

The Erne Rivers Trust

Growing a cross-border rivers trust

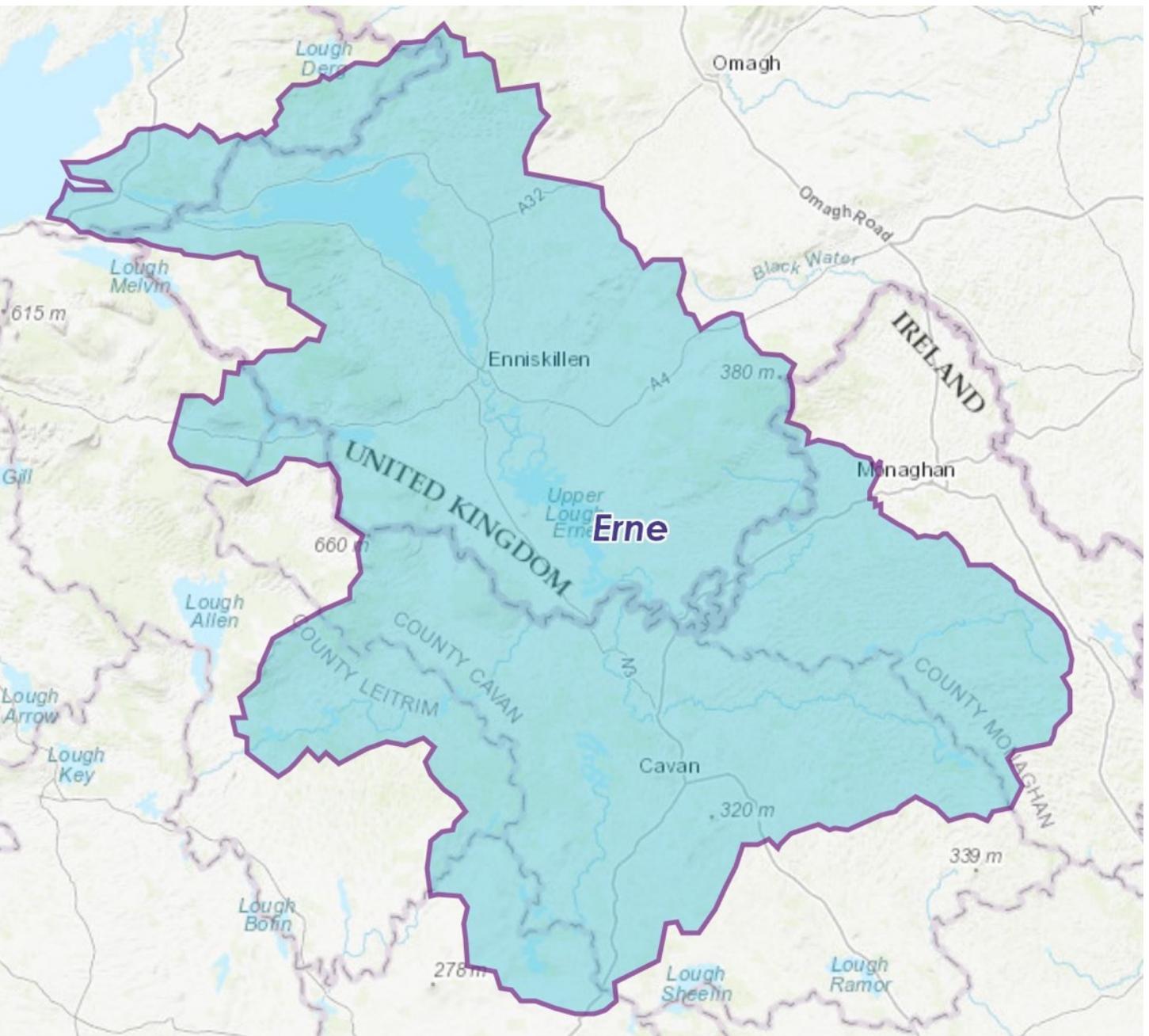
John A. Spence

Contents

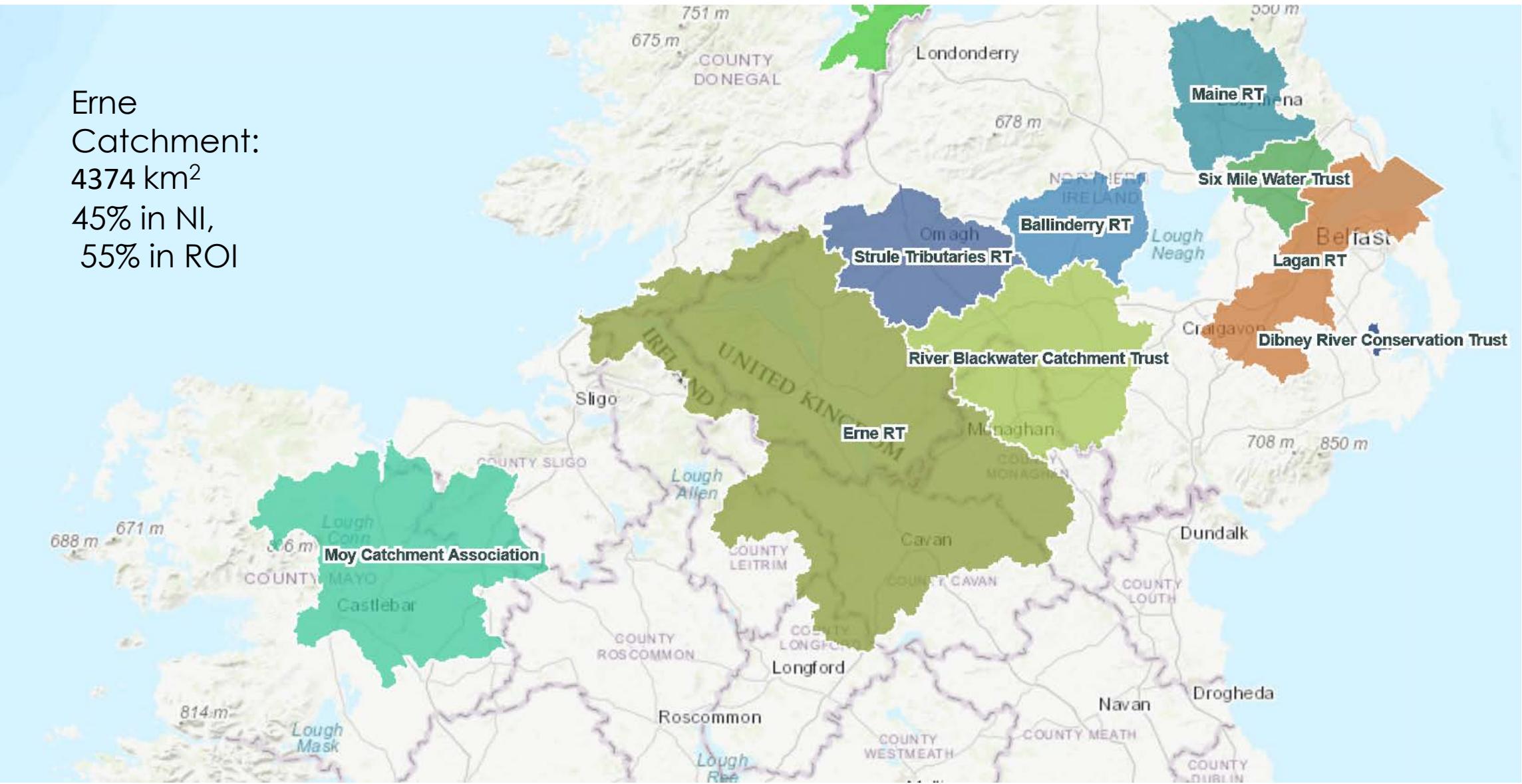
- The Erne Catchment
- Current Issues and Impacts
 - Intensive Agriculture
 - Urban Development
 - Invasive species
 - Global climate change
 - Multiplicity of interests and jurisdictions in management of the watershed
- The emergence of the Erne RT in 2016
 - Initial search for a focus, surveying issues
 - The ERT and outdoors education
 - The ERT and community interests
- Challenges
 - Brexit
 - Building linkages throughout the entire watershed
 - Fundraising for staff
- The Erne RT to 2020

The Erne Catchment





Erne
Catchment:
4374 km²
45% in NI,
55% in ROI



Current Issues and Impacts

Wetlands Ramsar Sites in the Erne System

- Pettigo Plateau (ROI)
- Lough Oughter (ROI)
- Fardrum and Roosky Turloughs
- Slieve Beagh-cross border
- Magheraveely Marl Loughs- 59 Ha.-3 cross border
- Upper Lough Erne (58 Km²) - cross border
- Culcaigh Mountain (27.44Km²) –cross border
- **The Erne has 7 Ramsar sites out of a Total of 19 in NI plus the 45 sites in ROI**



Invasive Species

The Zebra Mussel

- The zebra mussel (*Dreissena polymorpha*), native to the Black Sea, has colonised loughs in the Erne system,
- An invasive alien species, out-competes native mussel populations and can change the ecology of water bodies through filtering, with effects on biodiversity and fish stocks. LELP
- PhD research underway- hosted at Waterways



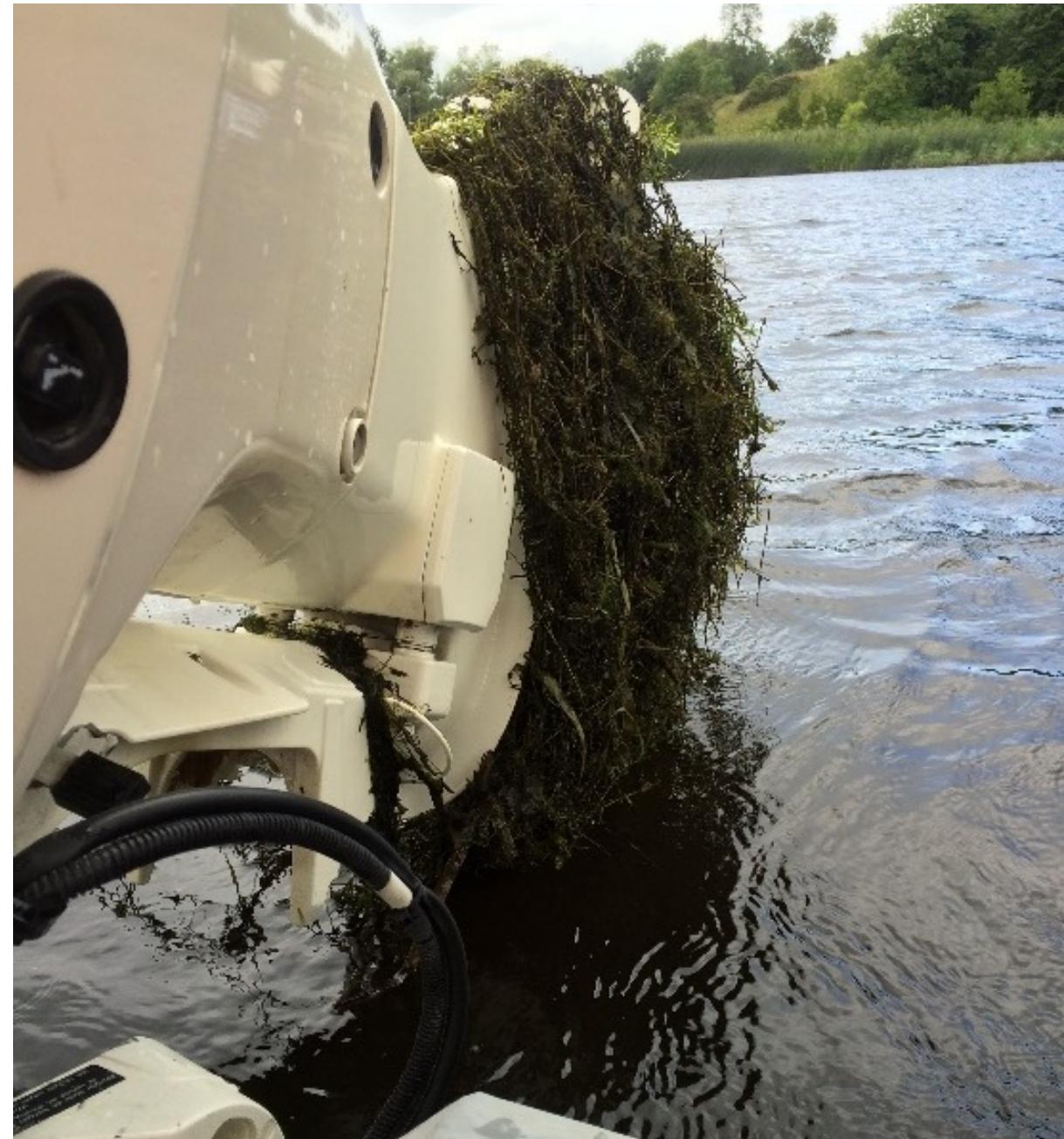
Nuttalls Pondweed

- It takes time (years) before the impact of an introduced species becomes apparent
- The invasion of Zebra mussels into the Erne (late 1990s) is one factor exacerbating the growth of Nuttall's pondweed growth – Zebra mussels increased water clarity, enabling sunlight to penetrate deeper. This enables the plants to grow on the bed of the shallow Upper Lough Erne where previously they could not.
- Further synergistic impacts can be anticipated.



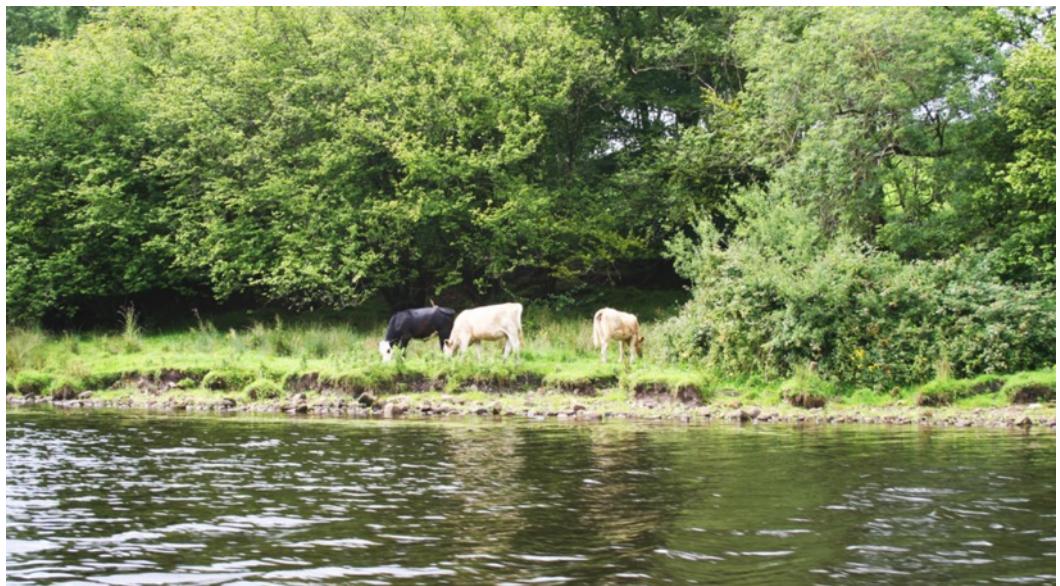


Aquatic Weeds Cutting





Pressures from agriculture



Source to Tap Project

€5.3m cross-border project to protect and improve the rivers and lakes within the Derg and Erne catchments.

Areas covered:

Love your Water

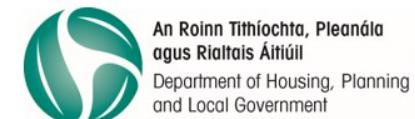
Learning for Water

Farming for Water

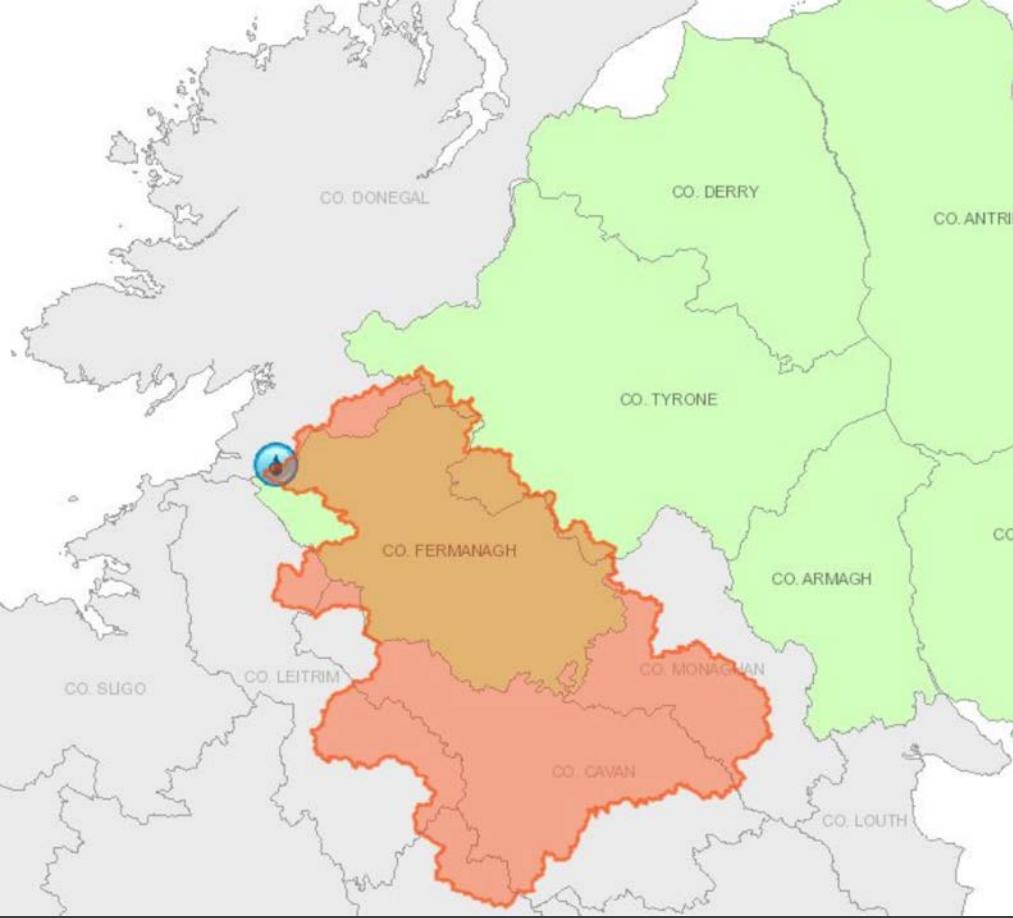
Forests for Water

Peatlands for Water

Best practice will help form a Sustainable Catchment Area Management Plan (known as a SCAMP), so that what is learnt, and is shown to work well, can be replicated in other drinking water source areas in the United Kingdom, Ireland and beyond.



The Source to Tap project is supported by the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB).



Headwaters in Cavan and
Monaghan



River Erne at Belturbet



Upper and Lower Lough Erne



Outlet to the Atlantic – Donegal Bay



Water level controls, Portora

The emergence of the
Erne RT in 2016

The Erne Rivers Trust

- Foundation from an ad hoc group of interests in the system- angling, recreational interests, conservation, tourism, etc
- Concerns about the future of salmon, trout, eel and & coarse fish stocks- need for more research as a basis for sound management
- Concerns about the need for environmental /outdoor education for children today
- Fragmentation of management, many statutory bodies with little administrative coordination

Challenges

The Challenges in Consultation and Coordination- Why a single voice for the River Erne is required

- The management of migratory fish (salmon, eels), wildfowl & Climate Change issues come under international agreements –Pan European, North Atlantic and Global and require national level commitments
- Coordination of interests and initiative by Statutory Bodies in Cavan, Monaghan, Donegal (in ROI and EU) and Fermanagh (NI, UK -Brexit)
- Within Fermanagh alone – DAERA, NI Water, The new merged District Councils (planning, waste recycling, tourism etc.) Drainage Division, flood committees, community groups etc.
- In 2017 the Lough Erne Lakeland partnership (Fermanagh alone) identified 69 community based organizations with expressed interest in the Lough Erne Shoreline Landscape. They held 137 meetings to discuss projects. Ultimately 22 community organizations engaged in developing Conservation action plans.

Future issues concerning the Erne

- Jurisdictional fragmentation
- Climate Change - More extremes, higher rainfall, increasing temperatures, milder winters
- Brexit Implications



ERT and Outdoors & Environmental Education for schools

- Children today are increasingly isolated from their local environment and the real world around them
- Outdoor experiences & education are associated with significant physical and mental health benefits for children- vis Forest Schools and programs
- With increasing pressures on educational budgets, the existing curriculum is becoming more busy
- We need collaborations with teachers, schools and authorities, to ensure that children have opportunities to experience nature and rivers and lakes



ERT Scoping Study in outdoors education

2016-17

- Surveyed more than 80 schools
- Reviewed existing initiatives, available supporting materials, health and safety issues etc.
- Schools becoming larger and more urbanized, curricula more crowded and busy; so outdoors activities need to be better integrated with existing teaching re health, healthy eating, exercise and social and community responsibilities
- Particular sites convenient to schools should be developed to provide access for school buses, plant and animal guides developed, and all weather clothing and equipment provided. e.g. a van with wellies, rain gear, sampling nets, jars etc.; trained teaching assistants

The Erne RT to 2020

Erne Rivers Trust 2018-2020

1

Build representative
membership throughout
the watershed

2

Build networking links
with diverse community
groups with
environmental interests

3

Identify and develop key
environmental projects of
relevance throughout the
region

Brexit and the ERT

In recent years under EU directives(Water Framework Directive, etc. there has been a promising trend towards more effective watershed wide perspectives on environmental matters.

20 years ago the Good Friday Agreement established the “all island” Waterways Ireland - now operational in managing Irish waterways – provides a precedent

Crossborder EU program funding has also been available
eg the Source to Tap Project

This established cross border framework now faces uncertainties in the Brexit process- will it be a “Hard” vs “Soft”- etc. etc.

Poses threats and also opportunities for Not-for-Profit bodies such as the Rivers Trusts in future conservation initiatives

ERT will be needed as a watchdog and independent voice to promote watershed wide environmental protection measures



Thanks for
listening

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