



Our natural habitats are a critical foundation stone of the landscape around us – it is crucial that they are protected and managed in such a way that they will continue to provide us with clean water, clean air and food. In managing our broader landscape (incorporating all aspects, whether natural, cultural or built), we need to take particular steps to insure that the natural landscape continues to perform its vital services for people.

As part of its role in identifying priorities for the identification, protection, preservation and enhancement of the national heritage, the Heritage Council needs to ensure that information about our habitats is collected in a standardised manner. This, in turn assists in the conservation and management of our natural heritage and landscape and the continuing performance of our landscape in providing services to people. A programme of work to deliver this began in 1999.

The first step in this programme was the preparation of a standard scheme for identifying, describing and classifying wildlife habitats in Ireland – *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000). Following this, a draft methodology for habitat survey and mapping was developed (2002). In the intervening years, this draft methodology was applied in a range of habitat survey and mapping projects around the country, particularly through the Local Authority Heritage and Biodiversity Officer programmes. In order to build on lessons learned from these projects and to take account of advances in mapping technology, the Heritage Council commissioned the preparation of *Best Practice Guidelines in Habitat Survey and Mapping* in Ireland in late 2008. These are due for publication in late 2009.

Partners

The National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government have been valuable partners in the development of both *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland* (Fossitt, 2000) and *Best Practice Guidelines for Habitat Survey and Mapping* (Heritage Council, in prep.)





Aims and objectives

The aim of this programme of work overall is to contribute to the effective conservation and management of our natural heritage through promotion of standardised data collection and best practice methodologies. The objective of the *Best Practice Guidelines for Habitat Survey and Mapping* is to standardise and improve habitat survey and mapping methods in order to achieve compatibility among surveys and surveyors and to ensure quality and consistency of the maps and data produced.

Required outcomes and benchmarking

On completion of the *Best Practice Guidelines*, the Heritage Council will work through its satellite bodies and partners to encourage and promote the application of the guidelines, particularly through projects it helps to support.

Budget

Recommendations will be forthcoming to the Heritage Council on potential next steps to further this programme of work. These will determine future budget requirements.

Implementation

The focus of Council's work under this programme has been the preparation of the following publications:

A Guide to Habitats in Ireland, Heritage Council, Kilkenny (2000)

Methodology for Habitat Survey and Mapping (2nd draft) (2005)

Best Practice Guidelines for Habitat Survey and Mapping in Ireland, Heritage Council (in prep.)

Details of programme evaluation

At least every five years

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