

DWOSL NEWSLETTER

Spring 2015

Chairman's Message

A Donegal Woodland Owners Society Limited (DWOSL) Field Day is to be held on Saturday 11th April 2015 at 10am in Stranorlar. Also the 8th Annual General Meeting of DWOSL will take place on Friday 5th June 2015 in Jacksons Hotel, Ballybofey at 8 pm. Details of both events are in this newsletter.

The past year has been very busy for DWOSL. The DWOSL Gasifier, installed and operating in the Nursing Home in Laghey since mid November 2013, has proven its ability to provide heat at a competitive price to oil. DWOSL were active in over 25 different forest sites throughout Donegal, felling, extracting, planting, processing, managing and growing its log and firewood sales business.

At the DWOSL Special Meeting on the 29th September 2014, the members decided to sell the Esco business and Gasifiers in order to concentrate on our core business of helping forest owners to manage their forests and add value to our timber. Since then the DWOSL Committee have agreed a price with a buyer for the ESCo and the operating gasifier. A sales contract is now being drawn up. Negotiations are ongoing regarding the two remaining gasifiers in Germany. The DWOSL Committee is compiling the data on the first year's output, costs and savings from Gasifier compared to heating oil. Once these figures are checked and agreed by all involved, I think they will make interesting reading.

At a recent Forest Owners Growers Group meeting in Dublin, a Forest Service official, Mr. Karl Coggins informed the various forest owner groups representatives present that no financial support would be given to any growers groups this year, but maybe next year.



He also stated that established Forest Owner Groups (such as DWOSL) could be barred from any financial assistance because of State Aid rules. This will have serious implications into the future for DWOSL; the voluntary commitment shown by DWOSL over the past 10 years deserves better treatment than this.

Two leading European forest owner representatives gave talks to all present regarding forest owner groups. The Swedish Family Forest Owner representative, Mr. Lennart Ackzell spoke of the fundamental importance of the involvement of local communities and people. The Danish speaker Mr. Karsten Raae said that forest owner groups need to be weary of focusing on State financial assistance as it can influence the direction of the growers group.

DWOSL active members pay a yearly membership renewal fee; this money is a vital source of income. Please ensure your membership renewal is up to date. DWOSL has a strong independent voice for farm forestry; this is needed now more than ever.

The DWOSL submission to the Rural Development Programme 2014 to 2020 is an example of that independence (see PAGE 3). Sadly not many of our comments were taken on board.

John Jackson, Chairman of the Donegal Woodlands Society Limited.

Brief Overview of the new Forestry Programme 2014-2020

by Teagasc

The new Forestry Programme provides new opportunities to landowners including attractive forest establishment and support grants. The following measures are currently open for applications:

1. Afforestation and Creation of Woodland:

This measure provides support for the establishment of new forests including afforestation, agro-forestry, forestry for fibre and native woodland establishment. In most cases, all the costs associated with the establishment of the forest in the early years are covered by an afforestation grant. The new forestry premiums are paid for a period of 15 years ranging from €500 per hectare per year for conifers to approximately €600 per hectare per year for broadleaves. No distinction is being made between farmers and non-farmers. In addition to the annual premium, it will be possible for most farmers to hold on to their Basic Payments.

2. Forest Roads:

This measure provides support for the construction of forest roads at a rate of €40/m to a maximum of 20m/ha. Additional funding may be available in certain circumstances.

3. Woodland Improvement (Thinning and Tending):

A grant of €750/ha is available for the thinning and tending of young broadleaf woodlands.

A cost based grant may also be available for brashing operations to facilitate manual fertiliser application.

4. Reconstitution Scheme (Chalara):

This measure provides support in relation to ash dieback (Chalara). A site clearance grant of up to €1500/ha and replanting grants of up to €5000/ha are available.

FORESTRY PROGRAMME 2014-2020

DWOSL Submission to the Draft Forestry Programme 2014 - 2020

Welcome

Ireland has achieved a remarkable transformation in raising our forest cover from near zero at the foundation of the state, to over 10% today. We have more recently established a diverse model of forestry, which values landscape, amenity, wildlife, a vibrant processing and wood energy sector, and a whole range of unseen environmental services, alongside the traditional production of timber. All this is an essential part of preparing Ireland to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing and increasingly unstable world. So we welcome the new Forestry Programme 2014-2020 as a positive contribution to helping our society and economy to face these changes.

Increasing Area

DWOSL believes that forestry has a vital role to play in mitigating climate change, and with such low forest cover, a strategic funded plan to double Ireland's forest cover has to be put in place. Unfortunately, the earlier aspiration to increase our forest cover which brought about the rise to 10%, seems to have now faded from sight.

The draft proposals in the new Forest Programme are a disservice to farm forestry, which has delivered the vast majority of the new planting in the last 20 years. More broadleaves, more diverse forest, more open space and greater recognition to the hidden environmental services which forests provide, has become the accepted norm. But only farmers are in a position to drive this radically transformed industry forward without fragmenting and destroying the fabric of rural Ireland. Handing the baton over to private companies will lead to the same dismantling of the warp and weft of landscape and community that already characterises the wind power programme and the motorway network. Only farmer control can bring about the scale of planting needed without further disruption of landscape and communities in rural Ireland.

Controls

In environmentally sensitive areas, forestry also has a positive role to play. But the blanket ban on forestry in wide categories of land should be more nuanced and flexible, and should allow the appropriate type of forestry to be encouraged.

The draft Forestry Programme devotes 17 pages to penalties – surely the wrong spin on what should be a warm welcome to a new generation of farm foresters. Farmers react negatively to new controls, guidelines or restrictions. But to the degree that these are necessary and inevitable, they should be implemented in a manner that will help farmers to respond positively. For this there would need to be more active support to help farmers meet these challenges.

Premiums

We regret the reduction in the premium from 20 to 15 years, as the majority of farm foresters will have no sustained income from their plantations until they are mature. The removal of the distinction between farmers and non-farmers is not as generous as it might appear. The distinction between the two categories was originally introduced in acknowledgement of farmers planting with no prospects for having any income until their trees were due for their second thinning. This did not apply to Coillte and other commercial interests, as they have a sustained income stream from multiple forest properties at all stages of growth.

So opening up the premiums to any non-farming individuals or companies will undermine farmers' confidence in their ability to compete in the sector. This will only further erode the resilience of rural life in Ireland.

Empowering Farmers

With a forest cover of under 11%, it is vital that Ireland increases our cover to the 18% already agreed. We need to greatly increase our cover for timber, energy, amenity and environmental reasons - those relating to climate change being mandatory, some being essential to reduce our demand on imported forest products, while others are essential for the wise development of our own social, environmental and economic capital



But the only hope of reaching the target of 18% of land cover afforested will be if the farming community is encouraged to participate enthusiastically in the forestry programme. The measures proposed will not do this. And the State's historic dithering in its support for farmers has already made any long term commitment to forestry very unattractive.

Farmers need to be further empowered to take their involvement in forestry forward, and to overcome their initial unfamiliarity with the industry and with forest culture in general. This has been made more difficult by the dominant roles of forestry companies and Coillte. With farmers in control of their own forestry enterprises, the timing of operations can be optimised, and the long-term interests of the forest maximised, in a way that is not possible for contractors. For example, felling by chain saws can minimise much of the damage associated with the use of heavy harvesting machinery. But contractors will always want to use the technology that speeds and eases their work. So new measures need to be devised to favour farmers taking control of their own forests, rather than favouring the large companies which already have the scales tipped in their favour.

Conclusion

Forestry in Ireland is today at a cross-roads. Some of the proposals in this new Forestry Programme are leading us down the wrong path.

PLEASE NOTE THAT OUR DWOSL FORESTER MEIKE SIEBEL IS BACK FROM HER MATERNITY LEAVE AND WORKING IN THE OFFICE MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON.

**FOR FORESTRY RELATED QUERIES PHONE
FORESTER DWOSL 087 9828223, Mo AND WED 2 - 4 PM**

*****NEW ADVANCED BUY & SELL SECTION*****

ON DWOSL WEBSITE: WWW.DONEGALWOODLANDOWNERS.COM

**DWOSL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME TO EMAIL THEIR ITEMS TO:
FORESTER.DWOSL@GMAIL.COM**

Acidification and other problems with planting in the hills

Ralph Sheppard

Somebody wanted to know why conifers increase acidification. In trying to answer this, it became necessary to address some other issues related to how and where we should concentrate our forestry effort.

In previous newsletters we have pointed out that the way forward for forestry in Ireland is Continuous Cover, which can be applied to new plantings, and to the conversion of existing plantations, in lowlands and in uplands. But although we have to accept that uplands are not generally suitable for *new* conifer plantations, Continuous Cover *is* possible in uplands, and we should be trying to convert our existing plantations to it.

Acidification

A number of processes have been suggested to explain the role that forests play in increasing the acidity of streams and lakes in acid-sensitive areas. These include:

- 1) Conifer needles are more efficient than broadleaves at intercepting atmospheric pollutants, which will then be transferred to the soil.
- 2) There is uptake by the trees of the alkaline chemical agents (base cations) that reduce acidity. These are then removed from the system when the trees are harvested.
- 3) Soil disturbance increases oxidation and mineralization of organic matter, resulting in the production of acids.
- 4) When water transfer is speeded up through drainage works, it means that there is less time for it to capture the base cations from the soil, so it enters streams and rivers in a more acidic state.

Slowing down run-off, to allow water to remain in contact with mineral soil particles and capture the base cations is perhaps the simplest way of buffering against acidity.

Soil Erosion

Drainage operations, normally regarded as essential in upland afforestation, increase rates of soil erosion, which causes siltation in lakes with afforested catchments. Silt can blanket streambeds and reduce oxygen levels in the water, which can greatly affect the fish and invertebrates (fish food), and even change the physical structure of the habitat. Measures to mitigate this are now required, but will seldom be totally efficient.

Peat Soils

Peat is dead plant matter, accumulated over thousands of years. In storing plant matter, peat is also storing all the carbon that the plants extracted from the atmosphere when they were alive. When we cut peat, through drainage operations, ploughing etc., we allow it to dry, which releases vast quantities of the stored carbon. And as we all now know, it is the increase in carbon in the atmosphere which is mainly responsible for the catastrophic climate change we are starting to feel here in our stormier and wetter winters – and which we also know has even worse impacts just starting to be unleashed for the world as a whole. So planting trees on upland peat soils is not only bad for the atmosphere, it is going to be increasingly difficult to keep them standing.

Marginal Land

(1) The marginal land targeted for forestry has less potential for water pollution than the peat soils on the higher slopes.

(2) It is also less valuable for agriculture than the lowlands.

But this is only half the story.

(3) Marginal land is the last refuge for much of the flora and fauna that has been banished from intensively farmed lowlands. The species that can still thrive if conifers replace low-intensity farming are mostly widespread and common, like Chaffinches and Robins, whereas those they exclude are also disappearing from intensive farmland – birds like Yellowhammer and Skylark.

Lowland Farmland

The easy assumption that the lowlands are needed for agriculture has to be looked at more closely. The EU is pressing Ireland's farmers to reduce their carbon footprint, as farming is one of the largest producers of the greenhouse gases which cause climate change. The government and the farming organisations argue that our grass-based farming is more efficient than most, and we need to increase our output to feed the world. But the only way to feed the world *in a manner that will combat climate change* is to produce food locally, less intensively, and to a much greater extent, organically. Applied to Ireland, we would export less, but also import less. We would produce, and eat, less secondary produce (meat and dairy products), and make greater use of primary produce (plants). Apart entirely from any arguments about the health benefits or the humanitarian reasons for eating less meat, secondary produce requires something like seven times as much land as primary produce to feed the same number of people¹.

So we would use less land (which for economic reasons we are doing anyway), and the surplus could be used for growing trees, and managing in other ways that contribute to national well-being and environmental imperatives.

2015 MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE NOW DUE

It was agreed at the 2010 AGM to make the renewal date for membership of Donegal Woodland Owners Society Limited the last day of March each year. We have enclosed renewal Invoices for outstanding renewals.

Cheques can be made payable to DWOSL, or Donegal Woodland Owners Society Limited, and posted to; DWOSL, PO BOX 10, Donegal Town.

OR

For Credit Transfer: Please quote your name on the credit transfer.

DWOSL Bank Account Details:

Allied Irish Bank, Main Street, Ballybofey, Co. Donegal

Account name: DONEGAL WOODLAND OWNERS SOCIETY LIMITED
BOX 10, DONEGAL TOWN, CO DONEGAL

Bank Sorting Code: 93-73-63 Account No.: 19164-189

IBAN: IE59 AIBK 9373 6319 1641 89 BIC: AIBKIE2D

ANY QUERIES PHONE ADMIN DWOSL 086 0410809

¹ The simple reason for this major difference between plants and animals, is that the source of all energy in the food chain is what plants absorb from the sun by photosynthesis. But converting that energy to animal flesh is an inefficient biological process, and most of it is lost. So a diet based on a good mixture of plant products can support many times more people than one based on meat or dairy products.

Shouting from the Tree Tops

Watching Paint Dry

Ralph Sheppard

Watching paint dry is a fair way to describe what many woodland owners experience when trying to assess the growth of their trees. Even more so, it is the assumption that non-woodland owners make when they decide to *not* plant trees.

Of course our foresters can tell us what yield class we have, but it doesn't translate into a real sense that our trees are growing well. So the recent experience of one of our members may be of interest. He was thinning his plantation, which included an area of 14 year old trees, and a similar area of trees that were ten years older. Both areas had previously been thinned, and the older trees were certainly larger. But how much larger came as a surprise. It turned out that the average volume of the older trees was more than twice that of the younger trees. This can't be simply due to the natural increase, as it would suggest that growth rates rocket between 14 and 24 years. It has to be due to a combination of three factors:

- 1) The natural growth in the extra ten years.
- 2) The cumulative removal of more poor quality trees in the older plantation than in the younger one.
- 3) The boost to growth rates when trees are given more space by the thinning process.

The moral of the story:

A For growers - thinning might seem counter-intuitive, but be assured that it will increase both the quality *and* the volume of your standing timber.

B For non-growers – given an acceptance that you would be operating on a much longer time scale than usual, trees really do add value to your land.

Freedom to Plant Trees and Grow

John Jackson, Chairman DWOSL

At a recent Forestry Growers group meeting in central Dublin, I asked a Swedish Forester what was the average yield class of forestry in Sweden. He told us yield class 4. I then asked an Irish Forest "expert" what was the lowest average yield class that we in the Republic could plant to. He said yield class 14.

If you drive around Ireland there are vast areas suitable for forestry, but the powers that be will not allow these areas to be planted. Instead they insist that better agriculture land gets planted, give more grant money for planting it and invite outside investment money into Irish afforestation on the same terms as local landowners. They call this Rural Development!

We know Ireland has top class growth rates, the lowest forest cover and plenty of farmers willing to plant. So why such low levels of planting? Because the powers that be, the politicians, top agricultural and forestry civil servants, forestry companies and environmental groups are greasing the system for their own ends, i.e. big business and getting bigger. It's shameful that the voice of the small farmers in marginal areas is not being listened to. Instead they are being told that you can't plant trees, their methods of farming are being strictly limited and the amount of state aid they get is being constantly lowered.

The new emphasis now is on special protection areas, and who cares if they go on fire every few years, sure that only will help to depopulate those areas faster.

In Donegal the level of new forest planting has hit rock bottom with vast areas being closed to forestry. Our upland areas are slowly turning into scrub, a fire hazard. I don't see rural development here, only the creeping forms of organised ethnic cleansing. We upland dwellers are an endangered species, our young are emigrating, and we are rapidly losing our culture of upland farming. This is far from balanced regional development – it's creating wilderness areas. One man, one vote is dangerous, especially if you pull the vast majority of the population to Dublin and watch the rest emigrate to the four corners of the globe!

For over 20 years I have represented farm forest owners in Donegal; for 5 of these years I represented IFA Farm forest owners nationally and for the past 8 years I have been the Chairman of Donegal Woodland Owners Society Limited. So after the next AGM of DWOSL on the 5th June 2015, I intend to step down as Chairman. I intend to use this freedom to fight for real rural development, especially the type that benefits all the inhabitants of rural Ireland.

Donegal has a lot of forests; we now need timber processing mills. Now is the time to grow this industry for the people and wildlife of Donegal.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Donegal Woodland Owners Society Limited (DWOSL) Field Day

In association with Forest Service, Teagasc and IFA Forestry Farm Section

Location: Teevickmoy Forest, Stranorlar

Date: Saturday 11th April 2015

Time: 10.00 am

Meeting Point: John Jackson's Yard, Teevickmoy, Stranorlar (use as Car Park)

Directions: 1.5 miles out Stranorlar / Letterkenny road. Turn Left into the L 70 84 Road and follow DWOSL Forestry Event Signs

Topics: Planting, Mixed Tree Species and Biodiversity, Forest Thinning, Timber Harvesting, Forest Roads, Firewood production and Log Sales. DWOSL update.

Take Suitable clothing, boots and a packed lunch. (Tea and Coffee provided)

NOTICE FOR DWOSL 2015 AGM

DONEGAL WOODLAND OWNERS SOCIETY LIMITED 8th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Is to be held on Friday 5th JUNE 2015 at 8.00pm

In JACKSONS HOTEL, BALLYBOFEY

Further details to follow

PLEASE ALSO CHECK THE HOMEPAGE: WWW.DONEGALWOODLANDOWNERS.COM FOR UPCOMING EVENTS.

Donegal Woodland Owners Society Limited cannot accept any responsibility for opinions or information contained in this Newsletter
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