

Green Party Protection of Nature Policy



Policy for the Protection of the Natural Environment

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1. Summary and key points

Our goals are to reverse declines in habitat richness, to increase biodiversity, to improve quality of waters in lakes, rivers streams and coastlines, to reduce flooding risks, to enrich urban environments, to improve air quality, to protect against emerging threats and to support systemic changes to bring about long term sustainability for future generations.. We wish to see Ireland blossom as a country with healthy soils, water and air supporting a much richer bird, animal, plant and insect life because we recognise that the health and wellbeing of the biosphere is integral to, and deeply interwoven with, human health and wellbeing. This will benefit citizens and tourists alike.

A strengthened Department of the Environment will unify responsibilities scattered in different corners of government. This will ensure joined up, results-oriented management of a better environment for everyone.

Our key policy objective is to develop the less economically important one third of agricultural land, which will be managed under the principles of High Nature Value Farming. This focuses on the environmental results achieved by landholders. This will improve biodiversity and tourism, while reducing pollution and flooding.

Our next policy objective is to support forward looking initiatives that recognise the intrinsic value of and the inherent rights of nature which aim to bring about the long term systemic changes needed for humanity to flourish in harmony with nature for generations to come.

2. Introduction

The Green Party aims to incorporate nature into the mainstream political arena. Recent governments have given little if any consideration to the state of the environment despite the enormous contribution the natural environment provides to society, to farming, to tourism, and to quality of life.

We are proposing a set of policies that would form the basis of good management of the natural environment. These include relieving funding restraints, reorganising environmental responsibilities in government, adding value to non-viable farms through conservation measures, integrating

environmental stewardship into agricultural activities, and supporting innovative approaches in law and governance to achieve long term sustainability.”..

The Green Party’s vision for our natural environment is that it is protected and enhanced for the common good of our generation and for future generations. The natural environment must be included in decision making with consideration given to our natural habitats and species alongside our development goals so that we prosper in harmony with nature. This approach will lead to the convergence of development and conservation, resulting in an enriched nation.

2.1 Threats and pressures

The most widespread ‘threats and pressures’ amongst all habitats are from pollution, human intrusion, agriculture practices, the built environment, invasive and problematic species, and from natural systems modification (eg. drainage).

“The main pressures to habitats are

- Ecologically unsuitable grazing levels in key habitats
- Fresh water pollution from agricultural and municipal waste
- Land Modification
- Use of pesticides, herbicides and excessive use of fertilisers
- Overcutting and destruction of hedgerows
- Non-native commercial forestry threatens natural habitats and species by altering the local ecosystem.
- Habitat erosion, with several species near extinction including the hen harrier, curlew and the Golden Eagle.
- Flooding in Shannon and other river basins
- Burning in upland areas
- Invasive species

Ireland has 585 sites designated as protected for conservation reasons (154 Special Protection Areas, and 431 Special Areas of Conservation) along with 148 raised and blanket bogs. Many habitats are deteriorating. Since 2007, nine (16%) habitats demonstrate a genuine improving trend, 18 (31%)

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habitats are considered to be declining, no change is reported for 28 (48%) habitats and an unknown trend reported for 3 (5%) habitats¹

A European Commission website² usefully summarises many of the key problems, including the observation that, in May 2015 all of Ireland's wetlands have an unfavourable conservation status and are continuing to deteriorate:

- The majority of Ireland's most important habitats are reported to be of poor or bad conservation status, including raised and blanket bogs, dune systems, oligotrophic lakes, fens and mires, natural grasslands and woodlands.
- Of over 60 different species assessed in 2013 more than half (52%) were deemed 'favourable', 20% as 'inadequate', 12% as 'bad' and 16% as 'unknown'. The assessment report also found that bird species, such as the curlew and dunlin, are in major decline in Ireland.
- While pollinators provide €53M in value the Irish economy, one third of Irish bee species are close to extinction³.

2.2 Obstacles to action:

Ireland has generally failed to place environmental concerns at the centre of all policy and decision making at national, regional and local levels, and environmental policy and legislation has failed to keep up with European and world developments. This lack of interest is reflected in the following deficits in our system:

- Failure to adequately fund the National Parks and Wildlife Service and conservation.
- The Common Agriculture Policy often provides incentives to the maximisation of land for agricultural production to the detriment of the environment, but our government has substantial power to direct these incentives in a different way, which it has to date ignored.
- Regulations within the Organic Farming Scheme impede the expansion of Organic Farming.

¹ [□] The Status of EU Protected Habitats and Species in Ireland, 2013, Dept Arts, Heritage & Gaeltacht. <https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/Art17-Vol1-web.pdf>

² European Commission website on Ireland's environment. http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/key-eu-policy-areas/environment_en

³ All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, 2013, www.biodiversityireland.ie/pollinator-plan

- Dispersion of ministerial responsibility for environment conservation across many departments.
- Unfulfilled EU obligations.
- Agricultural incentive schemes of the Department of Agriculture (REPS/GLAS) fail to protect and develop the environment.
- Bias in environmental law towards managing the externalities of business as usual rather than addressing root causes.
- Discord between the legal system and science: the legal system treats nature as a lifeless object, while treating economic arrangements as living subjects of the law.

Agricultural incentive schemes (REPS/GLAS) by Dept. of Agriculture fail to protect and develop the environment.

3. Policies

3.1 Enhance departmental organisation and accountability

The Green Party's vision of how to expand and extend the remit and enforcement powers of the Environmental Protection Agency are outlined in a separate document, the Environmental Protection Agency Reform Policy.

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)

A lack of funding has been a fundamental challenge for the NPWS, due to a 67% reduction in non-pay funding, as is a lack of clear accountability owing to the lack of a Chief Executive Officer.⁴ The European Court of Justice has criticised the lack of resources put into how EU conservation law is implemented and monitored. Ireland is continuously not in compliance with EU conservation laws. We propose to:

- Assign responsibilities for nature conservation to a department that leads on environmental matters
- Integrate the work of the NPWS with that of the Environmental Protection Agency.
- Expand National Park areas.

⁴ “A future for wildlife and people” Chapter 8 in “Whittled Away: Ireland’s Vanishing Nature”, Padraic Fogarty, The Collins Press, 2017.

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- Stimulate local biodiversity action plans through increased Heritage Council funding to support projects.
- Increase funding for the protection and development of wildlife habitats.
- Greatly increase NPWS staffing, and appoint a Chief Executive Officer, as recommended in a 2010 review ⁵.
- Engage the public in consultation regarding the establishment of an Ombudsman for the Rights of Nature and Future Generations.

Intended outcomes:

- More integrated and better management of environment by state departments and agencies.
- More efficient enforcement of wildlife legislation.
- Better resourcing, management and accountability of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in delivering its services.
- Fulfil obligations to the EU, including the designation of Natura 2000 sites.
- More extensive protected habitats will counteract the fragmentation associated with species decline.
- Mitigation of damaging endemic and novel species changes caused by climate change, agriculture and industry.

Departmental Responsibilities

⁵ □ Organisational Review of the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), July 2010, Grant Thornton. <http://www.ahrrga.gov.ie/app/uploads/2015/11/organisational-review-of-the-npws.pdf>

Our national environmental responsibilities are currently scattered between several governmental departments:

Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs for biodiversity;

Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for planning and development;

Agriculture, Food and the Marine for agriculture, food, fisheries, forestry and rural environment, including green subsidies;

Communications, Climate Action and Environment for conservation and management of freshwater fish.

This creates major inefficiencies and a lack of joined up thinking in the management of the natural environment, which has contributed directly to the wholesale degradation of the Irish environment, under the well-meaning but disorganised and unco-ordinated efforts of separate departments. It is now particularly urgent that we bring these responsibilities within a stronger Department of the Environment, whose work will need to be intimately managed in conjunction with the Dept. of Agriculture. To ensure the effective co-operation between the two departments, we propose the appointment of a Junior Minister specifically tasked with this.

3.2 National Action plan for the Environment

We propose to introduce a major initiative to consult with all relevant bodies including NGOs and the public. It will:

- identify activities and products that harm the natural environment including air, water, soil and wildlife
- devise action plans to eliminate them and restore habitats, species, and quality of air and water.
- identify and quantify the benefits of expanding and strengthening our natural habitats to Irish society and economy.
- uphold our international Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) obligations on conservation of habitats and species.
- Outline targeted investment in surveying, monitoring and research, through the NPWS and other bodies.

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Following this, a vision for what the Irish countryside and biodiversity should look like in 2030 will be translated into a high-level blueprint (“White Paper”) describing the structures and actions that are needed to achieve this vision. This will integrate the needs of farmers to make a living, the need to generate energy, the need to mitigate climate change emissions, and the need to increase rather than degrade soil quality and biodiversity.

3.3 Water and Soil

Water is a precious natural resource, and the island of Ireland has abundant sources of it. As a commodity, water is going to become more and more valuable internationally in the years ahead, and it is, therefore, a huge economic asset of the country, for supply to industry, agriculture and households (see the separate Green Party Water Policy which deals with the management of this supply⁶. “Water is much more than this - as without water, human life cannot exist. Additionally, water also supports our quality of life, our tourism, and the ecosystems and biodiversity that they both depend on. We need to value natural waters, and appreciate the substantial economic and other costs to society when their value is neglected.

Our Lakes, Rivers and Streams: Pollution and Flooding.

Ireland’s waters are substantially polluted, and government-driven dairy herd increases will likely increase these problems in the south and south east, where the problem is most acute.

- 48% of rivers, 57% of Lakes and 4% of coastal environments show moderate, poor or bad pollution levels.
- There were 70 incidents of fish kills in the 2010-2012 period.
- Although river nitrate and phosphorus levels have lowered, eutrophication of lakes has increased.
- 51% of samples of ground water are contaminated by faecal coliforms, mainly from problem septic tanks.

What we propose to do, in order to tackle this:

⁶ <https://greenparty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/Green-Party-Water-Policy-2015.pdf>
<https://greenparty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/GreenParty-ExpertWaterCommission.pdf>

- Better targeted implementation of the E.U. nitrates and phosphates directives..
- Explore potential of an insurance levy against fish kills in areas where silage seepage is a real threat.
- Proper investment in treatment work filtration systems to prevent *Cryptosporidium* contamination (see Water Policy).
- Monitoring and upgrading of septic tanks. The current practice of advisory notes may be strengthened to a licensing system with sufficient time being given to upgrade using the generous grant system.
- Ensure proper and realistic environmental assessment for any targeted increases in herd numbers.

We must also be vigilant against emerging threats, and provide resources to tackle them. These include:

- Pesticides that contain neonicotinoids that damage insect pollinators, as well as hormone altering substances such as endocrine disrupting chemicals, both of which should be prohibited from use.
- Use of plastic micro-particles in cosmetics and cleaners, which enter the water courses and are absorbed into the marine flora and fauna. These also should be banned from use.
- The Zebra Mussel continues to expand its range. Ongoing research is needed to monitor this and other invasive species and control their impact.

Mismanagement of the environment has led to increased disturbance through periodic flooding. The burden to society of flooding is enormous, with personal suffering from damage to homes and loss of insurance cover, increased pollution, and degradation of soil and ecosystems. It has been shown that habitat restoration, such as in peatlands, can reduce flooding problems⁷. Our policy on High Nature Value Farming will seek to tackle these problems in the one third of less economically viable agricultural land⁸ that falls under its remit (see Agriculture Policy), with the goal of reversing the

⁷ □ Co-benefits for Water and Biodiversity from the Sustainable Management of High Nature Value Farmland, J. Moran & C. Sullivan, for the Environmental Protection Agency, 2017, see <http://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/research/biodiversity/research209.html>; and see also Martin-Ortega, J., Allott, T.E.H., Glenk, K. and Schaafsma, M., 2014. Valuing water quality improvements from peatland restoration: evidence and challenges. *Ecosystem Services* 9: 34–43.

⁸ S. Matin, C. A. Sullivan, D. Ó hUallacháin, D. Meredith, J. Moran, J. A. Finn & S. Green (2016): Predicted distribution of High Nature Value farmland in the Republic of Ireland, *Journal of Maps*,

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extent of flooding in river catchments served by such regions. We will publish a road map for averting and minimising flood damage in the Shannon Basin and other areas. This will encompass:

- An assessment of the annual cost of flooding;
- Completion of surveys
- Completion of National Landscape Character Assessment
- Estimates for various flood prevention scenarios.
- Consultations
- Legislation for the place of Landscape in law.
- Ministerial responsibility for flood relief plans and implementation.

Soil.

“We recognise that soil is a complex living ecosystem - a home for numerous species - which has a right to its own healthful existence. We also recognise that soil provides human beings with the very source of life - through the production of healthy plant species on which we depend daily for sustenance. The state of soils globally is appalling and declining at alarming rates (UN FAO). Given the timespan that it takes for soil to develop, it may be considered a finite resource - and hence one facing extinction. Lack of political will and inadequate legal frameworks are part of the problem - there is no legal framework to protect soil in the EU, for example. Recognising the crucial importance of protecting the rights of soil ecosystems to a healthy existence, we commit to working towards addressing this gap at national level. Hence, we will work with our partners to consider how an ecological legal paradigm and the rights of nature framework can provide tools to ensure the thriving soil ecosystems for generations to come. Monitoring is an important component of the governance framework, and we will ensure nationwide testing of soil is repeated at least every five years to help direct planning of its development and conservation by farming, water management and forestry practices. See also our section on soil preservation in our Agriculture Policy.ⁱ

3.4 Landscape – Rural and Urban

We need to highlight and stress the role and importance of Local Councils in helping with environmental initiatives. We need to develop further the existing legislative, insurance, and practical

arrangements to foster access to land for both tourists and citizens, while addressing the concerns of landowners. We will introduce measures to give statutory powers to local councils:

- Provide grants through local authorities towards local talks and lectures, nature museums, creation of parks etc
- Provide access to the world of nature, whether it is through the procurement of public lands and creation of more public parks, gardens and forest walks, butterfly houses in villages, local museums in every town showing for example the local flora, fauna or geology and flower and herb gardens in every village.
- Connect/enhance ecosystems/Infrastructure, e.g. flood alleviation, shade, recreational space, functional green spaces
- Provide rural walks and support farmers with grants and resources to open up their land for recreation
- Strictly enforce planning laws to create nature spaces, whether small civic gardens, copses, parks, orchards, allotments etc. in all villages and towns.
- Create employment to design, develop and maintain the walkways, paths and other nature spaces.
- Acquire/procure more land by the State for the benefit and use of the whole population.
- Facilitate employment opportunities for horticultural and landscape gardeners in municipally- run gardens and parks.
- Assist local authorities in establishing Nature's Rights Zones in conjunctions with organisations who are promoting this approach.

3.4.1 Trees

At present only 11% of the island is forested, compared to an average of 40% in Europe. Of this, only 2% of our forests are native woodlands, the remainder being commercial, mainly coniferous, forests⁹. The Green Party Forestry Policy¹⁰ is set out in a separate document, which should be read in conjunction with this policy, but the following additional measures should also be implemented

⁹ [▫] "Ireland now has the 'second-smallest' forest area in Europe" The Journal 30 Aug 2012. <http://www.thejournal.ie/ireland-forest-area-577152-Aug2012/>

¹⁰ [▫] <https://greenparty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Green-Party-Forestry-Policy-2014.pdf>

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specifically in recognition of the rights of trees and shrub to a healthy existence and as a means to promote biodiversity.”

Tree and shrub planting should be prioritised to enable re-wilding of tree and shrub ecosystems and to generate biodiversity, carbon sequestration and oxygen production¹¹. We propose a nationwide scheme of deciduous tree planting in rural and urban areas using appropriate ecological expertise, in:

- Farmland copses and shelterbelts.
- Unplanted areas adjacent to railway lines, canals, route ways, unattended land etc.
- Street side planting.
- Supermarkets and shopping complexes – including those without sufficient landscaping
- Lands adjoining rivers and streams.

The long-term benefits of this are immense. Ireland, with its climate and soil, is ideally suited to growing trees, and indeed they grow faster here than elsewhere in Europe.

- They would provide huge improvements to the air we breathe, absorbing carbon dioxide, and emitting oxygen.
- They would improve drainage, minimize flooding, and prevent soil degradation and run-off from heavy rainfall and floods.
- They would be a haven for wildlife, increasing populations of birds, mammals, insects and bees.
- They would be a future sustainable resource for housing, furniture, and crafts.
- They would transform the landscape into one of beauty and variety and help to soothe and please the human spirit and ease the stresses of modern life.

We can raise awareness of the urgency of carbon storage, e.g. by providing an incentive scheme (e.g. a free tree and shrub) for every person in the state, which they can grow in their gardens or in the local community. Small local efforts create positive ripples and actual carbon benefits.

3.4.2 Hedgerows

Hedgerows are estimated to cover 3.9% of the Irish landscape and contain many species of trees, bushes, and other plant life. Without them many of these could disappear from the Irish landscape.

11 ¹¹ <http://www.treesintrust.com/environmental.shtm> and <http://www.arborenvironmentalalliance.com/carbon-tree-facts.asp>

They form vital arteries for birds, animals & insects to move, feed, colonise and bring up young secure from predators. They help create a food chain for animal life.

Increased intensity of farming management is one of the greatest threats to hedgerow biodiversity, involving either removal or over-cutting. Between 2006 and 2012, nearly 2% of hedgerows were lost¹².

Policies will be pursued to safeguard hedgerows and to encourage their flourishing for generations to come. These would include:

- Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) incentives need to be made flexible to discourage field maximisation and drainage at the expense of hedgerows. The Department of Agriculture will monitor and report regularly on the maintenance and development of hedgerows as an aspect of its review of land usage, to ensure hedgerows are not losing out to intensification.
- The Green Party calls for specifications that would regulate the extent to which hedgerows can be cut to: 2 metres in width and height for hedgerows along the roadside, with exceptions for hedges along road ways and junctions where safety is an issue, and 3.5 metres in height, 2 metres in width, for hedges in fields.
- The retention and conservation of hedgerows with appropriate species and sustainable management. In addition, to meet Ireland's international obligations (including the EU's Birds and Habitats Directives), and to reverse threatened and diminished biodiversity, revise section 40 of the 1996 Wildlife Act (as amended) to continue the closed period on annual hedge-cutting from 1 March to 31 August.
- This would be a means to safeguard the wide range of ecosystem services hedgerows provide and protect wildlife, including some very threatened species (birds, pollinators, bats etc..) that hedgerows sustain as a critical habitat. The Green Party advocates that later cutting should be encouraged and incentivised.
- As conserving hedgerows is critical for biodiversity, as well as of considerable significance for Ireland's landscape heritage, farming and archaeology, the Green Party advocates the formation of an advisory forum to bring together stakeholders to shape a framework for hedgerow conservation. This may include actions to implement agreed policy and best practice, education for hedgerow establishment and management for farmers and Local Authorities and procedures for conservation to thereby share knowledge and ideas, to encourage and inspire, to resolve conflicting interests and to work with farmers and other land managers to conserve, enhance,

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celebrate and maximise the private, public and environmental benefits from Ireland's hedgerows.

- We propose to halt all imports of honey-bees into the Republic of Ireland, and work for cooperation with Northern Ireland to bring forth a ban on all imports into the island of Ireland

3.4.3 Peatlands

There is an urgent need to reduce destruction of remaining peatlands in Ireland. We have less than 30% of the peatlands that existed in 1900, including less than 1% of active raised bogs (An Taisce). We are in danger of going the way of the Netherlands, which has lost all of its bogs in recent times. Peat is an important carbon sink in the fight against climate change. Burning of peat is a bigger carbon emitter than coal in producing electricity, and therefore we need to immediately stop peat burning in power stations, and discourage low-scale saving of turf in the countryside.

We will preserve and where feasible re-instate bogs for the unique biodiversity they provide and for cultural, landscape and climate reasons. Raised Bogs are of considerable conservation value in Ireland, and less than 1% of this once extant resource remains. The legal protection for these last remaining active raised bogs is in place; what is needed is the political will to resolve outstanding issues and deliver proper protection for the benefit of future generations.

3.5 Climate change and its implications for the natural environment

The EPA estimates that 1200 deaths occur in Ireland annually arising from the poor quality of air we breathe, largely caused by the burning of fossil fuels. The transition to renewable energy needs to be speeded up, as detailed in the Green Party Energy Policy¹³, not only to reduce climate change, but also to reduce the serious health damage caused by such polluting emissions,.

The Paris Accords “recognise the importance of averting, minimising and addressing loss and damage associated with the adverse effects of climate change” and commits governments to “strengthen societies’ ability to deal with the impacts of climate change”. The report “State of Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture in Ireland” states that climate change is a pressure on 10% of Irish habitats

13 [▣] <http://greenparty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Green-Party-submission-to-DCENR-Green-Paper-public-consultation-on-energy-policy-31.7.14.pdf>

protected under the EU Habitats Directive, and there is evidence that it is already negatively impacting coastal habitats¹⁴.

We propose to publish a road map for changes in land use and for the optimal use of land so as to minimise carbon emissions. This will take into account the impact that climate change will have on our biodiversity, with substantial shifts in bird species as the country warms up, as well as changes to many other species groups, including economically important insects that provide both benefits and dangers to agriculture and the natural environment. This road map will seek to resolve the challenges by natural means rather than by construction, where possible.

3.6 Agriculture

Agriculture exerts the largest pressures, threats and opportunities on species and habitats in Ireland, simply because so much of our land is for agricultural use. Innovative agricultural practises working closely with the agricultural sector also offer the greatest opportunities for improving the natural environment and biodiversity. It is essential that the industry is engaged in environmental protection if we are to safeguard our ecosystem for the future. The Green Party Agriculture Policy¹⁵ addresses the issues in this key sector, in particular how agricultural supports targeted to achieve environmental gains (Greening and GLAS payments) should be linked to measurable biodiversity and other environmental benefits. That policy should be read alongside this policy document.

3.7 Conservation of Habitats and Biodiversity:

Ireland's environment faces the following substantial problems:

- The 2013 Status of European Habitats and Species details the state of Irish habitats and species numbers. Since 2007, only 6% habitats demonstrate a genuine improving trend, 31% habitats are considered to be declining, no change is reported for 48% habitats and an unknown trend reported for 5% habitats (NPWS, 2013). Nationally we are failing to meet our legal obligation to protect and improve the status of our species and habitats on the most basic level.
- The consistent funding cuts to the NPWS, have limited the scope of their operations. With proper funding, the NPWS would be capable of managing these issues and meeting the basic requirements of our environmental obligations.
- The “EU Birds and Habitats Directives” are supported by hundreds of thousands of citizens in Ireland and in Europe. They are vital in our efforts to restore and protect all aspects of the natural environment. However, these directives face some threats at European level, and

14 State of the Environment Report, 2016. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

15 <https://greenparty.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Green-Party-Agriculture-Policy-Dec-2016.pdf>

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Ireland needs to campaign strongly to protect the directives.

- In contrast with most other European countries, Ireland lacks a network of legally protected sites of national, regional and local importance (the current network of SACs (Special Area of Conservation) and SPAs (Special Protection Area) are protecting sites of European importance). Such a network was in place until 1990 with the designation of the Areas of Scientific Interest, but has become redundant as a legal challenge found the designation process to be unconstitutional. The removal of this pillar of nature conservation policy should be rectified.

We propose to:

- Complete the "designation" process for planned special areas of conservation.
- Meet current EU obligations¹⁶
- Give the National Parks a legal basis and protection under law, including by proposing to designate national parks as legal persons with the right to a healthy existence.
- Special financial and taxation incentives should be available for landowners and farmers who are willing to designate their land as Important Nature Areas under a medium to long term agreement, and carry out specific, target-driven management actions to achieve nature conservation objectives (see above under High Nature Value Farming).
- We will implement stronger supports for conservation NGOs who provide a dynamic, meaningful and positive input into the development of public policy and awareness.

4. Rights of Nature

Nature and the environment must be granted stronger legal rights to exist, persist, be maintained and be restored.

- We will develop legislation to provide for the rights of nature in coordination with legal experts. We will engage in public consultation, as well as in dialogue with countries that have successfully integrated rights of nature into their constitutions and legal frameworks.
- We will develop a proposal to protect the rights of nature and the environment within the Irish Constitution.

- The rights of nature will be developed in such a manner as to support humans flourishing in harmony with

5. Education / promotion

The engagement and support of all sectors of society is vital to protect nature. We will:

- Introduce a high level promotional and educational campaign to promote Ireland's biodiversity and our interrelationship with nature. The Wild Atlantic Way has been a phenomenal success in promoting tourism along the west coast of Ireland. A similar large-scale promotional drive is needed to promote Ireland's biodiversity, its value and the benefits it brings to society, via tourism, farming and the recreational economy and the sustenance of a habitable planet for all. their role in supporting life on earth.
- Provide strong economic costings demonstrating the value of environmental initiatives enhancing economic activities, quality of life and well-being.
- Scientific documents such as those on climate change and the Conference on Biodiversity should be "translated" to smaller, more easily read messages for the public.
- Communicate the concept of Ireland as an island, where, apart from climate change, we have the power and capacity to control our own pollution.
- Environmental studies should be more strongly developed in Primary and Secondary schools, educating children about the inter-relatedness and dependencies of all living things in a healthy ecosystem which includes human beings as part of nature, the Countryside Code, the Green Flag policy, and the courtesies and obligations involved in walking on other peoples' property.
- Designate an annual bank holiday feast day celebrating virtues and joys of the natural environment.
- Work with partners to develop educational programmes on Earth Jurisprudence and rights of nature, so as to impart the understanding of a shared home and interdependencies to present and future generations, as well as to impart training in ecological solutions to the societal challenges we face

The Green Schools initiative has played an important role in raising environmental awareness in schools. We propose a major extension of this idea. We propose in addition that grants, be made to all schools that undertake a practical environmental project. The amount of the grant will potentially be significant, according to the nature of the project, and the level of student participation. In order to maximise student participation the spending of the grant will be decided by the student body, with approval of school management, so as to enhance education facilities within the school or be otherwise directly beneficial to students within the school. Projects may for example include: (i) Altering public

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attitudes towards our relationship with and caring for nature (ii) Science-based projects (iii) Stimulating environment improvement projects in their area e.g. involving residents and (iv) Direct action to improve the local environment. Factors to be taken into account in determining the amount of grant will include the number of students involved, and the significance, degree of impact and permanence of the project.

6. Funding and incentivisation

Across all arms of government the Green Party seeks to allocate expenditure on the basis of long term benefits rather than short term costs. This specifically impacts on the environment by:

- “Redirecting taxes, supports and subsidies towards improving the resilience of nature, and away from those activities which harm nature.”
- Reviewing environmental impacts of all tax breaks and allowances.
- Proper costing of the long term benefits of biodiversity, improved soil quality and carbon sequestration to the long term inter-generational value of farmland, agriculture practises, tourism and the overall economy.
- Properly resourcing the Wildlife Grant Scheme operated by the Heritage Council.
- Committing to adequately fund the implementation of the National Biodiversity Plan.
- Re-designing legal and governance frameworks to integrate ecological principles and the rights of nature across all sectors of

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