



**Irish Orienteering Association submission on
Coillte Business Unit Strategic Plans 2016 -2020
November 2015**

The Irish Orienteering Association acknowledges the opportunity to contribute to the Coillte Business Unit Strategic plans 2016-2020.

It is reassuring to note that Coillte are developing plans – both medium and long term and actively encouraging input from Organisations such as ours to help shape this future.

While acknowledging that Coillte is a commercial entity operating in testing economic times, the intention to encourage the use of its forests to support “the healthy and outdoor lifestyle” is both in line with current Government policy and reflecting the desire to be healthy in communities countrywide.

The current structure of Coillte is outlined in its eight (8) Business Area Unit Strategic Plans. The Irish Orienteering Association has over the last 35 years had a very positive working relationship with Coillte and we hope to continue to do so in the future. Our clubs have very good relations with the BAU managers and look forward to continuing with this relationship.

This submission is from The Irish Orienteering Association and as the parent body represents the views of the various member clubs. We have also asked a representative number of our clubs from diverse areas of the country and Coillte BAU’s to contribute in order to give a flavour of the issues affecting Orienteering clubs at “ground level”.

Orienteering is a sport that is “non profit making” and organised and administered by volunteers whose only passion is for the development of the sport.

The sport itself provides for all levels of ability. While acknowledged as a minority sport it caters for all levels of athlete – from the novice to the seasoned International. It caters for both male and female competitors of all ages. The sport can be enjoyed by individuals, families, teams and groups. It is an acknowledged military sport and many of our members are members of the Defence Forces. Many of our International athletes began their Orienteering careers competing at local level in the various Coillte forests around the country.

Schools have also begun to see the merit in Orienteering for their students as a way to get outdoors and be challenged both physically and mentally.

Coillte in conjunction with the Irish Orienteering Association can be at the forefront of the desire for Healthier living in some of the most beautiful locations in the country in an environmentally sustainable way for many years to come.

We would welcome the opportunity to further develop some mutually beneficial plans that are in line with both of our organisations "visions".

OVERALL ISSUES

Whilst Coillte operates as a profit making entity, the cost of permits to orienteering clubs is prohibitive – orienteering is non profit making – a shift in overall policy to all BAU's would be to charge a nominal fee only to cover administration costs and not be seen as a revenue generating stream. This would be in line with Sport Ireland policy and aims. The IOA are funded by the Sport Ireland and work within their guidelines and governance.

Where thinning occurs it would be most helpful if this was planned and identified in advance. This impacts on map development and use for orienteering areas and has significant cost implications to clubs.

Car park charges add extra cost to orienteering events which work on a break even basis and often cost more for a small club to organise, than what it costs the club to run the event.

There is uncertainty about where the responsibility lies for maintaining POC's on Coillte land. Coillte funded the equipment and installation of the POC's and host the relevant orienteering maps on the Coillte Outdoors web site, but it isn't clear if their commitment runs to the repair and replacement of damaged or missing markers.

It would be very useful from the long-term planning point of view to have information about planting and felling plans, to allow us to anticipate the life expectancy of an area we have mapped, or to decide whether it is worth mapping a particular area at all.

Centralisation and consistency of fees across all at 8 BAUS would be highly preferable to the association.

INDIVIDUAL CLUB ISSUES PER AREA

Great Eastern Navigators - Leinster

- Where possible thinning should take place as opposed to clearfelling.
- Orienteering takes place on paths and roads (beginners) and through open mature forest (more advanced). Thicket Stage crop is marked on orienteering maps as

'Fight' (ie the orienteer must 'fight' their way through it) and is not usable for orienteering.

- Several Coillte forests in BAU 5 are a mixture of thicket stage and mature forest (eg Ticknock, Trooperstown, Djouce). Others are largely densely packed thicket stage crop (eg Ballinderry, Ballinafunshogue, much of the planting in Ballinastoe since 1990). Where trees are in thicket stage and suitable for thinning (ie stable not too exposed to wind, eg Ballinastoe) preference would be for thinning over clear felling, in line with Key Objective 1 (1,597,000m³ of this will be provided through felling and 412,000m³ will be achieved through thinning).

Western Eagles Orienteers - Galway Based.

- Looking at the West of Ireland, Coillte seems to have plans to thin almost every area we might be interested in.
- Kilcornan near Clarenbridge village looks to be in line for clear felling, which is a pity, as it is a great recreational area (walking, cycling as well as orienteering) near to centre of population
- We would like to see more permanent courses in woods especially near to schools.

Waterford Orienteering Club - South Central

- We need to identify for Coillte which are our priority areas for orienteering and match them more carefully with the felling rotation plans. We need to know when within the 3 years they plan to fell which area.
- We need to agree licence fees based on an agreed set of areas to be used each year.
- Coillte should consider the state of the forest after they have left. Do they have good practice for contract fellers? Leave no Trace applies to all!
- We welcome any removal of invasives where it can be done. e.g. rhododendron in the Knockmealdowns.

Ajax Orienteering Club - BAU 3 and BAU 5

- Please find attached areas of interest for Ajax.

1 Ravensdale

2 Ballinastraw, Stump, Cahill's Hill and Cronybyrne

- We're holding the 2018 Leinster Champs in the Ballinastraw, Stump, Cahill's Hill and Cronybyrne area (BAU5 South East Leinster).
- Mapping for the event will commence this year. The club notes thinning is due to commence. We would like more detailed information on where the thinning will take place.

- We have ordered LIDAR of Ravensdale and wish to know more detailed thinning related plans.
- Ajax has other maps of Coillte forests, but the areas are not of immediate concern.

3ROC Orienteering Club - Leinster Based

- Our long term preference would be for less monoculture planting of Sitka spruce and the inclusion of more broadleaved species in the Coillte planting programme.
- Orienteers, as responsible users of the amenities owned and managed by Coillte, are in a position to alert forestry management to damage, illegal dumping, poaching or other antisocial or illegal activities and can be watchdogs in less trafficked areas of forests.
- We would be opposed to the sale of parts of Coillte forests if such sales were to interfere with public access (as seems to have happened at Ticknock where the Wicklow Way had to be diverted after a block of forest was sold to a private landowner.)
- Orienteering maps could easily be supplied to Coillte to improve their records of forest development.
- While orienteers recognise that ecological and wildlife conservation concerns are important, they need not lead to a blanket ban on structured and controlled activities like orienteering. If certain plant or animal habitats are identified as sensitive, orienteering could still continue in the area if the planner and organiser are aware of the affected areas so the courses can be planned to avoid these areas. This is normal for even the largest orienteering competitions in Scandinavia where there could be thousands of runners in the forest.
- Orienteers are naturally concerned about the possible spread of plant diseases like ash die-back or sudden oak death and would be happy to take whatever precautions are deemed necessary to prevent the spread of such diseases. Regular contact between Coillte and user organisations like IOA would be useful, as would IOA involvement in any forum where Coillte recreation management consult with forest users.

Cork Orienteering Club

Cork Orienteering Club are non profit sporting club. We are a large recreational user of Coillte lands particularly in BAU7 South Munster and also in BAU 6 South Central, and BAU 8 West Munster, bringing circa 1500 recreational users onto Coillte properties during approximately 25 orienteering events scattered throughout the year.

Orienteering is an adventure sport for all ages, where participants navigate between pre-determined points in a forest/parkland/mountain or urban area using a map. It promotes fitness, map navigation skills, and a love of the outdoors.

Over the past 34 years we have had a good relationship with Coillte and we hope to continue to do so.

Some of the main concerns for us regarding Coillte properties are listed below:

Access and Permits:

- Orienteering is an amateur sport. All organiser time is donated, and event entry charges barely cover costs (mapping, map printing, equipment, insurance, overheads, Coillte permits etc.).
- Coillte permit costs represent a very significant burden to our orienteering club and can render small events uneconomic to hold. Many of our Winter events have low attendance numbers and do not currently break even. Any increase in permit costs would force us to cancel many events and review our future use of Coillte properties.
- Parking fees also can have a big impact on participation at orienteering events.
- Orienteering events bring people out into Coillte woods who might never otherwise venture into these areas.
- It enhances the health of society by encouraging sporting activity and physical fitness. It improves self reliance and map reading and navigation skills and encourages the physical and social development of adults, teenagers, and children.
- Other access issues in recent years include the unfortunate outbreaks of diseases such as Sudden Oak Death etc. Cork orienteering club always complies fully with Coillte requests not to use forests affected by such diseases.
- Forestry operations (felling etc.) often restrict access to certain blocks of forest. Thankfully these operations are usually confined to limited areas, and we can usually work our events around them.
- In addition our orienteering events are usually held on Sunday's and Summer evenings, when work operations have ceased. Major problems (cancellation of a planned orienteering event due to forestry operations) are rare.
- It would be quite helpful if there was a web-site which showed plans for imminent felling or upcoming access restrictions.

Sustainability:

- Cork Orienteering club support the principle of Sustainable land use and replanting of forests.
- For orienteering purposes clear-felling is not so good for us as it is quite difficult to run/ navigate through a clear-felled forest due to the extremely rough nature of the terrain and tree debris left behind. The remaining rough tree stumps often render the terrain impassable. Mulching or chipping these would speed up decomposition. Other forest features, such as ruined walls, earth banks or large boulders should not be removed during clear felling as they are often used as orienteering features.
- Clear-felling a large portion (> 25%) of a Coillte wood can render it unusable for orienteering.
- Thinning is ok for us and may often open up dense impenetrable blocks of trees for running purposes, thus sometimes improving the forest for us.

- While reforestation is good it can take many years before a replanted forest reaches sufficient maturity to allow orienteering/running. It is not possible to run through an immature forest as trees are too low to the ground and the young forest blocks are generally impenetrable. Under such conditions, runners are confined to paths, which become quite repetitive and boring.
- Uniform blocks of conifer crops make the least interesting landscape for orienteering, especially where the underlying ground is flat and featureless to begin with. Varied mixed woodland makes a much nicer landscape and running environment. Streams, ponds, hills, boulders, fences, paths, crags, ruins, ancient or large trees, clearings, bridges also add to the forest landscape and make it a more interesting and scenic place to orienteer. Orienteers need these "features" as navigation points on orienteering courses. They use a map to find the specified "features" and run as quickly as possible between them.
- Orienteering often brings otherwise sedentary urban dwellers to forests where they develop and appreciation for the biodiversity of the woodland flora and fauna.
- Cork Orienteering club always endeavours to work with the land owners to protect sensitive flora/fauna by designating certain parts of the course map as out of bounds to running where necessary. This requires good communications between Coillte and our club.
- Orienteers generally appreciate the beauty of the rural landscape. We would be strongly opposed to seeing Coillte forests visually disfigured by ugly industrial features such as masts, power lines, wind turbines, warehouses, artificial drainage pits. While such features might make short term profits for Coillte and others, the visual destruction of the rural Irish landscape would be permanent.

Conclusion

- It is important for Cork Orienteering Club that our primary Coillte Forest areas are not significantly clear felled. (e.g. Farran, Curragh Wood, Ballyannon, Glenbower, Currabinny, Warrenscourt, Tracton, among others.)
- The amenity value of Coillte Woods within 50km of Cork city is huge for urban dwellers who have limited access to the countryside. Clear felling of such woods would have a very large negative impact.
- Increasing access costs are also an ongoing concern for this club. Pay access barriers to certain woods can act as a deterrent to competitors, as orienteering events already have an entry charge to cover costs (map printing, equipment, permits etc.)
- Coillte Permit costs are a significant portion of the expenses of holding an orienteering event and they can make holding very small orienteering events (i.e. less than 35 competitors) uneconomic.
- We would hope that there would be no further increases in permit costs or access costs, or that some rebate system could be organised for significant users. (Cork Orienteering Club purchase approximately 25 Coillte permits a year).