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Project Case Study: Source to Tap—Project update

THEME:

Environment

FUNDING (ERDF+MATCH):

€4,909,921.26

MATCH FUNDING:

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs; and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

LEAD PARTNER:

Northern Ireland Water

PROJECT PARTNERS:

Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), The Rivers Trust, East Border Region Ltd, Ulster University, Irish Water

Start Date: 01/10/2016

End Date: 30/09/2022

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Peat, sleep, restore afforested blanket bog, re-peat

Since Covid restrictions were relaxed in June-July 2020, a lot has been happening in the Source to Tap Peat pilot. This pilot aims to trial different restoration techniques at a formerly afforested site at Tullychurry Forest near Belleek, restoring the degraded peat back to peatbog.

The Forest Service NI site at Tullychurry has been split into 3 sections with cell bunding trialled in one section, blocking of drains at another every 12m or so and blocking only the exit drains at another section. After appointing contractors, a detailed survey of the site was carried out using handheld GPS and a drone, to produce a topographic model of the site. This information helped to determine the location of the cell bunds and the drains to be blocked, which will help rewet the site.

Diggers arrived on site on 22nd October to start work on the cell bunded area. In this area a trench is dug, approximately 1m deep through the damaged top layer of peat and a low bund wall made from saturated peat is built up and compressed along 4 sides to form a watertight cell. As the site contains tree stumps and brash these must be avoided when building the bund walls.

Despite difficult ground conditions, over 10 weeks or so approximately 140 cell bunds have been constructed. Shortly after the cells were created they were already retaining water. Work is well underway in blocking the drains on the site every 12m or so using peat dams. Once all the work is completed, monitoring using shallow groundwater piezometers will be carried out on the site to compare the recovery of the water table in each of the different sections.

Some of the recently created cell bunds filling up with water.