



August 2026

The Green

HEALTHY RIVERS IRELAND



Nature Bounces Back Fast.
All It Needs Is the Right Actions.

"Water quality will not improve unless nutrient pollution is reduced. Right now, there is no clear sign of long-term reductions in nutrient levels, making it unlikely that we will see meaningful improvements in water quality any time soon."

– Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Ireland (2026)

What Makes a Healthy River?

Healthy rivers are living ecosystems.

A healthy river meanders naturally through the landscape, connecting with wetlands and floodplains during periods of high rainfall. Trees and shrubs along riverbanks provide shade, reduce erosion and flooding. Clean gravels and diverse habitats support fish, insects, birds and mammals.

When rivers function naturally, they also provide benefits far beyond wildlife. They improve water quality, reduce flood risk, support agriculture and create beautiful places for people to enjoy.

Unfortunately, healthy rivers have become increasingly rare in Ireland.



**DID YOU
KNOW?**



According to the EPA, only around 54% of Ireland's monitored rivers are currently in good or high ecological condition, meaning *almost half* of Ireland's rivers are failing the required standards.

FAILED

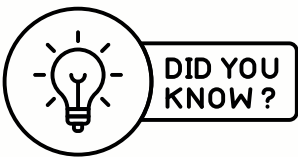
Rivers Are Under Pressure

The EPA identifies ongoing pollution from excess nitrogen and phosphorus as the main reason for Ireland's water quality issues. The sources of these are 'mainly from farming, wastewater (sewage) discharges and run-off from land.'



Ireland's Blue Dot Rivers Under Threat

The EPA highlights that water quality in Ireland's best rivers - Blue Dot rivers - continues to deteriorate. These are home to species such as freshwater pearl mussels that are on the verge of extinction.



Nitrogen fertilisers, especially spread on free draining soils in the south and east of Ireland, can end up in rivers, where it is toxic to fish. It can also cause algae growth - reducing oxygen in rivers. 43% of rivers have nitrogen levels that are too high. And one-third of rivers (and lakes) also have excessive phosphorus levels.

GOVERNMENT ACTION NEEDED

Ireland is the only EU country with a nitrates derogation, allowing higher nitrogen application on some grassland farms. In light of the latest EPA report on showing continued failing river water quality, the Government needs to support farmers reducing nitrogen use. And faster roll out of wastewater plant upgrades are critical.

Pollution in Irish Rivers

The Inland Fisheries Ireland organisation recorded 19,000 fish deaths across 30 fish-kill events between January 2023 and July 2024 — mainly due to pollution and low oxygen.



The Blackwater River Disaster

In August 2025, Ireland's **largest single fish kill on record** occurred on the River Blackwater in Cork — over 42,000 fish were reported dead along a 37 kilometer stretch of the river (RTE / Irish Times).

Inland Fisheries Ireland believes a chemical pollutant may have entered the water. No definitive source for the pollution was identified.

These fish kill pollution events are not just about fish — they affect the whole river ecosystem. The Blackwater supports otters, kingfishers, freshwater pearl mussels, Atlantic salmon and rich invertebrate life.

“The penalty doesn’t fit the crime... They significantly undermine enforcement efforts.”

Barry Fox, Head of Operations at Inland Fisheries Ireland speaking about fines imposed on polluters — often only a few thousand euros — which are far too low. (Irish Times).

Investing in Better Wastewater Treatment

Modern wastewater treatment plants do far more than treat sewage. They remove harmful nutrients, bacteria and other pollutants before water is returned to rivers, lakes and the sea, protecting wildlife, public health and our drinking water.

Investment in modern treatment plants means:

- Cleaner rivers and lakes
- Safer drinking water
- Healthier fish and wildlife
- Better places to swim and bathe.



Ireland is making progress...

Major investments are already making a difference. A €144 million investment in Cork Lower Harbour transformed wastewater treatment, ending the equivalent of 40,000 wheelie bins of raw sewage entering the harbour every day.

Wastewater from six surrounding towns is now fully treated before being safely discharged,

significantly improving water quality & protecting Cork Harbour.



...But more needs to be done

Despite this progress, untreated sewage from the equivalent of around 17,000 people was still entering the environment every day from **12 towns and villages** at the end of 2025 (EPA).

**DID YOU
KNOW?**

Over 80% of Ireland's public water supply comes from surface waters (lakes and rivers).

Nature Restoration Works: River Barrier Removal

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We need every European country dismantling barriers at scale if we are to truly rewild our rivers – and if the EU Nature Restoration Law target of restoring at least 25,000 kilometres of European rivers to a free-flowing state by 2030 is to be achieved.

Frans Schepers ([Rewilding Europe](#))

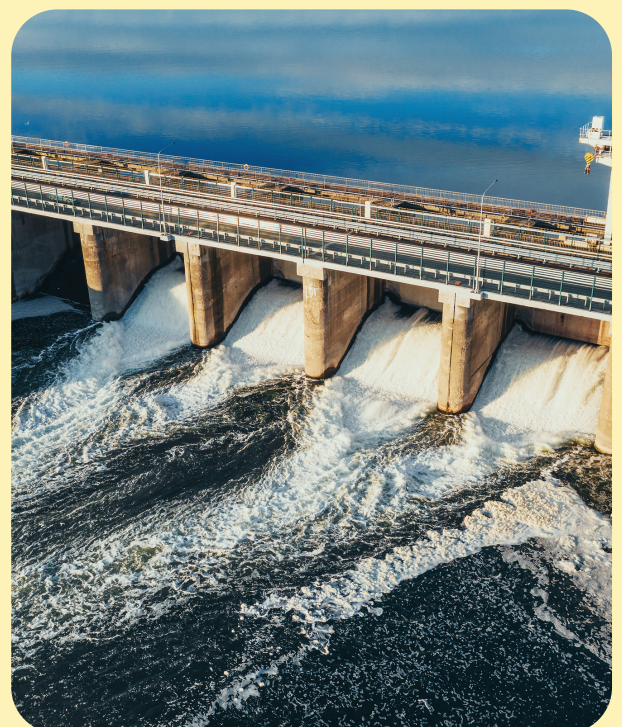
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River restoration works: Across Europe, obsolete dams and weirs are being removed, allowing salmon and other migratory fish to return to rivers they haven't reached for generations.



Dam Removal Europe achievements in 2025:

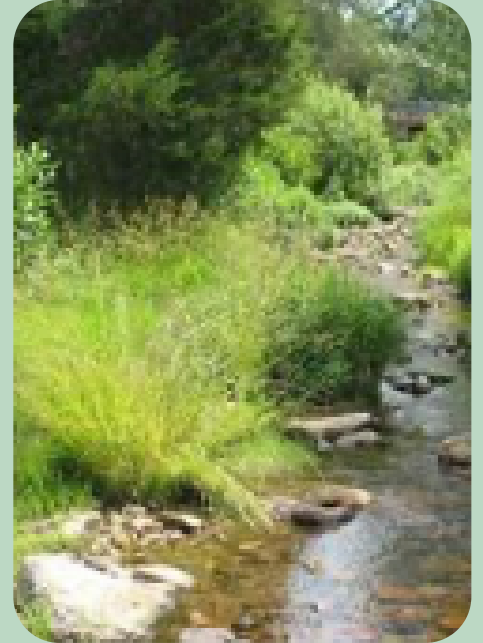
- 603 barriers were removed across 21 European countries
- 3,740 km of rivers were reconnected
- Fish migration routes were reopened
- Habitats were restored and biodiversity increased
- Rivers became more resilient to flooding & climate change.



Farming with Nature

Healthy rivers and productive farms can go hand in hand. Across Ireland, some farmers are adopting measures that reduce pollution, improve water quality and create healthier habitats for wildlife. Practical solutions include:

- Planting native trees and vegetation along rivers.
- Maintaining buffer strips or wetland areas between farmed land and rivers.
- Fencing to keep cattle and other livestock out of rivers and streams.
- Better fertiliser management
- Improved slurry management and spreading. (Slurry is a mixture of manure, urine and water.)



Nature-based solutions are already delivering results:

In Cork's River Bride Catchment, 30 farmers planted hedgerows, fenced streams and are reducing fertiliser use through the Farming for Water project.



Projects like these reduce flooding, improve water quality and create valuable habitat for birds, fish and insects.

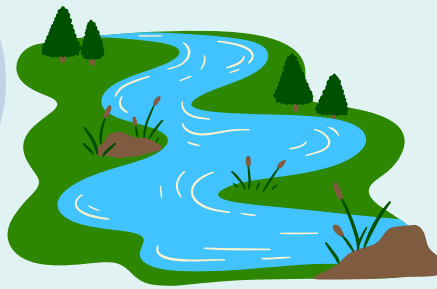
Farmers taking nature positive approaches are planting riparian (riverside) buffer strips and managing fertiliser application and timing more carefully, helping to reduce pollution in streams and rivers.

Ways to Support Rivers

Eat More Plant-Based Meals:
Reducing demand for livestock products, especially beef and dairy, can help lower pollution and improve river water quality.

Support Nature-Friendly Farming:
Choose food from farmers using practices that protect soils, rivers and biodiversity.

Support groups such as Burrenbeo Trust and ReFarm that promote nature-positive farming.



Scoop the Dog Poop: Dog waste contains harmful bacteria such as E. Coli and Salmonella and potentially parasites that can pollute rivers. Avoid letting dogs recently treated for fleas, ticks or worms, swim in rivers, as the chemicals can harm aquatic life.

Hold Polluters Accountable:
Support stronger enforcement, meaningful fines and greater transparency around water quality.

Look After Your Septic Tank:
Have it inspected regularly and emptied every 2–3 years by an approved contractor.

Advocate for Rivers:
Ask your TDs and councillors how they are protecting rivers and meeting Ireland's water quality targets.

Join Your Local River:
Volunteer with a River Trust, LAWPRO project or local clean-up to help restore your local waterway.

Learn More

Want to discover more about Ireland's rivers? These organisations provide excellent information, practical advice and ways to get involved.

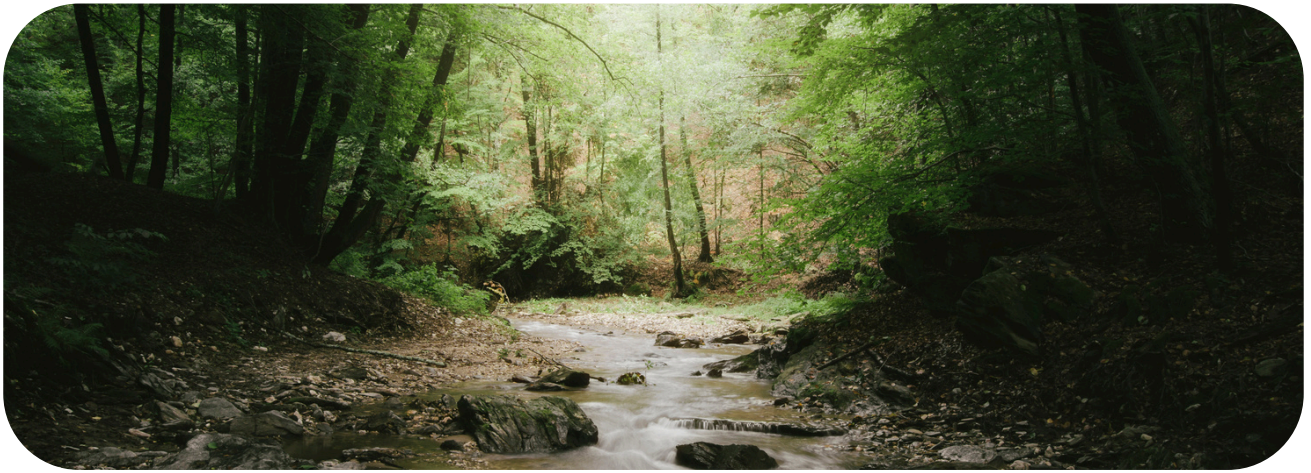
- [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)](#): Ireland's national authority for water quality monitoring, river health and the State of the Environment reports.
- [LAWPRO](#) (Local Authority Waters Programme): Helping communities understand, protect and restore local rivers, lakes and wetlands.
- [Inland Fisheries Ireland](#): Learn about Ireland's fisheries, river habitats, salmon conservation and catchment restoration.
- [Catchments.ie](#): Ireland's Water Framework Directive website, bringing together the latest science, maps and information on our rivers and catchments.
- [The Rivers Trust](#): Inspiring river restoration projects across the UK and Europe, with practical examples of how rivers can recover.



The Green Fridays newsletter is just the beginning.

Explore our carousels, guides, sources and practical actions at greenfridays.org/learn.

- Read this month's carousels
- Explore the science and sources
- Discover organisations making a difference
- Find ways to get involved



Have a great weekend!
The Green Fridays Team

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