



Research Paper 06/09

13 February 2009

FORESTRY IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

This paper considers the management of forestry resources in the Republic of Ireland. It focuses on the role of Coillte Teoranta which is responsible for the management of over 445, 000 hectares of afforested land. It considers the wide range of responsibilities and management functions necessary to effectively and sustainably manage a forest estate.

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SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- Over 70% of the forests in the Republic of Ireland are owned by Coillte Teoranta, a private limited company established by the Irish government, and managed on a commercial basis.
- Coillte's profits in 2007 were €40.1 million.
- The Coillte estate is comprised of over 445, 000 hectares of afforested land.
- The forestry estate is divided into 13 Forest Management Districts comprised of 317 Forest Management Units.
- The Management of the forests is conducted in accordance with the principle of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM).
- Coillte forests are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council Scheme.
- There are five distinct business sections within Coillte:
 - Forestry
 - Panel Products
 - Land Development
 - Training
 - Wood Products
- Coillte also provides recreational amenity through its management of 11 forest parks and the provision of recreational sites. There is a specific recreational policy for each of the 13 management districts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Axis 1 of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Plan (NIRDP) relates to improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector. In respect of forestry this primarily relates to the industrial production, processing and marketing of forestry products.

In addition, Axis 2 of the NIRDP (Improving the Environment and the Countryside) also addresses forestry issues by providing support under Measures 2.3 (First Afforestation (forest expansion)) and 2.4 (Forest Expansion).

Broadly speaking, forestry issues could also be addressed under Axis 3 (The quality of life in rural areas and the diversification of the rural economy) by, for example, the Encouragement of Tourism Activities (Measure 3). The uses of the forestry resource are therefore potentially very diverse.

In 1989 the role of Coillte Teoranta (Irish Forestry Board, usually known as Coillte), in the Republic of Ireland, was simply to manage forests. But this has subsequently expanded into a much more diverse operation though, at its core, Coillte still primarily manages forests to underpin its wood production business. However, in accordance with the principles of sustainable forestry management Coillte must also address issues such as the recreational use of its forests and its obligations in respect of nature conservation and biodiversity. This paper aims to describe how Coillte addresses the wide range of management responsibilities in respect of its estate.

2. THE FORESTRY ESTATE IN THE ROI

Over 70% of the forests in the Republic of Ireland are owned by Coillte. The Irish government established Coillte in 1989 as a private limited company to manage state-owned forests on a commercial basis.

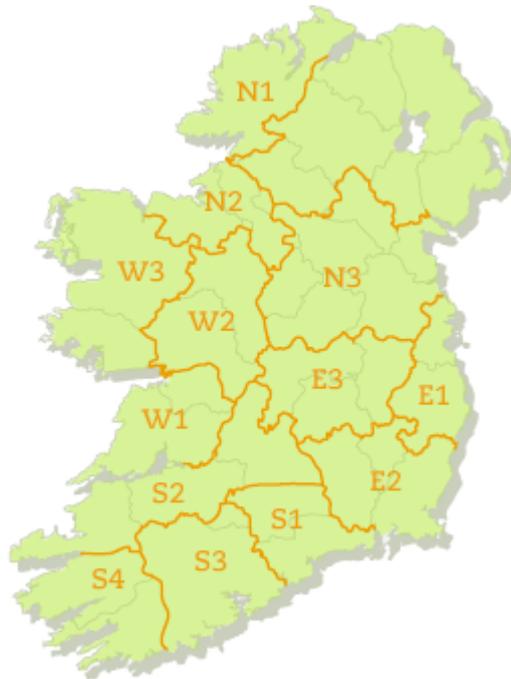
Between 1989 and 2007¹:

- Coillte's estate has increased from 376,000ha to 445,421 ha. (445,315 ha are forested).
- The value of net assets has increased from €730 million to €1,433 million.
- Profits have increased from a loss of €438K to profits of €40.1 million (2007).
- Turnover has grown from €38 million to €318 million (2007).
- Roundwood sales have grown from 1.5 million cubic metres to 2.6 million cubic metres.
- The percentage of revenue derived from products and services other than roundwood sales has increased from 9% to 66.5%.

3. MANAGEMENT POLICY

The forestry estate is divided into 317 Forest Management Units (FMUs) which are combined into 13 forest management districts. A district strategic plan (DSP) has been developed for each of the districts. These plans set out the long term vision for the management of these forests and address a wide range of economic, social and environmental issues. In addition, the forests have a management plan which is approved for five years.

Fig 1 Map showing the 13 forest management districts



Code	Name of District Strategic Plan (DSP)
E1	Dublin/Wicklow
E2	Southeast counties
E3	Midlands
S1	South Tipperary/Waterford
S2	Lower Shannon
S3	Cork
S4	Southwest Peninsulas
W1	Clare/South Galway
W2	East Galway/Roscommon
W3	Connemara/Mayo
N1	Donegal
N2	Sligo/Leitrim
N3	Lakelands

Management of the forests is conducted in accordance with the principle of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). Following a long process of discussion and Ministerial Conferences throughout the 1990s a number of criteria and indicators were developed and agreed to underpin Sustainable Forest Management (SFM). The 6 criteria are referred to as the Helsinki Criteria. The Helsinki Process defines SFM as *“the stewardship and use of forests and forest land in a way and at a rate that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic and social functions, at local, national and global levels and does not cause damage to other ecosystems”*².

There are 20 indicators that can be found on the [Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe](#). These can be tailored to regional or local needs. Coillte has adopted the 6 principles and developed 35 associated indicators for SFM. The Helsinki criteria and the number of indicators relating to each criterion that have been developed by Coillte are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

	Helsinki Criteria	No. of Coillte Indicators
1	Maintenance and appropriate enhancement of forest resources and their contribution to global carbon cycles	5
2	Maintenance of forest ecosystem health and vitality	7
3	Maintenance and encouragement of productive functions of forests (wood and non-wood)	5
4	Maintenance, conservation and appropriate enhancement of biological diversity in forest ecosystems	5
5	Maintenance and appropriate enhancement of protective functions in forest management (notably soil and water)	3
6	Maintenance of other socioeconomic and cultural functions and conditions	10

The Helsinki criteria and indicators are regarded as useful tools for demonstrating progress towards SFM but it is *not* an independent process for verifying that timber is being produced from sustainably managed forests. To achieve this Coillte forests are certified to the [Forest Stewardship Council](#) (FSC) scheme. This certificate is issued for five years. In comparison to the Helsinki requirements the FSC International Standard requires Coillte to adhere to **10** principles (Table 2) and **56** criteria that describe how forests are to be managed if economic, social and environmental sustainability are to be achieved.

Table 2

Principle Number	Title	Description
1.	Compliance with laws and FSC Principles	Forest Management shall respect all applicable laws of the country in which they occur, and international treaties and agreements to which the country is a signatory, and comply with all FSC Principles and Criteria
2.	Tenure and use rights and responsibilities	Long-term tenure and use rights to the land and forest resources shall be clearly defined, documented and legally established
3.	Indigenous peoples rights	The legal and customary rights of indigenous peoples to own, use and manage their lands, territories, and resources shall be recognized and respected.
4.	Community relations and workers rights	Forest management operations shall maintain or enhance the long-term social and economic well-being of forest workers and local communities
5.	Benefits from the forest	Forest management operations shall encourage the efficient use of the forest's multiple products and services to ensure economic viability and a wide range of environmental and social benefits
6.	Environmental impact	Forest management shall conserve biological diversity and its associated values, water resources, soils, and unique and fragile ecosystems and landscapes, and, by so doing, maintain the ecological functions and the integrity of the forest
7.	Management plan	A management plan, appropriate to the scale and intensity of the operations, shall be written, implemented, and kept up to date. The long term objectives of management, and the means of achieving them, shall be clearly stated
8.	Monitoring and assessment	Monitoring shall be conducted, appropriate to the scale and intensity of forest management, to assess the condition of the forest, yields of forest products, management activities and their social and environmental impacts
9.	Maintenance of high conservation value forests	Management activities in high value conservation forests shall maintain or enhance the attributes which define such forests. Decisions regarding high conservation value forests shall always be considered in the context of a precautionary approach
10.	Plantations	Plantations shall be managed in accordance with Principles and Criteria 1-9. While plantations can provide an array of social and economic benefits, and can contribute to satisfying the world's needs for forest products, they should complement the management of, reduce pressures on, and promote the restoration and conservation of natural forests

Coillte has also stated that in practicing SFM it will³:

- Develop its forests in a way that is both environmentally sensitive, socially beneficial and economically sustainable;
- Choose to independently verify that SFM is being practiced in its forests through the Forest Certification Process;
- Undertake to work, with our stakeholders, towards full compliance with Irish Forestry standards;
- Comply with applicable legal requirements and the FSC's International Principles and Criteria as embodied in the FSC Irish Forestry Standard;
- Strive to achieve full compliance with the Standard at the earliest possible date with the resources available;
- Abide by the Forest Service Code of Best Forest Practice and related guidelines on Archaeology, Fisheries, Landscape, Biodiversity among others; and
- Strive for continuous improvement of forestry practices.

4. COILLTE BUSINESSES

Coillte divides its operations into five areas:

- Forestry
- Panel Products
- Land Development
- Training
- Wood Products

4.1 FORESTRY

There are four business divisions within Forestry:

4.1.2 COILLTE FARM FORESTRY SERVICES

This is essentially a consultancy-based service that offers assistance to farmers who are considering afforesting their land and seeking management input e.g. possibly leading to Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) accreditation.

4.1.3 LOG SALES/HARVESTING/TIMBER PRODUCTION

Approximately, 2.6 million m³ of Rounwood per annum is sold per annum. Of this, in 2007, 1.7 million m³ was sold to sawmill customers with the remaining volume sold to Boardmills such as Coillte's own mills, SmartPly and Medite Europe Ltd.

Approximately 1.5 million m³ was harvested in 2007. This is linked to the volume of timber production. Production of timber is a complex process based on the *sustainable* yield of timber i.e. that the volume of timber harvested in one year does not exceed the amount by which the volume of timber increases in one year. It also involves identifying forests that have reached their optimum production potential as

well as marketing conditions to ensure that the price of the timber covers the cost of harvesting.

4.1.4 PLANT SALES

Plant sales are conducted through Coillte [nurseries](#) which is a division of Coillte Teoranta.

4.1.5 LABORATORY SERVICES

[Coillte Laboratory Services](#) (CLS) provides a laboratory and advisory service to Coillte and the private forestry sector. In particular it deals with forest soil and nutrition problems.

4.2 PANEL PRODUCTS

SmartPly is a fully owned subsidiary of Coillte. It specialises in the production of Oriented Strand Board (OSB) which is marketed as an “*environmentally-friendly timber based solution for structural and non-structural building applications*”. Coillte expanded this operation in 2007 by the acquisition of Medite Europe limited Medium Density Fibreboard (MDF) to establish Coillte Panel Products division.

4.3 LAND DEVELOPMENT

Coillte owns an estate of just over 445, 000 hectares which is managed in accordance with the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). It is Coillte’s practice to sell, lease or develop areas of non-strategic land for purpose other than forestry e.g. housing.

4.4 TRAINING

Coillte Training Services provides safety training in a range of different areas.

4.5 WOOD PRODUCTS

[Coillte Wood Products](#) is a division of Coillte which provides hard and soft wood products to Irish industry.

5. RECREATION POLICY

Coillte has also developed a recreation policy for its forests⁴. With over 445, 000 ha of forests, open land, lakes and roads Coillte can provide a recreation resource to the people of and visitors to Ireland: These include:

- Forest parks
- Forest car parks
- Camping and caravan sites
- Picnic sites
- Trailheads
- National Long Distance Routes
- Boat launching and fishing sites

Coillte manages eleven forest parks nationwide most of which provide facilities such as toilets, parking, playgrounds for children, and a shop or restaurant. There are also recreation sites, and the number of these varies from county to county. For example, there are 5 in Co. Roscommon and 28 in Co. Cork.

Fundamentally the challenge is to balance the management of forests in a commercial manner with due regard to amenity. The main points of the recreation policy are⁵:

- Coillte recognises that forests provide an excellent landscape for a wide range of recreational activities and as the country's largest land owner, has a special place in the provision of access to recreation. As such Coillte seeks to provide low-impact non-motorised recreation to the general public and other specialist activities under special permit.
- The company will continue to provide recreation that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.
- Coillte welcomes all visitors to the forest and expects them to respect the environmental code for users.
- While recognising its role in the rural community, Coillte does not have a primary or lead role in the provision of tourism facilities in its forests, but will facilitate such developments within partnership arrangements.
- Coillte sees its primary recreation objective as one of delivering maximum benefit to the most users.

Specific recreation policies for each of the 13 management districts can be viewed via the links to the district strategic plans in section 3.

6. ENVIRONMENT

Coillte developed a nature conservation strategy in 1999 not only in order to comply with its policy of sustainable forestry management and FSC guidelines but also to address the requirements of the EU Habitats and Birds Directive and National policies in relation to biodiversity and nature conservation in Ireland. Identification of habitats and species of key conservation value was a major component of this strategy. In respect of habitat conservation for example Coillte commissioned ecological surveys of its entire estate between 2001 and 2005. The aim was to identify a minimum of 15% of each forest management unit to be managed with nature conservation as the primary management objective. Management plans are being developed for the biodiversity areas identified.

Details of the strategy relating to specific areas can be found in the [forest management plans](#) 2006-2010.

In addition, Coillte has carried out other work such as an inventory of deadwood, an important medium for flora and fauna, throughout its estate as well as a Woodland History Survey to quantify and inventory Ireland's historical woodland sites. Other associated environmental work includes EU-sponsored LIFE-Nature Projects such as bog restoration and the restoration and conservation of over 550 hectares of priority native woodland habitats.

7. COMMUNITY

Coillte provides benefit to the economy, particularly the rural economy, directly and indirectly. A 2003 [report](#) on the socio-economic contribution of forests was recently completed by Dr. Peter Bacon, of Peter Bacon and Associates, Economic Consultants. This independent report states that for every one euro spent by the State on forestry, the economy will get a return of €1.59. Other key benefits of forestry include:

- Sustained employment in rural areas.
- Creation of a critical mass of raw material supply, which will underpin a sustainable industry.
- Significant contribution to the attainment of Ireland's greenhouse gas emission targets through the creation of a carbon sink.
- Creation of added value opportunities, particularly in rural areas. The current value of the forest industry is €500 million, and
- Increasing the leisure and recreational value of the country.

Coillte has also engaged in a number of community partnership projects, for example, to create new amenity areas close to population centres. These allow local people to have a direct input to the management of forests in their local area. Indeed, Coillte engages in consultation exercises with stakeholders to inform forest management policies. District Strategic Plans are the vehicle for consultation and these were revised and consulted on in 2006.

Related to Coillte's impact on the community is its approach to corporate social responsibility. Tangible examples of this include over 100 partnership programmes with various organisations, Schools Business Partnerships (working with students on career development) and contributing to the programme Management Excellence for School Principals, which involves business leaders sharing their experience and expertise with principals.

8. CONCLUSION

Coillte is first and foremost a business. Since it was established in 1989 it has diversified and expanded to become a company that owns over 7% of the land cover in Ireland, employing 1200 people and generating profits of €40.1m in 2007.

This is reiterated in the 2007 Chairman' Statement⁶ which highlights the company's focus for the next 5 years:

- Expand forestry business
- Realise greater commercial potential from land assets
- Strengthen market position in wood panels
- Invest in renewable energy

It is a multi-faceted operation that ranges from the provision of public services (recreational amenities) to production of timber products for the construction industry, all underpinned by management policies founded in Sustainable Forest Management principles.

¹ http://www.coillte.ie/about_coillte/coillte_s_history/

² Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe 1993

³ http://www.coillte.ie/forests/sustainable_forest_management_and_certification/certification_introduction/Recreation_Policy

⁴ www.coillte.ie/recreation/introduction_to_coillte_outdoors/

⁵ [Chairman's Statement. Coillte Annual Report and Accounts 2007](#)