

Dear Sir,

Mr. Fitzsimons seems unaware that wildlife conservation is one of the responsibilities of his Department, which has produced maps showing the location and extent of areas of scientific interest in Ireland, including western blanket bog and some upland areas. These are unique habitats in the European context and we have an international and in some cases a statutory duty to protect them for future generations. There are many studies which show that afforestation reduces the wildlife diversity of upland peat areas.

It obviously comes as a shock to Mr. Fitzsimons to discover that some people view the prospect of miles of Sitka spruce monoculture with the same distaste as he has for open moorland, nevertheless the landscape implications of forest planning and management are extremely important in a country which relies so heavily on tourism revenue.

Afforestation alters the character of a landscape and can have a major visual impact in relation to the position of the plantation, its size, scale, shape, colour and texture, pattern and also access and subsequent management, with regard to topography, vegetation and surrounding views. When these factors are taken into account the overall landscape is enhanced. When they are not, the landscape is despoiled. It is the contrast between open and forested land which is especially important.

I would sincerely commend to all Irish foresters, the very detailed and well argued paper 'Forests in the Landscape' by G. Dunstan, published in the conference proceedings of 'The Future of the Irish Rural Landscape', Department of Geography, Trinity College, Dublin, 1985, which gives guidelines and outlines policies suited to the Irish situation.

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