

Special EU Programmes Body

Project Case Study

Programme:
INTERREG IVA

Theme:
2.2 Environment

Funding:
€2,321,244.00

Lead Partner:
Donegal County Council

Website:
[http://
freshwaterpearlmussel.com](http://freshwaterpearlmussel.com)

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Geographical area:
**NI and Border Region of
Ireland on a catchment basis**

Protecting Freshwater Pearl Mussels

The Practical Application of Freshwater Pearl Mussel Measures project aims to tackle the decline in the population of freshwater pearl mussels on the island of Ireland, by introducing measures on a catchment basis.

Freshwater Pearl Mussels have lived in our rivers for thousands of years. They are slow growing, but very long-lived and can be up to 120 years old. They can grow to 14cm in length. Unfortunately, the population of this fascinating species has been in decline in recent years. The species is now endangered, and is listed in the Habitats Directive as a species requiring the designation of Special Areas of Conservation.

The project has developed catchment plans for testing innovative measures and has prepared guidance for a number of sectors to ensure that activities are

sustainable and do not affect pearl mussel survival.

The island of Ireland retains a significant proportion of the Freshwater Pearl Mussel populations remaining in Europe, most of it in eight catchments. Virtually all of these populations are in decline and evidence suggests that in recent decades juvenile mussels are failing to make it to adulthood. Unless measures are put in place to ensure successful breeding and survival of juveniles, the existing populations will become extinct as the adult mussels die off.

Pearl mussels live in rivers and need a high quality environment to survive. They must have clean river gravels to live in, especially important for the young mussels. Some activities in catchments can result in more nutrients entering and fertilising the rivers, giving rise to excessive weed growth that blankets the river bed and smothers the mussels. Other activities can release silt into the river choking the gravel bed and smothering the mussels, especially the young ones.

Key project outputs:

- 1 environmental management project.
- 3 measures trialled.
- Baseline data developed.
- 12 datasets created through GIS.
- 9 surveys undertaken to develop sub-basin management plans.
- Programme of stakeholder engagement implemented.



A bed of freshwater pearl mussels.