

Greening communities with native woodlands in Ireland



For many people, Ireland invokes images of green, rolling hills and lush landscapes. Few places in the world are as green, but after massive deforestation, Ireland is tied with the Netherlands as the least forested country in Europe, at just 11 percent—with only one percent being native forest. As climate change increasingly threatens our global society, reforestation is an important tool for sequestering greenhouse gas emissions. Ireland had been lagging in its goals for new native woodland creation as set out in the 2014-2020 Forestry Programme – then Microsoft stepped in to help.

Making a positive impact in datacenter communities

As Microsoft continues to grow our datacenter footprint, we also work on extending our Corporate Social Responsibility mission to each of our datacenter communities through the Datacenter Community Development team. A component of this effort is investing in projects that positively affect the environment. For this project, farmer landowners were provided €1,000 per hectare to create new native forest. Microsoft matches the government subsidies landowners can already receive from the Irish Forestry Service in exchange for having forests on their land indefinitely. This helps farmers and other landowners diversify income and makes forestation a more workable financial option. One Irish landowner, George Salter-Townshend, remarked, “Adding forestry to my land is something that I’ve thought about for 17 years. Microsoft has finally made it financially viable to move

ahead and I’m hoping to encourage other local landowners to do the same.” The new native forests in Ireland are [one of over 40 projects](#) we have sponsored around the world through our Environmental Sustainability initiative as part of the Datacenter Community Development program.

The Irish government was so pleased with the outcomes of the Microsoft partnership that they established the Woodland Environmental Fund (WEF), which will allow any corporation to contribute matching funds towards additional native woodland planting. WEF provides an opportunity for businesses to help increase native woodlands by providing incentives for landowners to plant trees that they may not have planted if it wasn’t for the additional financial support. Participating businesses’ reputations are enhanced through association with tangible environmental assets that will remain in place for years to come. Society as a whole benefits through carbon capture, greater biodiversity, and potential for improved water quality.

At Microsoft, our mission is to empower every person and every organization on the planet to achieve more. Our global datacenter communities play an important role in achieving our mission, and we believe that we have a responsibility to be contributing members of the communities where we operate. We’re working to create lasting positive impact at a local level, and to continue to look for opportunities to support our environmental sustainability initiatives in these communities.



Reforestation the Emerald Isle

In 2016, Microsoft initiated the Irish Forest Creation program in partnership with Natural Capital Partners, Forest Carbon Ltd., and the Irish-based forest manager Green Belt. This project is helping Ireland to achieve its national greenhouse gas emissions targets by creating 137 hectares of new native forest, which are projected to sequester 35,600 tonnes of carbon over the next 40 years, equivalent to removing 7,500 passenger vehicles from the road for a year.

Plantings across Cork, Kerry, and Galway began in the spring of 2017; the first round of the project resulted in 369,506 trees being planted. These initial hectares contain new saplings of downy birch, common alder, and scots pine, and will help re-establish Ireland's depleted stocks of native oak, as well as support biodiversity, reduce pollutants that enter streams and waterways, and act as natural flood protection. The project adds to Ireland's trees and wildlife, and contributes to the country's environmental well-being.

Additional rounds of planting were held in December 2019 (with 60 employees from the Microsoft Advertising team) and January 2020 (supported by more than 50 employees, including datacenter workers). The latest events involved the planting of over six hectares of woodlands as employees braved the wet weather and were even invited into a local farmer's home to learn more about the project impact.

Irish Forest Creation activities are conducted in accordance with the UK Woodland Carbon Code to ensure they:

- Are sustainably managed to Ireland's standards.
- Provide reliable estimates of the amount of carbon to be sequestered in the future as a result of the tree planting.
- Meet transparent criteria and standards to ensure that real carbon benefits are delivered.
- Are independently verified.

At Microsoft, we believe that corporate participation is required to support progress towards global, national, and local sustainability goals. We have been operating in Ireland for over 30 years and established our first European datacenter in Dublin over ten years ago. We currently have nearly 3,000 employees in Ireland and plan to build four new datacenters locally over the next few years.



Looking ahead

Microsoft continues to invest in its Community Environmental Sustainability fund, aligning with our local datacenter communities to reduce our impact on natural resources, provide social and economic benefits, and support our renewable energy goals. For more information, see the [Microsoft Green Blog](#).

