

Doneraile,
Co. Cork.

The Editor, *Irish Forestry*

Re. International Fellowship at the World Forest Institute in Portland, Oregon

Sir,

I am writing to inform *Irish Forestry* readers of what I believe is an excellent opportunity for Irish forestry professionals to learn about forestry and forest practices in North America. I recently completed (Summer 2012) an International Fellowship at the World Forest Institute (WFI) in Portland, Oregon (<http://www.wfi.worldforestry.org/>). Below, I have outlined details of the program and briefly share experiences from my International Fellowship.

WFI is a non-profit organisation established under the aegis of the World Forestry Centre in Portland. The Institute has hosted more than 100 forestry professionals as International Fellows from over 80 countries since its inception in 1989. During my own short fellowship, I had the privilege of working with Fellows from Bolivia, China, Ghana, Iran, South Korea, Taiwan and Zimbabwe. WFI allows forestry professionals from around the world to conduct a short term (6-12 month) research project while also gaining valuable knowledge and insight from studying the forest industry in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) region of North America. Fellows typically split their time between (i) their research project and (ii) group activities.

(i) Research projects normally utilise WFI's strategic position in the heart of the PNW through a comparative research project — often using information from the fellow's home country and comparing with information from North America. The time allocated to the fellow's research project is normally ~70%.

(ii) Group activities are varied, but always focus on issues in the forest industry in North America. They include, but are not limited to, informing the public about forestry in the Fellow's country through public presentations, and learning about forestry in the PNW through varied site visits to forests, mills, university seminars and other locations. The group activities normally constitute 30% of the Fellow's time.

To qualify for a fellowship, researchers must design a suitable research project in collaboration with WFI personnel and secure half of the fellowship costs. A six month fellowship costs approximately \$10,000 while a 12 month fellowship costs approximately \$20,000. Once the Fellow has secured half of the fellowship costs, a matching grant from the Harry A. Merlo foundation provides funding to cover the remaining half of the program cost. My own fellowship was part funded by the Council for Forest Research and Development (COFORD) through a Networking and Knowledge Transfer Support Initiative grant. The fees for the fellowship are used to provide Fellows with a monthly salary, office space, cover the costs of site and conference visits, and visa fees. To my mind, the fees are a very minor investment, as the information, knowledge and contacts fellows acquire are of immense value.

My own research project investigated the macrofungal communities of Sitka spruce forests in its native (PNW) and non-native range (Ireland and Britain). Irish Forestry readers may be familiar with some of my previous work in 2011, examining the macrofungal biodiversity of Irish Sitka spruce forests (*Irish Forestry* 68, 40-53). For me, getting data from Sitka spruce in its native habitat and comparing it with that of its non-native habitat was the next logical step in elucidating patterns of the fungal biodiversity of Sitka spruce forests. Using WFI as my base, I acquired data from Sitka spruce forests on Vancouver Island, in Oregon and Washington, and even from the Queen Charlotte Islands (one of the few areas where Sitka spruce forms relatively pure stands) from several researchers located in the PNW. Along with these data, I also availed of numerous opportunities to meet with many important players in the fungal ecology world. My findings concluded that Sitka spruce supports as much fungal biodiversity as any other tree species investigated in each of my regions, thus indicating that it may be suitable as a conservation tool for fungal biodiversity in Ireland and Britain. I also found that the fungal communities in each region were clearly different, probably related to fungal biogeography patterns. Overall, this research is intended for publication in a peer-review conservation journal in the near future.

In addition to my research project, I also gained a lot from the group activities. We visited some of the large and small lumber mills along the PNW coast, including Sierra Pacific Co. and The Humboldt Redwood Co. We attended conferences on aerial photography, forestry education, urban forestry and watershed protection to name but a few. We also had the pleasure of visiting three National Parks, the temperate rainforest of the Olympic National Park in Washington, the volcanic forests of Lassen National Park, and the towering redwoods of the Redwoods National Park in California. These field trips were certainly the “cherry on top” for my International Fellowship.

Anyone interested in the prospect of securing an International Fellowship should first view the website (<http://www.wfi.worldforestry.org/>) or contact the program manager Chandalin Bennett (cbennett@worldforestry.org) to discuss the prospect. I can whole-heartedly recommend the International Fellowship program to anyone involved in forestry in Ireland, be they active foresters, forest mill employees, forestry researchers, or forestry academics including postgraduate students. Currently four non-native tree species make up the vast bulk of Irish forests, and two of these (Sitka spruce, lodgepole pine) come from the PNW. The International fellowship program gives Irish forestry professionals a chance to compare information about these species in their native and non-native habitats.

Best regards,

Richard O’Hanlon.

www.rohanlon.org