

# THE IRISH FORESTER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF IRISH FORESTERS

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## Irish Forests and Countryside Recreation

This edition of the Irish Forester provides an insight to recent initiatives regarding countryside recreation in Ireland and the increasing importance of forests as accessible recreational facilities. The table below shows recent and ongoing recreational initiatives in this area:

Organisation	Initiative
SIF	Forest Walks, 3rd Sept 2006
Forest Service	Neighbourwood Scheme (2001) Recreational Guidelines for Forests (2006)
COFORD	Research on forest recreation and other public good benefits as part of the mid term review of forest research.
Department of Rural, Community and Gaeltacht Affairs	Formation of Comhairle na Tuaithe, The Countryside Council (2004)
Comhairle na Tuaithe	National Countryside Recreational Strategy (ongoing)
Irish Sports Council	Irish Trails Strategy (ongoing)
Coillte/ Irish Sports Council	Report on the economic value of trails and forest recreation in the Republic of Ireland (2005)
Coillte	Recreation Policy Healthy Forests, Healthy Nation (2005)
Fáilte Ireland	National Loop Trail Strategy (ongoing)
Leave no Trace Ireland	Adaptation of outdoor ethics code for Ireland (ongoing)

The health of the nation is now a major focus for our government with a dramatic rise in obesity, stress related illnesses and mental ill-health. The importance of physical, psychological and social well-being is now high on the health agenda and forests have a key role to play, due to their accessibility and the unique benefits that they have with regard to health.

Coillte is the largest single landowner in the country, and their forests are a key component of the national outdoor recreational infrastructure. Coillte forests receive an estimated 8 million visitors per annum and they currently provide 52% of all 'off road' walking trails in Ireland. Other areas which are accessible to the public include lands owned by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Local Authorities, Waterways Ireland and a small percentage of privately owned land.

In Ireland, there is no legal right to roam on private land and



Walkers enjoying the view of Powerscourt Waterfall, near Enniskerry, County Wicklow

in recent years we have experienced increased conflict between recreational users and private landowners. Consequently, publicly owned land is increasingly important to recreational users.

The demand for all types of countryside recreation has increased significantly in recent years both from the general public and visitors from abroad. This is partially due to our increasing population, our improved economic prosperity, the considerable rise in car ownership and the increased awareness about the health benefits of exercise.

The establishment of Comhairle na Tuaithe (the Countryside Council) in 2004, marked the beginning of a co-ordinated approach to countryside recreation in Ireland. The Council comprises representatives of farming and forestry organisations, recreational users and state bodies involved, or with an interest in countryside recreation. The Council is currently focusing on three priority issues.

- Access to the countryside
- Development of a countryside code
- Development of a National Countryside Recreation Strategy

The recreational potential of Irish forests will not be realised, however without significant input from all state sectors including health, tourism and rural development in addition to the bodies that manage and facilitate countryside recreation in Ireland.

# Forest Recreation in Ireland

## – A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers

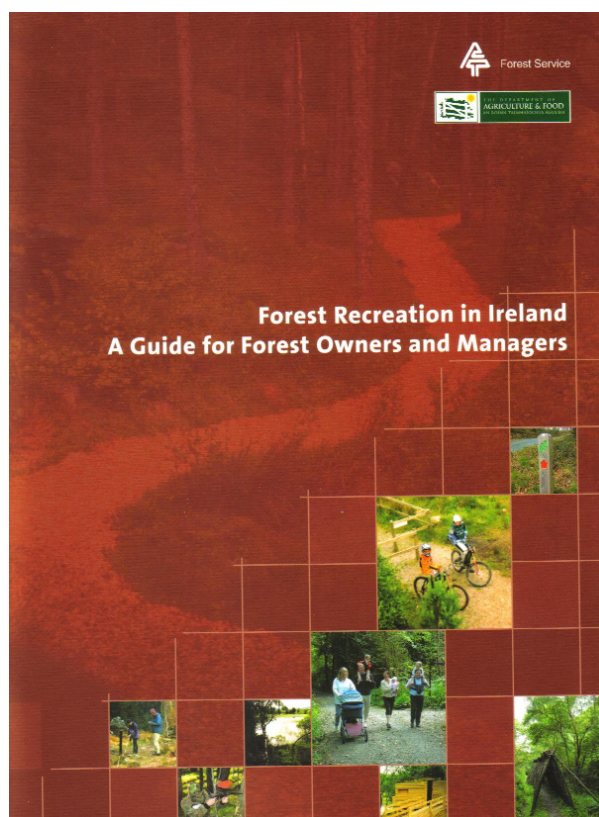
Under sustainable forest management, Ireland's woodlands and forests represent a multi-faceted resource that provides timber and employment, enhances the landscape and the environment, promotes biodiversity, and sequesters atmospheric carbon. Their use for recreation is yet another important public benefit arising from Ireland's forestry programme.

As Ireland's national forest authority, the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Food considers recreation as a key non-timber benefit. Developing a forest as an amenity creates a resource for the local community and for people visiting from elsewhere. Using the forest - be it for simple quiet enjoyment or for a particular sport or adventure activity - promotes fitness, health and a sense of well being. Forest recreation also creates the basis for a wide range of related leisure-based enterprises, promoting tourism, employment and rural development.

The Forest Service promotes forest recreation by supporting relevant organisations and initiatives, and by providing funding through its NeighbourWood Scheme. This scheme is aimed at encouraging the development of local woodland amenities through partnerships involving local communities, local authorities and other landowners. There are a number of NeighbourWood projects in both urban and rural settings throughout Ireland, each representing a 'hothouse' of activity focused on developing a local woodland amenity for local people. The relevance of such amenities was highlighted by a recent study by Coillte and the Irish Sports Council (ISC), which found that the lack of local availability of trails was the single greatest obstacle to usage, and that the majority of visitors to forests are not specialist users.

***Forest Recreation in Ireland - A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers***, recently launched during National Tree Week by Mary Wallace TD, Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food, further underlines the commitment of the Forest Service to promoting this aspect of Ireland's forestry programme. It is aimed at encouraging forest owners and managers to consider providing for recreation in consultation with users. It will also be of interest to other key players, including local community groups, outdoor activity and sporting interests, environmental organisations, local authorities and other statutory bodies.

The guide sets out practical advice and information on best practice within the Irish forestry context, focusing on issues



such as consultation, access for all, general recreational facilities, the use of the forest for environmental education, promoting safety, liability issues, and tackling 'undesirable activities'. As a practical guide, this publication will be relevant to various types of forest recreational development, from woodlands developed for public access and enjoyment, to leisure-based enterprises set within a forest context.

A wide range of individuals and organisations involved in forest and outdoor recreation contributed greatly to the development of this publication, and the Forest Service acknowledges this invaluable input. It is hoped that *Forest Recreation in Ireland - A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* will further promote this aspect of Irish forestry, and in so doing, encourage the creation of more opportunities for people to

experience and enjoy our woodlands and forests.

The publication of *Forest Recreation in Ireland - A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* and the ongoing application of the NeighbourWood Scheme are two of a number of significant initiatives focusing on both forest recreation and countryside recreation in general. Other initiatives include Coillte's recently launched *Recreation Policy - Healthy Forest, Healthy Nation* and its joint study with the ISC on the *Economic Value of Trails and Forest Recreation in the Republic of Ireland*, the work of Comhairle na Tuaithe in developing a countryside recreation strategy, the establishment of Leave No Trace in Ireland, and the development of an Irish Trails Strategy by the National Waymarked Ways. There are also considerable linkages with wider networks involving other countries, including the Rofl & UK Countryside Recreation Network and the European-wide Cost Actions E33 'Forestry and Nature Tourism' and E39 'Forests, Trees and Human Health and Well being'. All of these initiatives are focused on promoting forest and countryside recreation, to realise the considerable social, health and economic benefits for both landowners and recreational users.

Copies of the Forest Service *Forest Recreation in Ireland - A Guide for Forest Owners and Managers* are available from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture and Food, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford (t. 053-60200 / [www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service](http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service)).

***Kevin Collins, Forestry Inspector***

## Coillte Recreation Policy - Polasaí Fáillíochta



In September 2005, The Chairman of Coillte, Mr. Brendan McKenna presented Ms. Mary Coughlan T.D., Minister for Agriculture and Food with a copy of Coillte's Recreation Policy; Healthy Forests, Healthy Nation at Drumboe Woods, Ballybofey, during a visit by the Board of Coillte to Donegal.

Speaking at the presentation, Mr. McKenna said, "The objective of Coillte's Recreation Policy is to deliver worthwhile recreation experiences to all users, while managing our estate to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits".

Coillte wishes to encourage greater public use of its 1.1 million acres of forest land. Present day forest recreation users are more active and environmentally aware than those a generation ago. New and increasing demands are now being made on the forest for recreation including mountain biking and horse riding.

In 2003, Coillte initiated a review of its policy on recreation to meet the changing needs of modern Irish society. This review was completed in 2005 and a new policy adopted. Mr. McKenna added that Coillte was very pleased to present the Minister with the first copy in Donegal.

The Minister welcomed the policy which encourages greater public use of the forest. "I am delighted that Coillte has chosen to launch its policy in Drumboe Woods. This wood has a very special place in the heart of Donegal people and, given how widely used it is by the public, it is a very appropriate place for Coillte to announce significant enhancements to its recreation policy."

Facilities at Drumboe Woods will be improved over the coming year as part of a project supported by Fáilte Ireland to improve forest recreation facilities. Plans for Drumboe include provision of car parks, upgrading walks, providing a barbeque stand and picnic furniture, upgrading signage and waymarking.

Recreational use of Coillte's forests makes a significant contribution to national well being and social capital. Forests also contribute to Ireland's tourism industry by providing an extensive network of recreational facilities. The process to review Coillte's Recreation Policy, which took almost two years to complete, was undertaken by a Review Group representative of Coillte, the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Countryside Access and Activities Network (Northern Ireland) and the Forestry Department of

UCD. The group consulted hundreds of organisations here in Ireland and received extensive input to the policy. The Group also undertook research abroad to establish best practice in managing forests for recreation purposes.

## Minister launches Forestry and Timber Yearbook 2006 - a valuable source of information for Society members

The ITGA Forestry and Timber Yearbook 2006 was launched by John Browne, TD Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food. The yearbook has a wide readership, ranging from ITGA and Society of Irish Foresters' members to nurseries and timber processors and from forestry companies to state agencies which interact with the forest industry. Forestry and Timber Yearbook represents multi-purpose forestry and features articles and advice on subjects such as state support measures for forestry, woodland taxation and marketing issues. It includes articles on maximising forestry grants and single payment entitlements, a 33-page statistics section along with features on Ireland's great specimen trees.

The mainstay of the publication is the 40-page directory containing close to 200 organisations and companies in the forestry industry. As a result it has become an essential reference for forestry practitioners and stakeholders.

## Securing Ireland's Broadleaf Forests and Conservation of Native Red Squirrels through integrated management of Grey Squirrels

This pilot project, funded by the Forest Service, has been progressing since October 2005. Focused on 10 privately owned woodlands in Co Meath and the Coillte, Donadea Forest Park in Co Kildare, the project is aimed at the development of operational procedures for the protection of broadleaved woodlands, the red squirrel and the eradication of the threat posed by the grey squirrel.

The Project Team is anxious to hear from growers whose woodlands have been badly affected by grey squirrel damage in recent times in any part of Ireland, or any members of the public who may have such information. Please contact:

**Dr Michael Carey: Project Manager.**  
087-238-1060.

Careym1@eircom.net

**Mr Geoff Hamilton: Project Officer.**  
087-245-6450.

hamiltog@gmail.com

## EU Forest Action Plan

It is understood that work is now practically complete on the EU Forest Action Plan. The core actions within the plan were more or less agreed at a meeting of the EU Standing Forestry Committee in mid-March. It is now expected that the Action Plan will be presented for ratification to the EU Commission in June 2006.

## Field Day

SIF, in association with ITGA, held a well attended Field Day in the National Botanic Gardens on 28/04/2006. The morning session involved a visit to the national herbarium located in the Gardens and was led by Dr. Matthew Jebb, who is a splendid erudite communicator. The national herbarium contains a collection of more than half a million dried and documented plant species collected in Ireland and worldwide. Of particular interest was the role and contribution of Dr. Augustine Henry to the plant collection. In the afternoon, we were introduced to the history, past and present, of the National Botanic Gardens by its current director Dr. Peter Wyse Jackson. The introduction was followed by a guided tour of the Gardens and its plant collection of some 20,000 species and cultivars. The tour also included visits to the recently renovated Victorian glasshouses.

## SIF Annual General Meeting

The 64th AGM of the Society was held at the field day to National Botanic Gardens. The Annual Report 2005/2006 can be found on the Society website at [www.societyofirishforesters.ie](http://www.societyofirishforesters.ie) and the minutes of the 63rd AGM and the audited accounts for the year ending 31/12/2005 are available on request from the Society office.

The members of the 2006/2007 SIF Council are:

- President:** Mike Bulfin
- Vice President:** Kevin J. Hutchinson
- Secretary:** Clodagh Duffy
- Treasurer:** Tim O'Regan
- Editor:** Eugene Hendrick
- Business Editor:** Michael O'Brien
- PRO:** Cara Doyle

**Technical Councillors:** Pacelli Breathnach, Kieran Quirke, Bob Dagg, John McLoughlin, Pat Farrington, Michael Keane.

**Associate Councillors:** Derry O'Hegarty, Matt Fogarty.

**Regional Groups Representatives:** Daragh Little (CFRG), Richard Hyde (NIRG), Brian Tobin (UCD), Rob Moeran (WIT) Michael Culkin (GMIT)

### Programme of Events for 2006

Date	Event
16 June	Joint SIF/ ITGA Field Day, Waterford
3/10 Sept	Heritage Week
3 Sept	Forest Walks
7 Sept	Seán Mac Bride Forestry Lecture, UCD By Joe O'Carroll - Sustainable Energy
10/16 Sept	Annual Study Tour - North West Spain
29 Sept	Field Day with IFA & ITGA, Co Laois Landscape Design

**Note:** Many of these events are eligible for the SIF Continuous Professional Development Programme. For more information on CPD please visit the Society website: [www.societyofirishforesters.ie/cpd.htm](http://www.societyofirishforesters.ie/cpd.htm)

## New Members

SIF would like to welcome the following new members:

Technical	Student	Associate
Bernárd Burke	Ross Buchanan	Kevin Black
Dan Creedon	Joe Codd	Gilbert Little
John Farrell	Michael Culkin	Patrick Walsh
Brigid Flynn	Sharron Daly	
Michael Fogarty	Sean Doherty	
Thomas Gerety	Colin Doody	
Lorcan Harrison	Mark Keegan	
Nicholas O'Carroll	Luke MCGurdy	
Cormac O'Flynn	Rob Moeran	
Pierre Prouteau	Andrew Murphy	
	Ellen O'Brien	
	Brian O'Connor	
	Cillian O'Reilly	
	Vincent Upton	

### Meetings Attended by the Technical Director:

- 16/01/2006 FS Joint Liaison Policy Group
- 2-3/02/2006 Nancy, France. EU Forest Action Plan Workshop;
- 20/02/2006 Dublin, FS Audit Protocol Meeting;
- 20/02/2006 Dublin, FS Joint Liaison Policy Group Meeting;
- 27/02/2006 Athlone, FS Training/Education Funding Group;
- 06/03/2006 Dublin, IFCI Steering Group Meeting;
- 09/03/2006 Brussels, UEF Meeting with EU Officials re EU Forest Action Plan;
- 10/03/2006 Tullamore, National Forestry Conference;
- 14/03/2006 Tullamore, Public Consultation re EU Rural Development Regulation.
- 27/03/2006 Dublin, FS Audit Protocol Meeting;
- 29/03/2006 Athlone, FS Training/Education Funding Group;
- 20/04/2006 Portlaoise, FS Forestry inventory Information Day;
- 21/04/2006 Westport, FS Native Woodland Scheme Workshop.

## NOTICE BOARD

### Subscriptions 2006

Thank you to all members who have paid their membership subs for 2006. There are still however, some subscriptions outstanding. Your attention to this matter would be appreciated.

### Recruitment

Existing members who recruit new members before 23rd June will be entered in a raffle for two Croke Park Provincial Final Tickets (Hurling or Football). Details have been posted out. LET'S BUILD A GOOD FORESTRY TEAM GOING FORWARD.