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Coillte Forestry Fables In Regard To Tree Felling At Gougane Barra Heritage Site

The public amenity forest at Gougane Barra, co Cork has been clear-felled for no good reason. This is the claim of an internationally renowned Irish tree-scientist and a number of Irish NGOs.

In January 2014, Coillte, the Irish Forestry Board, contended that 'sudden oak-death' (*Phytophthora ramorum*) had infested the veteran larch trees in the forest and that urgent clear-felling was essential. Documentary evidence purporting to support this assertion dated July 2013 has been branded tenuous at best by Diana Beresford-Kroeger the renowned Irish tree-scientist who saw no sign of the disease while filming in the forest in August of that year.

Diana, who acts as a forestry scientific consultant to the not for profit NGO, The Woodland League, had received background information including the laboratory documents from the League.

Diana Beresford Kroeger stated " I was in Gougane Barra last August, I did not see the presence of the cankers of Phytophthora Ramorum, where the internal phloem and young, vigorous xylem tissue of the trees is killed by this fungal disease. As a scientist I would like to see proof of its presence, which is easy enough to detect before I express my horror and dismay at the destruction of the forest at Gougane Barra. Need I add the old timers must have sold at a premium price and now the shoulders of the mountains are bare and mangled with death and decay. It would not surprise me if the Irish public were expected to open their purse again to restore the site " .

Information from two laboratories was emailed to the Woodland League some months after their initial urgent request for scientific evidence of the alleged outbreak of ramorum. The independence of that evidence is questionable in that both laboratories are state-controlled. Coillte, had already felled and sold the timber, their own laboratory being one of those who confirmed the disease, the other being the department of Agriculture who regulate the forest sector. The two documents may be accessed here:

<http://woodlandleague.org/documents/13-4890.pdf>

and here:

<http://woodlandleague.org/documents/PF13-030.pdf>

Both contain one line statements with a reference code and no senior Plant pathology scientist signature. This is not proof of disease in Gougane Barra.

Andrew St Ledger, the Woodland League PRO commented, " It is inconceivable that Coillte, caretakers of the 1.2 million acre Public forest estate, the biggest single land bank are not accountable to anybody. The self-regulatory nature of Ireland's Forestry sector, the reliance on non mandatory guidelines, and complete lack of Independent scrutiny creates a serious environmental hazard and generates conflicts of interest " .

Furthermore, there is no trace of a felling application for the non-larch component of the Glen (i.e. Sitka and Lodgepole pine), which was also felled, a potential breach of the 1946 Forestry Act.

The Woodland League also allege active concealment within the Department of Agriculture and Coillte of the extraction of the stand of Western hemlock aged 70 years old within glen Gougane Barra. Neither Coillte nor the Forest Service did not reveal or disclose they were planning to extract other tree species from the park. The cultural value of the ancient glen, as a place of historic significance, has been ignored in the rush for short term profit. The trucks witnessed leaving the site with the timber had no covering, breaching sanitisation protocols as expressed by the Forest Service and violating Coillte's own FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) ecolabel in relation to the FSC's 10 Principles which are used to measure ecolabel compliance.

EIAs (Environmental Impact Assessments) are mandatory for timber extractions above 70 hectares. The Gougane Barra clearance exceeded by far this threshold. That there was no EIA means there was no public consultation. Thus the primary statutory stakeholders, the Irish Public, have been bypassed - YET AGAIN.

The Woodland league are joined by two other NGO's with concerns about this serious public issue, CELT (Centre for Environmental Living and Training), and MDEG (Macroom and District Environmental Group) who first raised the alarm about this forest destruction occurring in their locality.

Bob Wilson of CELT said,

" The wholesale harvesting by Coillte of many fine, mature trees at this world-renowned site without proper public consultation, without felling licences and with apparent complete disregard for natural biodiversity is very disturbing. Excuses of possibly diseased Larch and extensive storm damage have not been adequately shown to be true or accurate. With Ireland's extremely low area of tree cover, we cannot afford to lose such specimens in such a high-nature-value forest unless it is absolutely proven necessary "

Ted Cook PRO of MDEG had this to add ***" It is ironic that the while the state are in the process of launching a new forestry programme, hailing it as a new vision, "Forests, Products and People", the Gougane Barra incident reinforces the same old forestry fable, a continuation of the severance of the people from their forests, unaccountable to local communities or environmental NGO's. We note the draft of the new plan has increased funding provision for public amenity forests and wonder will Coillte now be compensated to restore the site with public funding "***

ENDS

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Background articles

<http://www.southernstar.ie/News/Controversy-lingers-over-clear-fell-as-Gougane-forest-park-re-opens-17072014.htm>

Cork's Gougane Barra Forest Park closing due to ... - The Irish Times

www.irishtimes.com/.../cork-s-gougane-barra-forest-park-closing-due-to..

Coillte urged to clarify extent of larch disease in Gougane Barra ... www.irishtimes.com/.../coillte-urged-to-clarify-extent-of-larch-disease-in.

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/farming/coillte-manager-denies-work-an-act-of-vandalism-268559.html>

Forest service rejects “frenzy of tree-felling”

<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/environment/forest-service-rejects-frenzy-of-tree-felling-1.1769032>

FOREST HEROINE: Tree advocate Diana Beresford-Kroeger sets reforestation sights high

<http://blog.cifor.org/21558/foreforest-heroine-tree-advocate-diana-beresford-kroeger-sets-reforestation-sights-high>