



“Restoration of the Lower Shannon SAC (Mulkear River) for Sea Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon and the European Otter”

Press Release

18th June 2013

4th Year Environmental Education Programme Completed

MulkearLIFE last week completed the fourth year of its Environmental Education Programme with a brilliant group of students and their teacher from Doon Convent National School. Doon Convent NS are part of the Green Schools Programme and therefore the opportunity to partake in MulkearLIFE's Environmental Education Programme strengthened the schools understanding and appreciation of biodiversity, according to the school principal, Eileen Blackwell.

MulkearLIFE's Environmental Education Programme involves two engagements – a classroom presentation and a field trip within the Mulkear Catchment. Events take place during the academic year in the hope that the field trips will take place in glorious sunshine in April, May and June. Thankfully, unlike last year, the Spring / Summer of 2013 has meant that nearly all river based field trips have taken place in very fine weather.

In total, 17 schools have been completed in the 2012 / 2013 academic year. Over the past 4 years of operation, a total of 65 schools have been completed as part of the project's Environmental Education Programme, reaching over 1,760 children and their teachers. This outreach work in local primary and post primary schools is something MulkearLIFE and Inland Fisheries Ireland are immensely proud of. It means that in excess of 1,760 people, mostly young local students, now have an enhanced understanding of the work of MulkearLIFE and the importance of riparian habitat and the connectivity of rivers and wildlife corridors. The students also have a better understanding of Ireland's fish species, invertebrates and water quality, the major threat of non-native invasive plant species and an appreciation of the seven principles of Leave No Trace. MulkearLIFE is confident that these young people will be the future guardians of the Mulkear catchment.

The final field trip took place in bright sunshine last week. It included putting theory into practice as the children learn about the wonderful natural heritage of the Mulkear River. This is done through real practical research; kick sampling for invertebrates, assessing water quality, electro fishing, assessing the impact of invasive weeds, habitat survey work and general fun of exploring rivers and riparian zones.

On the final field trip of the year, the students were treated by Mother Nature to a amazing display of the wonders of nature on the banks of the Mulkear River when, for the first time on a field trip, a mink was observed eating a headless sea lamprey. The students, their teacher and the MulkearLIFE Team, first investigated the headless sea, which most likely had been eaten earlier by an otter on site.

Evidence of mink prints were noted on site and then, bold and brazen, out emerged the non-native American mink. From the vantage point of the MulkearLIFE Mural site, the students were able to observe at close range the mink moved along the riverbank below for several minutes. It was nature at its best and a real revelation for the students as to the destructive power of mink in the catchment.

Rain or shine, schoolchildren and their teachers in schools across Limerick and Tipperary counties have derived great enjoyment from this year's programme and the river based field trips in particular.

Notes for Editors

1. High Resolution Digital Images are available to accompany this Press Release.
2. Interviews can be arranged with the Project Manager by using the contact details below.
3. MulkearLIFE is a new €1.75 million European Commission funded LIFE Nature project working on the restoration of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (with a focus on the Mulkear River catchment) for Atlantic Salmon, Sea Lamprey and European Otter. Further details may be viewed on the project website www.mulkearlifeproject.com
4. Inland Fisheries Ireland (Limerick) is lead partner together with the OPW and Limerick County Council. Additional funding support comes from National Parks and Wildlife Service. Other supporters include Teagasc, IFA, ICMSA, and local angling groups.
5. The project is one of the first and most important integrated catchment management projects in Ireland. It is a flagship EU LIFE Nature project –covering some 650 sq km which contain a variety of habitats and protected species. Much of the area is designated as a Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the EU Habitats Directive and forms part of the Natura 2000 Network.

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