

CASE STUDY

A review of the “Rural Beach Management: A Good Practice Guide” by McKenna et al.

ABSTRACT:

The “*Rural Beach Management: A Good Practice Guide*” presents non-specialist advice on rural beach management, which is based on 23 case studies from seven beaches around County Donegal, Ireland. These case studies were examined during the LIFE-funded project “*Implementing Alternative Strategies in Irish Beach and Dune Management: Community Involvement in Sustainable Coastal Development*” between 1999 and 2000. The publication focuses on rural Atlantic beaches and builds on the experience gained during the LIFE-project in County Donegal. Physical and ecological characteristics as well as human interactions with the seven beaches are described in detail as well as management problems and possible response scenarios. This guide might be applicable to other regions in the world, contemplating physical/ecological features and/or specific human interactions.

LOCATION:

Ireland, County Donegal

KEYWORDS:

Beach management in practice

<http://www.coastalpractice.net/en/managementguide/index.htm>

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1. Introduction:

The “*Rural Beach Management: A Good Practice Guide*” is a non-specialist text aimed at people that are interested and participating in rural beach management. Rather than being a detailed manual, the publication intends to provide guidance and a starting point for beach management. It raises awareness of physical, ecological and social processes on rural beaches in Ireland and related management issues. The book also provides response possibilities to several management concerns, highlights the importance of beach management and outlines how to develop a beach management plan.

The information in the book is based on the experience from the LIFE-funded project “*Implementing Alternative Strategies in Irish Beach and Dune Management: Community Involvement in Sustainable Coastal Development*”, which was carried out in Co. Donegal from 1997 - 2000 (see Power et al., 2000). This LIFE-project facilitated the cooperation of several individuals and organisations interested in working with Donegal County Council and the University of Ulster to preserve and improve Donegal’s rural beaches. The seven LIFE-projects sites in County Donegal are Culdaff, Lisfannon, Portsalon, Downing, Magheraroarty, Narin, Rossnowlagh. These areas provided 23 case studies used in the “*Rural Beach Management: A Good Practice Guide*” to underline issues, recommendations and scenarios.

2. Rural Atlantic Beach and Application of the information to other areas

Many rural beaches are under increasing pressure from several sources and require beach management. Management problems of rural beaches worldwide can vary substantially and are therefore in need of specific management. However, some of the issues raised in the book are not necessarily phenomena of local conditions.

The local conditions of rural Atlantic beaches are described in Chapter 2 and 3. The physical and ecological processes are investigated in Chapter 2 and provide the reader with insights on applicability of the management scenarios described later in Chapter 4. Chapter 3 outlines human interactions with rural beaches and possible impacts that can arise as a consequence of these interactions, examples are supported by case studies. The relationship and expectations of people with the beaches they are visiting are examined, which allows the reader to see which problems and issues are comparable to situations in other countries.

In order to give the reader a clearer impression of what is considered a rural area the authors of the rural beach management guide assigned a number of definitions to urban and urban/rural mixed areas. They define an urban area as “a contiguous set of local areas, each of which has a population density superior to 500 inhabitants per square kilometre, and where the total population for the set is

at least 50,000 inhabitants" and an intermediate area as "a contiguous set of local areas, not belonging to an urban area, but in which: each local area has a population density of at least 100 inhabitants per square kilometre, and either the total population for the set is at least 50,000 inhabitants or the set is adjacent to an urban area".

Areas that contain rural beaches typically have a low population density. Management concerns such as land ownership and use of the area are likely to differ from more populated areas. In Ireland, for example, land areas in rural setting are often commonly owned or used for agriculture. Furthermore, these areas are more likely to be protected or valued for natural heritage compared to other areas. In comparison to urban settings some rural areas tend to suffer from social concerns such as higher unemployment, lower payment and abandonment.

Rural Atlantic beaches are understood to present common characteristics, which distinguishes these areas from beaches elsewhere. The rural Atlantic beach is usually placed in an environment where strong winds, large waves, frequent storms and high rainfalls cause irregular recreational use of these areas. Compared to the Mediterranean or the Baltic Sea these areas are also influenced by larger tidal ranges.

Particular aspects of the guide are applicable to all beaches but the book is aimed at rural beaches with focus on the European Atlantic coast. However, other areas in the world where the guide could be useful include parts of North America or New Zealand which have comparable physical and coastal characteristics. In some areas social structures and issues might be similar to the situations described and recommendations can be adjusted even if the physical and ecological nature of the location is dissimilar. The same can apply to situations where the ecology and physical characteristics are comparable but social structures are different.

3. Issues of beach management

Chapter 4 investigates in detail management issues, which are outlined in Table 1 and gives possible response scenarios. Many described issues are emphasised by examples of case studies from seven rural beaches in County Donegal, Ireland.

Table 1

General Issue	Topics Addressed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operation of natural processes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beach and dune scarp erosion, Sediment starvation, Flooding, Algal bloom (red tide)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic congestion, Car parking, Beach parking, Environmental damage caused by vehicles, Environmental damage caused by trampling, Public access to the beach
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recreational use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beach and water user conflicts, Health and safety at the beach, Bathing water quality, Fast powered water craft, Dog control, Horses, Litter and beach cleaning, Public toilets, Use of ATVs/dune scrambling, Anti-social behaviour, Sports facilities in dune systems, Children's play areas, Unauthorised large scale gatherings,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-recreational use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sand mining from beach and dunes, Channel dredging and offshore aggregate extraction, Under-grazing and overgrazing, Burning of marram grass, Harvesting of marram grass, Removal of seaweed from beaches, Alien/invasive species, Dumping of rubble and fill, Harbours and piers, Marina development and operation, Fishing, Aquaculture, Collection of shellfish and bait from the foreshore, Development in sand dunes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jurisdiction, tenure, administration and regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jurisdiction, Land tenure, Recreational designations and awards, Conservation designations, Legal regulation of activities, Signage, Local community involvement in beach management, Cultural and socio-economic constraints on beach management

4. Summary

The beach management guide gives advice on beach management based on case studies of rural, Irish beaches in Donegal. The description of physical and ecological characteristics and possible human interactions on these beaches offers a possible comparison to other beaches worldwide. Depending on the beach management issues in question, the outlined response scenarios can be applied under consideration to beaches in other regions. However, when applying the concepts emerging from the work in Co. Donegal the reader should bear in mind the similarity to physical and ecological features and/or human interaction with the beach in question.

The “*Rural Beach Management: A Good Practice Guide*” is available in PDF format on the heritage council website - <http://heritagecouncil.ie>.

5. References:

Mc Kenna, J., MacLeod, M.J., Power, J. and Cooper, J.A.G. (2000), *Rural Beach Management: A Good Practice Guide*. Donegal County Council, Lifford, Co. Donegal, Ireland with the support of the EU LIFE-Environment Programme. British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data. ISBN:0950840777.

Power, J, Mc Kenna, J., MacLeod, M.J., Cooper, J.A.G. and Convie, G. (2000), *Developing Integrated Participatory Management Strategies for Atlantic Dune Systems in County Donegal, Northwest Ireland*. *Ambio*, Vol. 29, No.3, pp 143-49.