

Pearl Mussel Project News

Farming for nature in freshwater pearl mussel catchments



Issue no.2 November 2020

Welcome to our new participant farmers!

We are delighted to welcome **113** new farmers to the Pearl Mussel Project across all of our **8** catchments which gives us a total of **455** participants. The total area of farmland in the programme is now **35,000ha**, accounting for **80%** of farmland across all eight catchments.

Habitat Quality

Habitat scoring was completed by the advisors at the end of summer and early indications are that habitat scores have generally increased across many participating farms between 2019 and 2020. This would indicate that the environmental quality of the farms have improved which will also lead to higher farmer payments in 2020.

This will be confirmed following the PMP verification and audit process which is ongoing at the moment. Our observations on the ground are that farmers are starting to adapt their land management according to the scoring process, leading to improved environmental outcomes. In addition, many farmers have undertaken supporting actions (see page 2) that will result in increased scores....and increased scores, means an increase in water quality – crucial for the Freshwater Pearl Mussel. This is a considerable success for the project.

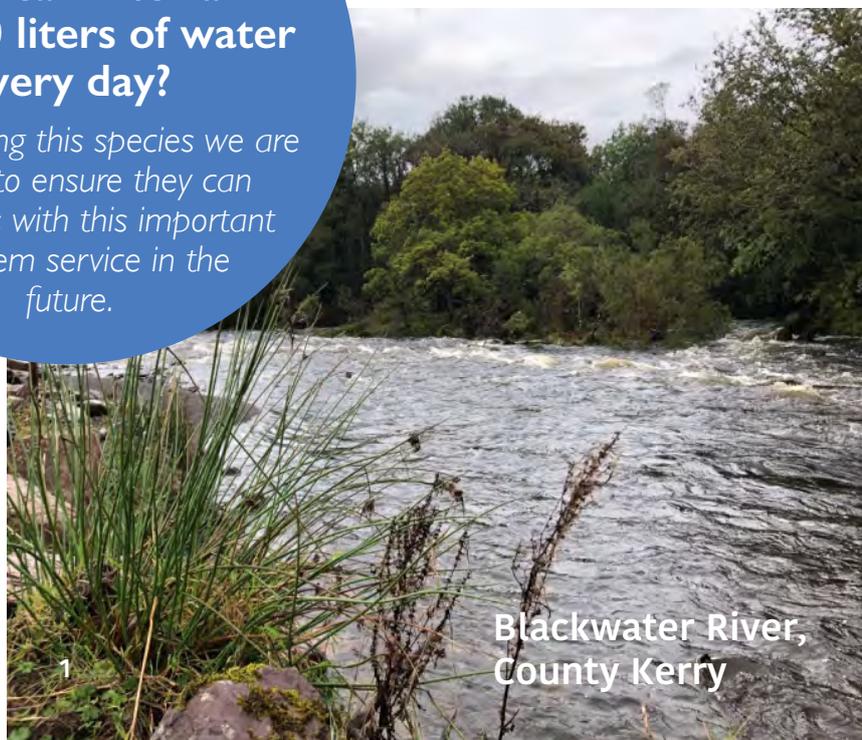
Did you know a single adult pearl mussel can filter and clean 50 liters of water every day?

By conserving this species we are helping to ensure they can provide us with this important ecosystem service in the future.



Farmer Training

We were able to hold a small number of outdoor training days this summer, however due to Covid-19 safety guidelines the majority of our farmer training sessions had to be held online this year. We were delighted to have over 100 farmers tune into our online sessions last month. If you were unable to join the online training sessions a recording is available to view on the video section of our website. www.pearlmusselproject.ie



Blackwater River, County Kerry

Supporting Actions

To date 119 Annual Works Plans have been issued to farmers across our eight catchments. These plans set out various approved co-funded actions for the farmer to complete. These actions will likely result in an improved score and associated payment.

Actions that have been approved include:

FENCING

DRINKING FACILITIES

DRAIN MEASURES
(flow reduction and re-wetting covering >200ha in total)



Farmers have completed a large number of the approved actions to date and we are currently processing our second batch of supporting action payment claims. Farmers should contact their advisor if they wish to apply for supporting actions.

Advisors need to submit 2021 actions for approval before the end of January.



Peat plugs



Timber weirs

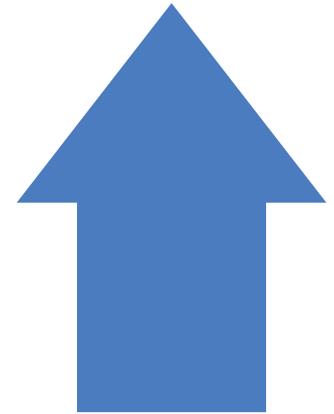


Locally adapted livestock crossing

A sample of completed actions on participant farms. From left, peat plugs, timber weirs, and a locally adapted livestock crossing.

How to improve your farm score and payment?

Farmers will be receiving their annual payment from the Pearl Mussel Programme towards the end of the year. There are opportunities to increase your payment in future years by improving the score on your farm. This could be done by making changes to the way you manage your farm and by undertaking supporting actions. We have recently added a range of videos to our website about how we score habitats on the farm. These may help farmers to learn more about how to achieve higher scores.



Pearl Mussel Farmer Profile



Timothy Curran has been a Pearl Mussel Project participant since the project commenced in 2019. He and his family operate a mixed livestock farm within the Currane catchment looking over Derriana Lake in County Kerry.

In 2002, Timothy and his wife Leona made the brave decision to move back to Ireland after spending a number of years in America. Shortly after arriving home they purchased a small holding in the townland of Derriana close to the townland of Octive where Timothy was brought up.

Over the years they increased the farm size by leasing a number of neighboring farms. Currently their holding is approximately 170 acres with a wide variety of habitats ranging from wet and dry grasslands, traditional hay meadows, wet and dry heaths, blanket bogs, mature native woodlands and old stone walls.

These habitats support over 100 breeding ewes. The flock mainly consists of breeds such as Scotch, Texal and Chalrois crosses with a few Zwartles thrown in for an extra bit of color and genetic diversity. There are also 10 suckler cows on the farm.

Timothy is fully engaged with the PMP programme and undertook a lot of work this summer with the overall objective of improving water quality on his farm. A lot of historical drainage took place over

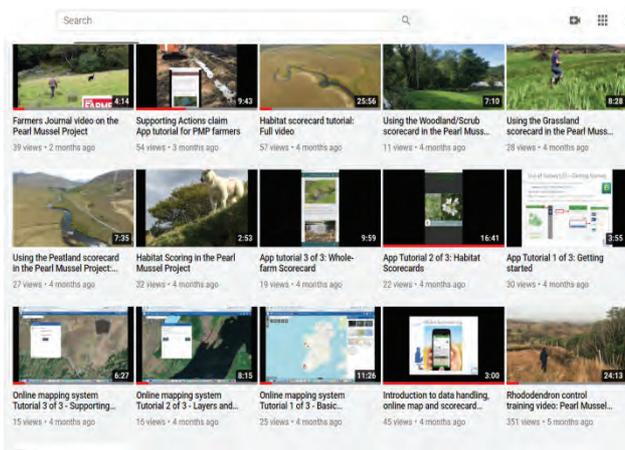
the years on the wet grasslands sloping down towards Derriana lake. Timothy and his advisor decided that installing a number of livestock crossing points on these drains would go a long way to improving water quality by keeping animals out of the drains. Timothy had all the skills and equipment needed to complete these works. The works also had the added benefit of improving the plot scores resulting in a higher annual payment from the PMP programme.

Timothy has a great understanding of the results based approach that the PMP project uses. He understands that, if the land is managed in a certain way, it is possible to obtain a high habitat score and also produce a livestock product. A minor adjustment in management could well result in a higher payment from the PMP programme. For example, moving out-wintering stock regularly might require a little more thought and effort but decrease the possibility of any poaching damage which again results in a higher farm payment.



Derek McLoughlin finished work with the Pearl Mussel Project at the end of October to take up a new role as Project Manager on the new 'Wild Atlantic Nature LIFE Project' which will be focusing on delivering conservation benefits to the blanket bog SACs. Derek had been working out of his offices at Westport, running the programme in the north-west along with Mary McAndrew. As project manager Patrick Crushell says "Derek has played a key role in the successful design and development of the PMP Programme and has been a fantastic colleague. I have no doubt he's the right person to make a success of the LIFE project."

Everyone at PMP wishes Derek the very best and success in the new post.



Keep in touch!

Don't forget to check our project website (www.pearlmusselproject.ie) for news and updates. We also have active Facebook (@pearlmusselproject) and Twitter (@pearl_mussel) accounts where we post regular updates, so follow us there if you don't already.

On our website you will also find a range of videos that we have created which may be of interest to you or someone you know.

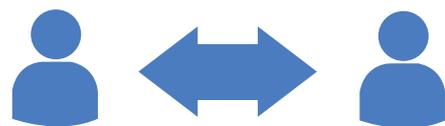
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We hope that you and your families are keeping safe and well. It has been a tough year for everyone during the Covid pandemic. If you find yourself needing to chat to someone about your mental health, you can call Samaritans free, day or night, 365 days a year on 116 123.

The Pearl Mussel Project is an EIP (European Innovation Partnership) Locally Led Scheme. The Project is funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine as part of Ireland's Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

