

LIFE Insular Sand Dune Restoration at Raven Point SAC, Co. Wexford

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 three key pressures affecting them: senescent forestry plantations tree encroachment, climate change and effects of tourism/recreation.

A. Preparatory Actions

Community engagement was undertaken in 2022 at the Raven Point Nature Reserve by conducting surveys and undertaking community engagement events. Ecological Surveys were conducted at the Raven Point Nature Reserve in 2022 and technical documents were prepared for the Life Insular Irish project teams in Coillte and NPWS. Roadworks were carried out to improve access. It was agreed that all felling works would be undertaken during daylight hours due to a major roost site close to the forest with the potential of negative impacts on the geese that use it.

C. Conservation Actions

The project target area contained the youngest forestry at the site in a location with the best restoration potential. Coillte carried out the elimination of exotic forest plantations to improve Fixed Coastal Dunes with the removal of 13.5 ha of pine trees through a combination of felling with chainsaws and machine felling with harvesting machinery. Brash mats were used as ground protection for extracting timber.

No herbicides or chemical means were used to kill stumps. The felled trees were de limbed and the trunks removed with a forwarder, followed by the removal of brash (branches). The main area of work was completed by the end of March 2023. Subsequently, it was decided that an additional felling area of 1.5 ha would benefit the site and this work was completed by the end of October 2023 opening and clearing an area of 13.5 ha to restored dunes.

In spring 2025, NPWS carried out further restoration of Fixed Coastal Dune habitat by removing the top layer of organic humus layer to exposes and over an area of 7 ha and removing some the tree stumps across a 1.6 ha area. The organic material was placed adjacent to the forest boundary. The tree stumps were temporarily stored on-site before being shredded for use in biofuel. The site is showing early signs of natural regeneration, and, if necessary, the seed bank may be boosted using green hay later in 2025-2026. Part of the site did not require dune scraping as there were dune species already on the site. Monitoring will take place over the following years by NPWS coastal ecologists.

Protection measures against anthropogenic impacts in the Fixed Coastal Dune habitat will be undertaken in 2025 by NPWS. The management recommendations will be informed by stakeholder engagement and will consider recreation, ecology, and future actions for the site.

Some images of felling in progress at the Raven (Jan/Feb 2023)



Taken: 1st Feb 2023 felling underway



Above: Raven Point prior to and during felling 2023.

LIFE Insular Irish Project Sites



Raven Point after scraping and removal of stumps 2025