

Management Guidelines for Ireland's Native Woodlands

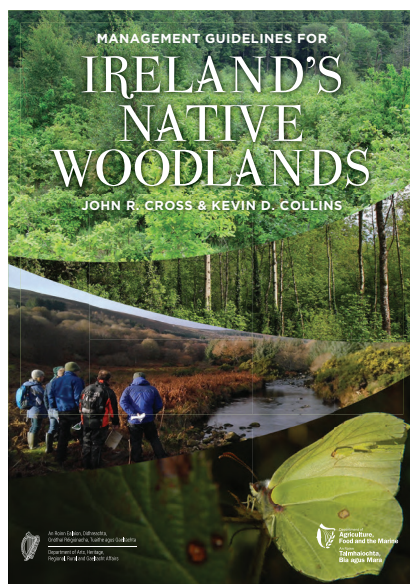
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In response to the renewed focus on Ireland's native woodlands, there are many publications which guide private and public native woodland owners towards a better understanding of the value of these woodlands and best practice in restoring them. This book compiles these guidelines and supports into a single, easily readable publication which dispenses practical guidelines on how best to manage, restore and hopefully, expand Ireland's native woodlands.

The opening section of the book presents an overview of Ireland's native woodlands, together with an introduction to the renewal of interest in restoring the "vital resource that is our native woodlands and the significant learning that ecologists and foresters have gained from working together and pooling their knowledge". The chapter entitled "Characteristics of Ireland's Native Woodlands" summarises

their extent and distribution, the species which are found in the different woodland layers, the woodland type and age classification designations, woodland structure and woodland ownership. These topics are covered more comprehensively in Part B of the book - General Management Guidelines. The “Planning and Management” chapter is divided into national and site level planning plus a section on general management guidelines, while more detailed guidelines are found in Part B which are structured around 11 relevant topics, and in Part C around specific woodland types in Ireland.

I heartily welcome the promotion of Continuous Cover Forest (CCF) management systems throughout this book, in particular in the “planning and management” section. CCF systems are often viewed as complex, costly to implement and requiring intensive management. In my view, the opposite is the case. Once CCF concepts and silvicultural principles are understood, all that is then required is to have an inventory/monitoring protocol in place and ongoing selection and marking of thinnings on a regular cycle. A reference to an inventory/monitoring protocol is one element which I feel could have been added to the planning and management section because this informs the manager about how woodland structure (e.g. natural regeneration, shrub layer stocking, upper canopy structure, timber quality, deadwood quantity) and other ecological parameters are developing over time. This is particularly necessary in transformation/conversion from even-aged forest to an irregular multi-structured forest.

The requirement to have an overall objective for the native woodland is detailed clearly in the planning chapter. One of the objectives for each site will be to achieve the specified woodland type as outlined in the classification system most suited to that site. The planning guidelines in the manual outline the steps to be taken over time to achieve the selected objective or woodland type.

The first line of Chapter 11 - Products states “the overriding objective regarding native woodland is to manage for biodiversity and conservation”. It also states that production of various wood products, using CCF, may be compatible with this primary objective. However, if we are to retain our native woodlands, I believe there must be a greater focus on making them economically viable. One of the primary drivers of the renewed interest and adoption of CCF across Europe has been the economic viability of this form of management. Of course, there are native woodlands where conservation and biodiversity should be the primary objective with minimal interventions to maintain the CCF system, but in general where CCF systems are adopted biodiversity enhancement and conservation go hand in hand with quality wood production and economic viability. The guiding principle in CCF management is to progressively concentrate stand production onto quality trees that can achieve premium prices e.g. the prices achieved for coopering quality oaks logs from Ballytobin Wood, Co. Kilkenny. Introducing an “A-D Quality Class Assessment” of the first 3-6 m lengths of trees at different stages of development to an inventory/

monitoring protocol incorporating financial appraisal and potential value would give great guidance to foresters in managing our native woodlands.

In Part B, the factors that one should consider when managing native woodlands are addressed via specific guidelines, the size of the woodland, the age or longevity of forest cover, the woodland structure, species and the achievement of natural regeneration are discussed together with specific guidelines on how best to enhance the native woodland characteristics. There is interesting discussion in the chapter on “Structure” on promoting irregularity in the vertical and horizontal structures within the different woodland types. The challenge for foresters is to achieve the transformation from the present even-aged single-story structure, which most of our native woodlands have, to a multi-storied irregularly structured forest. The extent of thinning and regeneration gaps is the kernel in the transformation thinnings which will lead, in time, to the irregular structure. A critical requirement for thinning interventions is the road/track network in the forest. This is mentioned in the chapter on Conversion, but I think it should also have been included in the planning section and given increased prominence throughout. The critical factor is that these are permanent tracks and machines should be confined to these tracks to minimise soil compaction and disturbance.

Pressures on native woodlands from grazing and invasive species are also addressed in Part B. These pressures can have significant cost implications in managing native woodlands and the management guidelines outlined in this manual give practical and pragmatic advice on addressing these threats. Grazing pressures are often put forward as a major obstacle to successful natural regeneration, especially where CCF is to be adopted. Grazing, especially by deer, is a threat to any form of management. Likewise, costs must be incurred in controlling *Rhododendron*, cherry laurel and other non-native, invasive tree species. Max Brucimacchie and Roland Suisse from Association Futaie Irrégulière, a group of French private forest managers formed in 1991 to promote the silviculture of irregular forest stands, recommended removal of prolific sycamore and beech natural regeneration in a pole stage native woodland in Curraghchase, Co. Limerick – such good practical advice is repeated in the book.

In the chapter on “Conversion” there is practical guidance on identifying opportunities for conversion of existing non-native woodlands to native species woodlands, either through transformation utilising CCF systems or by felling and replanting. The management guidelines sections provide valuable advice on which route to adopt.

In Part C there are excellent overall descriptions, characteristic features and specific management guidelines for eight different woodland types. A good knowledge of these will give guidance to managers in planning and managing many other woodland types. It was particularly interesting to come across the sections on hazel, willow and

yew woodland and the guidelines for these woodland types, as the focus is generally more about the main oak, ash, alder and birch woodland types. The use of Scots pine as a nurse species is mentioned in the afforestation section, but I wonder if a Scots pine woodland type should also be adopted into our Native Woodland Types, given the recent research identifying native Scots pine populations at Rockforest near Corofin, Co. Clare. The publication concludes with four appendices; Appendix 2 is particularly interesting as it lists the various classifications of our native woodlands and links them in the table provided.

This book is enhanced by excellent photographs throughout which show all aspects of native woodland, from glue fungus to epiphytes to harvested, high quality coopers logs. It will serve as an excellent guide to foresters, ecologists and native woodland owners seeking to enhance, transform and manage native woodlands.

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