



## **Coillte Fighting Major Forest Fire at Cloosh Valley, County Galway**

**A major fire at Cloosh Valley, Co. Galway, escalated out of control this afternoon despite the best efforts of Coillte and local ground crews to extinguish the fire.**

**Monday, May 08<sup>th</sup>, 2017:** Thousands of acres of forest, moorland and wildlife are now at major risk of destruction. Ireland's largest wind farm, Galway Wind Park, is also located within this forest, and is at close proximity to the fire.

A helicopter has been on site at Cloosh Valley over the past two days working to extinguish the fire, but with the situation escalating this afternoon, the local fire brigade has now been called in to help protect the wind farm and Coillte have also requested support from the Air-Corps, who provided invaluable air support at other fire incidents, including Sligo, over the weekend.

Recent forest fires around the country have resulted in hundreds of hectares of productive commercial forestry being destroyed and this has the potential to run into thousands of hectares if fires, such as the one in Cloosh Valley, continue.

These forest fires have also threatened the welfare of many homes and local communities, as well as causing devastation to vast areas of wildlife habitat.

Commenting on the damage to Coillte's forest estate, Gerard Murphy, Managing Director of Coillte Forest, said, "The recent outbreak of fires, particularly across the west and north of the country, has been responsible for the worst damage to Coillte's estate since 2011. The combined loss of productive timber, together with the cost of replanting the affected areas will result in a multimillion euro bill."

"In addition to the damage caused to commercial forestry, these forest fires pose a significant risk to farmland, native woodland and areas designated for nature conservation."

Under the Wildlife Act, it is illegal to set fires to growing vegetation from 1st March to 31st August and those found responsible for deliberately starting fires can be prosecuted. Recent dry and windy weather has greatly increased the risk of gorse and forest fire, but deliberate fire setting has also been a significant factor in the cause of many of the fires on Coillte property around the country.

Coillte greatly appreciates the tremendous assistance it has received from volunteers and the fire services, whose lives are put at significant risk in combating these forest fires.

With weather forecasters predicting the current dry conditions to continue for the rest of the week, Coillte are appealing to the public to be extra vigilant towards the dangers of wildfire and be mindful that responsible behaviour, including acting safely and responsibly in rural environments, can significantly reduce the chance of wildfire starting. Coillte also ask that you report any suspicious activity regarding the setting of fires to the local Garda Síochána.

Coillte has a comprehensive fire and emergency plan in operation for every forest, which includes the construction of fire breaks, operation of fire patrols, communication with fire brigade services and provision of specialised equipment in high risk areas.

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## **About Coillte**

Coillte is Ireland's largest forestry company and we manage our forests and land sustainably, to maximise the economic, social and environmental return for all our stakeholders. Our business ranges from supplying logs to the sawmill sector, to manufacturing innovative value added wood panel products to delivering renewable energy through wind and biomass. As well as fulfilling our commercial mandate, we are a leader in Ireland in the provision of recreation facilities and the protection of biodiversity across the 7% of the country we manage.

With 440,000ha of land, Coillte owns and manages approximately 7% of the land cover of Ireland.