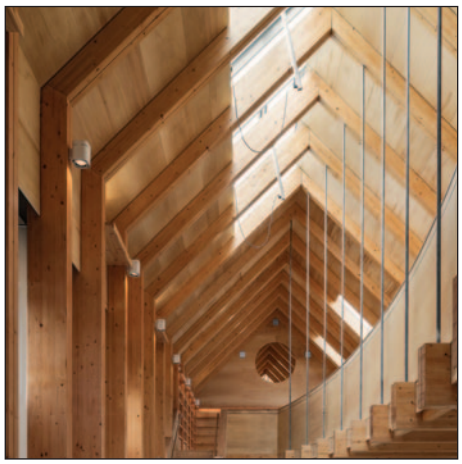
NEWLEAF
Nature's environmental way through
living, enduring & appropriate forests

National Forestry Conference

Meeting the Climate Change Challenge
The Role of Forests and Forest Products





Beyond the Trees, Coillte
Avondale, Rathdrum, Co.Wicklow

6 November 2026

National Forestry Conference

MEETING THE CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGE
THE ROLE OF FORESTS AND FOREST PRODUCTS

AGENDA*

09.30 Conference opening address
Niall Collins TD, Minister of State

SESSION 1

10.00 A vision and prospectus for forests in the context of climate change
Fergal Mulloy

10.25 The role of forestry in climate change mitigation
Alex White SC

10.50 EU Engagement: Lessons from Finland
Dr Cormac O Carroll

11.15 Coffee/tea break

11.50 Irelands Forest Strategy – a renewed vision, supporting EU and International policy commitments
Fergus Moore

12:15 Addressing climate change prerogatives in a commercial forest enterprise
Liam Malone

12.40 Open forum

13.00 Lunch break to reassemble at 14.00

SESSION 2

14.00 Adapting to climate change: species, provenances and mixed forests
Dr Niall Farrelly

14.25 Forests for Wood: unlocking the potential of Irish timber for a low-carbon future
Des O'Toole

14.50 Open forum

15.15 Closing address by the President of the Society of Irish Foresters
Eugene Griffin

15.30 Close of conference

*Tree planting ceremony planned during the morning session

NEWLEAF
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National Forestry Conference

Meeting the Climate Change Challenge
The Role of Forests and Forest Products

A collaboration between the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the Society of Irish Foresters and NEWLEAF to mark Ireland's EU Presidency

Beyond the Trees
Coillte, Avondale, Rathdrum, Co.Wicklow

6 November 2026

Acknowledgements

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November 2026

An Roinn Talmhaíochta, Bia agus Mara
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

NEWLEAF

Society of Irish Foresters

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Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

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NEWLEAF – a proposal for implementation during Ireland's EU Presidency

Introduction

This proposal emphasises three points:

1. The contribution that Europe's forests and forest products are projected to make towards a climate neutral Europe by 2050, in line with the European Green Deal. It also outlines the need to consider forest practice modifications that can reduce the risks to existing forests posed by climate change.
2. It complements Ireland's *Climate Action Plan* and coincides with the Irish Presidency of the European Union (July– December 2026).
3. The opportunity for Ireland to present a forest-based initiative at European level during an Irish Presidency is limited to once every 13 years or so.

Rationale and background information

Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2025 provides a roadmap to halve Ireland's emissions by 2030 and to achieve climate-neutrality by 2050. In addition, Ireland's national plan supports the objectives of the *European Green Deal* for a climate neutral Europe.

The primary imperative in tackling climate change is by rapid and sustained reductions in the principal greenhouse gases: carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. Forests can play an important additional role in driving climate ambition and are part of the EU's suite of measures to stabilise and ultimately reduce greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere in line with the European Green Deal.

At the same time, forests are being increasingly impacted by climate change, albeit at different scales, across Europe. Recent science[1] points to projected large-scale increases in forest disturbance regimes, caused by climate change, over the coming decades in Europe. These are likely to have important implications for ecosystem services provided by forests, including climate change mitigation and wood production. In Ireland, climate change projections are also predicting seasonal and annual changes in rainfall and increases in temperature. Adapting to changing climates will involve carefully considered changes to forestry practice both in forest composition and management.

At present forests cover approximately 39% of Europe's land area. Under the *European Green Deal*, the EU has set a target to increase its net carbon sink in the Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry (LULUCF) sector to 310 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per annum by 2030. A concerted effort through climate focussed forest management and forest expansion in member states such as Ireland is needed to realise this ambition. In this context there remains considerable scope to expand Ireland's current 11% forest cover to mid-century and beyond, in order to move towards a level that will sustain carbon storage and uptake, as well as other ecosystem services including wood production, biodiversity and flood attenuation.

In summary therefore this proposal focuses on the ability of forests to ameliorate climate change while recognising the variation that exists between Member States. It places an emphasis on the role of forests in storing carbon and as a provider of renewable wood products in the context of mitigating climate change, with a need for adaptive silviculture and forest management. The acronym NEWLEAF (Nature's environmental way through living, enduring & appropriate forests) reflects this need[2].

[1]*Grunig M. et al. 2026. Climate change will increase forest disturbances in Europe throughout the 21st century. Science: 391: No. 6789.*

[2]*NEWLEAF, an ad hoc committee formed in 2025, initiated the proposal to coincide with the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union It comprises stakeholders with expertise in forestry, wood design, economics, climate change and forest research.*

The proposal

1. That during the Irish Presidency of the EU, a stand-alone statement would be issued by Ireland outlining the importance of forests and forest products in contributing to ambitious climate goals to mid-century and beyond, and in the context of considering approaches to forest management practices that will help to adapt the forest resource to future climates.

2. That a tree planting event featuring EU leaders be held at a suitable venue using native Irish sessile oak to mark the importance of forests for Europe. A public information initiative would accompany the tree planting.

3. That a separate forestry event be held during the Irish Presidency by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine in collaboration with the Society of Irish Foresters, with an emphasis on the role of forests and forest products in contributing to climate ambition. The event to include up to six speakers including from DAFM, and academia in Ireland and abroad

Summary of importance and relevance for the Irish EU Presidency

The initiators of this proposal are unaware of a previous forest-related initiative during previous Irish Presidencies. This proposal would provide a timely focus on an increasingly urgent issue of meeting the EU climate change ambitions and give public expression to Ireland's climate action plan. A ceremonial planting of trees by the Heads of EU member countries during their autumn meeting in Ireland would provide added emphasis on this issue. The planting of a grove of 27 sessile oak – Ireland's national tree, is suggested.

At the national level the forests and climate change event would focus attention on the role of forests and forest products in the mitigation of climate change.

NEWLEAF committee

Fergal Mulloy, Chairperson
Dr Eugene Hendrick
Dr Brendan Kearney
Diarmuid McAree
Donal Magner
Duncan Stewart

Foreword



Niall Collins TD
Minister of State
With responsibility for forestry
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

When our State was founded a little over a century ago, forest cover stood at just 1.4 percent of our land area. Yet, our most recent National Forest Inventory puts it at 11.6 percent, the highest level in more than 350 years. This century-long recovery of Ireland's forest cover highlights the critical role played by strategic cooperation and professional advocacy. Organisations such as the Society of Irish Foresters have been instrumental in driving technical expertise, publishing research, and advancing the practice of sustainable forestry.

Ireland's Forest Strategy to 2030, provides a roadmap to put in place strong foundations for multifunctional forests that deliver for climate, nature, wood, people, and economic and rural development. The Government have continued its commitment to forest establishment and management by funding the €1.3bn Forestry Programme 2023-2027. This Forestry Programme implements our shared Forest Strategy in the immediate to short-term. It provides unprecedented incentives to encourage the planting of trees that can provide a valuable addition to diversify farm income and help to meet national climate and biodiversity objectives.

Sustainably managed forests make a significant contribution to the rural economy and contribute to Ireland's climate targets by removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through sequestration and storage in harvested wood products.The national forest estate is an important carbon reservoir, amounting to approximately 323 million tonnes of carbon. More than half of the carbon in harvested timber is stored in wood products and when these are used in long-lived products, the carbon can be captured for decades. These products have a vital role to play in reducing our reliance on carbon intensive materials, supporting climate mitigation and helping us to achieve net-zero objectives. Initiatives such as the timber in construction steering group have identified areas where this timber can be further used in construction.

Like all forests across Europe, Ireland's forestry sector faces growing climate challenges, such as the severe storms like those experienced in 2025. As climate change impacts growing conditions, Irish forests and foresters must adapt to ensure our forests remain resilient. Future research will help to fill the knowledge gaps around mitigation measures and to find optimal solutions to address these challenges.

The Society of Irish Foresters will play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable forestry practices, and their expertise is essential for building resilient forests future-proof the outputs of goods and services from Irish forests.

Niall Collins TD



National Forestry Conference 2026
SESSION 1
Chaired by: Professor Áine Ni Dhubhain
Director of the Forestry Undergraduate Programme, UCD
Chair of the COFORD Council

The production of wood, through photosynthesis is among the ultimate environmentally friendly products...Without radical change in implementation, Ireland will fail to meet both the long-standing target of 8,000 ha of new forests per year and the 18% national forest cover by mid-century...Finland talks to the EU about forestry with one voice while Ireland engages with conflicting voices. Irish forestry stakeholders need to go to Europe with a coordinated message so we need a strong EU Engagement Working Group, with main focus on the Economic Sustainability of Irish forestry... The implementation of Irelands Forest Strategy will require a collaborative approach and will require all stakeholders working together. Irelands Foresty Programme will continue to provide financial supports to implement many actions in our Strategy and into the future...Our forests can and must continue to play their unique role in mitigating the effects of climate change



Fergal Mulloy

Chair, NEWLEAF,
Society of Irish Foresters

A VISION AND PROSPECTUS FOR FORESTS IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change has become one of the main concerns facing today's citizens. That the Irish government has a commitment to reducing carbon emissions by 51% by 2030 and climate neutrality by 2050 has relevance in the context of the current Irish Presidency.

Since Ireland joined the European Economic Community in 1973, forests have never been on the agenda on the meetings of an Irish Presidency. Thus the combination of the Irish Presidency, Ireland's forests and the forecasted calamity for European forests, is the raison d'etre for this conference.

A wake up call for the forest sector is the publication in Nature last March when forty-three forest scientists throughout Europe undertook a remote sensing study of 189 million hectares of Europe. They forecasted that up to the end of this century forest fires would increase by 183 %, bark beetle attacks by 83% and wind blow by 12%.

Since the article's publication, Europe has experienced its hottest summer ever recorded when a further 692,419 hectares have been devastated by fire. These factors will inevitably influence the price of wood at the very time when wood has become an environmental alternative for high carbon emission building materials.

With the expectation of reduced wood availability, Ireland's afforestation programme has dipped in recent years. In 2023 and 2024 afforestation it was at it's lowest since the 1920s. This will undoubtedly reduce Irish wood supplies in the decades ahead at the very time when wood is forecasted to play a larger part in alleviating the housing crisis.

The production of wood, through photosynthesis is among the ultimate environmentally friendly products.

Fergal Mulloy



Alex White

Chair of Climate Change Advisory Council (CCAC).

THE ROLE OF FORESTRY IN CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

In its Annual Review 2026, the Climate Change Advisory Council made a number of observations and recommendations regarding the forest sector.

Forests are essential for people's lives, homes and livelihoods and have a crucial role to play in tackling the biodiversity and climate crisis. Going forward, the challenge to the forest sector is the balance the diverse economic, social and environmental services demanded of all lands.

The Council has repeatedly observed that the Forestry Programme is not achieving afforestation goals. Without radical change in implementation, Ireland will fail to meet both the long-standing target of 8,000 ha of new forests per year and the 18% national forest cover by mid-century.

The Council has recommended that the next Forestry Programme, due in 2028, address these issues. This will require setting specific and introducing the necessary policy flexibilities to support increased participation by landowners and farmers. Informed by insights from behavioural analysis, which identifies key non-economic barriers to participation.

The Government should integrate the evidence and findings of the Land Use Review Phase 2 into a coherent national land use framework consistent with the National Climate Objective. This framework is needed to address growing and diverse demand for resources and ecosystem services, delivered through sustainable land use management in all regions across the country, while sensitive to local concerns.

The Council has emphasised that current constraints on afforestation on deep peat should remain unchanged and be rigorously enforced, given the strong evidence that afforestation on deep peat leads to significant carbon losses over time. Furthermore, the Council fully supports the recommendations of the Independent Advisory Committee on Nature Restoration that the Government support forest owners in transitioning unproductive plantation forests on deep peat. Planning and regulatory barriers should be addressed to ensure that, where forest removal is necessary, action to avoid further carbon loss, restore appropriate habitat, and contribute to enhanced biodiversity can be taken. Specifically, this would involve provision for exemption to the replanting obligation when appropriate.

Alex White



Dr Cormac O Carroll

Co-Founder, Chair and Senior Partner of Forest Sector Advisors and Principal, Cormac O Carroll Ltd.

EU ENGAGEMENT: LESSONS FROM FINLAND

Wood production from Irish forests will continue to increase over the next decade, supporting a growing and successful timber sector. But Ireland remains among the least forested countries in the EU and the ongoing low rate of afforestation risks compromising Ireland's Climate Action Plan as well as our rural economy and forest-based industries.

Some forestry stakeholders consider elements of EU legislation as a barrier to achieving our national forestry targets. Using Finland as case study for best practice forest sector advocacy, Dr O Carroll looks at how Ireland can engage more effectively with the EU to ensure that Ireland's forests and forest forest product industries are able to contribute their full potential to Ireland's Climate Action Plan.

The presentation analyses the critical success factors behind Finland's powerful ecosystem for commercial forestry advocacy and concludes with seven lessons and one key recommendation.

The following are a number of points Dr O Carroll makes in a wide-ranging presentation:

Finland talks to the EU about forestry with one voice while Ireland engages with conflicting voices.

Irish forestry stakeholders need to go to Europe with a coordinated message so we need a strong EU Engagement Working Group, with main focus on the Economic Sustainability of Irish forestry.

Effective EU advocacy begins at home and forest sector advocacy cannot succeed without political and government support which depends on the public having a positive perspective on commercial forestry.

The critical role of commercial coniferous forestry in Ireland's Climate Action Plan should be better communicated and understood.

The reality is that production forestry can and does finance non-commercial, biodiverse, native woodlands and should be a core element of our nature restoration plan.

Dr Cormac O Carroll

Dr O Carroll's paper draws heavily on his research for a study on EU Engagement, commissioned by the Irish Timber Growers Association and funded, under the 2025/2026 Open Call for Forestry Promotion Projects, by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.



Fergus Moore

Head of Forest Sector Development Division Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine

IRELANDS FOREST STRATEGY – A RENEWED VISION, SUPPORTING EU AND INTERNATIONAL POLICY COMMITMENTS

Irelands forest resource and sector is the result of the collective work of many generations of families over the last 100 years. Irelands forest cover today is nearly 12% of the land area, and this resource continues to expand as each decade brings new forests to our landscape. Government has a strong track record of supporting the forest sector and there have been several plans and strategies that have assisted the development of the sector over the last century.

Irelands new Forest Strategy builds on previous strategies and supports our European Union and International commitments.The Strategy has five value areas which focuses on the importance of forests for climate, nature, wood, people and economic development. These value areas align with our EU Forest Strategy and International commitments. One such international commitment is the United Nations Paris Climate Change agreement which recognises the important role of forests.The UN has also dedicated the next decade as the decade for Afforestation and Reforestation (2027-2036) which provides a strong mandate for increased action across member countries.

The implementation of Irelands Forest Strategy will require a collaborative approach and will require all stakeholders working together. Irelands Foresty Programme will continue to provide financial supports to implement many actions in our Strategy and into the future. Ireland has achieved a lot in the last one hundred years.

The next phase of the journey is to realise the full potential of our existing forests, build more in wood and to continually expand our forest area by planting a wide diversity of productive and native forests. Working together we can realise the vision, and we can make the next 100 years the story of forests that are more diverse and resilient in a changing climate while supporting a thriving forest sector.

Fergus Moore



Liam Malone

Environmental, Social & Governance Director, Coillte

ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE PREROGATIVES IN A COMMERCIAL FOREST ENTERPRISE

Coillte manage Ireland's State forests to balance and deliver multiple benefits for climate, nature, wood and people. Forests play a vital role in climate change mitigation and can reduce its impacts on society and the environment. However, forests themselves need to be resilient to the changing climate to continue to provide these important benefits.

This presentation explores Coillte's Forests for Climate strategy in two key areas:

1. the role of its forests and lands in helping to mitigate the effects of climate change;
   and
2. how Coillte is building resilience to protect its estate from those same impacts.

The presentation will examine how Coillte is managing its forests and lands, and the products it supplies, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by sinking, storing and substituting carbon dioxide.

With regard to climate adaptation, delegates will be introduced to the Resilience Concept and see how Coillte has applied a Vulnerability Matrix to systematically identify and quantify the threats posed by climate change and to prioritise our responses.

Our forests can and must continue to play their unique role in mitigating the effects of climate change; building resilience into our forests is essential to allow them to carry out that vital task.

Liam Malone



National Forestry Conference 2026
SESSION 2
Chaired by: Duncan Stewart
Committee member of NEWLEAF
Environmental architect and broadcaster

A more regional approach to tree species selection will be required to adapt forests to climate change. In eastern and southeastern Ireland, where drought may become more of a concern, species and provenances such as Douglas fir, sessile oak, Corsican pine, Monterey pine and Scots pine may be appropriate on suitable sites. In other regions, Norway spruce, Sitka spruce, western hemlock and pedunculate oak will continue to perform well. Species performance is gained through the re-evaluation of historical forest plots and experimental trials; these data provide valuable evidence of adaptation to Irish conditions...As Ireland faces the dual challenge of delivering housing and infrastructure while meeting ambitious climate targets, sustainably produced timber is emerging as a critical solution. The presentation Forests for Wood explores Coillte's strategy and the growing role of Irish timber in supporting a more sustainable, resilient and circular economy.





Niall Farrelly

Senior Research Officer, Forestry Development Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Teagasc.

ADAPTING TO CLIMATE CHANGE – SPECIES, PROVENANCES AND MIXED FORESTS

Climate change is creating new challenges for Irish forestry, with implications for tree species selection, forest productivity and long-term resilience. Projections indicate increased seasonal temperatures promoting a longer growing season, coupled with regional variability in rainfall, creating risks of drought and increased soil waterlogging. The FitForest and AdaptForRes projects investigate opportunities to improve the adaptation, productivity and resilience of Irish forests through appropriate species and provenance selection and the use of mixed forests.

A more regional approach to tree species selection will be required to adapt forests to climate change. In eastern and southeastern Ireland, where drought may become more of a concern, species and provenances such as Douglas fir, sessile oak, Corsican pine, Monterey pine and Scots pine may be appropriate on suitable sites. In other regions, Norway spruce, Sitka spruce, western hemlock and pedunculate oak will continue to perform well.

Species performance is gained through the re-evaluation of historical forest plots and experimental trials; these data provide valuable evidence of adaptation to Irish conditions. Provenance trials demonstrate the importance of identifying suitable seed origins, with growth performance informing selection. The use of climate matching can identify species and provenances from climates that resemble the projected future Irish climates for testing, followed up by formal testing of performance and adaptation under trial conditions.

For broadleaves such as oak, special care should be given to provenance selection, given their relatively recent arrival in Ireland after the last glaciation and knowledge about phenotype plasticity can assist the species to adapt in situ. Species which have seen limited use, and those which show promise are likely to become more suitable for long term use (e.g. Japanese red cedar). The use of alternative silvicultural systems will be a key component to facilitate increased diversity in species and management which will facilitate adapting our forests to climate change and improving resilience.

Niall Farrelly

FitForest and AdaptForRes are funded by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine under grant awards 2019RI511 and 2021RI511

A more regional approach to tree species selection will be required to adapt forests to climate change. In eastern and southeastern Ireland, where drought may become more of a concern, species and provenances such as Douglas fir (opposite), sessile oak, Corsican pine, Monterey pine and Scots pine may be appropriate on suitable sites.



Des O'Toole

Head of Timber Marketing and Promotion, Coillte Forest

FORESTS FOR WOOD: UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF IRISH TIMBER FOR A LOW-CARBON FUTURE

As Ireland faces the dual challenge of delivering housing and infrastructure while meeting ambitious climate targets, sustainably produced timber is emerging as a critical solution. This presentation explores Coillte's Forests for Wood strategy and the growing role of Irish timber in supporting a more sustainable, resilient and circular economy.

The presentation will examine how timber can contribute to the decarbonisation of the built environment by reducing embodied carbon, storing biogenic carbon and providing a renewable alternative to more carbon-intensive construction materials. It will highlight the increasing adoption of modern timber construction systems, including timber frame, cross-laminated timber (CLT) and other mass-engineered timber products, and their potential to support faster, more efficient housing delivery through modern methods of construction.

Delegates will gain insights into the capabilities of the domestic forest products sector and the economic opportunities arising from greater use of homegrown timber. The presentation will also showcase key demonstrator projects, policy developments and education initiatives designed to build confidence in Irish timber and accelerate market adoption.

By connecting forestry, manufacturing and construction, Ireland has a unique opportunity to create greater value from its forests while supporting climate action, rural development and housing delivery.

This presentation will outline the evidence, innovation and collaboration needed to realise that opportunity, and position timber as a cornerstone of Ireland's future built environment and bioeconomy.

Des O'Toole

Society of Irish Foresters

The Society of Irish Foresters

The Society of Irish Foresters is an all-island organisation which was founded in September 1942. Its main aims are to spread knowledge of forestry and to improve professional standards in the Irish forestry industry. To that end the Society publishes an annual scientific journal, organises field days, public lectures, conferences, international study tours and produces policy position papers on forest policy, research and education.

The Society is committed to sustainable development of the Irish forestry industry especially in the continued development of rural areas. We are dedicated to the provision of renewable resources, the protection of local and global environment, the integrity of global carbon and hydrological cycles and the conservation of biological diversity.

Further information

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