to grassland or other montane vegetation. Note that minimum dwarf shrub cover within 4010 Dry heaths is addressed by the positive indicator species attribute.

#### **Cross-leaved heath**

Cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) is specifically mentioned in the formal title of habitat 4010 Wet heaths and is the only characteristic species listed in European Commission (2013). Whilst it is seldom abundant in wet heath its presence at high frequencies is considered one of the few characteristics common between the varied communities of this habitat (JNCC, 2009). The target is for the presence of cross-leaved heath within a 20m radius of each monitoring stop.

#### **Ericoid species and crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*)**

A dwarf shrub layer with ericoid species is characteristic of 4010 Wet heaths (crowberry is only rarely present). Low cover of these species would be indicative of chronic overgrazing, burning etc. The target is for at least 15% cover of these species.

### **5.3.3 Vegetation composition: negative indicator species**

A percentage cover threshold for negative indicator species has been established for all upland habitats listed as qualifying interests for Corraun Plateau SAC except 8220. Habitat specific negative indicator species lists have been established for each of the habitats (Perrin *et al.*, 2014). Presence of these species would likely indicate undesirable impacts of management such as overgrazing, undergrazing, nutrient enrichment, agricultural improvement or impacts on hydrology. The percentage threshold is generally set quite low such that impacts can be reversed before they become more severe.

#### **5.3.4 Vegetation composition: non-native species**

An attribute for non-native species is common to each of the upland Annex I habitats. Non-native species can be invasive and have deleterious effects on native vegetation. The target for each habitat is for the total cover of non-native species to be less than 1%. A low target is set as non-native species can spread rapidly and are most easily dealt with when still at lower abundances.

#### **5.3.5 Vegetation composition: undesirable native species**

For many habitats maximum percentage cover thresholds for undesirable native species are also set. These are detailed below.

##### **Bracken, native trees and shrubs**

The cover of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and native trees and shrubs is assessed for 4010 Wet heaths, 4030 Dry heaths and the rocky habitats (8110 Siliceous screes and 8220 Siliceous rocky slopes). Tree and shrub cover is assessed for 7130 Blanket bogs (\* if active). High cover of bracken would indicate that the habitat may be succeeding towards a dense bracken community, and high cover of native trees and shrubs would indicate that the habitat may be succeeding towards scrub or woodland due to lack of grazing or, for bog habitats, due to the habitat drying out. For chasmophytic rocky habitats (8220), high cover of these species indicate that rocky slopes are becoming more vegetated which would impact on the niches of the chasmophytic species.

##### **Grass and dwarf shrubs**

For 8110 Siliceous screes a high cover of grasses or dwarf shrubs would indicate that the scree is becoming less exposed and succeeding to another habitat. The target is for the total cover of grass species and dwarf shrubs to be less than 20%.

##### **Soft rush**

High cover of soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) in 4010 Wet heaths or 4030 Dry heaths would suggest undesirable hydrological conditions. Note however, that poor flushes dominated by soft rush often naturally occur in mosaic with these habitats. Discrete areas of this separate habitat should not be considered here. The target is for the cover of soft rush to be less than 10%.

##### **Dwarf shrub cover**

A dwarf shrub layer is characteristic of 4010 Wet heaths but the vegetation should be a mixture of dwarf shrub and graminoid species with higher cover of dwarf shrubs being potentially indicative of drainage. A maximum target of 75% is therefore set.

Similarly the calcareous version of 4030 Dry heaths, which was not recorded at this site, characteristically has a greater component of broad-leaved herbs than siliceous dry heath. A maximum target of 75% is therefore set.

##### **Dwarf shrub composition**

The dwarf shrub layer within 4030 Dry heaths should not be composed primarily of bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*), creeping willow (*Salix repens*) and western gorse (*Ulex gallii*). Bog-myrtle is indicative

of flushed conditions and is more characteristic of wet heaths and blanket bogs. Creeping willow is more characteristic of dune heaths. Western gorse is a component of dry heath, but high proportions of it may indicate a history of undesirable levels of grazing. The target for 4030 Dry heaths is for the proportion of dwarf shrub composed of these species to be collectively less than 50%.

## **5.4 Vegetation structure**

Vegetation structure is assessed through a number of attributes tailored to each of the habitats. These measures assess levels of grazing and browsing, burning, *Sphagnum* condition and, for 4030 Dry heaths, growth phases of ling (*Calluna vulgaris*).

### **5.4.1 Browsing and grazing**

Browsing is generally measured through viewing the last complete season's shoots of particular species and assessing the proportion which shows signs of having been browsed. The species which are assessed for browsing are generally the dwarf shrub species: ericoids, crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*) and bog-myrtle (*Myrica gale*). The target for the heath habitats (4010, 4030 and 4060) is for less than 33% of shoots to show signs of grazing. On the rocky habitats (8110 and 8220), live leaves of forbs and shoots of dwarf shrubs showing signs of grazing or browsing collectively should be less than 50%. An additional assessment of grazing of live leaves of specific graminoids is made for 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths. The specific graminoids are stiff sedge (*Carex bigelowii*), wavy hair-grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*), sheep's-fescue (*Festuca ovina*) and viviparous sheep's-fescue (*Festuca vivipara*). High levels of grazing of these species in 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths would be undesirable as grazing is not required to maintain this habitat.

### **5.4.2 Burning**

Fires can be part of the natural cycle of heaths and peatlands and may also be used as a valuable management tool to promote a diversity of growth phases in ling. However, currently most hill fires in Ireland are intentionally started to encourage grass growth for livestock. Fires which are too intense, too frequent, too extensive or which occur in sensitive areas are damaging to habitats. An assessment of burning is made for the heath habitats (4010, 4030 and 4060). Habitat-specific lists of sensitive areas where burning should not occur are presented in Perrin *et al.* (2014). Examples of sensitive areas are: 'areas where soils are thin and less than 5cm deep' and 'pools, wet hollows, hags and erosion gullies, and within 5-10m of the edge of watercourses'.

The target for 4010 Wet heaths is no sign of burning into the moss, liverwort or lichen layer or exposure of peat surface due to burning and no sign of burning in sensitive areas. The target for 4030 Dry heaths is no sign of burning in sensitive areas. The target for 4060 Alpine and Boreal heaths, which does not require burning for the maintenance of the habitat, is for there to be no signs of burning within the habitat.

### **5.4.3 Sphagnum condition**

Disturbance to *Sphagnum* is assessed for habitats 4010 Wet heaths. High levels of disturbed *Sphagnum* would indicate undesirable levels of grazers. For both of the habitats the target is for less than 10% of the *Sphagnum* cover to be crushed, broken and/or pulled up.

#### **5.4.4 Growth phases of ling**

The growth phases of ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) are assessed for 4030 Dry heaths. The growth phases are pioneer (<10cm high), building (10-30cm high) and mature (>30cm high). The target is that all growth phases of ling should occur throughout the habitat, outside sensitive areas, with at least 10% of cover in the mature phase. As burning is undesirable within sensitive areas, it is not reasonable to require the stated diversity of growth phases within these areas. The list of sensitive areas is presented in the NSUH manual (Perrin *et al.*, 2014).

#### **5.4.5 Senescent ling**

The cover of senescent ling (*Calluna vulgaris*) in 4030 Dry heaths is also assessed. Senescence is part of the natural cycle of ling but a dominance of ling in the senescent phase would indicate a lack of management (appropriate grazing or burning) to promote ling regeneration. The target is that the cover of senescent ling should be less than 50%.

### **5.5 Physical structure**

The physical structure of upland habitats can be damaged by drainage, walking trails, unsuitable levels of grazing and erosion. Physical structure is assessed through a number of attributes tailored to each of the habitats. Elements which are assessed for the various habitats comprise disturbed bare ground, drainage and erosion; these are detailed below.

#### **5.5.1 Disturbed bare ground**

This attribute is common to all the upland habitats listed as qualifying interests for Corraun Plateau SAC, except 8220 Siliceous rocky slopes. Disturbance can include hoof marks, wallows, human foot prints, vehicle and machinery tracks and, for 8110 Siliceous screes, scree running. Excessive disturbance can result in loss of characteristic species and presage erosion for heaths and peatlands. Scree is subject to naturally recurrent disturbance, but high levels of disturbance may impact on vegetation cover and diversity. The target for each habitat is set at there being less than 10% disturbed ground.

#### **5.5.2 Drainage**

Drainage can result in loss of characteristic species and transition to drier habitats. This attribute is applied to 4010 Wet heaths. The target is the area showing signs of drainage from heavy trampling, tracking or ditches to be less than 10%.

### **5.6 Indicators of local distinctiveness**

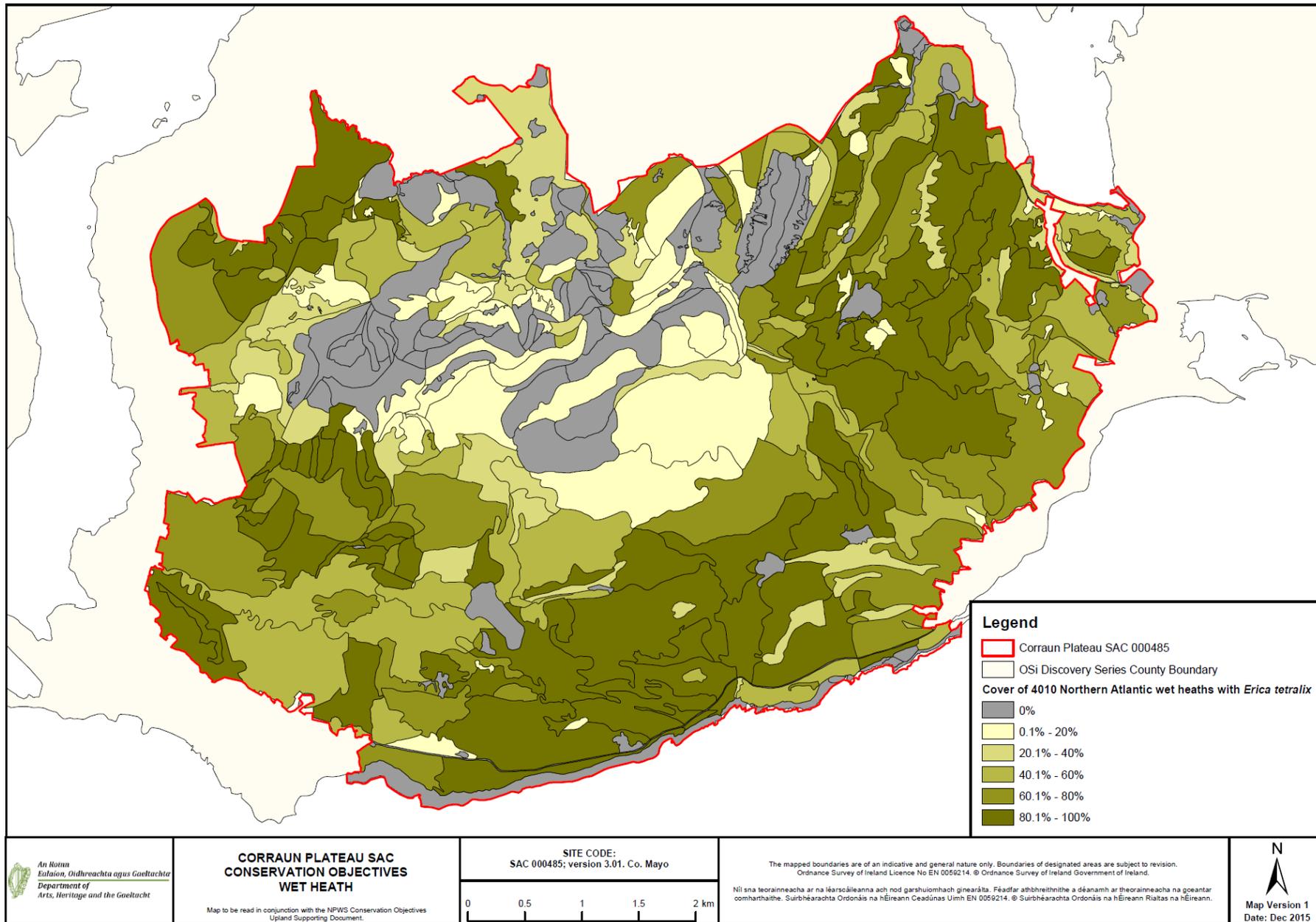
Roche *et al.* (2014) compiled and mapped existing rare and notable plant records for the SAC. Rare species (those considered at least Near Threatened on the appropriate Red Data List) which could be assigned to a particular habitat, either through waypoint data collected during the NSUH or expert judgement, were considered indicators of local distinctiveness for habitats. The target is for no decline in distribution or population sizes of rare, threatened or scarce species associated with the habitat.

Where hepatic mats of the *Calluna vulgaris-Herbertus aduncus* community were recorded within a particular habitat by Roche *et al.* (2014) these are also listed as indicators of local distinctiveness. No assessment of the conservation status of this community has been conducted but proposals for such an assessment are presented in Barron & Perrin (2014). The target for these hepatic mats is for no decline in status of hepatic mats associated with this habitat.

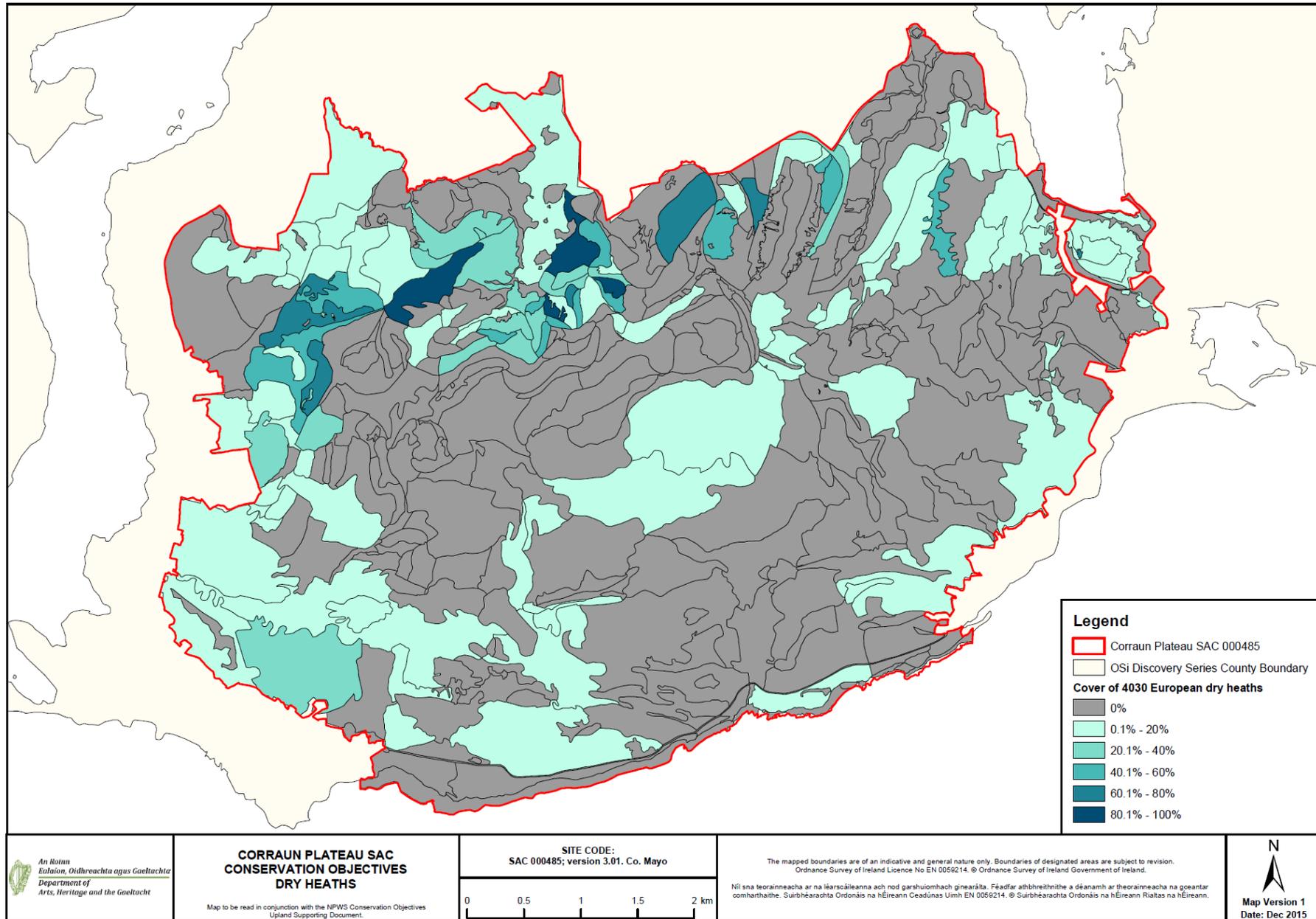
## 6 References

- Barron, S.J. & Perrin, P.M. (2014) National Survey of Upland Habitats (Phase 4, 2013-2014) – Summary report. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.
- European Commission (2013) Interpretation manual of European Union habitats EUR 28, European Commission, DG Environment.
- Fossitt, J.A. (2000) A guide to habitats in Ireland. The Heritage Council, Kilkenny.
- JNCC (2009) Common Standards Monitoring guidance for upland habitats. JNCC, Peterborough, UK.
- NPWS (2013) The status of EU protected habitats and species in Ireland. Vol. 2. Habitat assessments. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.
- Perrin, P.M., O Hanrahan, B., Roche, J.R. & Barron, S.J. (2009) Scoping Study and Pilot Survey for a National Survey and Conservation Assessment of Upland Vegetation and Habitats in Ireland. Unpublished report to National Parks & Wildlife Service, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin.
- Perrin, P.M., Barron, S.J., Roche, J.R. & O'Hanrahan, B. (2014) Guidelines for a national survey and conservation assessment of upland vegetation and habitats in Ireland. Version 2.0. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 79. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.
- Roche, J.R., Perrin, P.M. Barron, S.J. & Daly O.H. (2014) National Survey of Upland Habitats (Pilot Survey Phase, 2009-2010), Site Report No. 2: Corraun Plateau cSAC (000485), Co. Mayo (Revision). National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Dublin, Ireland.

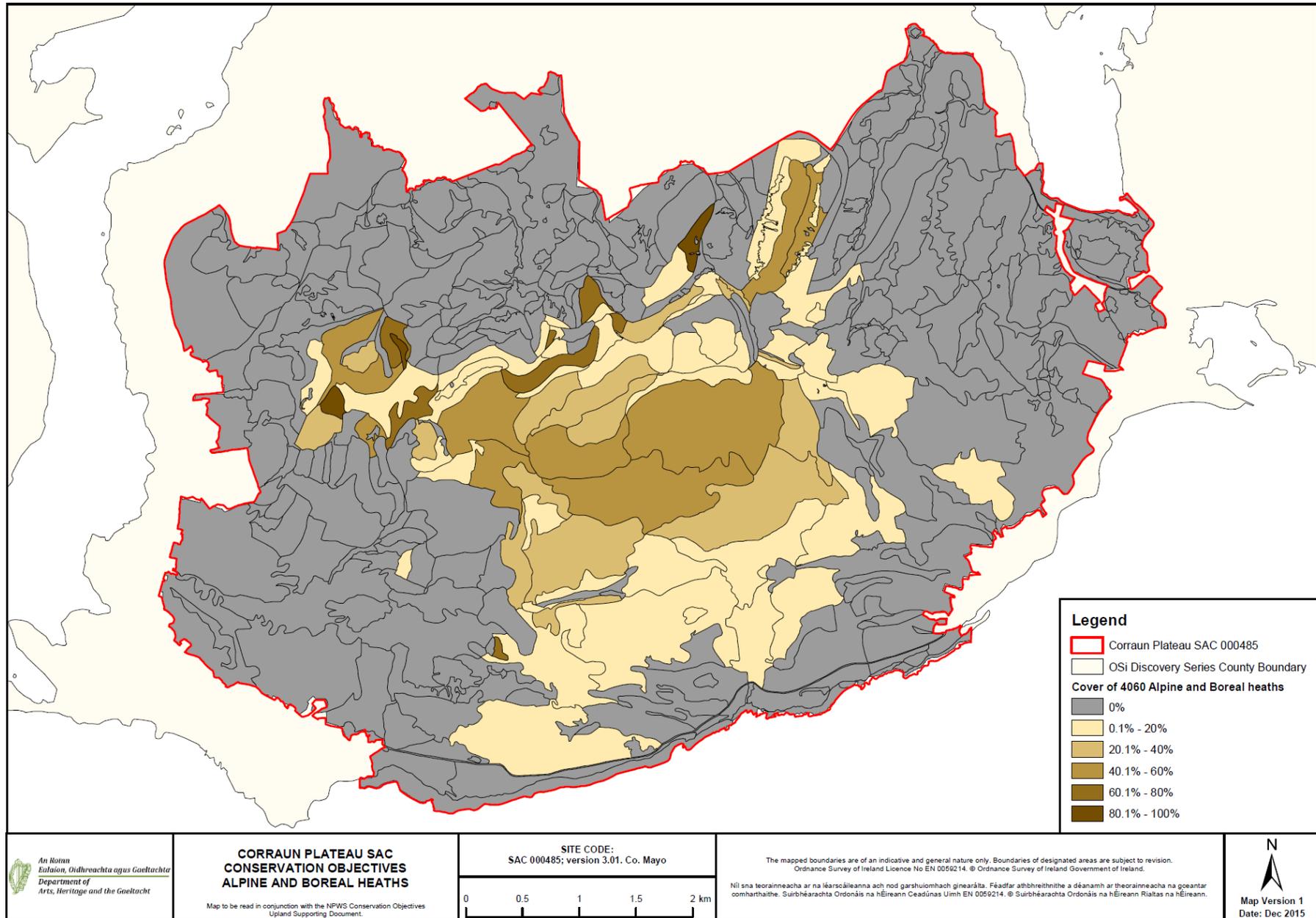
Map 1 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 4010 Wet Heaths



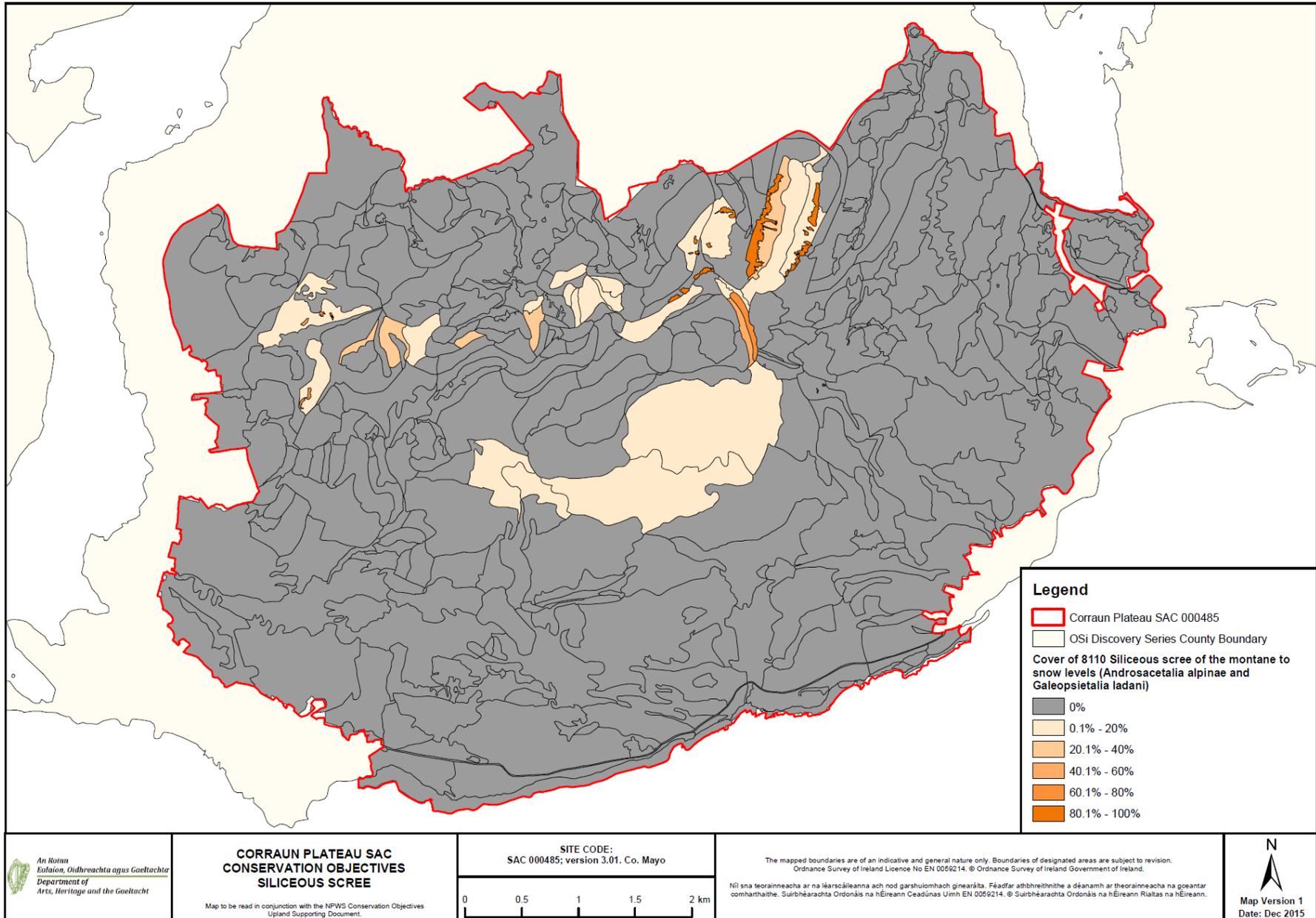
Map 2 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 4030 Dry Heaths



Map 3 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 4060 Alpine and Boreal Heaths



Map 4 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 8110 Siliceous Screes



Map 5 Corraun Plateau SAC Conservation Objectives – 8220 Siliceous Rocky Slopes

