

# MAYO'S TRANSATLANTIC PARK AGREEMENT

## To Promote Tourism And Cultural Exchange With The US

A unique twinning agreement between the Wild Nephin National Park in Co. Mayo and the Yosemite National Park in California aims to foster international co-operation between both parks to support their shared goals in nature conservation and to promote tourism and cultural exchange. A signing ceremony for the five-year 'Sister Park' agreement will take place early this year.

**M**inister for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform Malcolm Noonan announced the twinning agreement when he unveiled a plaque at McCann's Cottage at Wild Nephin National Park in Co. Mayo in November.

The cottage, which was originally home to local man Paddy McCann and his family until their death during the Great Famine, has been restored by the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) staff over the past year.

As part of an innovative heritage project to restore former cottages for use as 'bothies', it will provide shelter for hikers, walkers and star gazers visiting Wild Nephin National Park.

"We celebrate our efforts to manage and protect our natural heritage in the beautiful surroundings of Wild Nephin National Park. We also recall a dark and sad time from our nation's history. We mark the lived experience and history of the community in Mayo, many of whom were forced to leave their homes during the Great Famine.

"As we remember the events which will always connect our history, we also open a new chapter in our relationship – to protect nature and biodiversity in our national parks, for the future benefit and enjoyment of local communities and visitors to national parks in Ireland and the USA."

### INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

The Sister Park agreement will enable international co-operation between both parks to support their shared goals in nature conservation and promoting natural and cultural tourism. Activities under the arrangement will include information exchange, collaboration and sharing good practice in community



*Pictured at the announcement of the twinning agreement between Mayo's Wild Nephin National Park and California's Yosemite National Park (l-r): Catriona Ryan, NPWS Director of National Parks and Nature Reserves, Minister Malcolm Noonan, and Denis Strong, NPWS Senior Divisional Manager, at Wild Nephin National Park. (Pic: Michael McLaughlin)*

engagement, cultural and visitor service management, forestry and fire management, wilderness and dark sky management and climate change.

The US Ambassador to Ireland Claire Cronin said that the agreement will foster collaboration to preserve and increase natural biodiversity, to restore healthier habitats, to encourage environmental education and to promote tourism and cultural exchange.

"In the US we are proud of our national parks – often called 'America's Best Idea' – and the National Park Service ensures that our parks' natural beauty will be protected for generations to come. I remain confident that the professionals from Yosemite and Wild Nephin have much to learn from each other."

Located in northwest Mayo, Wild Nephin National Park was designated as Ireland's sixth National Park in 1998.

The park is home to Owenduff Bog, one of the largest intact active blanket bog systems in Western Europe, along with a wide range of protected species and habitats, including internationally important freshwater river systems and associated habitats. Wild Nephin National Park showcases some of the most pristine night skies in the world and is certified as a 'Gold Tier' standard International Dark Sky Park, drawing new visitors to the park over the winter months.

Yosemite National Park in California consists of over 300,000 hectares, 95% of which is designated wilderness. Yosemite was designated in 1890 as a National Park and is home to five of the world's highest waterfalls, granite domes and wells, deep valleys, giant sequoia groves and lakes. It is known for unique and pronounced landform features as a result of glacial action on granitic bedrock.

## Heritage Twinning Agreement



Malcolm Noonan, Minister of State for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform, announced the heritage twinning agreement after he unveiled a plaque at McCann's Cottage at Wild Nephin National Park in Co. Mayo. (Pic: Michael McLaughlin)

### EXPANDING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Denis Strong, NPWS Senior Divisional Manager, said: "Wild Nephin National Park collaborates with many partners to protect our natural heritage and support biodiversity. This international collaboration enhances our partnerships and gives our team the opportunity to learn from a long-established park such as Yosemite National Park.

"While there may be differences between us, there are global challenges in our work – how to protect our most

vulnerable species and habitats, visitor management, and wildlife related law enforcement. We look forward to exchanging knowledge and good practice about these challenges with our sister park in California over the lifetime of this agreement."

Niall Ó Donnchú, Director General of the NPWS, said: "This kind of initiative reflects the commitment, creativity and dedication of staff in our national parks to continually enhance their conservation work and develop their offer for visitors." He paid special tribute to NPWS outdoor staff, whom he said do this work in the most challenging of conditions, and to those involved in bringing forward this exciting partnership arrangement.

Catriona Ryan, NPWS Director of National Parks and Nature Reserves, added: "Our national parks benefit greatly

from exchanging learning and ideas through these relationships. Both Connemara National Park and Killarney National Park already have international twinning arrangements in place. We're delighted to expand our international partnerships through this new arrangement."

During his visit, Minister Noonan also opened a new walking trail from McCann's cottage up to Jamsie's Well. According to local folklore, the properties of water from the well are said to hold the cure for kidney stones!

### HERITAGE TWINNING AGREEMENT HIGHLIGHTS

- 'Sister Park Arrangement' will support international co-operation to enhance management of national parks and protect nature.
- Announcement made at 'McCann's Cottage', remembering the Great Famine in Mayo and emigration to the USA.
- Visitor experience at the park to be enhanced through 'bothies', providing shelter for hikers and a new walking trail to Jamsie's Well.
- Event marks the official launch of the 'Wilderland' Arts project for Wild Nephin and communities around the National Park.

**Sister Park/Twinning Arrangements:** They will enable international co-operation between parks. Connemara National Park has a twinning agreement with Terra Nova National Park in Newfoundland, Canada. In 2021, Killarney National Park signed an agreement with Glacier National Park in Montana. For more information about Sister Park arrangements visit: [www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/sister-park-model.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/internationalcooperation/sister-park-model.htm)

**Wilderland Arts Project:** This public art and community ecology project in Co. Mayo will connect people to their local environment through a two-year programme of embedded research, public engagement and education activities, creative community workshops and site-responsive artworks for exhibition and installation in the landscape. The project aims to raise awareness about the biodiversity crisis and encourage behavioural change at individual and community level toward people-led climate action.

Partners include NPWS, Wild Nephin National Park, Mayo County Council's Arts Service, and the Environment, Climate Action and Agriculture Department, The North Mayo Heritage Centre and TASC Think-tank for Action on Social Change and the Materials Matter Artists Collective.

