

Annual Report for the Year 2025

State: Ireland

Name of the area: The Burren

Year and number of years since the award or renewal of the European Diploma for Protected Areas: 2025, 8 (EDPA adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 10 July 2013, renewed in 2017)

Central authority concerned:

Name: The National Parks and Wildlife Service

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Authority responsible for its management:

Name: High Nature Value Services Ltd (ACRES Burren Aran Co-Operation Project)

Address: Old Schoolhouse, Caron, Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland V95 KONA

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1. Conditions: List here all conditions which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the conditions have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the conditions. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. Secure a budget from 2022 onwards for the development of a successor programme to the current Burren Programme (BP); share with the Group of Specialists on the European Diploma for Protected Areas the details of the successor programme to the current BP prior to its entry into force;

When the Burren Programme (BP) ended, as planned, in December 2022, it was immediately succeeded by a new National Agri Environment Programme called 'ACRES' which built on some of the key principles of the BP (e.g. local support team, result-based payments, supporting actions) while also adding a new funding stream for 'Landscape Actions'.

The target area for the new (2023-27) 'Burren Aran ACRES Cooperation Project (BUA CP)' includes the core EDPA area of Burren, but also extends to include the Aran Islands and a section of south Galway. HNV Services, who previously managed the BP, is managing this project under a 5-year contract with the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. Over 14 staff (some part-time), based in the old BP office in the heart of the Burren, are now working with c.1,300 farmers in the extended region, with each farmer expected to receive annual payments of up to €10,500 for environmentally-positive actions and outcomes.

The full details of this new BUA CP are available at www.acresburrenaran.ie

While the new Project is well-funded (thus meeting the 'Condition' attached to the EDPA Award) and has an excellent local team to manage it, it has been beset with admin and IT challenges at Department level which have delayed payments to farmers, and delayed the roll-out of some of the key measures. While this has resulted in a loss of momentum built up under the BP, many of the issues are now largely resolved or in the process of being so, which should see an improvement in outcomes generated in the coming years.

2. Recommendations: List here all recommendations which were attached to the award or the renewal of the European Diploma. Explain either how the recommendations have been totally complied with or detail the progress in complying with the recommendations. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

1. Prepare an overarching management framework document for the Burren Region diploma-holding area, outlining the various management initiatives and their inter-relationships;

Under the BUA CP, a Local Area Plan (LAP) has been developed in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. This plan outlines the key attributes of the area, the management challenges facing its natural and cultural heritage, and the measures which will be taken to address these challenges under ACRES. The plan is updated annually - the most recent copy of this plan is included with this report.

2. Aim both to increase the quality of the natural heritage and to prevent damage to the cultural heritage in those areas of the Burren Region not included within the three SACs;

Under the BUA CP, a whole-farm approach is being taken across a wider geographical area than previously under the BP (which targeted only species-rich areas of the farms, mostly within SACs). The new Project will include protection, and enhancement of, the Burren's natural and cultural heritage over a much wider area as part of its key objectives. In addition, Burrenbeo Trust has a Conservation Volunteer Group who, usually twice monthly, work to improve the natural and cultural heritage of the Burren – from archaeological excavations to litter picking to seed collection (2,182 BCV volunteer hours contributed in 2024). Burrenbeo Trust also held its inaugural 'Burren Archaeology Festival' in 2025, raising awareness of local built heritage.

3. Work with other stakeholders, especially those involved in tourism predicated on the farm holdings, as well as the natural and cultural heritage, to support communities living and working in the Burren Region;

A Steering Committee has been established to help guide the BUA CP and to assess its progress relative to the objectives and targets set out in the Local Area Plan. Stakeholders dealing with tourism, planning and heritage are part of this Committee, as well local community representatives. A 'Burren Learning Alliance' has been convened, comprised of local organizations seeking to enhance the region's educational potential. In another tourism-related development, CIE Tours, one of Ireland's largest tour operators, invested in the 'ReFarm Burren' project which, in 2025, resulted in 18 Burren farmers purchasing 'virtual fencing' collars for their cattle, enabling more efficient and targeted grazing of key Annex I habitats in the Burren.

4. Consider the development of further walking trails throughout the Burren Region.

While this is out width of the remit of the BUA CP team and project, its Project Steering Committee will include the development of walking trails in its discussions. Burrenbeo Trust continues to host two monthly walks in the Burren, many of them led by local farmers, thus opening out new areas of the Burren to visitors and students. The NPWS, who recently acquired property in the central Burren, are actively working on developing a new walking trail to connect it to the nearby Michael Cusack Centre in Carron.

3. Site Management: List here any changes to the European Diploma holding site management, in relation to both terrestrial and aquatic environments (as appropriate), and in relation to staff and finances, since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There have been no significant changes to site management, or staff & finances, since the last annual report (2024). One small change (reported in 2024) has been the extension of NPWS property in the Burren to include 'McGann's farm', where a very successful Burren Winterage Cattle drive was held in 2024.

Regarding unresolved difficulties, the new BUA CP has continued to struggle to establish momentum and buy-in among local farmers, but things have certainly improved in this regard over the past year.

4. Boundaries: Give details of any changes to the boundaries of the European Diploma holding site since the last annual report was submitted to the Council of Europe. If there are any changes, please attach an appropriate map to this report. Please also indicate any unresolved difficulties that you have encountered.

There have been no changes to the boundary of the European Diploma area since the adoption of the resolution.

5. Other information: List here any other information about the European Diploma holding site which you consider should be provided to the Council of Europe.

Several noteworthy events were held in the Burren in 2025:

Burren in Bloom (Burrenbeo Trust, May 2025)

The Burren Archaeology Festival – Inaugural 2-day event in June 2025

The Burren Winterage Festival – 14th year - October 2025

Burrenbeo Trust carried out heritage courses in 10 local schools under its 'Calf and Cuckoo' Programme.

The Burren, and its conservation, continues to regularly features on National TV, Radio, Newspapers and social media.

The BUA CP team hosted, or contributed to, a large number of farmer training and advisor training events in 2025.

The following sections of the form should only be filled in if your area is in the year before a renewal of its European Diploma for Protected Areas, i.e. year 4 after the award of the European Diploma or year 9 after its renewal.

6. Natural heritage (general abiotic description: geomorphology, geology and hydrogeology, habitats, flora, fauna, landscape) – State of conservation

- 6.1. Environment: changes or deterioration in the environment, of natural or anthropic origin, accidental or permanent, actual or anticipated
- 6.2. Flora and vegetation: changes in the plant population and in the vegetational cover; presumed causes
- 6.3. Fauna: changes in the sedentary or migratory populations; congregating, egg-laying and breeding grounds

7. Cultural heritage and socio-economic context

- 7.1. Cultural heritage
 - 7.1.1. Changes concerning cultural heritage
- 7.2. Socio-economic context
 - 7.2.1. Changes concerning the socio-economic context

8. Education and scientific interest

- 8.1. Visitors – Information policy
 - 8.1.1. Arrangements for receiving and informing the public (building, booklets, maps, cards, etc.)
 - 8.1.2. Frequentation by visitors and behavior (number, distribution in time and space)
 - 8.1.3. Special visits (distinguished persons, groups, etc.)
- 8.2. Scientific research
 - 8.2.1. Current or completed research (observation, experimentation, etc.; identification or inventory of the species listed in the appendices to the Bern Convention, etc.)
 - 8.2.2. Scientific publications

9. Site description (vulnerability, protection status, ownership, documentation)

- 9.1. Changes in legislation or regulations
- 9.2. Changes in ownership title (conversion to public property, rentals, etc.)
- 9.3. Extension or transfer, new uses (for example, conversion into total reserve)

10. Site management (management plans, budget and personnel)

- 10.1. Improvements made
 - 10.1.1. Ecological action affecting the flora and biotopes; controls of fauna
 - 10.1.2. Protection against the elements (fire, water regime)
 - 10.1.3. Approaches and thoroughfares (paths, roads, car parks, signposting, fencing, etc.)
 - 10.1.4. Field equipment (hides and study facilities)
 - 10.1.5. Waste management
 - 10.1.6. Use of renewable energy systems
- 10.2. Management
 - 10.2.1. Administrative department: changes made
 - 10.2.2. Wardens' department: changes made
 - 10.2.3. Internal policing measures
 - 10.2.4. Infringement of regulations and damage; legal action

11. Influence of the award of the European Diploma for Protected Areas

The EDPA award positively influenced the 2016 decision to continue, and expand, the BP, a decision which has been fundamental to the management of the Burren's natural and cultural heritage across 30,000ha of the Burren region, including most of the Natura 2000 designated land. This in turn has helped inform the BUA CP Project which is the successor to the BP, operating over a much wider area (with the EDPA area at its core). It is hoped that this Project will overcome initial challenges and deliver positive outcomes for the Burren.