

Press release

QUB launches CIRB, a new £2.6 million project to tackle invasive species

A new £2.6 million project CIRB (Controlling priority Invasive species and Restoring native Biodiversity) was launched today at Queen's University Belfast. Invasive species are the second biggest cause of biodiversity loss worldwide and their economic impact in Europe has been estimated at over €12 billion per year. Invasive species are a growing problem in the UK and Ireland and the CIRB project will contribute to addressing this in river catchments through an innovative approach combining research, control programmes and stakeholder engagement.

The CIRB project will run until December 2014 is part financed by the European Union's European Regional Development Fund through the INTERREG IVA Cross-border Programme¹ managed by the Special EU Programmes Body² and is being undertaken by a partnership of Queen's University Belfast, the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland, University of Ulster and Inland Fisheries Ireland³. The CIRB project aims to demonstrate that a prioritised suite of invasive species, giant hogweed, rhododendron, Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam, can be controlled or eradicated strategically on a catchment scale. Together these species have been estimated to cost over £7.5 million to control each year in river catchments in Britain.

Professor Christine Maggs, project leader, said 'this exciting new project will not only control invasive species in key river catchments, but deliver new research showing how these species and their control affect native biodiversity and soils and how they can be restored effectively. It will also clearly demonstrate the economic benefits of controlling invasive species and restoring the amenity value of river corridors.'

Dr Cathy Maguire, project manager said 'these species take over river banks, preventing their use for angling and recreation, and excluding native biodiversity. Giant hogweed also contains toxic sap that can result in painful blisters and is a danger to public health. We need to prevent further environmental, economic and social impacts from invasive species and this will require new approaches combining scientific research with action on the ground and community engagement, which CIRB will deliver.'

SEUPB's Chief Executive, Pat Colgan, welcomed the project saying: "I would like to welcome the launch of this project, which addresses key objectives of the INTERREG IVA Programme concerning the sustainable development of the eligible region, as well as the EU's broader objectives in environmental protection. This project is a great example of how the overarching priorities of the Programme can successfully be applied to local and region-specific environmental challenges.

Speakers at today's launch include Professor Sean Gorman, Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences and Professor Christine Maggs, Head of the School of Biological Sciences. Further information on CIRB will be available at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/cirb/>

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Notes to Editors

1. The INTERREG IVA 2007-2013 Programme is worth €256 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders. It has two distinct priority measures to create co-operation for a more prosperous and sustainable cross-border region.

2. The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Finance

in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU structural funds Programmes PEACE III and INTERREG IV designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society. The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and Western Scotland. For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu

3. The CIRB project will take place in three catchments in the border regions of Ireland (River Faughan, Newry Canal/Clanrye and River Dee/Glyde) and 4 areas in Scotland (Argyll, Ayrshire, Galloway and the Tweed).

For media enquires please contact:

Cathy Maguire / Project Manager/ c.m.maguire@qub.ac.uk