

Letters to the Editor

Ballynakillew,
Ballinrobe,
Co. Mayo.

The Editor, *Irish Forestry*

Re. Early forestry policy in Ireland

Sir,

A book dealer in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A. recently offered an item entitled Forest Lands and Timber Supply in the Irish Free State. This turned out to be a 10-page extract from the Proceedings of the First International Congress on Sylviculture, held in Rome from 29 April to 5 May 1926, the author being stated as The Department of Agriculture, Dublin.

It states that the area of woods and plantations in 1918 was 248,878 acres or 1.46 percent of the total area of 17,019,155 acres.

It goes on 'The woodland area is distributed more or less uniformly over the country, and interspersed with agricultural land to an extent which is seldom found outside these islands. While some of the woods have been preserved or created on land of low quality, corresponding to the mountain land referred to above, probably three-fourths exist on demesnes or other holdings, and on land which does not differ materially from the arable land and pasture surrounding them. The chief distinction therefore between woodland distribution in Ireland, and in many parts of Europe, is the total absence in the former of large forests, or tracts of country in which forests predominate... This [hill] land is at present generally made use of for the grazing of sheep and cattle during the summer months, a system which has had a very adverse influence upon forest preservation and development... Hill grazing and burning...are extremely ancient in origin'.

It tabulates the forest classification as of 1916. (Slightly modified. All data in acres).

Crop	1-25 years	26-50 years	51-75 years	76 years and over	Various ages	Total
Conifers	14,633	18,722	12,938	13,243		84,096
Broadleaves	2,399	6,662	10,457	19,815	24,560	66,103
Mixed	3,049	9,812	11,459	20,104	26,770	97,403
					52,979	247,602
Coppice/scrub						4,253

‘On a calculation based on general data the reduction in Free State woodlands between 1916 and 1925 was estimated at approximately 20,000 acres (sic)’... Made up as follows:

Area under conifers	decrease of 12, 614 acres (8%)
Area planted after 1916	6,285 acres
Area under broadleaves	decrease of 3,305 acres (5%)
Area under mixed woods	decrease of 9740 acres (10%)

‘These figures show a net decrease in the woodland area during a period of 10 years of 19,374 acres, equal to a reduction of over 8%, leaving the total woodland area in 1925 as 228,229 acres, or 1.3% of the total land surface.’

‘The species used in afforestation are mainly coniferous, consisting of Larch, Pine, Sitka Spruce, European [Norway] Spruce, and Douglas Fir, the object being to work the woods on an average rotation of about 50 years, and to produce timber suitable for building purposes and other requirements in rural districts. Individual areas vary generally from 300 acres to over 6,000 acres, and the policy in connection with acquisition is to bring, within a radius of five miles or so, a total area of about 5,000 acres, capable of being managed by one forester with four or five assistants.’

So far as I know this is the earliest official statement of the position and policy in relation to forestry in Ireland after independence. At this time A.C. Forbes was Director of Forestry in Ireland and it is certain that, whether this account was written by him or not, it would have received his final approval.

Yours sincerely,

Niall OCarroll.