



SUITE 2, WICKLOW ENTERPRISE PARK, THE MURROUGH, WICKLOW TOWN, CO. WICKLOW. A67 P309

## National Planning Framework (NPF) - Submission

### Introduction

Woodlands of Ireland is an environmental Charity dedicated to the proactive management and expansion of Ireland's native woodlands. It is an inclusive, partner-based organisation with a strong scientific and technical approach in developing the tools and expertise to meet our goals. Therefore, we work with the relevant State/semi-state Agencies (Forest Service, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Heritage Council, Environmental Protection Agency, Coillte, Bord na Mona, etc.) and the private sector (forestry and ecological professionals), as well as the general public.

Only approximately 1% of our indigenous woodlands remain from an estimated maximum of ca. 80% over 6,000 years ago. There are considerable opportunities to expand the native woodland resource (as per the attached 'A Native Woodland Strategy for Native Woodlands in Ireland'). A recent report by Woodlands of Ireland on the Natural Capital Values of our native woodlands estimated that they are currently worth approximately €140m annually. These values include biodiversity, recreation, eco-tourism, health, climate mitigation functions and wood production.

Multiple benefits would accrue if this was strategically done through afforestation with native trees and shrubs. It would address key concepts of the NPF goals with respect to

1. How Ireland would look 20 years from now
  2. Contribute to a better-quality environment
  3. Climate change mitigation
  4. Adopt best practise environmental management with multiple benefits, and
  5. Provide niche indigenous local employment and empowerment of local communities
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1. The aesthetics of our landscape are often forgotten and yet it is a key factor that attracts tourists to Ireland. Native woodlands strategically place, especially in upland gullies and valleys, where appropriate enhances the visual character of the landscape. This can be achieved through current grant-based incentives, especially the Forest Service Native Woodland Scheme
  2. Native woodlands can also be utilised - not only to enhance landscapes, increase biodiversity and wildlife functions, but also have a protective function when planted at strategic locations in water catchments. They intercept pollution (nutrients and sediment) from elsewhere in the catchment when planted on river, stream and lake banks, thereby protecting and enhancing potable water and instream species such as fish that depend on clean water.
  3. Predicted climate change indicated more frequent flood events and a warmer climate. Native woodlands planted strategically on slopes and on floodplains slow overland flows during flood events thereby mitigating the worst excesses of flooding. The shade provided by trees and shrubs along streams and rivers also keeps temperatures more even and

reduces instream temperatures during summer temperature peaks which can lead to stress and mortality of some fish species such as Atlantic salmon. Trees and shrubs also sequester/lock up carbon from the atmosphere and as native woodlands are permanent features in the landscape these can be viewed as permanent carbon sinks.

4. Native woodlands are management is associated with a high degree of skill and technical know-how that has relevance for the management of commercial conifer management. Over the past 20 years or so these skills have been developed through silvicultural training and management. Therefore, the foundation and basis for strategically expanding our native woodlands for specific objectives as outlined above has already been laid and good, sustainable environmental management is an integral concept of the approach adopted to date.
5. There are specific, highly skilled jobs associated with native woodland management including forest and ecological management, quality indigenous wood production, eco-tourism projects, crafts and outdoor-based education initiatives. Though difficult to quantify, there's little doubt that concerted action in this area will have direct employment benefits at a local level and indirect benefits via tourism. In addition, local communities can be directly involved through native woodland management projects in conjunction with State-owned woodlands which can also be used for education and recreation. These would also have considerable health and well-being benefits.

## **Conclusion**

Woodlands of Ireland has outlined the enormous potential and benefits of native woodlands and works closely with all stakeholders to create a better environment for us all. We would appreciate an opportunity to discuss the potential for focussing on native woodlands to benefit society in the future and look forward to your response.