

6. A Vision of Forestry for Ireland

It is accepted that the plantations cannot be removed over night; however, we would like to see a reappraisal of the simplistic mechanistic monocultural approach to forestry management in Ireland, which has been dominated by narrow economic interests for too long.

We would like to see environmental and social NGOs and individuals funded to allow them to have a dignified and meaningful input into creating an Agenda 21 based partnership led new forestry policy, which acknowledges the realities of global warming, the need to conserve and create biodiversity, find alternative fuels, construction timbers and promoting same as naturally renewable resources. It is our understanding that the Nordic countries fund their NGOs directly and evenly without favour.

We wish to see the creation of new local craft industries contributing to local economies via wood and non-wood products (e.g. mushrooms, herbs, berries). We also understand the economic realities of multinationals moving towards cheaper labour markets meaning rural areas need to develop new sustainable economies more than ever, with the wisest management of local natural resources.

We are proposing a triple aspect forestry programme to satisfy the many areas of concern to stakeholders that have been raised during the FSC process in Ireland - one that satisfies and embraces the three main strands of Sustainable Forest Management, i.e. economic, social and environmental aspects.

We have formed relationships with Swiss, German, Austrian, American, South African, Welsh, English, Canadian and Irish foresters, some of whom live in Ireland and would like to see change. These people have a passion for and understanding of continuous cover multi-use forestry.

We wish to form partnerships with these sources of knowledge and experience, along with the other areas of expertise, in which we have support. We are also aware of the latent talents of some of our newly arrived citizens, immigrants from Poland, etc., who may have useful knowledge to bring to the table. We would also like to include some of the current state foresters who have much to offer with open minds and who are restricted by the current regime.

This programme would consist of:

1. An economically viable programme continuing with non-native conifers, mixing larch, Scots Pine, Douglas Fir, some non-natives broadleaves such as Spanish Chestnut and Hornbeam with natives such as Oak, Ash, Holly, Alder, Birch, etc. – mixing and matching trees to suitable sites. We would like to see old monoculture sites, deemed to be uneconomic by the current regime, gradually brought back to native woodland by phasing out non-native conifers while providing cover for the natives to recolonise within purposely made coups within the plantation (using non-destructive methods of extraction, such as horses). Perhaps REPS could fund this scheme?

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2. Sustainably managed plantations with 30% mixed-broadleaf, local community input into management plans, reduction and eventual elimination of pesticides and fertilisers and no clearfell.
3. A programme of social and environmental forestry concentrating on creating continuous cover multi-use native woodlands, beginning with the creation of a countrywide network of native tree nurseries run as community enterprises, reflecting the understanding of local trees for local conditions from Rio Convention on Biological Diversity. With 30% coppice areas near local towns and villages which would cater for the biodiversity, conservation and restoration commitments of the state along with social policy, recreation, crafts, spirituality, with some economic benefits via ecotourism, coppicing for local crafts and energy crafts, for example.

We realise this three stranded approach needs more research and time spent to make it ready for use, and would need to be accompanied by the establishment of new Centres for Excellency in Forestry, to disseminate information and conduct research into this approach.

“...The nature of the independent role played by NGOs within a society calls for real participation; therefore, independence is a major attribute of NGOs and is the precondition of real participation.”

- Section 27.1 of Agenda 21