

## **Launch of Ireland's largest woodland restoration project**

Ms. Mary Wallace T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with responsibility for forestry today launched Ireland's largest priority woodland restoration project, which is being co-funded by Coillte and EU DG-Environment under the LIFE-Nature Programme. The launch took place in Kilcoran Lodge Hotel in County Tipperary.

Launching the project, Minister of State Wallace commented: *"Forests are among the most diverse and complex ecosystems in the world, providing a habitat for a multitude of flora and fauna. All of this is part of our heritage and it is important that action is taken now to restore and conserve for future generations."*

In Ireland there are four native woodland habitat types - alluvial woodland, bog woodland, woodland associated with limestone pavement, and yew woodland - which are recognised under the EU Habitats Directive as being critically rare. Under Annex I

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm)

of the Habitats Directive, these woodlands have "priority" status which means they have an extremely high nature conservation value.

The project focuses on the restoration and conservation of over 550 hectares of priority woodland habitats, which are vested in Coillte Teoranta. There are nine sites included in this project and all sites are designated as special areas of conservation (SACs) within the Natura 2000 network. The sites are located in nine different counties around Ireland, namely Counties Mayo, Clare, Sligo, Laois, Limerick, Tipperary, Galway, Cavan and Offaly.

The Minister of State also noted: *"This priority woodland restoration project is one of many initiatives that Coillte is currently undertaking as part of its Nature Conservation Programme which was initiated in 1998. As part of Coillte's commitment to sustainable forest management, it was awarded the Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC) Certificate for well managed forests, in which context the company has committed, over time, to set aside 15% of its land holding to be managed for biodiversity. This LIFE-Nature project complements this policy by facilitating habitat restoration on nine environmentally sensitive priority woodland sites."*

In conclusion, Minister of State Wallace commended Coillte for taking the opportunity to work with Government and the EU in continuing its policy of sustainable forest management and noted that Coillte is also progressing two other important LIFE-Nature projects - on the restoration of blanket bogs in the west and raised bogs in the midlands.

<http://www.woodlandrestoration.ie/>