

Lough Braden Peatland Restoration Project

Forest-to-Bog restoration work is now complete in a 27 hectare area around the shores of Lough Bradan in Co. Tyrone (above). Developing on the trailblazing Source to Tap Forest-to-Bog restoration work piloted at Tullychurry Forest in Fermanagh, Lowry Building and Civil Engineering have built cell bunds and blocked forestry drains in the area around the Lough.

After all the licences, approvals and procurement were completed the work started on Wed 6th Jan and was completed on the 19th Feb, well in advance of the bird nesting season. Work commenced on the Western shores of the Lough and proceeded in an anti-clockwise direction. The western section, about 8-10 hectares, was recently felled and the terrain was relatively flat, leaving it suitable for cell bunding.

Cell bunding is the construction of watertight cells made from low peat walls. They retain water into the area, encouraging the regrowth of important water-retaining mosses (e.g. sphagnum) which slow the flow into the Lough from surrounding areas, encouraging the return of a functioning bog which will slow and filter the water flowing to the Lough for years to come. A buffer strip was left directly around the Lough to protect from initial run-off.

In total an impressive 211 cells were constructed in this area and the water table has already clearly been raised. The southern, eastern and northern sections had the trees felled a long time ago and were already naturally regenerating. This, as well as the fact that there was a greater slope in much of this area meant that it was unsuitable for cell bunding. Instead the drains were blocked in these areas, wherever drains could be found, in order to raise the water table, allowing mosses to re-establish and also providing better filtration and settlement for the water.

The area is 0.5km west of the Gortnasool Glebe and Meenadoan ASSI which is designated for areas of precious raised and blanket bog along with the priority species they support e.g. Merlin, Marsh Fritillary and Hen Harrier. This area has been leased by NI Water to Forest Service NI long-term for commercial conifer forestry. Through this project, the SCaMP Team were able to have this land released back to NIW for restoration.

This project will have multiple benefits in terms of water quality, carbon sequestration and biodiversity, using nature and ecosystem services to deliver results for years to come. The SCaMP Team hope that Lough Bradan will be the first of many similar projects to protect and improve raw water quality through reducing colour and turbidity, capturing carbon and habitat benefits and encouraging the return of functioning peatland to where it belongs.

