

EDITORIAL

Meeting the environmental challenge

Since the Rio Earth Summit conference in 1992 Irish forestry has been more and more influenced by environmental concerns. But concern for the environment is not the sole preserve of environmentalists. As far back as 1964 annual reports on forestry by the Ministers for Lands refer to the multiple use of forests. Progress on amenity development, recreational use of forests and nature conservation programmes was outlined. The reports also show that semi-natural woodlands in the ownership of the Forestry Division were designated for conservation, probably the first such designation of woodland in the history of the state. This policy was enthusiastically promoted and implemented by foresters. A great deal was achieved in that period, putting in place many facilities that the public still enjoy to this day.

In the 40 years since the early nineteen sixties, and up to the present day, new environmental concerns have arisen such as global warming and the impact of acid rain on forests and aquatic life. Biodiversity, the diversity of plant and animal species and the relationships among them, has come to the fore as an issue, as habitats come under threat through urban and rural development.

All of these issues impact profoundly on forestry and general policy. Forests for instance have been at the very centre of discussions on the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. It is fair to say that in the absence of agreement on the role that forests play in storing carbon that there would have no international process on the reduction of emissions.

In recent years foresters and policy makers have come under pressure to respond to environmental issues and concerns that have been raised by NGOs and others, often at the European level. Sometimes these concerns are based on poor information and, it has to be said, on preconceived anti-forestry attitudes. The net result is that foresters, from a position where we were active promoters of environmental issues have become almost defensive about forest practices. Be that as it may all sectors of society have had to respond to environmental concerns, from waste disposal to building regulations, often at very considerable cost. We are not alone in having to respond to change. But those who raise environmental concerns should remember that forests have a huge positive role to play as a carbon sink, in conserving and enhancing biodiversity and in improving water quality.

Work by Peter Clinch at University College Dublin has shown that well-managed plantation forests make a positive contribution to the environment. Most forests in Ireland are first generation, often growing on areas that were degraded, overgrazed pasture. Through the growing, harvest and regeneration cycle they provide the variety of habitat that promotes biodiversity. One has only to look at many reforestation sites to see the increase in biodiversity that occurs following a single rotation of conifers.

Growing affluence at a national level will continue to fuel concerns for the environment. The challenge facing foresters and policy makers is to meet those concerns without losing sight of the need to manage their forests profitably.

Submissions to *Irish Forestry* are welcomed and will be considered for publication.

The attention of contributors is drawn to "Guidelines for Submissions".

Submissions to be addressed to:

The Editor,
Irish Forestry,
The Society of
Irish Foresters,
Enterprise Centre,
Ballintogher,
Co Sligo.
sif@tinet.ie

Editor
Eugene Hendrick

Business Editor
Sean Lenihan

Editorial Committee
Conor O'Reilly
Eugene Hendrick
Padraic Joyce

ISSN 0021-1192
Volume 57
Nos. 1 & 2, 2000

Designed, laid out
and printed by:
Elo Press Ltd.,
Dublin 8, Ireland.