

Riparian Margin (Tree Planting)

Specification extract · Pages 45–48

What this document is

This is an extract of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) document “ACRES Co-operation Non-Productive Investments Specification”, Version 2.2, July 2026. It contains the pages covering the Riparian Margin (Tree Planting) action (pages 45–48 of the full specification).

Because the specification runs each action straight into the next, the first and last pages of this extract may also show the end or beginning of a neighbouring action. The section for this action starts on page 45 (the printed page number matches the page number in the full document).

Always check the current version

DAFM updates the specification from time to time. The full document is the authoritative version and should be consulted before undertaking any work. It is available from:

Full specification (PDF, opens at this action):

https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/f8e2ccf8/NPI_specifications_July_2026_2.pdf#page=45

ACRES NPI page on gov.ie:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/f5a48-agri-climate-rural-environment-scheme-acres/#non-productive-investments>

About this action on the ACRES CP website

<https://acresireland.ie/action-projects/npi-riparian-zone-tree-planting/>

SMR2. In this case to be eligible for NPI Riparian Margin 3m watercourse would need to be fenced 4.5m from top of the bank.

4. Fencing posts must consist of timber or alternative metal/PVC/concrete posts, it is not permitted to attach wire fencing directly to trees.
5. If selecting Riparian Margin sheep fencing the lowest line of the sheep wire mesh must be 100mm above ground level to allow adequate clearance for wildlife.
6. The Riparian margin must be fenced off and stock proof to exclude all livestock and maintained for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
7. Chemical or organic fertiliser cannot be applied to the Riparian margin.
8. Plant Protection Products are not permitted, except for the spot treatment of noxious/invasive weeds.
9. Cutting is permitted but cannot take place between March 1st and August 31st.
10. Only one claim for payment is allowed per approved NPI-Annual Works Plan. This action can only be claimed for payment once delivered in accordance with NPI Specification.

Additional guidance

- An access point into the margin is advised to allow for management/maintenance if advised, as some margins may require cutting and removal of vegetation to reduce nutrient load.
- The use of heavy machinery should be avoided within 2m of the bank.
- Riparian margins are very susceptible to non-native invasive species e.g., Himalayan balsam and Giant hogweed. Monitor the riparian margin and carry out appropriate management/ removal of non-native invasive species where necessary.
- The fence should be placed at least 1m out from any riparian margin trees planted to prevent damage by livestock.

Riparian Margin Tree Planting

Objectives

To protect water quality by enhancing nutrient uptake while also supporting biodiversity. In some situations, new riparian margins will benefit from the planting of appropriate tree species to enhance erosion interception and provide improved bank stability. Tree roots and canopies will help intercept subsurface and aerial pollutant pathways.

Site suitability

- This action can only be selected on parcels with an Eligible hectare > 0.
- This action is available on CP and Non-CP LPIS parcels that will be claimed by the participant for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
- On CP forage parcels, this action can only be selected on fields with the following scorecards assigned or submitted: Grassland or Rough Grazing Scorecards.

- This action cannot be selected within an archaeological monument buffer.
- This action is not available on Blanket Bog.
- In Non-CP parcels this action is not available on areas that are SAC/SPAs, NHAs, pNHAs, or Annex 1 Grasslands **Allowed in Breeding Wader Hotspots but may fail screening in certain areas.**
- Sites should be suitable to establish the chosen tree species, should be reasonably sheltered and have no requirement for additional drainage.

Note 12: The planting of trees in any area greater than 0.1 hectare which has tree crown cover of more than 20 per cent of the total area, or the potential to achieve this cover at maturity is considered a forest. To remain in line with the Amendment of Forestry Act 2014 under Animal Health and Welfare and Forestry (Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022) which facilitates planting of native trees in areas not less than 0.1 hectare and not greater than 1 hectare without an afforestation licence, the total cumulative area of forest that can be planted on a holding is limited to 1 hectare. This would apply to the combination of all tree planting actions in ACRES General / ACRES CP that could be considered forests depending on planting layout and density i.e. Planting trees in riparian buffer zones, Tree planting and Tree belts for ammonia capture from farmyards.

Requirements

1. Riparian margin tree planting can only be selected where Riparian Margin or Riparian Margin Sheep Fencing NPI have been selected.
2. Select the location for Riparian Margin Tree Planting by drawing on the map. Each point drawn on GLAM will represent 10 trees. They are only eligible for one NPI payment and once claimed must be maintained in the same location for the remainder of the ACRES contract.
3. The minimum number of trees to be delivered is 10.
4. Plants must be of Irish Origin or Irish Provenance and purchased from DAFM registered professional operators.
5. All trees purchased for this action must have an accompanying plant passport and participants must ensure that they retain the plant passport(s) and receipts(s).
6. Purchased trees must be a minimum of 60cm in height.
7. Plant at least 2 species from Table 9 below.
8. Do not plant in the vicinity of overhead wires or within 20m of railway lines. See Table 10 for clearance distance for overhead lines.
9. Fit each tree with a staked tree shelter, minimum 75cm in height, and ensure trees are protected from livestock damage with appropriate fencing (the riparian margin will be fenced off to protect from appropriate livestock as a requirement under Riparian Margin or Riparian Margin Sheep Fencing NPI).
10. Grass and competing vegetation must be controlled around the trees annually. It will be necessary, from time to time, to lift the tree shelter/guard and remove any weeds/grass by hand that may be growing within the shelter.
11. Failed or dead trees must be replaced during the next dormant season.

12. Only one claim for payment is allowed per approved NPI-Annual Works Plan. This action can only be claimed for payment once delivered in accordance with NPI Specification.

Additional guidance

- When planting trees in riparian margins, tree planting density should be kept sufficiently low to allow establishment of ground storey vegetation. Planting small groups of 10 trees with 2.5m spacing between the trees and 10m spacing between the groups is recommended.
- **Trees should not be planted within 60m of a neighbouring dwelling house.**
- Plant species that have already been shown to grow in local riparian areas. Plants should be of native provenance where possible.
- Trees should be planted between November and March. Bare root trees should be planted as soon as possible after delivery.
- Trees should be pit planted in a vegetation-free area. Clear the area prior to planting to ensure planting is undertaken on a weed-free area (less than 1m in diameter).
- For pit planting, a spade is used to dig a hole and the tree's roots placed in the centre. Soil is placed around the tree and firmed in, ensuring that it is upright and straight.
- Unmanaged riparian areas are very susceptible to non-native invasive species - e.g. Himalayan balsam, Giant hogweed. Monitor the riparian margin and carry out appropriate management/removal of non-native invasive species where necessary.
- In arterial drained catchments, Office of Public Works (OPW) require certain banks to remain free of trees. Contact OPW if unsure whether this may apply to your farm or to seek guidance on channel width.

Table 9. Native Species for Riparian Margin Tree Planting

Common name	Scientific name
Alder	<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>
Silver birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Downy birch	<i>Betula pubescens</i>
Pedunculate oak	<i>Quercus robur</i>
Goat willow	<i>Salix caprea</i>
Grey willow	<i>Salix cinerea</i>
Bay willow	<i>Salix pentandra</i>
Mountain Ash	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>

Table 10. The required clearance distance depends on the voltage of the overhead line

Power line type	Clearance distance (from centre of line)
Low voltage (230/400V)	5 m
10 kV and 38 kV	10 m

110 kV	31 m
220 kV	34 m
400 kV	37 m
Note: All trees must be outside their falling distance from line support structures.	