

## Submission to Coillte's Consultation on Forest Five Year Plans Review 2021-2025

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### Overview

Ireland is the most deforested country in Europe. While reforestation is ongoing, most is with non-native sitka spruce plantations used for commercial forestry. These forests are poor habitats for wildlife and less effective carbon sinks, and our focus should be on preserving and expanding our natural biome of primarily deciduous forest. Only about one-quarter of Irish forestry is native broadleaf species, while of our forested land, conifers occupy 479,530 ha while broadleaved species cover 193,580 ha.<sup>1</sup> With modern knowledge of ecology, this is simply unacceptable.

Ireland needs to invest more seriously in afforestation and to set more ambitious targets for the amount of native broadleaf species being planted.<sup>2</sup> Our focus should be on preserving and expanding our natural biome of primarily deciduous forest. We need clear rewilding strategies, the conversion of portions of agricultural land to native forest, and the establishment of wildlife corridors. Forestry on every farm, with special incentives in place along watercourses, and special areas of conservation will help generate connected wildlife corridors throughout the country.

Coillte is a major component of any changes to the Irish forestry sector. In the midst of a climate and biodiversity crisis, it is essential that it takes ambitious positions in responding to contemporary challenges.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Agriculture, Food & the Marine, 2019. *Forest Statistics Ireland 2019*.  
<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/forestservicgeneralinformation/ForestStatisticsIreland2019161219.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Carroll, R (2019) The wrong kind of trees: Ireland's afforestation meets resistance. *The Guardian*, 7 Jul  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/07/the-wrong-kind-of-trees-irelands-afforestation-meets-resistance>

## 1. Biodiversity

It is noted that Coillte is making a contribution to the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the environmental concerns feature strongly in the public responses in consultations<sup>3</sup>, but it is imperative these efforts are strengthened in the five year plan, through the follow actions:

1. Increase the designated Coillte forest estate for nature conservation and biodiversity management from 15% to 25%.
2. To achieve and surpass the unambitious target of 30% broadleaf afforestation in the National Biodiversity Action Plan.<sup>4</sup>
3. To develop and resource a coherent response to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan by using Coillte resources to assist in 'making Ireland pollinator friendly', including specific actions on generating networks of 'diverse and flowerrich habitats to support pollinators across Ireland.'<sup>5</sup>
4. To develop the Dublin Mountains Makeover initiative<sup>6</sup> into a nation-wide strategy to actively transform Irish forestry areas into non-commercial recreational and biodiversity functions, with clear ambitious targets for each BAU.

## 2. Recreation Facilities

Coillte has a large range of excellent recreation facilities across Ireland. West Cork, specifically, has many excellent sites including, Castlefreke, Rathbarry; Dromkeen, Innishannon; Garrettstown, Ballinspittle; and Rineen, Union Hall. These amenities are rich natural resources which have benefits for local populations and visitors alike. However, there is considerable scope that more areas under Coillte ownership could be converted to recreational use in a strategic approach, as suggested in action no.4. This is inline with the public consultation outcomes, with respondents requesting 'that Coillte actively increase development of new/additional recreational amenities'.<sup>7</sup> In particular, the BAU 5 Central Munster Strategic Plan should include the following actions:

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<sup>3</sup> Coillte (2017) *Public Consultation Process: Summary*. Coillte:

[https://www.coillte.ie/media/2017/01/Forestplans\\_consultation\\_summary.pdf](https://www.coillte.ie/media/2017/01/Forestplans_consultation_summary.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (2017). *National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021*.

Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht:

<https://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/publications/pdf/National%20Biodiversity%20Action%20Plan%20English.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> National Biodiversity Data Centre (2015). *All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020*, National Biodiversity Data Centre Series No. 3, Waterford.

<https://pollinators.ie/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Pollinator-Plan-2018-WEB.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Coillte (2020). Dublin Mountains Makeover. *Coillte Website*,

<https://www.coillte.ie/coillte-nature/ourprojects/dublinmountainsmakeover/> [Accessed 28 May 2020]

<sup>7</sup> Coillte (2017) *Public Consultation Process*

5. Development of two forest parks in the Cork South West constituency. While West Cork has a range of woodland and outdoor amenities it lacks designated forest parks; in contrast, the neighbouring Cork North West constituency has Farran Forest Park and Guagan Barra Forest Park. The plan should include the target of identifying and developing two forest parks in West Cork by 2025.
6. In line with the strategy outlined in action 4, identify forestry areas in West Cork which could be begun to transition to non-commercial cycles within the lifetime of the plan.
7. An examination of the steps necessary to ensure the public have rights to access and use forestry land, while ensuring land-owners are fully protected.

### **3. Natural heritage: restoring Plantation on Old Woodland Sites (POWS)**

Ancient and long-established woodlands have a considerable cultural and natural heritage value, 'and the exhibit a more diverse complement of plant and animal species than woodlands of recent origin, and hence are considered to be of higher conservation value.'<sup>8</sup> However, only very few of these remain: 481 identified sites cover only 0.2% of land surface. Plantations on Old Woodland Sites (POWS) still contain remnants of the original woodland, which, with management, can be restored back to health. Under PEFC Irish Forest Certification Standard, Coillte is obliged to 'maintain and enhance remnant features on all POWS'.<sup>9</sup> The following action is necessary to progress this area:

8. Fully restore all Coillte owned POWS following best practice.
9. Fully realise the requirements of the 'Conservation of semi-natural woodlands and plantations on old woodland sites' as outlined in *PEFC Irish Forest Certification Standard*.

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<sup>8</sup> Perrin, P.M. & Daly, O.H. (2010) A provisional inventory of ancient and long-established woodland in Ireland. Irish Wildlife Manuals, No. 46. National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin, Ireland. Pg.4.

<sup>9</sup> PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification schemes) (2014) *PEFC Irish Forest Certification Standard*, Second Editio, PEFC (Ireland), pg.36

[http://pefc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IFCS\\_2nd\\_edition\\_Jan\\_2014.pdf](http://pefc.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/IFCS_2nd_edition_Jan_2014.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.