

1 Problem

We are conflating a couple of separate problems here:

1. Challenges in generating economic activity and sustainable employment outside major urban centres. Decreasing viability of farming per official statistics
2. Ireland failing badly on conservation of our biodiversity per official statistics (Note 1). We are subject to investigations by EU on a number of fronts.
3. Ireland not maximising potential for tourism based around hiking, camping and eco-tourism along models well established in places like New Zealand and North America.

2 Complications

- Investment in ecological conservation (National Parks and Wildlife Service etc) is constantly trumped by other priorities.
- Scale is critical to creating a comparatively compelling National Park proposition around hiking, cycling, camping and eco-tourism.
- Scale is critical to successful conservation of biodiversity (Note 2).
- Current conservation strategy is fragmented, and primarily concerned with marshalling resources to 'check boxes' around our commitments to EU habitats directive ([link](#)).

3 Solution

Vision is required...

Devise, and invest in, an ambitious long term strategy to create a flagship national park that serves as both (A) an engine of economic activity and (B) the cornerstone of a national strategy to conserve and re-introduce flora and fauna – *think Yellowstone National Park for Ireland*.

The template for world-class National Park tourist offerings is well defined – for example [Fiordland National Park in New Zealand](#). Characteristics:

- Allows multi-day in-park hiking trips via a system of tracks and accommodation
- Provides scale for effective conservation initiatives and allows conservation investment to be off-set by additional tourism generated by improved wildlife experience.
- Integrates strategic objectives around tourism and conservation ([link](#)) under a single controlling authority.

We have a proven capability to generate extra tourist visits via international campaigns around keystone tourism offerings (The gathering, Tour De France, Wild Atlantic Way etc). This flagship National Park would be another headline offering in that category. In conjunction with the tourism benefits, and downstream revenue from extra visitors, the park will provide a platform for us to drive conservation initiatives at scale and to move in the direction of complying with international obligations that we have agreed to.

A National Park expansion program would have to compete for land with alternative commercial land uses (agriculture primarily). The 2012 National Farm Survey produced by Teagasc ([link](#)) found that the % of long term viable farms is < 40% and falling. With this in mind, it follows that locations where agriculture is relatively less commercially viable would be the ones where there is most likely to be a critical mass of local support to create the expanded amenity.

Locations and feasibility would need to be established. Two illustrative concepts shown in Notes 3 and 4.

Note 1:

We are into our second [National Biodiversity Plan](#) and are signed up for numerous international agreements and directives on conservation and biodiversity.

- EU Nature Directives [Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC)
- Convention on Biological Diversity
- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (85/337/EEC)
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive (Directive 2001/42/EC)
- UN Convention on Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)
- Bonn Convention (on conservation of migratory species of wild animals)
- RAMSAR Convention (on wetlands)
- Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife
-

We are failing to meet our commitments on any of these fronts,

- EU Commissions assessment on Convention on Biological Diversity:
 - *“...set out a target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010; a target that has not been reached”*
 - *“seeing the constant loss, degradation and fragmentation of natural habitats and entire ecosystems are also being pushed to the point of collapse.”*
 - *“...the five principal pressures directly driving biodiversity loss (habitat change, overexploitation, pollution, invasive alien species and climate change) are either constant or increasing in intensity.”*
- The states assessment of implementation against Ireland Biodiversity Plan 2003 – 2010
 - *“...ecological footprint of humanity exceeds the biological capacity of the Earth by a wider margin than it did at the beginning of this Millennium.”*
 - *“... biodiversity loss has not been halted in Ireland. The status of many of our habitats and some of our species is judged to be poor or bad”*

Note 2

See [“The Theory of Island Biogeography”](#) and related work on theories of biodiversity in scenarios where flora and fauna is restricted to isolated pockets of land. The conclusion is that the smaller the pocket of land, and the further it is from another pocket then the fewer distinct species it will contain.

This idea underpins conservation efforts all over the world which seek to join up, or create corridors between geographically separated National Parks, e.g. Yellowstone to Yukon Initiative, The Great Limpopo etc (for more information, see [book](#))

Note 3

An initiative to develop and link two of our national parks that are nearest neighbours (Ballycroy National Park + Connemara National Park + Nephin Beg wilderness area) would look something like this:

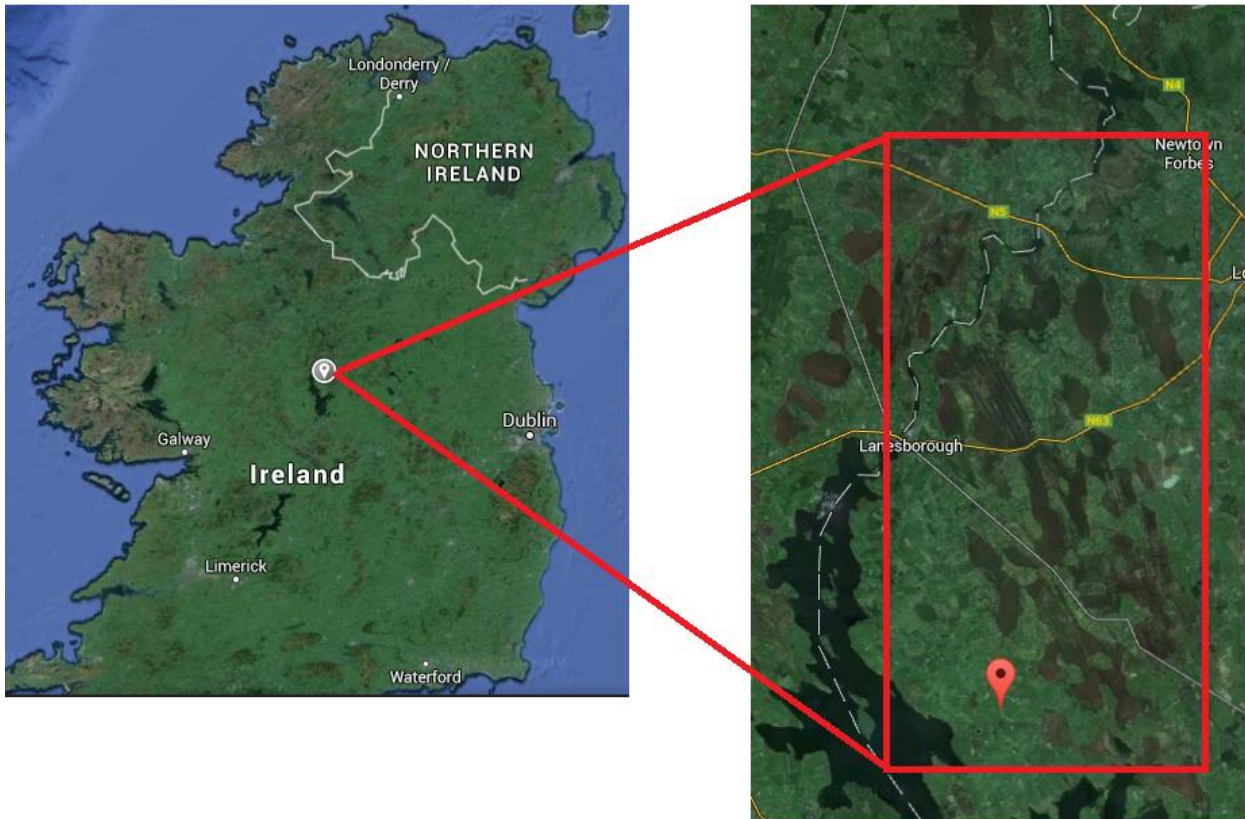


1. Ballycroy National Park & Nephin Beg Wilderness
2. Croagh Patrick & the Sheefry Hills
3. Connemara National Park, Mamturk and The Twelve Pins

Note 4:

Look at Ireland on Google maps and you will see large swathes of “brown patches” around the midlands. Broadly speaking these areas are Bord Na Mona owned sites that have been harvested for peat.

With the exception of potential for wind farms, there is no plan for the future use for these lands. Based on studies have been carried out, it appears that these sites have potential to be developed into valuable habitats with high amenity value.



This idea is not new – the map above shows the area known as Mount Dillon, c. 18,000 acres on the Longford / Roscommon border. Local groups have been pushing for development of a National Park in this area (unsuccessfully) for several years – [link](#).

Vision, investment and determination to break through blockers is required.