

## Editorial

It's nothing new to say we must take care of the environment. We know about the dependence of living organisms on their physical surroundings and on each other. We know too, about conservation and the demands of modern society to preserve for posterity something of the "old", the "beautiful" and the "natural", however these may be defined. As foresters too, we understood the principals of sustainable development, although we called it something else, long before the current term came into vogue. The vital importance of conserving the productive capacity of the site has been recognised for as long as there have been professional forest managers.

In this country, our predecessors were faced with an enormous challenge, the task of restoring a lost forest resource. For most of this century, foresters have been preoccupied with the establishment of productive forest plantations. They have approached this task with single-minded dedication and they have been very successful.

The ecosystems created as a result of their efforts are very obvious on the landscape. At first, they were regarded as marks of progress. Today however, their presence is viewed by many with a mixture of distaste and concern. Coniferous monoculture is seen as ugly, it transfers atmospheric pollution to the soil and to freshwater bodies, afforestation results in the destruction of precious remnants of our ecological history. Foresters are left confused, uncertain how to proceed. While we understand, for the most part, the management of forests for timber production, we lack knowledge of the environmental consequences of those management decisions.

In this Special Issue of Irish Forestry, we bring together papers on the interaction of forestry and the wider environment. These are the results of research into issues of importance for forestry in Ireland today. However, the coverage is not comprehensive, the results are often tentative and incomplete. These papers represent but one step on the path to improving our knowledge of ecosystem processes in our forests. Much more work is needed.

Investment in research in forestry in this country has been woefully inadequate and despite the major increase in afforestation, it has in recent years, actually declined. The establishment of COFORD is a welcome development, but without adequate financial support, it can achieve nothing. To be effective, forestry research today requires well-organised interdisciplinary teams, working on specific, clearly defined projects with adequate funding and with the certainty of sustained support for the duration of the project. Substantial funds must be committed to research if a truly sustainable forestry enterprise is to be established in this country.

EC support has been helpful in recent years, but funding awarded through competitive research programmes, on the basis of priorities established in Brussels for the whole Community, are no substitute for a national research programme, tailored to the specific, current needs of forestry in this country. This is the kind of support that is needed if the work reported here is to be extended and developed to provide the scientific basis upon which our forest managers can build a sustainable forest resource compatible with the economic, environmental and aesthetic demands of society.

E .P. Farrell