

Information meeting on restoration of Cloonshanville Bog

A FIELD day and information session on the restoration of Cloonshanville Bog, Frenchpark will take place this Saturday, September 10th as part of the celebrations for Water Heritage Day in association with Heritage Week.

Coillte has invited members of the public to participate in a short bog walk, and information meeting on the restoration of Cloonshanville Bog which is ranked as one of the ten most ecologically diverse in the country. The field day will begin at 2.30 p.m. this Saturday with a meeting point at the junction of the N5 and R361.

Cloonshanville Bog, Lough Ree Bog and Drumalough Bog in North Roscommon are three areas of bog under restoration in the county as part of the EU LIFE / Coillte co-funded project.

During the 1950's-1990's, the Irish State undertook a major national programme of afforestation, with the aim of reducing Irish reliance on timber imports. The policy at the time was to establish plantation forests on areas that were unsuitable or marginal for agricultural production. This included large tracts of peatlands. Today, Coill-

te Teoranta, The Irish Forestry Board, is reevaluating some of these afforested peatlands, and their significance for nature conservation is coming more to the fore. In the context of heavy losses of biodiversity across Europe during the past few decades, the EU is supportive of efforts to redress habitat losses that occurred in the past, where possible. The LIFE-Nature fund is directed at sites that are designated as Natura 2000 sites, i.e. they have been identified by our own National Parks and Wildlife Service as having special nature conservation value.

Natura 2000 safeguards the most important rare habitats and species in Europe.

Cloonshanville Bog, close to Frenchpark village is ranked as one of the ten most ecologically diverse in the country. It contains raised bog, bog woodland, and calcareous fen habitats in close proximity to each other which is a very interesting hydrological situation which requires further survey. Water monitoring has already commenced on the site. The Coillte owned, bog restoration project site measures 34.2 hectares. Indeed one of the more

interesting facts about Cloonshanville Bog is the fact that it contains a large population of a sphagnum moss rarely found in Ireland and the presence of this moss also adds to the conservation value of this site.

It is planned that Cloonshanville Bog will become one of the two demonstration areas for the raised bog restoration project. A car park and boardwalk will be put in place which will allow visitors to the bog to observe closely, but safely. Interpretative displays will also be put in place. The purpose of the demonstration site is to facilitate public awareness of the bog restoration project, so that visitors to the site will learn about the objectives, actions and expected results of the project.

The Lough Ree bog restoration project site is 49 hectares. Under the raised bog restoration project an area of coniferous forestry - 29.1 hectares will be clearfelled, this will help to raise the water levels on the bog. This bog is a good example of a small raised bog, which supports significant areas of active raised bog which means that some areas of the bog are still growing. In favo-

urable conditions i.e. when it is wet enough, peat grows at a rate of 1mm per year or 1 meter per thousand years! Some areas of the bog have birch woodland developing this too is valuable habitat - wet / bog woodland.

Drumalough Bog in North Roscommon has a surface area of 260 hectares and is a medium sized raised bog. Two sections of this bog are in Coillte ownership 43.2 hectares and form part of the restoration project for the next couple of years. This bog is one of a small number of relatively intact bogs in the area and thus the site has considerable regional importance. A large proportion of the raised bog resource in north Roscommon, consists of cutover peat now utilised as grassland or forestry.

Raised bog habitats are now very rare in Europe and it has recently been estimated that the Ireland contains 50% of the relatively intact oceanic raised bog systems in Europe. So if you fancy learning more about Cloonshanville Bog and its rich and varied eco-system then why not take part in the field day this Saturday, September 10th at 2.30 p.m.