

Forestry in Ireland – Future Vision

Submission to the Forestry and Heritage Review Public Consultation by the Irish Orienteering Association

Increased forest cover

At present Ireland has about 8-10% of tree cover, the lowest in the European Union. Given that Ireland was once over 80% covered in Oak, Ash and other native trees, this is a serious decline which needs to be reversed. Increased afforestation will contribute directly to Ireland's Kyoto Protocol compliance, help restore Ireland's landscape to its native state, provide greater future timber harvests and bring us in line with European norms.

Increased forest diversity, with an emphasis on sustainable forestry

Orienteering is best suited to forested areas with diversity of physical detail (different species, densities, presence of other features such as walls and streams, footpaths etc). It is less suited to dense plantations of Sitka Spruce or other non-native coniferous trees. In addition to the ecological problems posed by monoculture (cf Owenriff Freshwater Pearl Mussel kill), a greater diversity of planting will increase the aesthetic appeal of forestry.

Mass clearfelling of monospecies plantations should be phased out and replaced by renewable multi-species forestry.

Increased encouragement of Forestry as a Tourist Resource

Orienteering (in addition to other outdoor sports) has great tourism potential. In the UK, the annual JK orienteering event attracts up to 5,000 competitors (many from abroad), while the Swedish 5-day attracts up to 30,000 competitors. Orienteering events of this size and nature are mirrored all over Europe, where the required terrain (complex, diverse forest) is abundantly available. By contrast, Ireland's largest Orienteering events attract about 400 competitors. Only with the right natural resources (larger areas of diverse forestry suited to Orienteering), could Ireland look at hosting such large events.

Forestry's local Amenity value to be encouraged

Amenity use of Irish Forestry should be encouraged, not discouraged. As the main forestry owner, Coillte finds itself in a difficult situation trying to manage car parks and amenity areas with limited resources, and as a result many car parks are being closed and facilities (eg picnic tables) left to fall into disuse. Other ways of ensuring that car parks are available and maintained could be explored (eg Public Private Partnerships, pay-per-use, third party commercial interests etc). It should also be possible to allow recognised, insured groups (eg the Irish Orienteering Association) to have full use of existing and future Irish Forestry.

Forestry should be treated as a long-term asset, not a short-term gain

While Forestry interests are largely commercial, the landscape on which they are planted are not and belong to the Irish people. These should not be seen as a place to grow short-term cash crop to satisfy a bottom line, but as something that future generations will appreciate and value as a long-term asset for the country. Policy should reflect a long-term view, not a short-term gain.

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