

Press release

Foster launches £4million geological project

Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster today launched a £4million EU funded geological project to carry out further analysis of Northern Ireland's natural resources.

The cross-border Tellus Border project has been funded by the INTERREG IVA development programme of the European Regional Development Fund, which is managed by the Special European Programmes Body. This is the largest of the latest awards under the Environment theme of INTERREG IVA and is part funded by the Department of the Environment and the Republic of Ireland Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

The Geological Survey of Northern Ireland (GSNI) will manage the project in partnership with Geological Survey of Ireland (GSI), The Queen's University, Belfast and Dundalk Institute of Technology (DKIT).

The project is an extension of the award-winning Tellus Project in Northern Ireland, which produced new maps and digital data of soils, rocks and stream waters of the whole of Northern Ireland.

Launching the Tellus Border Project in Northern Ireland, Arlene Foster said: "This project will provide high quality geological information to ensure sustainable use of Northern Ireland's natural resources. It will continue the analysis of the information gathered under the Tellus Project and help inform government development decisions including sustainable use of land in planning decisions, and enhance further private sector investment in areas such as mineral exploration."

Minister Poots, whose department has injected £0.6million into the scheme, said: "This is an exciting project which will provide us with further detailed information on Northern Ireland's natural environment and help us understand more the pressures which it faces. In particular it will provide important background information on geology, stream water quality, and potential pollution sources, which will help to inform the work of a number of different partners including my own Department."

Welcoming the launch of the EU funded project Pat Colgan, Chief Executive of the SEUPB, said: "Upon completion this innovative project will inform and improve sustainable land management practices across Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland. It has been supported under the cross-border infrastructure element of the EU's INTERREG IVA Programme which is encouraging sustainable development in a number of sectors including environmental protection."

The project will involve scientists from Queen's School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology and the School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering. Queen's Vice-Chancellor Professor Peter Gregson said: "Queen's University is pleased to be part of this major investment in earth science and environmental research in Ireland. Our leading researchers in geosciences will use the latest scientific techniques to quantify and map levels of carbon in our soils and to identify and monitor groundwater pollution."

“Queen’s research will be a vital component of the Tellus Border project and will help us better understand our natural environment and work towards a more sustainable future for Ireland, north and south.”

Continuing the analysis of the Tellus data, the Border project will undertake innovative research, particularly in the scientific assessment and management of wetlands, soil-carbon and ground-pollution. The project will also integrate the geo-science information mapped on both sides of the border and improve cross-border collaboration in the management of earth resources and the environment.

The area covered by the project includes Northern Ireland, (excluding the Belfast Metropolitan Area) and the six northern counties of the Republic of Ireland (Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Monaghan, Cavan and Louth).

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Notes to editors:

1. SEUPB

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.

The INTERREG IVA 2007-2013 Programme, funded through the European Regional Development Fund, 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.

For more information on the SEUPB please visit <http://www.seupb.eu>.

2. Partner responsibilities

GSNI - Project management

Airborne geophysical survey of approx 65% of the land area and inland waters of parts of Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Louth, Cavan and Monaghan.

GSI - Communications management; Data management ; Geochemical soils and streams survey of the above six counties of RoI.

GSNI/GSI - Integration of new RoI data with Tellus data; cross-border analysis and interpretation.

Queen's University Belfast - Characterisation and quantification of carbon in soil (post-doc). This will be led by Dr Jennifer McKinley and Dr Alastair Ruffell at Queen's School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology.

Detection, mapping and characterisation of pollution plumes (post-doc). This will be led by Dr Ulrich Ofterdinger at Queen's School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering and Dr Alastair Ruffell at Queen's School of Geography, Archaeology and Palaeoecology.

Dundalk Institute of Technology - Hydrology and hydrogeology of wetlands of the border area (post-doc).

3. Project background

Tellus Border is the latest phase of a project originally conceived by GSNI, GSI and BGS in the late 1990s as 'The Resource and Environmental Survey of Ireland' (RESI). This was intended to be a comprehensive and integrated geophysical and geochemical survey of the whole island of Ireland, with the objective of providing state-of-the-art geo-science information to inform government development decisions.

The first phase of RESI, the Tellus Project, comprised geoscience surveys of Northern Ireland completed between 2004 and 2007. The project was co-funded by DETI, DoE, and the EU's 'Building Sustainable Prosperity' fund of the Rural Development Programme of DARD. These surveys comprised detailed geochemical surveys and a low-level airborne geophysical survey of the whole of Northern Ireland. The results have been used widely by government and industry for environmental management and the value of the project was acknowledged by national awards for GIS, mineral exploration promotion, and public relations.

The second phase of the programme in Northern Ireland, 'Tellus2', was funded between 2008 and 2011 by the Chancellor's Fund for Innovation; this phase extended data analysis and promoted the use of the data widely amongst the research community. Today, 10 PhDs based on Tellus data are in progress in UK and Ireland.

Objectives for Tellus2 were set out in the Regional Innovation Strategy for Northern Ireland Action Plan, 2008-11. These include Action 3.1.3: 'Collaborate with government and industrial partners in the RoI in extending the Tellus project into the RoI'. Accordingly, in July 2009 GSNI assembled a cross-border partnership to apply for funding under the Environment theme of INTERREG IVA. The submission

proposed geochemical and airborne geophysical surveys of the six northern counties of ROI, continued analysis and application of existing Tellus data in NI, and three complementary research projects in wetlands, soil carbon, and detection of pollution plumes. The application was successful and SEUPB awarded a grant of £4,014,609 for a project to run from 1 November 2011 to 31 December 2013.