



Anti-forestry protests in County Leitrim

Not for the first time in its history Leitrim found itself in the forestry spotlight again this summer following a concerted campaign led by the Leitrim IFA (Irish Farmers Association) protesting and agitating against afforestation within the county. The campaign made national news in all media including TV, and necessitated the Minister Andrew Doyle going on national radio also to Leitrim to meet with the campaigners.

The protesters main claims were that forestry was a major contributor to de-population in the county, that investors, pension funds and vulture funds were responsible for most of the afforestation, and that very little employment was being created for Leitrim residents. Their headline claim was that 35% of the county was already planted however this was refuted by the minister as the official forest cover according to Forest Service statistics in Leitrim is 17%. In addition the claims that investors and pension/vulture funds were responsible for the majority of the planting were also rejected by the minister in parliament when he stated for the record that in 2015 80% of all new afforestation in Leitrim was carried out by farmers and in 2014 farmer planting accounted for 96% of the area afforested. The irony regarding employment is that one of the biggest employers in County Leitrim is Masonite Ltd. who employ 170 workers at their plant in Carrick on Shannon which manufactures moulded doors etc. from sawmill residues.

This is not the first time that forestry has been vilified in Leitrim. Back in the late eighties and early nineties when private afforestation was starting to gear up protests in Leitrim took a serious turn when machinery and equipment belonging to private forestry contractors was destroyed or burnt, and forestry personnel were prevented from gaining access to sites that were approved for planting. Going back further to the 1940s and continuing right through the

1950s, 60s and 70s state foresters encountered, and had to deal with frequent anti-forestry sentiment and resistance to state afforestation, which created difficulties in the day to day management of their forests.



The campaigners did succeed however in securing a commitment from the minister that a notice would have to be placed on all sites where owners are planning a forest in future as part of the approval process for grant aid. Forestry consultants and companies are concerned however that this will lead to a reduction in afforestation as potential new growers will be put off because the site notice will flag their intentions, and create pressure to sell their farms or land to locals rather than plant it.

Dothistroma

The first case of Red Needle Blight in the Republic of Ireland was confirmed in October at two locations in Cork and Limerick. The species affected were thicket stage Scots pine. It is highly likely that more confirmations will follow especially as Scots pine has been planted extensively in mixtures as a nurse species for oak and beech since 1998 all over the country. In addition the fact that the disease has been present in Northern Ireland since 2011 will also impact on the spread of Dothistroma particularly in the northern counties of the republic.



New Forestry Minister appointed

Ireland's forest industry got a new minister in 2016 with the appointment of Andrew Doyle T.D. The appointment was wholeheartedly welcomed by foresters, growers and the media alike as not alone does Andrew hail from County Wicklow, which at 22% has the most forest cover of any county in all of Ireland, but he is also a farm forester with over 30 acres of mainly conifer plantations on his farm in County Wicklow. In 2012 he chaired a strategically important Department of Agriculture committee which critically examined the role and future direction of Coillte, looking at potential options including a merger with Bord na Móna the state organisation with responsibility for the nation's bogs. Ultimately, however it was decided to leave Coillte intact.

He has a comprehensive knowledge of the industry, the personnel involved and the main current issues which need to be addressed. He is also seen as someone who will fight for more resources and a bigger budget for forestry at cabinet level, and who will be a tough negotiator at EU level because of his unique exposure to, and experience of the major benefits that forestry has brought to Ireland, and especially to his home county of Wicklow where it is an important source of employment. We wish him well over the next few years.

Irish Forestry and Woodland Show 2017

The fourth IFWS will be back in in Stradbally Hall, Co. Laois on the 05-06 May 2017. The organisers have obviously responded to the very small attendance on the Sunday in 2015 and the views of many of the exhibitors who were not happy with having to exhibit on the Sunday, and gone back to a Friday and Saturday show. Hopefully there will be a major improvement to the organisation, promotion and onsite management of the show in 2017. In 2015 there was no show catalogue or programme, no public address and very little

signage on approaching roads or the wider regional road network. In addition it is imperative that the Forest Service have a prominent and active presence at the show after their absence in 2015 and hopefully will be joined by Coillte who were also absent in 2015. There was and is general agreement that Stradbally is an excellent site and location but the show needs a major organisational upgrade, bigger spend on promotion, and to have key stakeholders like the Forest Service and Coillte present if it is to survive and thrive.

Timber prices

Timber prices in Ireland have softened considerably since the start of 2016 and that trend appears set to continue. Timber at roadside is currently trading at €32 for pulp, €45 for pallet and €60 for sawlog. First thinning's are still in good demand, with active competition between the panelboard sector and the general woodfuel & biomass sector keeping prices at very acceptable levels. Conifer first thinnings standing are selling from €8/m³ to 12/m³ with exceptional lots making up to €13/m³.

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