

LIFE Insular Sand Dune Restoration at Ards Forest Park, Co. Donegal

Some of the most endangered habitats in the Atlantic Ocean islands are dune ecosystems. This project seeks to improve the conservation status of Annex 1 fixed grey dune habitats by addressing the primary pressures affecting them: senescent forestry plantations and tree encroachment climate change and effects of tourism/recreation.

A. Preparatory Actions

Ecological surveys were conducted at Ards Forest Park in 2022 & 2023 to identify the areas most suitable for restoration, and to prepare an ecological report, a project plan and an appropriate assessment screening report. A felling licence application was applied for and approved in October 2024.

Visitor surveys, interviews and consultation walks were also carried out. With this information a management plan was developed for the works. Signage explaining the purpose of the project was erected in the park.

C. Conservation Actions

Two small sections (1 ha each) of Corsican and Monterey pine trees were felled with chainsaws in February/March 2025. The logs and remaining brash (branches) were removed from the dune restoration area. Additional regeneration of isolated pine trees were removed from the open dune.

At Ards there is a relatively thin layer of organic soil and this poses a limited nutrient source, and a reduced risk of tree/scrub regeneration. Some dune characteristics remain as the forestry was quite open. Therefore no further scraping was deemed necessary at this point.

Monitoring will take place in 2025 and beyond to assess the impact of the works and if any further restoration work is required to restore the fixed dune habitat.



Above: 2 sites at Ards prior to felling



Above: 2 sites at Ards during felling



Ards after felling and removal of trees