

IRISH FORESTRY SERVICES NEWSLETTER



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Minister Joe Walsh TD

MINISTER REAFFIRMS THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO IRISH FORESTRY

premiums scheme. The Minister said he was confident that a viable planting programme could be achieved in 2004 with the increase in funding he has secured for the sector.

The Minister pointed out that the 2004 allocation for his department in the Book of Estimates represented a 31% increase over the allocation in 2003. "Forestry is an integral part of the CAP Rural Development Plan and as such will be established as a vital part of the activities of the department." The Minister said he wanted to assure landowners and investors that the government is committed to forestry as a vibrant, viable industry capable of providing a sustainable alternative economic land use. "Our government has reaffirmed its commitment to the development of the forestry sector, in a manner, that maximises its contribution to national economic and social well-being, on a broad sustainable basis, which is critically important for the future of our nation" he continued.

Minister Walsh said that the forestry agenda extends into many and diverse areas of Irish social and economic life particularly in the rural areas. "The range of activities extends from the growers to the assessment and

management companies, the sawmills and processors as well as the many ancillary industries such as nurseries and engineering providers. It embraces non-timber benefits such as environmental protection, bio-diversity and makes a significant contribution to amenity and aesthetic values that have a direct bearing on Ireland's attractiveness as a living and working environment". He pointed out that Forestry is estimated to employ over 10,000 persons and has an annual turnover of some €500 million with €100 million being injected into the rural economy annually. Mr Walsh said that the government estimate for forestry in 2004 has been increased by some 30% and indicates strong commitment by government to the sector. "I want to accelerate the planting programme in coming years and continue sending out a positive message to all sectors of the industry" he added.

He also said that he wants to make forestry a competitively attractive long-term investment opportunity for private funding and in this regard will be examining various options open. He expressed particular interest in exploring the possibility of carbon credits related to forestry investment. cont pg 2

Effective from the 1st January, 2004, the Forest Service, has now moved to its natural home at the Department of Agriculture and Food. Forestry measures, come under the C.A.P. Rural Development Programme, along with many of the agriculture measures. This move will ensure that landowners can make decisions on land use options, including forestry, with one single department of state. In the context of the transfer of responsibility for the Forest Service, the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Mr. Joe Walsh TD, announced in November 2003, the resumption of approvals in the forestry grants and

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In conclusion Minister Walsh said that the fact that forestry is now a part of the Department of Agriculture and Food enables an overall view of land use policy to be taken and ensures that the various support measures in relation to land use and the rural economy are consistent, co-ordinated and complementary.

The move from the Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources to the Department of Agriculture and Food is very welcome by those directly involved in the Irish forestry industry as it will ensure that Forestry will be viewed as a complementary farming enterprise, that can be fully integrated with other farming and land use activities.

ASH

(*Fraxinus Excelsior L.*)

Distribution & Provenance

Ash is a native species to Ireland but with a wide natural distribution, ranging across Europe as far as central Russia in the east, the Mediterranean in the south and central Sweden in the north. Ash has a strong ability to regenerate naturally on bare ground or in hedgerows, where it is probably best known in Ireland. There are no known differences between ash provenances from different parts of Ireland. Generally, seed used in Ireland is of either Irish or English provenance and has been collected from straight, fast growing trees of good form.

Silviculture & Management in Ireland

Ash requires moist but free draining, nutrient rich and sheltered but frost-free sites on which to produce quality fast grown timber. Because ash is so site demanding, suitable sites are generally small. Ash is planted at an initial stocking of 3,300 stems per hectare at a spacing of 2.0 metre x 1.5 metre (2 metres between rows and 1.5 metres within rows). Vegetation control is extremely important in ash plantations as it is a species very sensitive

to competition from weeds for both nutrients and moisture. Ash is a strong light-demander and must be thinned heavily and regularly. Thinning promotes the development of large crowns which in turn stimulate diameter growth. Deformed, diseased and over aggressive trees are removed at an early stage and pruning of selected stems is also sometimes necessary. Ash is not known to grow well as a pure crop and pure ash stands have a low volume production per hectare. It is therefore often advised either to plant ash in mixture with other species such as alder or larch or to introduce an under-storey crop such as beech or hornbeam at a stage when the ash is about 15 to 20m tall.



Sizeable ash thinnings (approximately 30 centimetres in diameter at breast height) can be harvested for hurley production. This is a highly skilled operation and should be carried out by the hurley maker. Following this harvest, the crop is grown on for a further 20 years to produce veneer logs and large sawlogs.

Ash is very susceptible to frost which causes forking of the main stem and can result in poor quality stem form. It is therefore not suited to sites where frosts occur regularly. Other risks to ash crops include livestock trespass, browsing from rabbits, hares and deer and ash bud moth which lives in ash buds and can cause forking.

Non Timber Benefits

As a native species, ash has important heritage and ecological values. It fits naturally into the Irish landscape, both as a hedgerow and woodland species. Ash is the latest of the broad-leaved species to flush in the springtime and its crown and foliage are light. The combination of these two factors allows a high level of light to reach the woodland floor, thus fostering a rich array of ground flora and fauna.

Position in Irish Forestry

Ash has become a popular species to plant amongst farm foresters, particularly in recent times with the increasing availability of better sites for planting. Irish nurseries currently produce and sell approximately 2.5 million ash transplants each year making it one of the most popular broad-leaved species alongside oak. In 1999 alone, 806 hectares of ash were planted in Ireland. Virtually all of this planting was carried out by the private sector.

Ash is commonly referred to in Ireland's cultural heritage and has often been associated with sacred wooded sites known as "bile" from which townland names such as Knockavilla have been derived.

Uses & Markets

Ash has large annual rings and a clean white appearance with a distinctive sheen making it popular for a variety of uses. Ash timber, when grown quickly, is strong and flexible with a good capacity for shock absorbency. For this reason ash has been traditionally used in Ireland for the production of hurleys. The same shock absorbing qualities make ash suitable for other sports equipment and tool handles. Larger ash stems may be used as veneer logs or sawlogs for use in furniture manufacture. Generally, ash for such purposes is grown to a diameter at breast height of 5060 centimetres. Ash also has a high calorific value and is consequently a preferred firewood species.

(Courtesy of Forest Service at The Dept. of Agriculture & Food.)

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Aerial Fertilising

Introduction

The Irish Forestry Funds and Forestry Investment Plans completed an Aerial Fertilisation programme of selected properties in 2003. The operation was carried out in July and involved an area of 218 hectares in the south and south west of the country. It is expected that the plantations concerned will respond well to the operation in the years ahead. This article will stress the importance of continually monitoring the health of your plantations and the actions undertaken in order to maintain maximum productivity of the plantations.

Why Fertilise?

Loss of production in the case of a plantation deficient in nitrogen or phosphorous can be estimated at around €200 per acre per year. This is because the trees are not maximising their potential and this can have serious consequences in the case of a 10 year Forestry Investment Plan. It is imperative that nutrient deficiency is identified early and the operation be carried out as soon as possible.

How do we know a plantation needs fertilising?

The health of Irish Forestry Fund and Forestry Investment Plan plantations are continuously monitored by the forest managers. Where a nutrient deficiency is suspected, foliar analysis is carried out. It is usual in conifer plantations that foliar samples are collected in the dormant season, i.e. November and December. A forester collects samples by cutting side shoots off the upper parts of a representative sample of trees in the plantation. The sample is then bagged and a foliar sample sheet is filled in detailing where the sample was taken, management



(Photo courtesy of the Forest Service, Dept. of Agriculture & Food)

history and current description of the health of the crop and site conditions. The information provided on this form helps the analyst in his/her prescription for the site. Samples are sent to an approved forestry laboratory for analysis. The laboratory provides a written report identifying nutrient deficiencies and recommending corrective fertiliser applications.

How do we fertilise?

In the past, fertilising was carried out literally by hand. This is now rarely done for several reasons such as labour costs, consistency of application and access to the areas requiring fertilising. Nowadays, aerial fertilising by helicopter is the norm. It is fast, efficient, consistent and access is generally a small issue. It is also highly computerised with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) used to identify and map the most efficient flight path and Global Positioning Systems (GPS) used to keep the helicopter on track during application. At the end of the operation a computer generated map is produced showing the manager of the site the extent of the fertilised area.

Fertilising and the environment

As you might expect with aerial fertilising, there is a potential to cause harm to the environment if the operation is not carried out carefully. For this reason the Forest Service has issued guidelines which must be observed by forest managers when carrying out this operation. The guidelines are comprehensive and involve an application and consultation process with



This is a map showing the flight path of the helicopter and the actual application of the fertiliser.

statutory bodies, fisheries boards and Gardai, telecommunication and power generation companies. They also include exclusion zones around water courses and water bodies, houses, roads and designated areas such as SACs and NHAs. Operationally, the guidelines outline measures for storage of fertiliser, health and safety, disposal of waste packaging, timing of the operation and supervision.

If the operation is carried out according to these guidelines, the impact on the environment is minimised.

Fertilising plantations in 2003

After a survey in the winter of 2002/2003 it was determined that 7 properties should be fertilised. These were all located in the south and south-west of the country. Applications for approval were made to the Forest Service according to their guidelines. In May and June, the Forest Service approved all of the sites. The work was carried out in July.

In total 218 ha of plantations belonging to the Irish Forestry Funds and Forestry Investment Plans were fertilised. A total of 85 tons of fertiliser was spread over the plantations.

The overall operation was highly successful. There were no reports of pollution or complaints from neighbours/statutory authorities. Already, we have seen significant improvement in colour and next season we expect to see improved growth. Their progress will be monitored over the coming seasons and it is likely that they will not require further fertilising in the future.

Daragh Little, B. Agr. Sc. (Forestry) is a director of Forest Enterprises Ltd.

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to the Irish Forestry Funds

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