

Breakout Session 2 – Tackling Rhododendron & Cherry Laurel at the Local Level



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Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) are two significant invasive shrubs which grow vigorously and outcompete native plants, posing a serious threat to native woodlands. As part of the Local Action Group Workshop, a breakout session was held to understand what action is being taken on Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*) and Cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) at the local level and identify the resources needed to achieve success. In doing so we hope to discover what support local groups need to undertake management of these invasive species and ultimately achieve nature restoration. The prompts and key discussion points are summarised below.

- **What specific Rhododendron & Cherry Laurel projects are currently happening on the island?**

Location	Organisation(s)
Connacht	
Achill Island, Ballycroy, Bangor & Belmullet, Co. Mayo	Acres West Connacht
Connemara, Co. Galway	Dúlra
Hazlewood, Co. Sligo	Coilte Nature
Kylemore Abbey, Co. Galway	Kylemore abbey
Leenane, Co. Galway	Killary Adventure Company
Letterkeen, Lough Gill & Slievemrore, Co. Mayo	Atlantic West Alliance Community Group
Multiple sites	Gaelic Woodland Project
Milltown Wood, Co. Leitrim	Our Native Glens
Wild Nephin National Park, Co. Mayo	National Parks & Wildlife Service
Leinster	
Abbeyleix Bog SAC Co. Laois	Abbeyleix Bog Project
Aurora, Glencree, Co. Wicklow	Wicklow Uplands Council
Co. Kilkenny	Acorn Project
Durrow, Co. Laois	Durrow Tidy Towns
Emyvale, Mountain Water & Slieve Beagh, Co. Monaghan	River Blackwater Catchment Trust
Glenasmole, Co. Dublin	Dodder Action, LAWPRO & NPWS
Woodstock Gardens and Arboretum, Inistioge, Co. Kilkenny	Kilkenny County Council
Munster	
Killarney National Park, Co. Kerry	National Parks & Wildlife Service
Ulster	
Clogher, Lissan, Pomeroy, Co. Tyrone	Forest Service
Co. Donegal	South Donegal Living River Services
Ely Lodge & Florence Court, Co. Fermanagh	Forest Service
Dunlewey, Co. Donegal	Cairde na hEragaile
Glenveagh, Lough Derg & Riverfinn, Co. Donegal	ACRES Donegal
National Trust sites, Northern Ireland	National Trust Northern Ireland
Ulster Folk Museum & Ulster Transport Museum	Woodland Trust, National Museums Northern Ireland & CEDAR

1. What are the key resources needed in undertaking a Rhododendron or Cherry Laurel control project?

- Training and Expertise in:
 - Species identification
 - Control techniques
 - Herbicide use
 - Ecological assessment e.g. Appropriate Assessment
- Surveys and baseline mapping
- Access to information on landowners

- Enthusiastic and engaged volunteers
- Qualified ecologists for planning, assessment and oversight
- Equipment and Infrastructure:
 - Manual and mechanical tools appropriate to infestation scale
 - PPE
 - Safe storage facilities (tools, chemicals)
- Permits for:
 - Herbicide use
 - Works during bird nesting season
- Sustained Funding for:
 - Surveys, mapping, and long-term monitoring
 - Community engagement and awareness campaigns
 - Contractors, machinery, tools, PPE
 - Insurance coverage for volunteers



2. How could groups be further supported to achieve successful control of Rhododendron and Cherry laurel at the local level?

- Organisational and Network Support
 - Greater presence and ongoing engagement from supporting organisations is needed.
 - Cross-agency and community partnerships could help ensure consistency in approach.
 - Linking local groups together to share experience, methods, and lessons learned would be highly beneficial.
 - Island-wide sharing of novel and trialled techniques could improve effectiveness and confidence.
 - Bringing groups working on similar species together would strengthen collective impact.
- Access and Landownership
 - Private and state landowner cooperation is essential.
 - As lack of access permissions remains a major barrier for community groups, improved access arrangements with landowners is needed.
 - There is a need to make identifying and contacting landowners easier.
 - The process for acquiring access arrangements e.g. to Coilte land, needs to be simplified.
 - There should be an incentive or reward scheme for private landowners and farmers to encourage removal.
- Guidance and Standards
 - Island-wide removal standards are needed to ensure consistency in approach.
 - There is a need for guidance and clarity around herbicide use for community groups.
- Funding, Capacity and Practical Support
 - Groups need more access to funding advice and practical support. Grant writing is time-consuming therefore having a dedicated “grants writer” or shared support role would help.
 - There needs to be clear a distinction between tasks for professionals versus volunteers.
 - Realistic expectations are needed to avoid volunteer fatigue and pressure
 - Templates outlining steps, requirements, and best practice would be helpful.
 - Local projects should have tailored strategies.
 - Legacy planning needed to maintain long-term interest and engagement.



- Longevity and follow-up maintenance are critical as short-term interventions are ineffective.
- A Local Action Toolkit to empower community-led control efforts would be welcome.
- Role of Government and Public Bodies
- Mixed views on government involvement:
 - Some believe strong community-led approaches are more effective.
 - In rural areas forming groups is harder.
 - Farmers may be disengaged by overt government involvement but more receptive to local, practical initiatives.
- Local councils:
 - Often under-resourced, making collaboration difficult.
 - Opportunities exist to involve local representatives alongside estate managers, farmers, and community groups.
- National Parks and Wildlife Service mentioned as a potential stakeholder, though clarity on role/support is needed.

Other points raised during the session

- Improved public education on invasive versus non-invasive species is needed.
- Accidental spread of species through pots, soil, and plant transport must be reduced.
- Impacts of these species:
 - Severe impacts on peatlands, water quality, riverbanks, and biodiversity
 - Shading creates river “dead zones” affecting fish migration. Some species not migrating as it is too dark.
 - Increased erosion and long-term maintenance where removal is incomplete
 - Loss of agricultural value and abandonment of heavily infested land
 - Threat to Ireland’s limited native woodland resources
- Status of Cherry Laurel:
 - Ongoing planting of in new developments is a concern
 - Messaging around invasive species needs to reach planners and developers. Where the message comes from is critical to its acceptance.
 - Greater interception and information-sharing during the planning process could prevent new infestations.
 - Stronger legislation needed – must be added to list of regulated species.
- Trialled and Alternative Control Methods:
 - Non-herbicide methods being trialled include:
 - Cutting stumps low, applying salt, and covering
 - Covering stumps with sheep’s wool
 - Mixed confidence in cutting-and-covering methods due to Rhododendron’s regrowth behaviour.
 - Drill-and-kill (drilling, corking, targeted treatment) highlighted as very effective, especially for old infestations.
 - Making charcoal from Rhododendron discussed as a potential use of removed material.
- Deer pressure is a significant concern. Removing these species may increase deer access and cause further habitat damage. There is interest in “eat more deer” initiatives, though challenges exist with meat processing infrastructure.