

# **FOREST MANAGEMENT PROTOCOL FOR HEN HARRIER SPECIAL PROTECTION AREAS**

## **DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND FOOD**

Mr Dick Roche, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Ms Mary Wallace, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food with responsibility for forestry are pleased to announce that agreement has been reached on a management protocol for planting in areas that are important for the hen harrier.

Under the EU Birds Directive Ireland must designate areas important for particular types of birds as Special Protection Areas. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), part of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, has been considering a number of areas as possible Hen Harrier Special Protection Areas. These areas are typically upland zones with high levels of forestry and the challenge has been how to marry to best advantage the continued development of forestry in these areas with protection of the species. Young forests are of critical importance to the hen-harrier, but it is extremely important also to maintain sufficient open-areas for foraging. In order to move the process forward, a Working Group consisting of NPWS, the Forest Service and both landowner and forestry interest groups was established last year and has now agreed a path forward.

Minister Roche stated that “the agreement reached within the Working Group represents a balance between good and sensible environmental practice and legitimate desire for sustainable development in these areas”. He went on to say “I fully expect that the EU Commission will recognize and value the consultative approach that has taken place here and the commitment shown by the Forest sector to the conservation requirements for hen harrier”.

The key component of the agreement reached is that an annual quota of new planting will be established for each of the six proposed Special Protection Areas, based on the areas identified as available for planting by NPWS, so as to manage and monitor the impact on habitat. Under the new rules, the heath-bog habitat which is so important for the hen harrier will be fully preserved. The objective will be to establish a mosaic of different landscape types in Hen Harrier areas that will encourage the further development of the species. This should include young forestry, both new and replanted, which the recent research has shown to be a vital component in the foraging pattern of the bird.

The Forest Service will be responsible for processing applications, and will implement the new protocol immediately. All applications for approval to plant in these areas had been suspended pending agreement on the new management regime, but it is expected that decisions can now be made quickly in these cases.

Minister of State Wallace has warmly welcomed the new development, which, she

said, reflected the fundamental principles of sustainable forest management, the cornerstone of forestry policy in Ireland. “Properly planned forestry is good for people and good for the environment,” the Minister said. “I have no doubt but that forestry can play an important role in the recovery of species such as the hen harrier in the same way that species such as the red squirrel and the pine marten now find refuge in these forests denied to them elsewhere. I am particularly pleased with this development as this issue was raised with me on my first day as Minister of State for Forestry and on a weekly basis since that. I am glad that during my time as Minister of State a resolution has been found”.

23 March, 2007

The six proposed Special Protection Areas, which will be designated shortly, are:

- Slieve Bloom Mountains Special Protection Areas (Laois and Offaly)
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- Stack's to Mullaghareirk Mountains, West Limerick Hills and Mount Eagle Special Protection Areas (Cork, Kerry and Limerick)
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- Mullaghanish to Musheramore Mountains Special Protection Areas (Cork)
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- Slievefelim to Silvermines Special Protection Areas (Limerick and Tipperary)
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- Slieve Beagh Special Protection Areas (Monaghan)
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- Slieve Aughty Mountains Special Protection Areas (Clare and Galway)