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EDITORIAL

APRÈS MOI · . . .?

MOST of us are aware of the awful problems facing man in these last decades of the twentieth century. We dance a merry jig, or so it seems, on some unseen tightrope between the frying-pan and the fire. Will we poison ourselves with the products of fossil fuel combustion or will the fuel be exhausted before that, leaving us cold and helpless surrounded by the elaborate, electronic anachronisms of our doomed civilization?

Let us not trouble our minds with such imaginings. Our involvement in forestry is, after all, evidence in itself of our confidence in the continued existence of the human race. Let us instead concentrate on things within our own sphere of influence and try to ensure that the impact of forestry on the environment will be to the benefit of future generations.

Forestry has long been associated with the conservation of nature and the minimal disturbance of natural ecosystems. Even in plantation forestry, the intensity of management is such that the forester attempts to come to terms with nature rather than to dominate it. This is less true today than formerly, however. The level of mechanical and manurial intervention, so necessary for the successful establishment and development of plantations on oligotrophic sites, has had a significant impact on energy flow and nutrient cycling in the natural ecosystems. It is important that we examine and, if necessary, control this influence.

We should not assume, for instance, on the basis of observation alone, that the current departure from the sound soil conservation principle of contour ploughing will not lead to an increase in the rate of soil erosion in mountain areas. Again, it would be foolhardy to accept the results of one or two isolated experiments in order to assure ourselves that significant fertilizer phosphorus losses, however unlikely on theoretical grounds, do not occur in peatland forests. We have not yet, in Ireland, had to deal with the problems of large-scale nitrogen fertilization in forestry. It is well known in other countries that leaching of nitrogen following the application of nitrate-nitrogen

fertilizers, can lead to groundwater concentrations of nitrate which exceed health authority safety standards. More disturbing is the recent finding, in Sweden and other countries, that the loss of nitrate following clear-felling *(even on unfertilized, acid soils)* is almost as great as that following the application of ammonium nitrate fertilizer.

What is clear-felling doing to our environment? The answer is that we do not know and we cannot afford to be complacent until we have found out.

Obituary

WILLIAM PHELAN (1951-1977)

Bill died tragically following an accident in December last. A native of Windgap, County Kilkenny he graduated from University College Dublin in 1974 with the degree of B.Agr.Sc. (Forestry). He joined the Forest and Wildlife Service early in 1975. In his short, though already quite full career he worked in Forest Management for a time, in both Donegal and Wicklow, before joining Inventory Section, Research Branch.

He was, in his heart, a forester with a distinct leaning towards mechanical engineering. Those who knew him well will remember that his imagination was forever fired by the prospects of increased mechanisation in Forest Utilisation and, in fact, in all aspects of Forestry and Agriculture in general. During his last year, being based in Wicklow meant being able to travel home most weekends to lend a hand and work on all things mechanical.

To his friends, as with everyone, his manner was consistently jovial and generous — and this, I feel, captures the essence of a man who is sorely missed by all who crossed his path.

On behalf of the Society of Irish Foresters I extend our deepest sympathy to his family.

Declan Ward

FIONAN MORIARTY

We regret to note the death of Fionan J. Moriarty which occurred while this issue was in press. We hope to print an obituary notice in our next issue.