

# Green Sod Ireland

Strategic Plan  
2022-2025

*Establishing Wild  
Acres across  
Ireland*



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# PART 1: Framing the Strategic Plan

## Introduction and Purpose of the Document

- This document is intended to serve as a 'roadmap' for Green Sod Ireland's development over the next three years.
- We may decide to share this document or aspects of our plans with key partners and other stakeholders from time to time where appropriate.
- This document is intended to provide the complete narrative and flow for what we believe is a robust and logically structured strategic plan.

# Our Vision and Mission

**Our vision is of Ireland as a country where ecosystems are thriving and flourishing.**

To achieve our vision, Green Sod Ireland works with local communities, raising awareness of the benefits of caring for land and its biodiversity. Encouraging landowners to establish Wild Acres in every county in Ireland, conserving the land in perpetuity.

**There are three pillars to our work**

- 1. Land conservation** - to create safe habitats, and facilitate the free movement of wildlife, vital for biodiversity.
- 2. Community Engagement** - increase awareness of the importance of protecting their own ecological environment.
- 3. The delivery of Ecological Education** to inform and educate.

# About Us

Green Sod Ireland (GSI) was established in 2007 as an Environmental Land Trust by a small group of women from across Ireland. The founders were concerned by the significant commodification of land in the early 2000's and the subsequent loss of biodiversity. The aim of the Trust is to protect land for its own sake and for the sake of its biodiversity by establishing Wild Acres (land under protection) across Ireland and working with local communities to increase awareness of the importance of protecting their ecological environment.

GSI is run solely by volunteers, with funding for education and conservation work from local authorities, Rethink Ireland, Lifes2Good Foundation, Mercy Projects Fund, Heritage Council, LEADER...

## ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE INCLUDE

100 Acres of gifted land under protection

Elected to membership of the European Rewilding Network.

Biodiversity education provided to +c.2,000 people, [GSI's education Initiatives](#) covering six counties

*Save a Sod* campaign at Christmas (2021) raised €21,000

Carbon Offsetting Certification achieved in 2021

## AWARDS

Dublin Bus Community Spirit Award (supporting organisations with impact for change),

Rethink Ireland Social Innovation Fund Awardee (2020-2022)

Social Entrepreneurs Ireland Award in 2011 (supporting organisations offering creative solutions to social/environmental problems)



# Three Pillars

1. **CONSERVATION OF LAND:** The land currently in Green Sod Ireland's care has been gifted by individuals and communities in Counties Galway, Cork, Carlow, Donegal, Mayo and Cavan. Gifted land is appraised by our ecologists who complete an ecology report with findings and recommendations.
2. **ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION:** *Bee Aware; Story of the Universe; Bee BioDiverse; Connect; Earth is full of Precious Things* are all delivered to primary and secondary students, and adults in the communities where we have land.
3. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:** Our volunteers work with the local community near land in our care, supporting them to be proactive, through educational workshops and engagement in local activities.

# Context of the Strategic Plan

The urgency of the Climate and Biodiversity emergency is the main context for the development of GSI's Strategic Plan. Many areas, including special areas of conservation (SACs) are being subjected to ongoing illegal burning on mountains and in bogs, with hundreds of hectares burnt illegally outside the legitimate area of burning control. Biodiversity is suffering; losses are occurring at a phenomenal rate - upland birds; Plover, Curlew, Wheatear, Red Kites; to mention but a few. Unfortunately also many rivers and their tributaries are being contaminated due to fertiliser run off and indiscriminate slurry spreading.

This devastation of natural ecosystems and the subsequent loss of biodiversity and the commodification of land is driven by successive policies, which are human-centred as against Earth-centred, and is in tension with nature and climate action. GSI's education aims to bring about greater overall awareness of the human's place in the web of life and the impact of our actions on the future of the planet, thus, addressing climate change and biodiversity loss, and how we can positively restore ecosystems.

There are a number of external and internal factors currently impacting Green Sod Ireland's strategic and operational organisational context.

There is growing recognition as government increasingly – if still too slowly – accepts the need to transition to a green economy. Amongst the public too there is now greater awareness than ever before of the challenges we face as a society if we don't urgently lower carbon emissions and simultaneously respond to the threat of biodiversity loss. This is creating a movement for change which **Green Sod, as a visionary and early leader in the area of land and biodiversity conservation, has the power and legitimacy to significantly influence.**

However, Green Sod itself has a significant hurdle to climb. As an organisation entirely dependent on the goodwill and availability of volunteers, our capacity to deliver is heavily constrained. This situation is being exacerbated by a strong labour market environment which has seen many of our volunteers understandably return to full-time employment post the lifting of Covid-19 restrictions. With no staff, our ability to achieve our potential as a force for change continues to be hindered. **This plan seeks to focus our voluntary efforts to ensure we can increase our capacity and thus our impact.**

# Part 2: Theory of Change

## THE PROBLEM

**Ecosystems are being destroyed and we are witnessing huge loss in biodiversity.** There is a huge disconnect from nature, and a lack of understanding of the impact of our actions to destroy or positively restore balance, both collectively and individually.

There are powerful lobbies, coupled with short-term political horizons that mean the crisis of biodiversity loss is not being addressed with the urgency required.

## OUR SOLUTION

**A land Trust that protects land and its biodiversity.** An ecological report and plan are drawn up by ecologists for each gifted land making recommendations for its care. GSI serves as an example, encouraging communities/farmers across Ireland to improve the protection of wild acres/nature by applying a passive management approach - minimal footfall in areas under conservation. Local communities are encouraged to learn about the importance of protecting their own ecological environment. GSI and local communities work in tandem, sharing ecological findings to demonstrate the impact of rewilding in encouraging the return of biodiversity to an area and the benefits that ripple out to surrounding lands.

*We are a concrete action responding to the twin crises of climate & biodiversity loss*

# Values Underpinning Our Mission

We believe that planet Earth within the evolving Universe is alive, sustaining and nourishing all life forms through the living systems of sun, air, water and soil.

We value the innate diversity, interconnectedness and interdependence of all life and honour our rightful place within, not apart from, the community of creation.

We recognise our privilege and responsibility as humans: the self-reflective consciousness of the Universe/Earth. Therefore, we endeavour to live in harmony and right relationship with Earth's processes for the wellbeing and flourishing of the total community of life.

# In a Nutshell

## WHAT WE DO

We restore and protect land

We engage the communities we  
have land in through education

We are vocal on land conservation  
and biodiversity loss

## HOW WE DO IT

Land in Trust

Partnerships

Network of Biodiversity Ambassadors

Educational talks/courses

## WHAT WE NEED

High Media Visibility

People

Money

Land

# Part 3: Goals 2022-2025

**Overarching Goal of this three year strategy is to build a strong voice and visibility through partnerships encouraging the establishment of 'WildAcres' across Ireland**

- Goal 1: Spread the Rewilding Message
- Goal 2: Develop the 'Wild Acre' Model
- Goal 3: Gather the experts and enthusiasts on biodiversity
- Goal 4: Secure funding to release the potential

## **Success**

- Number of acres of land in Trust, or committed to rewild
- Recognised for leadership in rewilding and land restoration.
- Growing number of ecologists and biodiversity experts supporting the organisation
- Funding secured

## **Long term Success**

- Wild Acres in every county on the Island of Ireland

# Goal 1: Spread the Rewilding Message

## Outcomes

- Higher profile publicly - well respected. (Have clear and defined expertise)

## Evidence of Success

- Recognised organisation to speak on biodiversity and rewilding.

## Long term Success

- Every Local Authority has designated 'Wild Acres'

## Next 3 years - How we will achieve this goal

- Ensure a functioning communications sub-committee with a strategy, operation plan and budget
- Build profile of the organisation and its expertise
- Develop County Champions as spokespeople and local advocates

## Actions

- Develop a communications plan and materials to target media, local authorities, religious congregations and the public.
- Care for and develop the internal communication subcommittee
- Create communications calendar - develop local profile in key counties of Galway, Mayo, Donegal, Cork, Cavan and Carlow, Cavan and Mayo.
- Create a panel of trained spokespeople in each of the counties we have a presence in. Drawn from Biodiversity Ambassadors and County Champions.
- Target local media/radio. Promote key campaigns: *Biodiversity Ambassador Programme, Wild Acres Week, Save A Sod*

## Funding dependent:

- Media production outsourced to provide content for our education programmes, events and social media

## Targets:

- Traditional Media mentions
  - o 8 in 2022
  - o 20 in 2023
- 4-5 Wild Acres ambassadors working annually
- Social Media sees increased;
  - o brand engagement
  - o website traffic to 5000 unique visitors in 2023
  - o revenue conversion from social

# Goal 2: Develop and Grow the 'Wild Acre' Model

## Outcomes

Increase in land donations

## Evidence of success

Doubling of land donated or allocated to rewilding

Impact of rewilding measures evidenced

## Long term Success

Every Local Authority has designated 'Wild Acres'

## Approach over the next 3 years

Targeted geographic expansion to counties surrounding Cork, Carlow, Cavan, Mayo, Galway and Donegal. Aim for larger/clustered lands for easier management

Target partnership/contracts with LEADER / LDC's / Local Authorities

Targeted engagement with religious congregations

Increase public engagement in establishing and caring for Wild Acres, trial a hybrid approach where GSI does not own the land.

## Actions

Define Wild Acres model. Develop our business case for donating land and its ongoing management - determine the cost to restore and manage gifted land.

Develop the systems and processes to support land donations and management.

Define rewilding in our context.

Develop a programme on soil & biodiversity that can be run in partnership with Local Authorities. Trial in the West.

Establish guidelines for various ecosystems – e.g., woodland, wet meadow, coastal, urban gardens, hedgerows.

Develop and integration of Wild Acres with neighbouring communities and farms.

Trial a new partnership approach - a campaign for Community care of Wild Acres

## Targets

- 100 Acres
- 6 Local authority partnerships
- 10 Local Development Companies

# Goal 3: Gather the Experts and Enthusiasts on Biodiversity

## Outcomes

Increase in volunteers and supporters - GSI is the natural home for ecologists and biodiversity enthusiasts  
GSI is a respected voice in rewilding/biodiversity/soil national dialogue/conversation

## Evidence of Success

To have a core group of four ecologists, one for each province  
An active core group of volunteers competent in biodiversity and nature conservation

## Long term Success

Green Sod Ireland is the 'go to' expert for matters ecological

## Next 3 years - How we will achieve this goal

Build the profile of the organization amongst community in local communities.

## Actions

Develop Biodiversity Ambassador programme and appoint county champions  
Develop a programme of engagement and supporter recruitment. Link with Local Environmental Networks  
Secure a highly visible/vocal GSI spokesperson and/or patron  
Strengthen relationships with the University of Ireland, to recruit students to volunteer/research various relevant subjects, e.g., biodiversity

## Targets:

4x ecological experts  
32 County Champions (also Goal 1)  
15 active volunteers  
50 Biodiversity Ambassadors

# Goal 4: Secure Funding to Release the Potential of GSI

## Desired Outcomes:

- Full time GSI executive in situ who is an ecologist/conservationist and has the management skills to grow the organisations impact
- **Evidence of Success**
  - Secured committed 'seed funders' 3-5 year commitment
  - *Save a Sod* bringing in €50k pa; people re-commit each year
- **Next 3 years - How we will achieve this goal**
  - Build the organisations profile and 'Ask'
  - Grants: cross border funding schemes, UK funds/philanthropic foundations
  - Target local philanthropists in the areas where we have a presence.
  - Launch of carbon offsetting project
- **Targets:**
  - Secure 3 year multi-annual seed funding of €50k
  - Raise €100k pa
  - 30 local solicitors (wills and legacies)
  - 100% utilisation of carbon credits

## Actions

- Apply to IEN for membership
- Develop a fundraising plan with clear messaging and positioning of our 'ask'
- Board to take ownership of fundraising and target potential donors ( NB a high degree of connection important with potential supporters), update monthly.
- Explore possibilities for philanthropy, target local solicitors
- Seek mentoring on best practice fundraising
- Develop 2022 Give-a-Sod fundraising Campaign

Objective 1: Secure seed funding to release the potential of GSI to grow

1. Develop case for support
2. Engage close supporters, friends of GSI and religious congregations.

Objective 2: Maximise potential of the *Save A Sod* fundraising campaign

1. Plan now for Christmas - need raise €20k Yr 1, grow to €30k Yr 3
2. Approach the Dept of Foreign Affairs as a potential gift for foreign dignitaries
3. Approach the IDA (as above/trade missions)

Objective 3: Grow earned revenue through offering Carbon Offsetting.

Objective 4: Increase land donations

1. Develop the land donation 'ask' to include cost of management
2. Target county solicitors for inclusion in Wills etc
3. Raise profile in target counties via local media

# Implementing the Strategy



# PRIORITIES

The ambition set out in this plan, requires GSI to secure multi-annual seed funding to make the step change to be able to take advantage of the opportunities that are being offered. Therefore, we have set three priorities that will enable the Goals to be resourced and achieved..

1. Develop a communications campaign to raise GSI's public profile, build momentum behind Xmas *Give-A-Sod*
2. Develop the case for support and secure 3 years of seed funding +€50k pa
3. Develop a programme on soil & biodiversity that can be run in partnership with Local Authorities and Rural Development Companies. Trial in the West.

# Approach

Our focus is the Island of Ireland, North and South, connecting communities to nature. Educating communities on nature to deepen their understanding, appreciation and sense of responsibility to protect nature.

Our community engagement and education work hand-in-hand in the communities where we have a land interest.

GSI is sharing, under licence, its education material, as an Open Education Resource (OER), to encourage sharing and re-use by educators across Ireland and globally: in support of UNESCO's 2020 call to action in global education.

Our ambition is 32 counties. Our footprint now is Galway, Cork, Carlow and Donegal, Mayo and Cavan. We will build from these areas of strength, growing our profile and networks of support. Engaging with Local Authorities and Local Development Companies to progress the climate and biodiversity agenda.

# Capacity & Capability

Green Sod Ireland is resourced almost entirely by volunteers, with an engaged and supportive Board. Where funding allows, the delivery of certain programmes (in particular the education programmes) and the undertaking of ecological evaluations of land is carried out by paid staff/contractors. However, the day-to-day administration, promotion and development of the organisation is undertaken by volunteers. While much has been achieved by the extremely committed team of volunteers and advisors, the opportunities and potential of GSI outstrip the capacity of voluntary leadership and management. A step change is required.

The ambition within this plan see a tripling of land donations and the development of community engagement and education programmes with LEADER/LDCs/LAs. This along with a growing national footprint of land and Biodiversity Champions requires the hiring of a land manager to manage the land and a GSI Executive Director to grow and develop the organisation.

In addition to developing staff capacity, the Board would like to add to its skill set, particularly in the area of Communications and Fundraising.

# Organisation & Governance

## **BOARD MEMBERS**

Cyrrilla Costello - Chairperson

Maria Heneghan - Secretary/Treasurer

Mary White – Director

Nellie McLaughlin - Director

Pedro Angulo - Director

Sam Bishop - Director

Jenny Cunningham - Administrator

Cian Kiely Cuddy - Assistant Administrator

Paul Cullen - Land Caretaker

Oisin Whelan - Land Caretaker

Large number of volunteers working with land and education

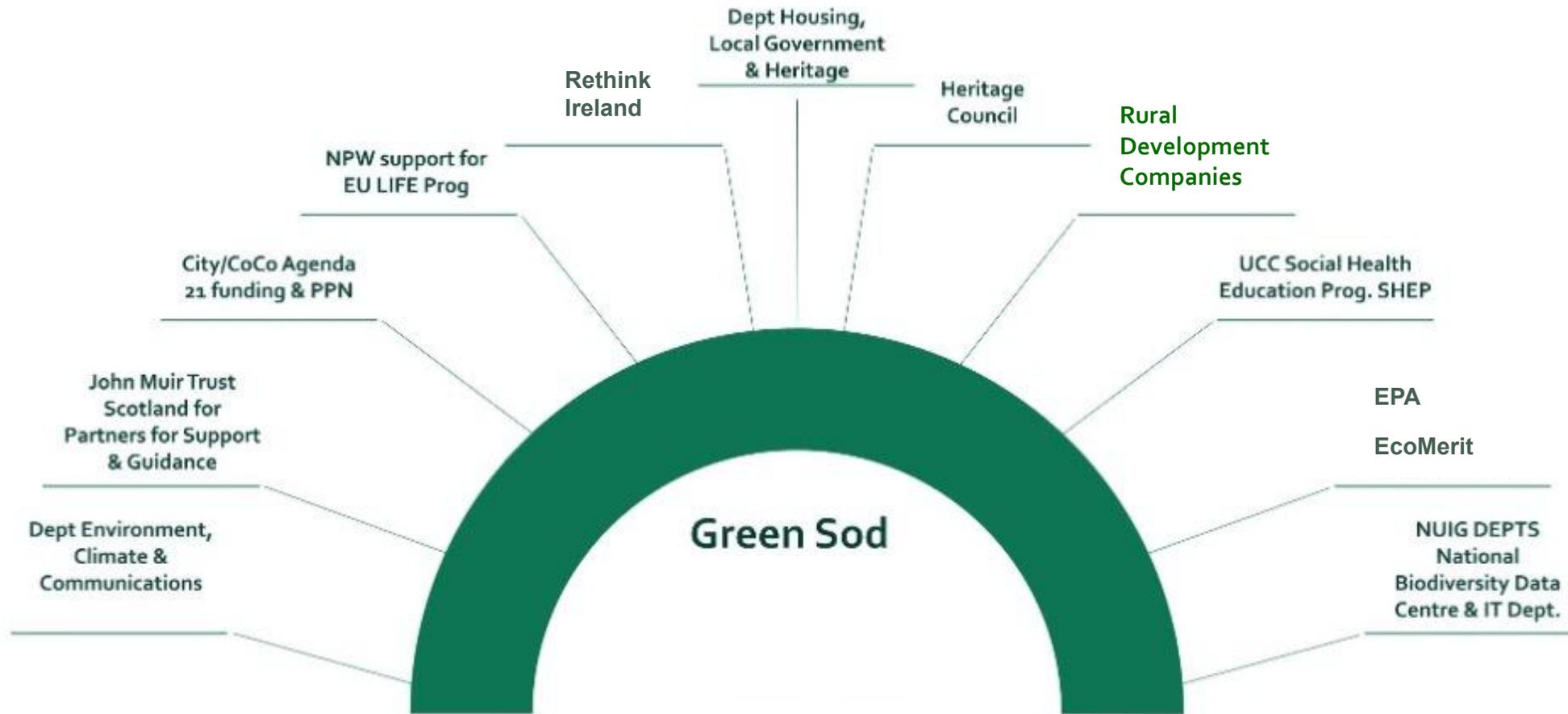
# Stakeholders

There are a large number of potential stakeholders across government, state agencies, third level institutions and NGO's. But at the core, our key stakeholders are the landowners and farmers and the local communities that we hold land within.

- Landowners and Farmers
- Local Communities
- Local Authorities
- The State
- The Ecology Community
- The Public

As we look to the future development of GSI, we see a real opportunity to partner with Local Authorities and working with the LEADER programme in local/rural development companies to engage local communities and support them to embrace the protection of nature, the restoration of habitats and the establishment of wild acres. Helping the state and communities to address the biodiversity crisis and transform the way we live to meet our climate targets.

# Partnerships



Part 4  
Financing our  
Ambition  
3 Year Budget



# INCOME

Income	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total	
Save a Sod FR Campaign	€ 20,000	€ 25,000	€ 34,921	€ 79,921	19%
Carbon offsetting	€ 2,000	€ 11,800	€ 11,800	€ 25,600	6%
Philanthropy & Donations	€ 32,122	€ 53,985	€ 91,009	€ 177,116	42%
Government Grants	€ 9,911	€ 28,568	€ 38,468	€ 76,947	18%
LEADER Contract	€ 20,000	€ 20,000	€ 20,000	€ 60,000	14%
	<b>€ 84,033</b>	<b>€ 139,353</b>	<b>€ 196,198</b>	<b>€ 419,584</b>	

# Expenditure

	<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Year 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	
Staff	€ 32,000	€ 58,750	€ 90,750	€ 181,500	43%
Office	€ 4,413	€ 3,084	€ 3,509	€ 11,005	3%
Land	€ 6,920	€ 15,120	€ 20,120	€ 42,160	10%
Projects	€ 16,973	€ 24,000	€ 29,500	€ 70,473	17%
FR & Comms	€ 8,000	€ 9,600	€ 11,520	€ 29,120	7%
Finance	€ 1,750	€ 2,300	€ 2,300	€ 6,350	2%
Travel	€ 477	€ 1,000	€ 1,000	€ 2,477	1%
Ecologists	€ 13,500	€ 25,500	€ 37,500	€ 76,500	18%
	<b>€ 84,033</b>	<b>€ 139,354</b>	<b>€ 196,199</b>	<b>€ 419,585</b>	

# Budget Notes & Analysis

1. The intention is to modestly increase resourcing over three years to 1.5 FTE. The rationale for the modest increase is that the ability to hire a resource initially 3 days a week is dependent on securing seed funding and a successful fundraising *Save a Sod* Campaign. There is very limited state or philanthropic funding for the environment.
2. LEADER is identified as a potential partner, net contribution estimated at €7k. While there is great potential, GSI needs to scale up its resourcing to realise the opportunity.
3. Main cost driver after staffing is land. Insurance is €50/acre and land management €150/acre pa.
4. Funding from LEADER and other State grants is 21% over the three years.
5. Fundraising (incl philanthropy & carbon offsets) averages 67%.
6. Staff costs are just 43% of total (v.low)