**THE WOODLAND LEAGUE PRESS RELEASE**

**STOP THE SALE OF PUBLIC FORESTS**

Once again the sale of the public forests is announced with very little detail or background information. This time the Troika have facilitated the State regards public opposition, by changing the MOU to allow the proceeds from the sale of State assets to be reinvested in job creation. This vague promise remains just a possibility, there is no lock in mechanism, no plans in place that would ensure this would ever happen. New Era was supposed to be the vehicle that was going to manage the merger of Coillte and Bord Na Mona to maximise their National potential when the new government announced there would be no sale of Coillte, it remains a mere slogan for an empty notion.

Thats the first hoax, the second is the idea that just selling the trees and not the land they are on is any different to a full sell off, the questions below require answers from the government.

Who will own the potential carbon value of the trees in the future.

What value has been placed on this carbon asset.

How will public access to the public land be maintained.

How will the forestry operations be regulated.

How will the biodiversity and water be protected when the buyers will be looking to maximise their returns in full.

We need only look at the Eircom sell off debacle to see how private investors treat State assets.

The Woodland League welcome the recent TASC report on State assets, which sensibly calls for a fuller examination of each State asset in terms of its Social, Economic and Environmental value, which is known as the triple bottom line. This is the criteria to measure Sustainable Development as set out in the 1992 Rio declaration on Sustainable Development to which Ireland is a signatory. Ireland has never embraced or implemented the Rio principles of Sustainable Development.

The public forests managed in such a way could provide enormous benefits for all the citizens of this State. Irelands poorly managed public forests have relied on the sale of public lands and the sale of public forests to pension funds, 66m euros worth between 2009 and 2011, according to Coilltes annual accounts, to maintain a veneer of profitability. With an area the size of 1.1million acres, 7% of Ireland, the public forest estate, with approx 400,000 acres of private forestry, only 11,000 people are employed according to the recent CSO figures. Despite the government figure of 16,000 in recent Press Releases regarding the forestry Industry.

Switzerland a country half the size of Ireland with twice as much mixed forest, approx 3 million acres, using a close to nature management system with no clearfelling or chemicals, have approx 120,000 people employed in their forestry industry. An urgent re-evaluation of the current State forestry model based on the TASC recommendations would make much more sense, with a view to creating a new State forestry model as part of a national public works programme, involving training for the unemployed and creation of long term forestry employment regionally. Good forestry management is one of the only industries that grows exponentially, and could form the backbone of a national recovery plan.

The Mc Carthy report identified 500,000 acres of the public forest estate as being of no commercial value, this is an indictment of the current model if ever there was one. David Gunning CEO of Coillte, appearing before a dail public accounts committee in 2009, said the current forestry model was no longer viable. The Woodland league have an outline plan for an alternative vision for Irish forestry policy, and are among many other stakeholders calling for major changes in Forestry policy. The Public forest estate was built up over many years with Public resources as a National asset and investment in Irelands future, it makes no sense to sell it off to the highest bidder in a depressed economy.

The Woodland league are calling on the public to gather at Leinster house tomorrow, 23rd February at 11 am to register the public opposition to the Sale of Irelands Forests in this latest guise. We continue to urge the public to sign our petition which now has approx 32000 online signatures and approx 4000 physical signatures, this we believe is a mandate from the people against any sell off that also calls for a new forestry model based on a questionnaire attached.

We are also asking the Public to reclaim their forests in their locality by walking them on Sunday March 4th, the beginning of national tree week, as a National day of protest and walking their forests every Sunday thereafter until this extremely unwise decision is taken off the agenda.

Diana Beresford Kroeger, the Woodland league consultant Irish scientist, author, ethno-botanist, and recent Wings World Quest award winner says, "The Irish forests are the inheritance of the children of Ireland, and must remain under Public control". She is author of the best selling book “ The Global Forest “ outlining how wise management of the Worlds forests can solve many of the problems facing humanity at this time, Socially, Economically and Environmentally.

“ A culture is no better than its woods”

W.H. Auden

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Save Ireland's Forests petition  <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/2/help-save-irelands-forests/>

Contact Andrew St. Ledger (P.R.O. The Woodland League) on 0879933157, or e-mail [stledgerwood@gmail.com](mailto:stledgerwood@gmail.com)