

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Recently there have been a series of newspaper articles complaining about the afforestation of peatland areas. Reasons given are typically confused. Occasionally economics are mentioned. Usually the two major objections are on the grounds of conservation and aesthetic values. The conservation arguments, dubious though they are, at least lack the total subjectivity of the aesthetic appeals.

The real motivation of the objectors is a prejudice against plantation forestry based on a hazy notion that artificial peat wastelands are somehow more 'natural' than plantations. Thus, incredibly, scenery is introduced as an argument for keeping huge featureless, unappealing tracts of bog free from the undoubted benefits of forestry. While the idea that blanket bog looks better than wooded countryside may seem absurd to most of us, we, as foresters, should beware lest such fashionable ideas interfere with the afforestation programme. The danger of this is illustrated by statements from influential people that planting of western blanket peats be discontinued, not for economic, but for aesthetic reasons.

It is time for those of us, who like coniferous woodlands, to speak up. Last night I asked five people whether or not they thought that, in general, conifer plantations improve the landscape. Four of them thought they did.

I suggest that this survey of mine is a more objective analysis of the aesthetic aspects of afforestation than was ever carried out by the objectors.

Yours sincerely,

B. Fitzsimons,

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Co. Wicklow.

(Readers' comments please: Editor)