

# Summary of stakeholder consultation following reviews of our management plans



## Common topics highlighted from stakeholders

Every 5 years Coillte review and update its strategic plans throughout the country. During these reviews, we invite the public to participate in our public consultation process. Submissions are received from individuals, groups and organisations covering a range of interests. Coillte in the past have received numerous consultation submissions which are considered, responded to and incorporated into our plans where it has been possible to do so. Generally our consultation processes involve a number of initiatives to reach out to the public, which can include:

- placing adverts in national and regional newspapers
- use of our website and social media sites
- mailshots issued to our stakeholders flyers and notices erected at amenity entrances
- open public consultation meetings if required
- open forest office invites to stakeholders
- one to one meetings with our staff if requested by the public

During these consultation processes, stakeholders highlighted key topics that they felt we should consider in our plans.

The topic of most interest to our stakeholders, was recreation provision in forests. Other topics included the following: access/roads, archaeology, deer nuisance/damage, dumping, habitat impact, harvesting, landscape impact, local heritage, renewable energy, park/recreation, property sales, restocking species choice, trespass, unauthorised land use, water nutrient release and fire protection.

As a way of helping our stakeholders understand the process, the following table provides a summary of extracts from submissions under the topics listed above and Coillte's response.

## **Access / Roads**

Stakeholders have raised the issue of problems with access / roads in their consultation submissions. Among those outlined were:

- Coillte should take greater account of the potential adverse impacts of forest operations on the local road network
- Whether damaged roads would be redressed, with many roads having been left with very rough stones.
- Coillte should prepare and maintain a timber production/haulage plan for each forest property
- Coillte should put in place an agreed protocol to deal with the construction of new entrances.

## **Coillte Response**

Each year Coillte builds a number of kilometres of new forest roads, and lay-bys in order to access areas for thinning and clearfelling.

Coillte tries to minimise usage of County roads by only using the designated haulage routes. Coillte also endeavours to build new internal roads to exit onto those designated routes. If road damage is caused by Coillte we repair such damage and redress to an agreed standard.

## **Archaeology**

Stakeholders questioned Coillte's protection measures of archaeological monuments

## **Coillte Response**

Coillte protects known archaeological sites and monuments on its estate, particularly during high impact forest operations such as tree planting, road making and harvesting. In addition, Coillte protects numerous sites which are not defined as national monuments, but are of local cultural value and interest. All recorded archaeological monuments are highlighted at the planning stage for forest operations, and are identified and taped off on site to ensure their protection.

## Deer Nuisance / Damage

Stakeholders raised the following in relation to deer nuisance/damage:

- Concerns about deer trespassing from Coillte forests onto private land
- Concerns about deer hunters trespassing onto private lands from Coillte lands
- Concerns about deer hunters saying they have a licence from Coillte but actually shooting on private lands
- A comment expressed, "Generally Coillte is a good neighbour".

### Coillte response

In developing and implementing appropriate deer management strategies, Coillte endeavours to balance its primary objectives of preventing damaging impacts, public safety and animal welfare with the requirements of conservation and the management of a valuable biological resource. Where possible Coillte aims to achieve deer management through collaboration with local land owners / managers and other stakeholders. Coillte issues licences for suitable areas of forests for both bird and deer hunting. All holders of licences to hunt on Coillte lands are issued with a map clearly indicating the licensed area. The onus of responsibility rests with all hunters to know the extent of the rights to which they are entitled to exercise.

Hunting on lands where a person does not have permission of the owner or holder of sporting rights, is contrary to section 44 of the Wildlife Acts (as amended) and they could be subject to prosecution.

Furthermore, it is an offence for non-licensed hunters to hunt deer or game on Coillte lands and Coillte's policy is to report such offences to the Garda Síochána. Coillte encourages stakeholders who are aware of illegal hunting on Coillte lands to inform Coillte and to report it to the Garda Síochána also.

## Dumping

Comments from stakeholders regarding Illegal dumping were expressed. Some of the views forward were

- Dumping particularly at forest entrances is too common
- Some people felt certain areas need to be blocked off to limit/lessen chances of dumping.

### Coillte response

Illegal dumping on Coillte sites is a serious problem and dealing with it is a costly activity. Removal and proper disposal of the dumped material is our responsibility as the owner or occupier of the land. The issues we deal with include one off and persistent dumping at specific locations, and the dumping of large items such as cars, dead animals, large household items etc.

Illegal dumping is identified as a security issue and is dealt with in Coillte's security action plans. These plans are drawn up for all Coillte dumping sites in the country and are co-ordinated by the local forest manager. Coillte deals with illegal dumping as follows:

1. Notification to the litter warden for domestic rubbish or to the enforcement officer of the County Council for non-domestic rubbish.
2. If possible, establish the owner by examination of the material.
3. Notify Garda authorities if appropriate to do so
4. The relevant authorities i.e. Garda / Litter warden to pursue prosecutions in normal way
5. Coillte to pursue all costs associated with removal and disposal of rubbish.

By strict adherence to Coillte's Internal Security Policy and the laws of the land, we expect a reduction in dumping in the short to medium term.

## **Habitat Impact**

This subject interested a lot of stakeholders and individuals and special interest groups sent us submissions focussing on the following:

- Concerns about the effects of planting trees on fish and insect life
- Concerns over safeguarding protected species within Coillte forestry following land sales.

## **Coillte response**

One of Coillte's main sustainable forest management objectives is the identification, mapping and protection of areas of nature conservation significance. In addition to its responsibilities in relation to Natura 2000 sites, ecological surveys have been commissioned across the Coillte estate in recent years, to assess, evaluate, propose and protect the best such areas in the Country. Coillte also contributes in a meaningful way to Ireland's "National Biodiversity Action Plan", having designated a minimum of 15% of each BAU for nature conservation as the primary management objective.

Coillte complies with the EC Birds and Habitats Directives also. These directives provide for the protection of certain bird species and for the protection of a range of habitats and their species. Where necessary the Directive also requires their restoration to favourable conservation status. For more information on what Coillte is doing in relation to the biodiversity management area, please click on [www.coillte.ie](http://www.coillte.ie).

## Harvesting

Stakeholders generally felt they would like to see more native hardwood trees which they believe would improve the forest as a habitat for wildlife. In addition they wished to see less clear felling of forest stands.

### Coillte response

Coillte's clear felling is a natural part of forest management, where mature crops are removed and replanted with a new crop. The extent of clear felling is strictly controlled both externally and internally and carried out under licence from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food. In addition consultation is carried out with local stakeholders in advance of all high impact operations including harvesting.

The principal forms of tree harvesting carried out in Coillte are thinning and clearfelling. Coillte also replant these sites post harvesting. Regular thinning improves the quality of the remaining trees and while a clearfelled site may look unsightly post harvesting; within three to four years the appearance will ameliorate as the newly planted trees begin to grow and the site is colonised with other vegetation. Deadwood, retained in the forest after harvesting may often look untidy but places a vital role for woodland biodiversity and nutrient cycling in Irish forests.

Coilltes felling throughout the country is controlled by the Forest Service who issue appropriate felling licences under the 1946 forestry Act. All such felling proposals are consulted on in advance with the appropriate statutory bodies and their recommendations fully considered.

## Landscape Impact

Landscape impact issues put forward by stakeholders included:

Coillte implementing a more sympathetic harvesting approach to avoid very dramatic changes to the landscape by brutal clear felling. Concerns were also expressed at the degree of deforestation which impacts on the landscape significantly.

### Coillte response

Forests can add considerable value to rural areas when appropriately located and on a scale and design that is sympathetic to the character of the existing landscape. Coillte recognises its responsibility to ensure its forest are planned and managed in a manner that enhances the landscape. Across the country there are Coillte staff trained in forest landscape techniques and design.

## Consultation topics highlighted during our Coillte response to the consultation process

Coillte's forest landscape areas have been assessed and given a sensitivity rating and forest design plans are developed and implemented for areas of high sensitivity. In order to minimise dramatic changes to landscape, limits are set in relation to harvesting trees on upland forests, and also on lowland forests. Coillte also follow the Forest Service guidelines on Landscape Design and our staff liaise with the Forest Service experts in this area.

### Renewable Energy

Comments in relation to this topic included reducing carbon emissions, and queries around the wind energy area.

#### Coilltes response

Coillte is committed to helping reduce Ireland's carbon emissions. Its current work in relation to biomass is playing a key leadership role in delivering renewable energy technologies and climate change mitigation by providing biomass energy solutions to Irish industry.

Coillte provides long term, secure biomass fuel supply contracts to its clients and can assist in the evaluation of the technical and commercial viability of biomass technology for a client's facility. For further information about Coillte's involvement in biomass, please click on the following: [http://www.coillte.ie/coillteenterprise/renewable\\_energy/biomass/](http://www.coillte.ie/coillteenterprise/renewable_energy/biomass/)

In relation to wind energy Coillte have been active in the wind sector for a number of years now and project are developed in the appropriate way subject to all the planning and other guidelines. We focus on sustainable projects in order to support the achievement of Ireland's renewable energy targets. Our land is often suitable for wind farms due to its height and relative isolation from housing.

Our job is to make the best use of all the land we manage on behalf of the our shareholders – the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform. For further information or any further queries in relation to our wind energy business, please click on the following: [http://www.coillte.ie/coillteenterprise/renewable\\_energy/wind\\_energy/](http://www.coillte.ie/coillteenterprise/renewable_energy/wind_energy/)

## Recreation

Coillte's forest parks and recreation areas are of great interest to the general public. Almost half of all consultation submissions received relate to the topic of forest recreation.

Amongst the comments and suggestions made by stakeholders were:

- Overall experience is of excellent woodland and great resource to local area"
- Further development of some forest areas for recreation
- More pony trekking routes
- More interpretative panels to enhance the visitor experience
- Permanent orienteering courses in suitable locations
- Improving forest tracks and roadways.

## Coilltes response

Coillte has a long tradition of responsive community involvement through its extensive forest network. The development of recreational activities, along with Coillte's open forest policy are some of the many ways Coillte contribute towards the "public goods" value of forests in communities, and enhance long relationships and good will. Coillte recognises that forests provide an excellent landscape for a wide range of recreational activities and the company, as the country's largest landowner, has a special place in the provision of access to recreation. As such Coillte seeks to provide low-impact non-motorised recreation to the general public and other specialist activities under special permit.

The company will continue to provide recreation that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. Coillte welcomes all visitors to the forest and expects them to respect the environmental code for users.

In recognising its role in the rural community Coillte seeks to work in partnership with the tourism sector to facilitate developments e.g. the redevelopment of Lough Key Forest Park, in Co. Roscommon and the Cavan/Burren development within partnership arrangements. For further information on Coillte's recreational facilities, please visit the Coillte outdoors website [www.coillteoutdoors.ie](http://www.coillteoutdoors.ie)

## Property Sale

Consultation responses relating to land sales were mostly in the form of questions about the policy for land sales and policy on leasing areas for sporting and recreational purposes.

## Coilltes response

Coillte sells, leases or develops limited areas of non-strategic land for purposes other than forestry. Most of these sales are made in response to local demand and typically comprise house sites, isolated uninhabited dwelling houses, small outlying forest properties, small areas of forest to neighbouring land owners, gravel pits, and land to local authorities for infrastructural projects. Before any sale takes place, a consultation process is carried out with those most closely involved (e.g. neighbours, and other people likely to be affected by the sale).

## Consultation topics highlighted during our Coillte response to the consultation process

A signing-off committee within the company considers all sales proposals, with very large sales requiring the approval of the Board of Directors. Coillte issues licences for suitable areas of forests for both bird and deer hunting, for which it receives a certain amount of revenue. Such activities are carried out in strict accordance with Coillte Deer and Game Management policies, Guidelines and Codes of Practice, as well as the conditions of the licence agreement.

Each year Coillte publishes a list of areas that have been excised from its estate on its website: [www.coillte.ie](http://www.coillte.ie)

### Restock Species Choice

Some consultees were concerned with the choice of species for planting and replanting. A number of stakeholders would like to see replanting with native broadleaved species or more areas left to naturally regenerate. Stakeholders expressed negative views on replanting with Pine as there is a need to use chemical fertiliser on such crops.

### Coillte response

Coillte policy is to encourage species diversification in order to maintain and enhance the productive potential of its estate and to increase biodiversity in its forests.

The company has a specific objective to increase the current % of broadleaves from 10% upwards over the next rotation.

Coillte has also developed a species diversification strategy based on the requirements for forest certification. To reduce or eliminate the need for artificial fertilisation programmes, a more cautious species selection is being applied so that the species planted will not need supplementary fertiliser over its rotation. Buffer zones are being left beside watercourses in new planting and replanting schemes. These consist of open space which allows the establishment of natural ground vegetation and often complimented with the planting of a fringe of native broadleaf trees. These have benefits for both water quality and wildlife.



## **Trespass**

Stakeholders felt that there was no control over the public using forest entrances after forest hours, leading to antisocial behaviour.

### **Coillte response**

Coillte deals with the issue of anti-social and unauthorised usage of our forests on an ongoing basis. Trespass after forest hours constitutes a security issue for Coillte. Responses to unauthorised activity includes

- Keep forest barriers locked, at allocated times;
- Erecting warning notices, and safety signage.

This type of issue is also dealt with under Coillte's security action plans.

## **Unauthorised land use**

Stakeholders expressed dismay at the levels of unauthorised use of forests such as deer poaching, dumping, burnt out cars, lighting of fires, scramblers, quads, car use, horses and sheep straying.

### **Coillte response**

Coillte's response to some of the issues such as dumping and trespass has been covered in earlier sections. Unauthorised land use, is a security issue for Coillte and is dealt with under our security plans. Coillte are very concerned about these issues and work actively to deal with them according to the company policy on a daily and weekly basis. Some of the actions we carry out here include:

- Identify firstly that there are no Rights of Way or access problems, such as barriers not being locked
- Renew signage at entry re unauthorised uses such as bikes, dumping etc.
- Maintain frequent visits by supervisory staff to keep a watch on activity

## Water Nutrient Release

Some stakeholders were concerned at the impacts of forest activities on water quality, and particularly at the potential for nutrient releases to water from forested areas.

Some comments stakeholders made were that:

- sites with peaty soils should not be planted
- soil analysis should be carried out prior to planting
- planting of native broadleaved trees along watercourses, and buffer zone would be beneficial to appropriate habitats
- ground disturbance should be minimised during planting
- no harvesting activities should take place during heavy rain, to minimise discharges of polluting.

## Coillte Response

Coillte actively participates in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive ensuring that the forest industry is playing its part in protecting water bodies. Water protection areas (buffer zones) are established in all our plantations. Environmental assessment is carried out in all high impact operations. Long term monitoring of selected rivers in sensitive forest areas is carried out to study the long term effects of forests on water.

Coillte is also reducing and in some cases eliminating chemical usage in forests by adopting control methods other than pesticide use and by continuing to review and evaluate non-pesticide alternatives as they become available.

As outlined in the section on restocking, in order to reduce or eliminate the need for artificial fertilisation programmes, a different species selection is being applied so that the species planted will not need supplementary fertiliser over its rotation.

Buffer zones are being left beside watercourse in new planting and replanting schemes. These consist of open space and a fringe of broadleaves. These have benefits for both water quality and wildlife and can often act as wildlife corridors linking areas of adjoining forest lands.

## Fire Protection

Stakeholders expressed the view that all forestry should be provided with adequate fire breaks

## Coillte Response

Fire break provision are part of normal operational activities to protect Coillte and surrounding forests. Coillte are actively raising awareness of the dangers of forest fires through media initiatives and the hosting of forest fire awareness day.

