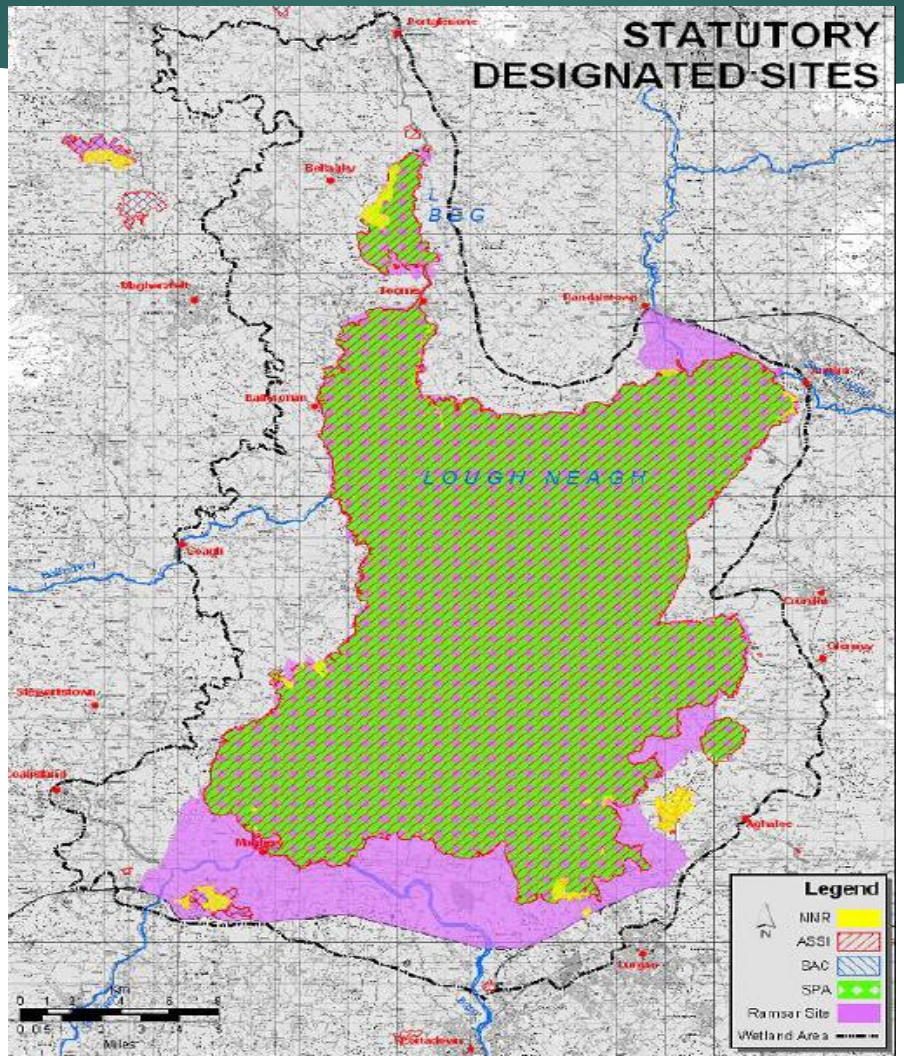
LOUGH NEAGH
PAST AND FUTURE OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

UK AND IRELAND LAKES NETWORK CONFERENCE

2016 CUMBRIA

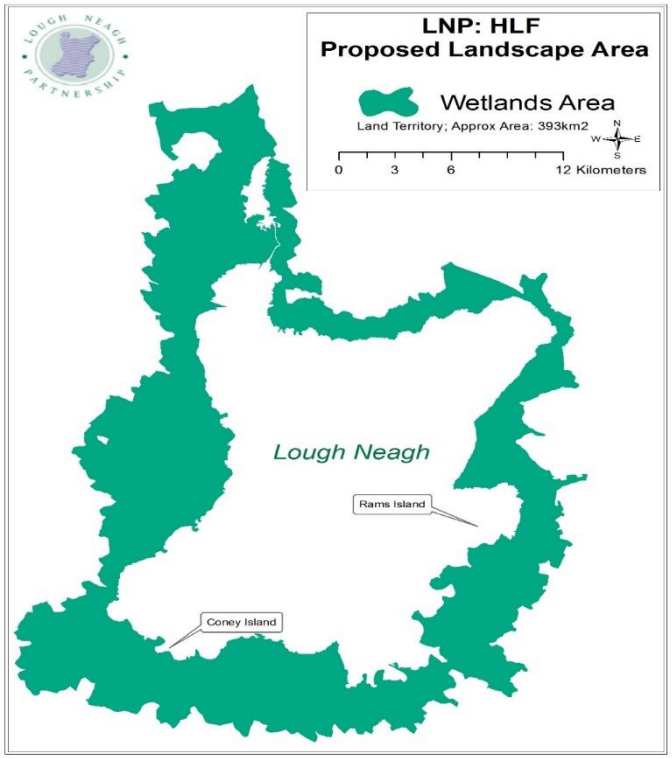
Lough Neagh Designated Sites



LOUGH NEAGH WETLAND

LOUGH NEAGH SPECIES

Lough Neagh Catchment



Lough Neagh Past Managmnet and Ownership Issues

- **Biggest Lough/Lake in UK and Ireland**
- **Highly Eutrophic**
- **Industrial Lough**
- **No navigation authority**
- **ASSI, SPA losing favourable status due to migrating and wetland bird decline**
- **Over seen by Lough Neagh Partnership but no sustainable income or statutory responsibility**
- **Bed and Soil owned by Lord Shaftsbury**

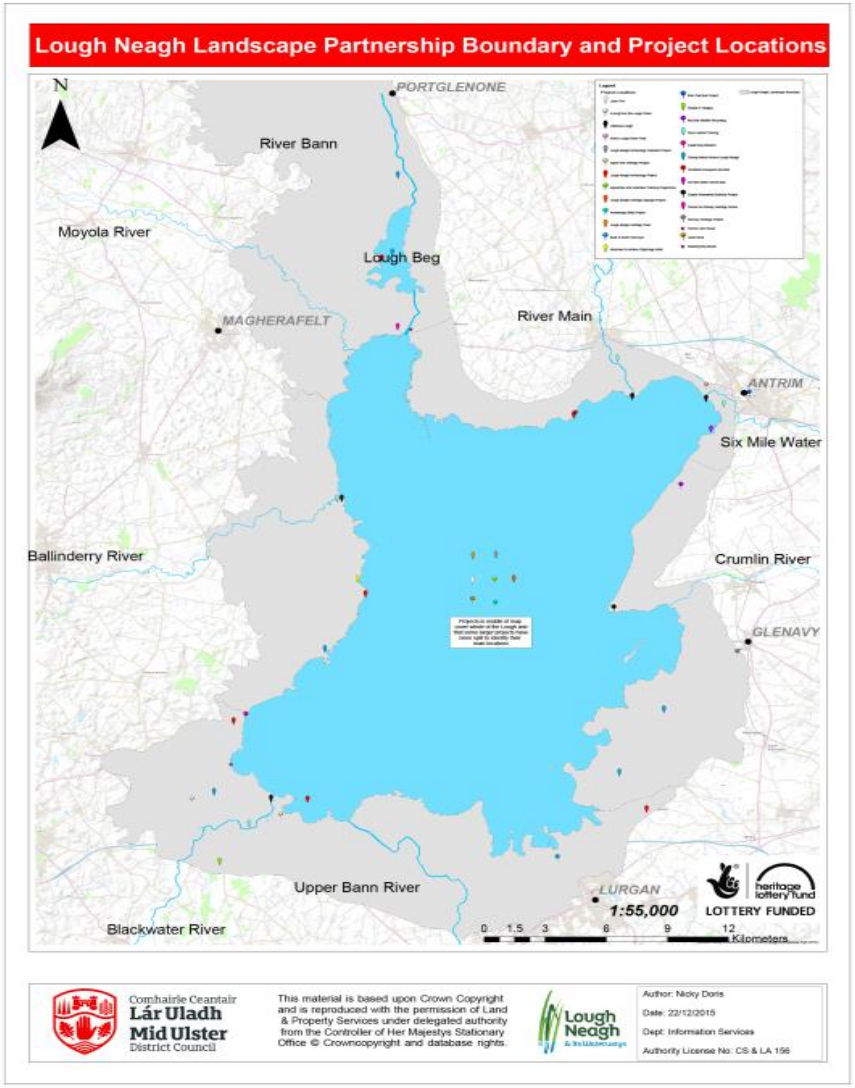
Lough Neagh Past Managmnet and Ownership Issues (CULTURE AND APPROACH)

- **Top down policing**
- **Balance between research monitoring and actual doing is out of balance**
- **To much focus on public land and not majority which is private land**
- **No local ownership and management**
- **Farmers detached from conservation**
- **Not enough self belief and not enough risk taking**

Lough Neagh Future Management and Ownership Issues

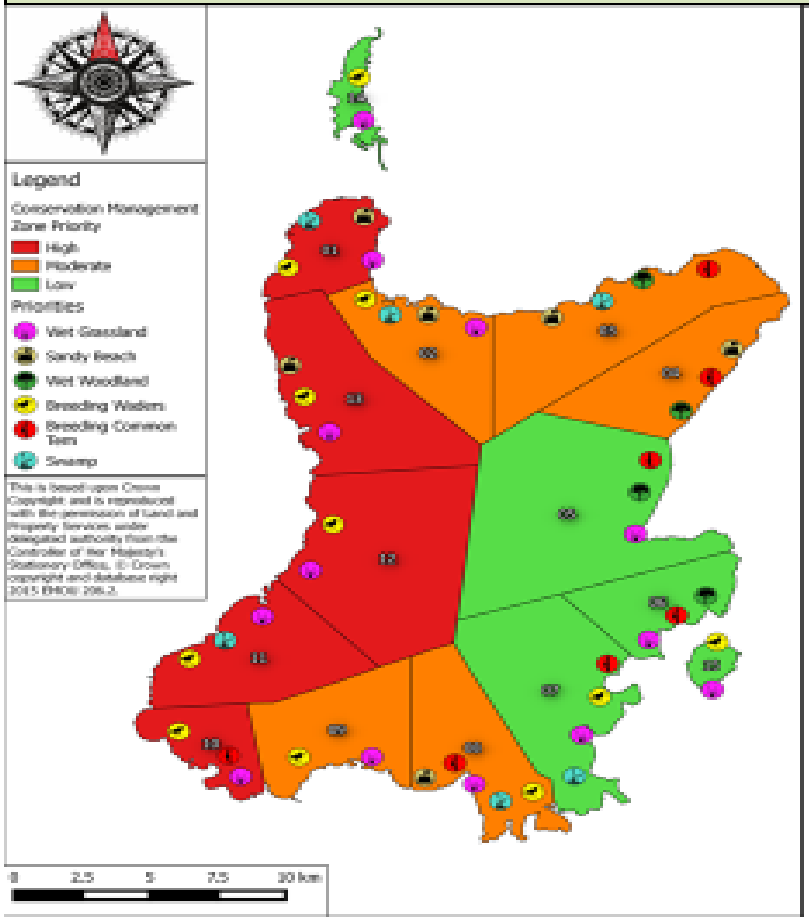
- **HLF landscape Scheme £3.5 Million**
- **SPA Management Plan with Farmers and Agri environment**
- **Develop Navigation Authority**
- **Target Local European Funds**
  - **Northern Peripheries, Life Plus, Rural dev Programme, Life Plus**
- **Address Ownership of Lough (Buy Lough Neagh)**

Lough Neagh HLF Landscape Scheme



Lough Neagh Future Management Issue

Lough Neagh Conservation Management Zones Summary



Conservation Issues:

SPA Features:

- All SPA selection features have declined over the last 20 years, particularly diving duck species (pochard, scaup, goldeneye and tufted duck) which contribute to ~74% of the total annual numbers of wintering birds on Lough Neagh. Recent research suggests this is likely due to a combination of climate change, with milder winters allowing the birds to winter further north (Lehikoinen *et al*, 2013) and widespread measures to limit nutrient pollution entering the Lough, which has in turn reduced the numbers of important chironomid larvae prey by as much as 85% (Tomlinkovaite *et al*, 2013) between 1997 and 2010. Declines for these species are widespread with no obvious spatial pattern; however there is some evidence to suggest that downward trends may be most severe in areas of the lough which host tributaries. Some significant correlations were reported between local population trends and changes in specific terrestrial habitat features, although causative effects cannot be determined and overall the results do not generally support the hypothesis that recent changes in lough shore habitat are significant drivers for these species.
- Widespread declines were also evident for great crested grebe and shelduck, this is also likely to be due to a reduction in prey species as a result of widespread improvements in water quality.
- Bewicks swan and golden plover and have also suffered widespread declines, for these species external factors such as breeding productivity in Northern Europe may be playing a part; for Bewicks swan the key wintering areas are outside the SPA boundary, so recent changes in lough shore habitat are unlikely to be a significant driver. For golden plover loss of wetland habitat is likely to be a major influence.
- Lough Neagh hosts breeding common tern, trends could not be calculated for this species due to insufficient data, however these sites are currently sensitively managed for this species by the RSPB.

ASSI Features:

- The historically important core areas for breeding wader ASSI features (curlew, redshank, lapwing and snipe) is predominantly along the west shoreline, where there has been widespread and severe declines; the analysis suggests that even recent portions of these downward trends can be largely apportioned to loss of wet grassland habitat since 2004, (primarily as a result of scrub encroachment), but other likely drivers include anthropogenic factors such as habitat loss and disturbance as a result of development and sand extraction, and also to a lesser extent, due to climatic factors such as flooding.
- Wet grassland as an ASSI selection feature is under threat and has decreased everywhere on the Lough, with the exception of the south. Key drivers of habitat loss include abandonment and succession resulting in the proliferation of scrub.
- Many ASSI plant features, such as *Spiranthes*, occur on wet grassland. Available data could not be used to identify trends but loss of wet grassland has been identified in the north, west and east of the lough.
- Wet woodland as an ASSI feature has decreased in some areas of the lough as a result of development and flooding. However, scrub encroachment onto wet grassland is increasing the extent of wet woodland.
- The Lough hosts several invertebrate ASSI selection features; trends for these species are unknown, however, evidence suggests that loss of beach habitat is an issue for specialist species, especially in the north where sand extraction and scrub encroachment is a problem, indeed populations of the rare *Anthicus flavipes* may have become extinct from the north of the lough since 2004. It is likely that other wetland specialist features have declined in areas where wet grassland losses have been most significant although this cannot be confirmed.

Lough Neagh Future Management and Ownership Issues (New Culture and Approach)

- **Self Sustaining**
- **New Policing**
- **Ownership is power**
- **Action and Target focus not policy focus**
- **Conservation is not Brain Surgery**
- **Change Farming Mind set**
- **Self Belief**

“Believe in Miracle, Cures and Healing Wells,

Believe that a farther Shore is reachable from here”

Seamus Heaney, The Cure at Troy