



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

# IRELAND'S FOREST STRATEGY

2023-2030 







## Acknowledgements

Ireland's Forest Strategy has been prepared by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and is based on the work of Project Woodland. It has been informed by a series of consultations with the public including a public attitude survey, an online consultation survey, a study of the attitudes of rural communities, a citizens assembly style deliberative dialogue, a youth forum, and a series of bilateral meetings with key stakeholders.







## Our overriding objective

The overriding objective between now and 2030 is to urgently expand the national forest estate on both public and private land in a manner that will deliver lasting benefits for climate change, biodiversity, water quality, wood production, economic development, employment and quality of life. This will be a challenge of significant proportions, which will require a whole of society and whole of government response if we are to succeed.





## Minister's Foreword



As Minister of State with responsibility for Forestry, it gives me great pleasure to launch Ireland's Forest Strategy to 2030. This Strategy provides us with a roadmap for the rest of this decade to put in place strong foundations for multifunctional forests that deliver for climate, nature, wood, people, and economic and rural development.

Forestry, like the broader land use sector, has the capacity to be a hugely significant policy lever in meeting our climate and biodiversity targets, as well as improving water quality and providing quality employment opportunities in rural areas.

Forestry, in its many different forms, evokes a broad range of views and requires sensitive and balanced policy design. As such, in preparation of this Strategy, my Department carried out extensive consultation to find out what we as a nation want from our trees. The Shared National Vision for Trees, Woods and Forests in Ireland until 2050 reflects the outcome of that consultation, calling for "the right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management – supporting a sustainable and thriving economy and society and a healthy environment".

Our Shared National Vision anticipates by 2050 that Ireland's forests will be seen as a key solution to the climate, biodiversity, housing and health emergencies of the 2020s.

This Strategy outlines at a high level how we will make that Vision a reality. The Forestry Programme 2023 – 2027 and its successor Programme will be key to the implementation of the Forest Strategy between now and 2030. The Strategy recognises that we are moving away from previous eras of an excessive focus on commercial forestry in Government policy, where too often the wrong trees were planted in the wrong places, to an era in which we prioritise a multifunctional forest estate with a variety of tree types delivering different benefits for different objectives.

I am hugely optimistic about the direction and the potential of Irish forestry over the next decade and beyond. I believe we will see unprecedented levels of planting of mixed native forests by farmers, a significant shift towards continuous cover forestry in commercial plantations, and widespread adoption of agroforestry on farms across our landscape.

Through implementing this Vision we will see a forestry sector that makes a valuable contribution to rural communities and economies, providing highly skilled jobs and quality timber for use in construction, as well as restoring and enhancing our existing forests, and creating recreational spaces where all members of society can enjoy the benefits of spending time in nature.

I look forward to engaging with all stakeholders to make this Strategy a success, and to reflecting in 2030 on a thriving forest estate delivering the full range of benefits that trees and forests have to offer.

**Senator Pippa Hackett**

*Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity*



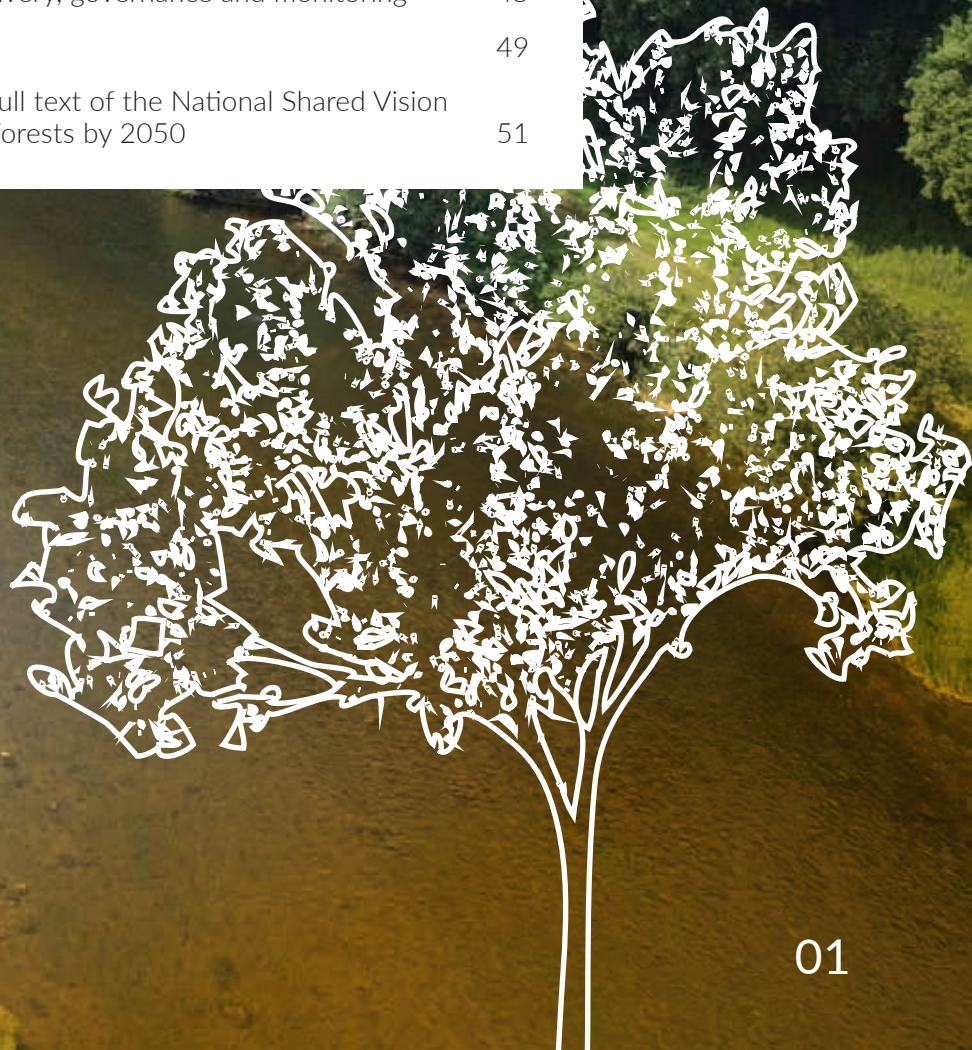






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# Section 1 Introduction and Context





Following an extensive period of engagement and consultation about the role of forests and forestry in Ireland's future<sup>1</sup> it is clear that there is a strong public appetite for more trees and forests in Ireland, as well as a very strong appreciation of the positive impact trees and forests can have in helping combat climate change and restoring nature – addressing two of the greatest global challenges of our time. Flowing from these public and stakeholder consultations, Ireland now has for the first time in its history, a Shared National Vision for the role of forests, and trees in Ireland's future. The vision is built around the principle of the right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management. It is an ambitious vision that if achieved, will result in a more widely forested country with multifunctional and diverse forests delivering multiple benefits for climate, nature, wood production, people, communities, the economy and rural development. In realising the vision, the forests of the future will also look different to many of today's forests as diverse and mixed forests become the dominant feature along with a greater presence of agroforestry, continuous cover forests, native forests and urban forests.

Ireland now has for the first time in its history, a Shared National Vision for the role of forests, and trees in Ireland's future, built around the principle of the right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management.

This strategy is all about making this ambitious Shared National Vision a reality. It is a Vision for meaningful change and is designed to provide an overarching framework to identify the actions needed to implement that change. These actions are described in the associated Implementation Plan for the Forest Strategy.

The current status of forests and forestry in Ireland is set out in Section 2. It describes how people and communities currently interact with forests, how forests and forestry can be both good or bad for the environment depending on how they are planned and managed, the role of forests in helping combat climate change, the development of our timber products industry and its role as a leader of the emerging circular and bioeconomy and forestry's important role in supporting the social and economic viability of rural communities.

In Section 3, the key drivers for change are described. These include the climate and biodiversity crises and the role that forests and forestry can play in tackling both crises; the role of multifunctional forests in delivering multiple benefits for the environment, economy and society; the emerging circular and bio-economy; wood product innovation and greater use of timber in houses and buildings; rural development and job creation; and, building the necessary skills and knowledge base needed to support a growing industry.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, (2022). Summary report of the results of the Public Consultation – In the context of the communication on developing a shared vision for the role of trees and forests and a national Forest Strategy for Ireland. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle, Wexford.







The Shared National Vision is set out in Section 4 with the strategic objectives, values and goals required to implement this vision described in Section 5. Goals for 2030 are set out for: forests for climate, forests for nature, forests for wood, forests for people and forests for economic and rural development. System-wide challenges and how to address them are described in Section 6 with Section 7 setting out an overall framework for delivery, governance and monitoring.

The overriding objective between now and 2030 is to urgently expand the national forest estate on both public and private land in a manner that will deliver lasting benefits for climate change, biodiversity, water quality, wood production, economic development, employment and quality of life. This will be a challenge of significant proportions, which will require a whole of society and a whole of government response if we are to succeed. This Strategy is designed to make this happen.







## Section 2 Forests and Forestry in Ireland







Following the last ice age, Ireland was colonised by vegetation, including trees that migrated from Britain and the Continent. These included species such as ash, birch, elm, hazel, oak, rowan, Scots pine and willow. Between 7,500 and 5,000 years ago, forest is considered to have covered approximately 80% of the land surface of the country. However, centuries of over-exploitation and clearances for agriculture left the country with a forest cover of just over 1% of the total land area by the beginning of

Today, after over a century of afforestation, the forest area has increased to over 808,848 ha, more than 11.6% of the area of Ireland, the highest it has been in over 350 years.

the twentieth century. Few remaining native forests were present, largely limited to fragmented and disconnected islands in a landscape dominated by grassland and peat.

Today, after over a century of afforestation, the forest area has increased to over 808,848 ha, more than 11.6% of the area of Ireland, the highest it has been

in over 350 years. Despite this achievement, Ireland's forest cover remains low by European standards. Half the area of forests in Ireland is in public ownership, mainly managed by the state-owned forestry company Coillte, with the remainder owned privately. National Parks and Nature Reserves are also in public ownership. Private afforestation increased considerably in the mid-1980s following the introduction of new grant schemes, and today there are over 23,500 private forest owners in the country, mainly farmers. Of the total forest area, 69% is conifer forest, 31% is broadleaved forest. Sitka spruce is the most common tree species, occupying 45% of the total forest area. The most prominent broadleaf species consist of willow and birch, followed by ash, oak and alder.

## Supporting Climate Action

This is a time of great opportunity for Ireland. Through a major expansion of new forests, we can provide a meaningful contribution to our commitments under the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal to become a climate-neutral country by 2050 and protect our natural heritage and biodiversity at the same time. Failing to seize this opportunity will potentially expose future generations to suffer the burden of missed climate targets.

Forests and forest products play an important role in mitigating climate change by sequestering and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>). The national forest estate is an important carbon reservoir, amounting to approximately 325.5 million tonnes of carbon<sup>2</sup>. It has been estimated that the level of avoided emissions from fossil-based products through the use of wood-based products is 0.79 tCO<sub>2</sub>eq/m<sup>3</sup> at the roundwood stage<sup>3</sup>. This highlights the importance of using wood as a building material to mitigate against climate change.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine, (2022). Ireland's National Forest Inventory 2022 – Main Findings. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle, Wexford.

<sup>3</sup> COFORD (2021). Forests and wood products, and their importance in climate change mitigation. A Series of COFORD Statements. COFORD, Dublin, Ireland.





More than half of the carbon in harvested timber is stored in wood products and when these are used in long-lived products, the carbon can be “locked-in” for decades. In this regard, the cascading principle is crucial for a just transition to a sustainable and climate-neutral economy. Wood should be used as much as possible for the production of long-lived materials and products, for example in buildings, to substitute carbon-intensive materials while acknowledging that not all wood is fit for long-life products. Short-lived wood products also have a role to play, especially in the substitution of carbon-intensive materials. The wood used for the production of short-lived products and also for energy production should rely only on wood that is unsuitable for long-lived materials and products and secondary woody biomass such as sawmill by-products and residues. The Renewable Energy Directive<sup>4</sup> (RED II) sets out the sustainability and greenhouse gas emissions saving criteria for the use of forest biomass, which minimises the risk of using forest biomass derived from unsustainable production.

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<sup>4</sup> Renewable Energy Directive (EU) 2018/2001 available at: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/dir/2018/2001/2022-06-07>





## Protecting Nature and the Environment

Planned and managed correctly, both planted and semi-natural forests can complement and enhance the important biodiversity that we have. Forests are complex habitats and depending on different factors such as forest type, management, age, structure, site conditions and the original habitat they replace, can support a wide range of flora and fauna. Forests have the potential to complement and connect surrounding habitats and ecosystems, providing a richer more diverse landscape. Forest biodiversity is

not just about the trees but also about providing a range of habitats such as wet habitats, open space, grassland types, hedgerows and semi-natural woodland.

Our forests can, and should become outdoor classrooms for citizens (young and old), providing education on how the forests interact with nature, climate and our economy.

Ireland is fully committed to the European Union's Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. This represents a comprehensive, ambitious, and long-term plan to protect nature and provide continuous improvement to nature's ecosystems. Ireland welcomed the publication of the EU Forest Strategy for 2030

and its increased ambition in relation to the potential contribution of forests to realising the objectives of the European Green Deal. The EU Forest Strategy sets out a vision for European forests to be wholly compatible with and supportive of nature and the environment while also providing economic and social benefits to communities.





This Strategy recognises that achieving the goals and objectives set out will be possible only with the cooperation and active involvement of farmers and landowners; where there is trust and confidence in the regulatory framework and between the key stakeholders.

Forests can provide multiple benefits to our environment by contributing to air, soil and water quality and through the provision of timber as a valuable renewable resource. In urban areas, even small pockets of forest can create biodiversity hotspots and protection for communities of plants and animals. Poorly sited, inappropriately designed and badly managed forests, though, can also be bad for the environment, particularly for water quality, habitats and species.

In line with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and the EU Forest Strategy to 2030, this Strategy for Ireland seeks to, *inter alia*, support the restoration and expansion of a range of different forest ecosystems. This includes the promotion of resilient silviculture that is based on the natural processes of the forest ecosystem: a greater diversity of tree species, natural regeneration, rewilding, significantly increased levels of Continuous Cover Forestry and native forest establishment. It also includes agroforestry, the protection and restoration of ancient woodland and promoting forest health and resilience through closer-to-nature forest management practices; helping to ensure that forest ecosystems are an integral part of the wider ecosystem.

## Supporting the Bioeconomy

Ireland's forest bioeconomy is starting to thrive. A highly efficient timber products industry has been developed based on the forest output of fast-growing conifer species. The forest sector itself includes the State, Coillte, farmers, private forest owners, sawmills, and other manufacturers of forest products together with foresters, harvesting and haulage operators, forestry contractors, various forestry-related enterprises and service providers. The sector makes a sizeable contribution to the national economy.

Conifers are an essential factor in the supply chain of timber products in Ireland and across its export markets. This is also the case throughout most of the developed world. There is minimal waste throughout the supply chain as every part of the tree that is harvested can be processed to make different wood products at sawmills throughout Ireland. The bottom part of the tree is typically sawn into construction-grade timber that is used for rafters, joists, studs and the frame of our homes. The middle part of the tree is typically sawn into pallets that are used to transport goods around the world or decking and fencing that is used in our gardens and farms. The top part of the tree is used to make fence posts or is chipped to manufacture oriented strand board (OSB) and medium-density fibreboard (MDF) which is used in our buildings or for furniture manufacture.

The Irish sawmilling and board manufacturing sector is competitive internationally and has developed major export markets and supply chains over recent years in the UK and elsewhere. Demand for all wood products remains strong as overseas markets for Irish sawnwood and wood-based panels continues to expand in response to our global need for low-carbon building solutions.







With the current demand for increased housing in Ireland, wood products can help play an important role in providing a sustainable, efficient and home-grown solution. Using wood as a substitute for more carbon-intensive materials like steel and concrete has several advantages. For example, wood is recyclable and renewable and it facilitates quicker build times. Products engineered and constructed off-site can also reduce environmental impacts onsite. The operational performance and embodied carbon is much less when buildings are constructed with increased amounts of wood. Innovation in the emerging circular bioeconomy is steadily developing in Ireland and there is increasing demand for the use of wood as a substitute material for concrete and steel in the construction industry. House building in Ireland is mostly low rise but analysis shows that increasing the use of timber frame and adopting new engineered wood technologies such as cross-laminate timber (CLT) for high rise applications has the potential to reduce CO<sub>2</sub>eq emissions by 3.4 million tonnes by 2050<sup>5</sup>.

## Supporting Rural Communities

Total employment generated by activities in the forest and wood products sector is estimated at 9,423 (direct and indirect) full-time equivalents and the sector contributes over €2 billion annually to the economy<sup>6</sup>. Ireland continues to support the creation of new forests and provides financial supports for forest establishment as well as annual premium payments. There are almost 24,000 forest owners in Ireland and in 2022 alone, 49.5 million was paid in forest premiums. This has driven an increase in the availability of wood for harvest. For example, the roundwood harvest in 2021 was over 4 million m<sup>3</sup>, the highest level since records began, approximately 2 million m<sup>3</sup> of which came from the private sector. Exports of wood products from Ireland are also important to the circular economy; valued at €751 million in 2020<sup>7</sup>.

The national forest estate is an important carbon reservoir, amounting to approximately 323.5 million tonnes of carbon.

Forest creation can provide opportunities for income, employment and enterprise diversification, particularly in rural areas and for farmers. A sustainable forest bioeconomy relies on our continued commitment to the principles and practices of Sustainable Forest Management and this Strategy recognises the central role of land owners, foresters and those employed in the forest sector and the entire forest-based value chain in meeting our national climate targets and the objectives of the EU Green Deal. Engaging with farmers and securing confidence in forestry as a rewarding long term enterprise will be essential in increasing participation in forestry and unlocking economic growth potential at individual farm level. Trees are sometimes considered separate from traditional agricultural activities, but forest creation can be a valuable, compatible element of any farming enterprise. It can complement and contribute to existing farming activities and offers a competitive long term land use option and investment opportunity.

<sup>5</sup> COFORD, (2021). Forests and wood products, and their importance in climate change mitigation. A Series of COFORD Statements. COFORD, Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>6</sup> COFORD, (2022). Economic activity and employment levels in the Irish forest sector. COFORD, Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>7</sup> CSO, (2022). Wood and Paper Exports and Imports 2020. Central Statistics Office, Dublin, Ireland.





For the majority of forest owners selling timber is the primary source of income from forests and these products will be key in Ireland's transition to a sustainable climate-neutral economy. Softwoods (wood derived from conifers) are essential in providing us with these wood products but with more diverse forests we can ensure that they deliver more of their socio-economic functions for generations to come, providing forest-based economic activities that diversify local economies and jobs in rural communities.

Forests provide a source of renewable raw materials and can replace materials and energy produced from fossil fuels which help mitigate rises in greenhouse gases. Ireland has a magnificent asset in its forest recreation sites and there are opportunities for growth in ecotourism and in unlocking the additional potential from non-wood forest-based products in Ireland. Managed sustainably forests can benefit local economies and human health without adversely impacting biodiversity. These opportunities can extend to edible forest products, oils and other products from herbs, shrubs and fungi associated with forests.

## Supporting People

*"Research has demonstrated that there are quantifiable physical, mental, social health and wellbeing benefits from green spaces such as forests<sup>8</sup>".* Visits to Coillte's forests

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<sup>8</sup> EPA, (2019). Protecting and developing Ireland's green and blue spaces to benefit our health and well-being. Available at: [www.epa.ie](https://www.epa.ie)





increased by nearly 40% during the Covid-19 pandemic, with 2.2 million people visiting their top fifty forests between March and December 2020. There is an opportunity under this Forest Strategy to benefit a significant proportion of the Irish population, increasing forest cover and providing quality accessible spaces for recreation, exercise, connecting with nature and promoting physical and mental health and well-being.

The function of some of Ireland's forests has changed over time. Today forests can be places of enjoyment and there is an increasing demand for activity-based pursuits particularly in public forests. Walking, cycling, orienteering, nature watching, fishing, horse riding and camping are just some of the activities people can

enjoy in Ireland's forests. Additionally, our forests can, and should become outdoor classrooms for citizens (young and old), providing education on how the forests interact with nature, climate and our economy.

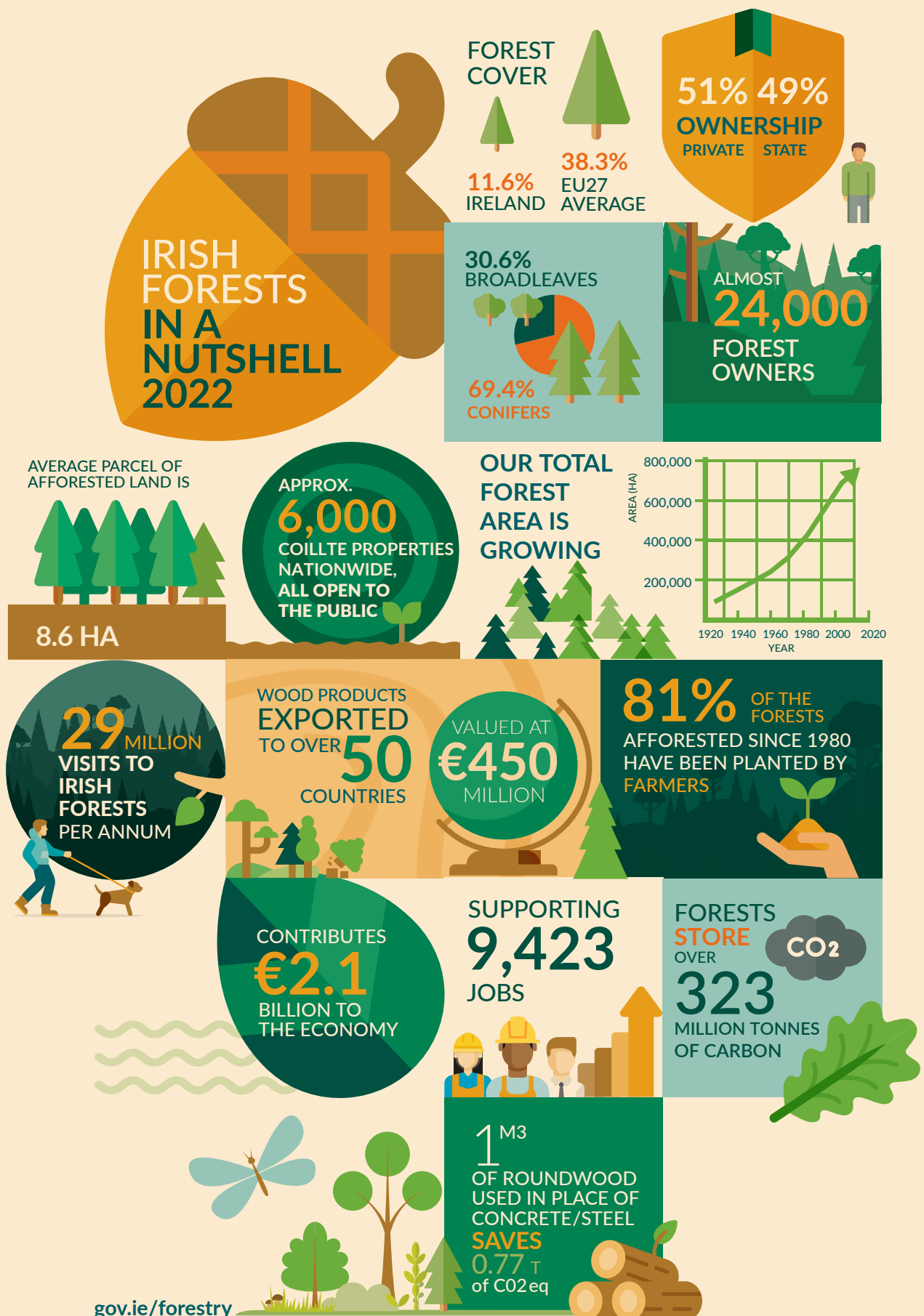
With the majority of our population living in urban areas, it is important that they are included in this strategy. Forests can become as much a part of the natural fabric of urban and peri-urban areas as they are for rural communities. It is important that people from rural and urban communities are part of a more integrated land use approach to forest creation that can deliver multiple benefits for climate, wood, nature and for local economies and communities.

It is clear from the public consultation and engagement that addressing challenges associated with climate change and biodiversity will be key to realising our Vision and to future forest planning, creation and management.

This Strategy recognises that achieving the goals and objectives it sets out will be possible only with the cooperation and active involvement of farmers and landowners; where there is trust and confidence in the regulatory framework and between the key stakeholders. It is important that farmers and landowners retain a strong sense of ownership and decision making capacity as their forest resource

establishes and matures. Support measures must be designed and developed in a way that makes the decisions around land use change and the creation of new forests easier for farmers who are considering this option. Similarly, it is recognised that the future expansion of forests in Ireland depends on a skilled workforce with sufficient capacity to adapt to changing conditions within the sector. The demand placed on our forests to play an increasingly multifunctional role, as set out in this Strategy, will create opportunities for upskilling and reskilling. Promoting and improving gender balance in the forestry sector will be an important part of this. Continued support for education, training, knowledge transfer and career path development will be essential in this regard.









## Section 3 Strategic drivers for change





## Climate crisis

This Strategy is being written at the onset of a rapidly accelerating climate crisis. Higher temperatures and the frequency and impact of extreme weather events are resulting in significant costs to Ireland and the EU's economy and society<sup>9</sup>. The current changes in the planet's climate are transforming the world. Each of the last four decades has been warmer than any previous decade since 1850 and the last two decades have included 18 of the warmest years on record. Extreme weather events, such as heatwaves, floods and severe storms, are becoming more frequent in Europe and elsewhere.

Climate change, if not adequately dealt with, will have a devastating impact on nature, bringing about irreversible changes to many ecosystems, further aggravating the loss of biodiversity and the ecosystem functions and services that human well-being depends on.

This crisis is driving a transformation of our society. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 sets Ireland on the path to a 51% reduction in emissions by the end of this decade and to net-zero emissions no later than 2050 and forests have a key role to play in this transformation.

## Climate change mitigation & adaptation

Expanding the area of forest cover, coupled with a significant reduction in emissions in the agriculture and transport sectors, together with increased carbon removals in other land uses will be integral to meeting the country's climate commitments.

Over the coming decade and beyond, forestry will be the one of the largest land-based climate mitigation measures available to Ireland. Forest creation is one of the most effective land-use changes which can contribute to Ireland's carbon emission targets.

Over the coming decade and beyond, forestry will be the one of the largest land-based climate mitigation measures available to Ireland.

Ireland's forest sink is declining and is projected to be a source of emissions during the period 2025-2030. This is due to a number of factors including recent low levels of afforestation; legacy emissions associated with forests planted on organic soils over half a century ago; a projected increase in the levels of harvesting in the private sector; and a decline in growth rates associated with the age profile of our forest estate. In line with Ireland's Climate Action Plan, an expanded and sustained afforestation programme of 8,000ha or more will improve the sink capacity of the estate. We must, therefore, substantially increase our current rates of afforestation and provide a range of forest management measures to increase carbon storage in our existing forests.

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<sup>9</sup> Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, (2022). Summary report of the results of the Public Consultation – In the context of the communication on developing a shared vision for the role of trees and forests and a national Forest Strategy for Ireland. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle, Wexford.



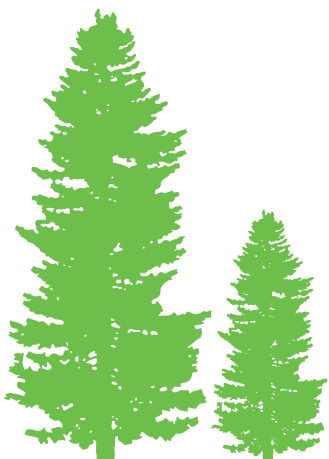


The changing climate will also impact the health and productivity of our forests. This may include, the frequency and intensity of forest fires, drought, extreme storms, as well as phenology (seasonal timing of biological activity), and the distribution and abundance of invasive species and pests. This has the potential to reduce the adaptability of trees to climate change, and may consequently affect the range of social, economic and environmental services that forests provide, including the ability to sequester carbon. Therefore, our forests need to be resilient to cope with, or even take advantage of, future growing conditions that a changing climate may bring.

## Biodiversity crisis

Going hand in hand with the climate crisis is a biodiversity crisis. Biodiversity is at the very foundation of our environment and forests can be among the most biologically diverse ecosystems on earth. Ireland's remaining natural forests are fragmented across the country and often degraded. The European Commission's proposal for a Nature Restoration Law will come with an overarching objective for the long-term recovery of nature. For forest ecosystems, the proposal contains specific targets with an increasing trend for standing and lying deadwood, uneven-aged forests, forest connectivity, the abundance of common forests birds and stock of organic carbon.

There is a need to ensure a sustainable forest sector that increases forestry's contribution to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity and habitats, while also combating climate change. There is also a need to ensure that robust environmental safeguards are in place for licensed forestry activities and grant aided schemes. New approaches and tools in forest creation and management to preserve and restore biodiversity are required to create forest structures that support natural life cycles and processes, through natural regeneration or rewilding, for example. This Forest Strategy aims to significantly expand the range and area of our native forests, and in line with the EU Forest Strategy, to strengthen forest protection and restoration with more biodiversity-friendly Sustainable Forest Management to ensure the resilience and productive capacity of our forests for generations to come.







## Multifunctional forests

The need for our forests to provide multiple benefits is increasingly driving how we manage our forests. All forest types can deliver benefits to the economy, environment and society. However, the choice of management approach will result in trade-offs between the types and the range of benefits they can provide. While each will have its advantages and disadvantages depending on the objectives and purpose of the forest, environmental protection must always be a key factor. This will mean applying the most appropriate forest management approach for the objectives set for a forest – whether that be even-aged forests with a commercial focus, closer-to-nature forests, semi-natural forests or agroforestry etc., but all within the overall framework of Sustainable Forest Management (SFM)<sup>10</sup>. SFM is a dynamic and evolving concept, providing a framework for balancing the provision and enhancement of ecological, economic and

social services of forests and/or forest ecosystems to contribute to the three dimensions of sustainable development and thus promoting the multiple functions of forests.

Over the coming decade and beyond, forestry will be the one of the largest land-based climate mitigation measures available to Ireland.

Ireland has incorporated SFM into national forestry programmes and environmental guidelines and the Forestry Act 2014 itself references them. A central tenet throughout is that forest management is compatible with the protection of

the environment, including specific receptors such as water, archaeology, biodiversity and landscape. Management of our forests, both today and in the future, will require the full implementation of the principles of SFM, aligned with the principle of the right trees in the right places for the right reasons, with the right management.

## 'Legacy' Forests

It is recognised that as well as the positive attributes of forests, the potential exists for negative impacts on biodiversity that need to be considered and managed. A cohort of maturing planted forests are located in upland areas and on peatland. These sites often coincide strongly with protected habitats (e.g., Blanket Bog and Wet Heath Annex I habitats) and species (e.g., Hen Harrier, Freshwater Pearl Mussel) and with sensitive water catchments (namely High-Status Objective Waterbodies). There is a need to examine and restructure our legacy forests in a way that is more closely aligned with the goals, objectives and ambitions of the Forest Strategy. Initiatives like the LIFE Programme and particularly projects funded under the 'Nature and Biodiversity' sub-programme will help inform forest planning and management that benefits from research focused on nature restoration, engaging with land owners and stakeholders and halting biodiversity loss. This will be key to providing science led solutions that use an ecological approach to rehabilitating and restoring some of our sensitive landscapes and peatland sites that are currently forested. For example, the Wild Western Peatlands Project, led by Coillte Nature is working to rehabilitate Atlantic blanket bog and wet heath that is currently planted with commercial spruce and pine forests. Future research will help to fill the knowledge gaps around mitigation measures and to find optimal solutions to address legacy issues and associated costs with these forests.

<sup>10</sup> FOREST EUROPE. Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe. Available at: <https://foresteurope.org/workstreams/sustainable-forest-management/>





## Water Quality

Forestry activities have the potential to impact both positively and negatively, on aquatic resources. It is recognised that inappropriately sited forests and poorly managed forest operations can negatively impact on water quality and on aquatic habitats and species, particularly in terms of sedimentation and nutrient runoff. However, it is also important to acknowledge the significant role that properly sited, designed and managed woodlands and forests can play in protecting and enhancing water quality, through the delivery of a range of water-related ecosystem services. Forest management is long-term, and many forests that are now at tree felling age were planted prior to the introduction of water setbacks and other mandatory measures<sup>11</sup> designed to protect water. As these forests are felled and restructured over the coming years, forestry will move away from being considered a pressure on water quality, and towards the recognition that forests can play a considerable role in protecting and enhancing water quality. In addition, there is a need to take steps to create new forests in targeted areas, with the specific objective of protecting water from significant pressures; helping Ireland achieve objectives set out in the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland 2022-2027 and expanding woodland habitat such as Alluvial Woodland, a priority Annex I habitat that has an overall current conservation status of Unfavorable-Bad.

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<sup>11</sup> Current iterations of these mandatory measures are set out in the Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (2016) and the Standards for Felling and Reforestation (2019).



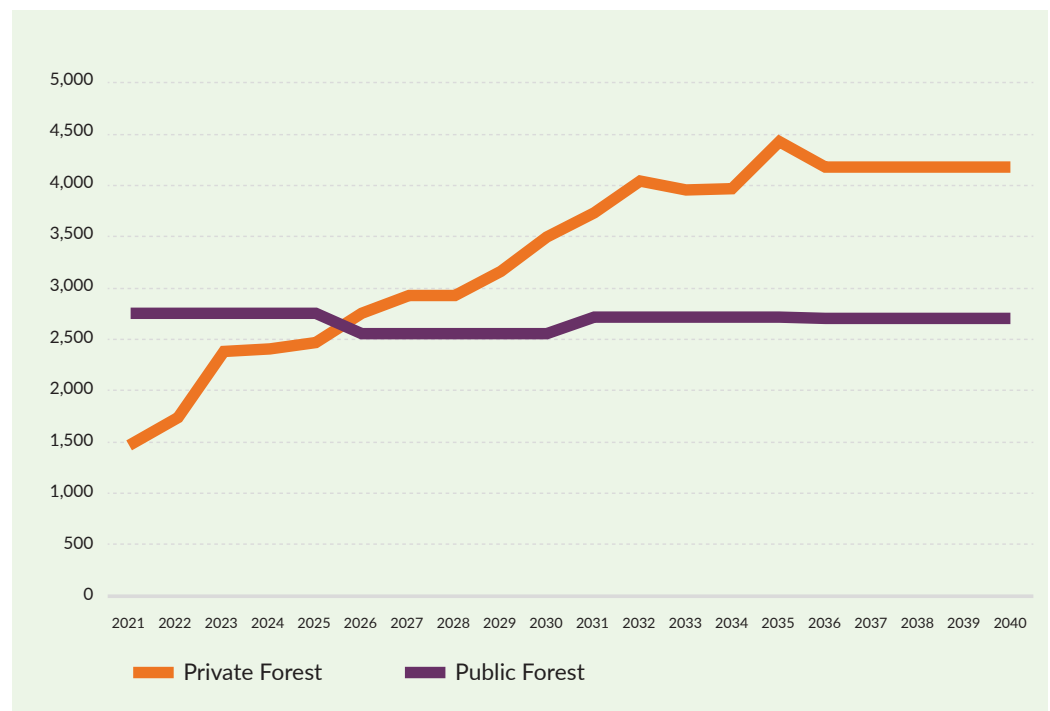
## Wood supply and demand

To meet the needs of the circular economy there is increasing demand for sustainable wood products. The forest sector holds significant potential for sustainably increasing supply. Estimates indicate that the annual potential roundwood supply will increase from 4.7 million m<sup>3</sup> in 2021 to 7.1 million m<sup>3</sup> by 2035, with the increase largely driven by the private sector, with softwood timber from conifer species being the main component. Hardwoods are currently a minor element of the annual roundwood available for processing, and this is reflected in the very limited hardwood processing capacity. As more of our private forest estate matures it is essential that markets are

developed for the increased use in hardwoods. This will require increased funding for research and innovation for developing new and emerging markets.

The need for our forests to provide multiple benefits is increasingly driving how we manage our forests.

The cascading principle for the priority uses of wood is a key driver for how we will use wood in the future. This approach is described in the EU Forest Strategy, where it proposes the use of wood according to several ordered priorities as follows: first, 1) Wood-based products; followed by 2) Extending their service life; then 3) Re-use; 4) Recycling; 5) Bioenergy, and finally cascading down to 6) Disposal. This helps to ensure that wood is being used to substitute more carbon-intensive products as much as possible and deliver the highest value for carbon storage.



Forecast of total net realisable volume (2021-2040)





## Wood markets, innovation and promotion

As Ireland's forest estate increases and matures, new opportunities will arise to further harness the economic potential and develop new wood markets. The forest sector can capitalise on the increasing demand for sustainable construction materials, as well as for woody biomass. For instance, there are currently low levels of wood used in house building and construction in Ireland. This represents a significant opportunity for the sector, both in the use of existing products such as sawn wood and panel products, but also in timber-frame manufacturing and the development of new and innovative engineered wood products. New technology, research and innovation also offer the potential to help stimulate higher efficiency and productivity throughout the supply chain. Promoting the use of wood products will also require a cross-Governmental approach to demand-side actions, including combating some misconceptions about fire risk and lack of durability, communicating to the general public on multiple benefits of wood products in terms of reducing pollution, and reducing the carbon footprint of our future building stock.

## Rural development and rural-based jobs

As Ireland's economy transitions to net zero emissions by 2050 the forest sector can provide opportunities for income and enterprise diversification, particularly in rural areas and for farmers. Presently total employment generated by activities in the forest and wood products sector is estimated at 9,423 full-time equivalents<sup>12</sup>, while since 1980, almost 24,000<sup>13</sup> private landowners have received grant aid to establish forests, the majority of which were farmers. A greater expansion of forests will reward farmers and landowners and will underpin increased demand for sustainably sourced timber from local sources. Such changes can also increase opportunities for tourism and recreation, providing additional opportunities to support local communities.

## Skills, Education & Knowledge

The ambition for a much larger and more diverse forest footprint successfully managed to balance and deliver multiple objectives and benefits for people, planet and prosperity will drive the need for people with a wide variety of skills. There is a clear expectation from the public consultation that forests are increasingly seen as multifunctional. This will require a diverse range of forest professionals, among others, foresters skilled in a range of sustainable forest management practices, ecologists, engineers and designers, data specialists, as well as skilled forest operatives. It will also drive the need to empower forest owners to recognise the full potential of their forest and become active in their management. Behind the development of skills and education will be the need for adequate capacity in the Education and Training Sector and a strong research sector to ensure forest practice and policy are well founded, and that decisions are made based on best available science.

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<sup>12</sup> COFORD, (2022). Economic activity and employment levels in the Irish forest Sector. COFORD, Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, (2022). Forest Statistics Ireland 2022. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford, Ireland.



## Societal changes

The population of Ireland has grown significantly in the last number of years, growing from approximately 3.8 million at the turn of the millennium to over 5 million today and is forecasted to reach 6 million by 2050<sup>14</sup>. The majority of our population live in urban or near urban areas and this trend is forecasted to continue. It is important therefore that their needs are considered in the planning and management of forests. A recent Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine survey<sup>15</sup> highlighted recreation as the key driver for forest visits. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the important role our natural spaces play in our society. Our public forest estate is open to all and recreation facilities have been developed which attract thousands of visitors each year. There is an opportunity under this Forest Strategy to provide further accessible spaces for recreation, exercise, connection with nature and promotion of physical and mental health and well-being.

There is a clear expectation from the public consultation that forests are increasingly seen as multifunctional.

Population demographics are also driving the need for new and better-quality housing. There is currently a critical lack of supply, with the State needing an average of 33,000 new homes per year up to 2030<sup>16</sup>. As we build these new homes there are significant opportunities for reducing the use of carbon-intensive materials such as concrete and steel, and replacing them with wood-based products, thus reducing carbon emissions and storing carbon for longer periods. Continued innovation in building design and new techniques in offsite construction will lead to increased use of timber in the future. Cross-sectoral cooperation between government departments, developers, construction planners, insurance providers and others along with a structured education campaign has the potential to facilitate a transition away from concrete and steel to wood as the building material of choice for homes and buildings.

## The wider policy framework

Requirements to meet national and international commitments on climate change, biodiversity, water quality and forest health are becoming increasingly important strategic drivers of forest policy. The United Nations Global Forest Goals, European Green Deal (2019), the EU Biodiversity Strategy and the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030, all place a focus on ensuring healthy and resilient forests, that contribute significantly to biodiversity and climate goals, reduce and mitigate natural disasters while securing livelihoods and supporting a circular bioeconomy and rural communities. Nationally these requirements are reflected in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act (2021) and the actions included for forestry in the Climate Action Plan<sup>17</sup>. The wider policy framework will be strengthened even further with the coming of the new EU Nature Restoration Law, the EU Deforestation Regulation and national policy such as the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the Bioeconomy Action Plan.

<sup>14</sup> CSO, (2022). Census of Population 2022 – Preliminary Results. Central Statistics Office, Cork, Ireland.

<sup>15</sup> Behaviour and Attitudes, (2022). Public Attitudes Survey on Forestry – November/December 2021. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford, Ireland.

<sup>16</sup> DHLGH, (2021). Housing for all – A New Housing Plan for Ireland. Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Custom House, Dublin, Ireland.

<sup>17</sup> DECC, (2021). Climate Action Plan 2021. Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. Adelaide Rd. Dublin 2.





## Section 4

# A Shared National Vision for the Future





Developing a Shared National Vision for the role of trees, woods and forests in Ireland's future is a cornerstone of Ireland's Forest Policy. Following an extensive engagement and consultation process, feedback from a wide range of stakeholders, the general public and young people has been considered in arriving at the Vision, which is built around the principle of the right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management.

It is clear across all strands of the consultation carried out that trees and forests, and having access to them are important to people and communities. People agree that

People agree that Ireland needs more forests, both in rural and urban areas and on private and publicly owned land and it is clear that Ireland should be ambitious in its targets for forest creation.

Ireland needs more forests, both in rural and urban areas and on private and publicly owned land and it is clear that Ireland should be ambitious in its targets for forest creation. There is a broad preference for more mixed forests in the landscape and a wish to see more native and broadleaf trees established. There is also a level of interest in more community involvement in forest planning and management. There is support for considering an alternative approach to forest planning, one that is plan

led and based at a catchment, landscape, local authority or county level. There is a preference to see more wood products used in the construction of Irish houses and as an alternative to carbon-intensive products.

It is understood that there needs to be a significant shift in land use change and a regulatory and licensing system in place that can facilitate efficient and effective forest expansion and management. There is also a preference for a more diverse approach to forest management.

Climate change and biodiversity rank high on the list of drivers for creating new and managing existing forests among citizens. There is a wide recognition that forest resilience and the ability to adapt to future threats will be key to future forest planning and management.

There is a general consensus that increased use of wood and wood products in construction and energy production can provide multiple benefits in terms of climate change mitigation and support the circular bioeconomy.

There are some areas of tension, and trade-offs exist around the preferences for more wood and timber products to be used in construction and its supply from the growth and harvest of fast-growing conifer trees in Ireland. We need to provide a mix of forest types, which will include native and non-native species so that forests can provide the wide range of benefits required by society.







There is widespread support for promoting greater awareness and educating people about the multi-functions, benefits and culture of forests. A need has been identified to re-establish a more rooted understanding of the value of forests, collective support for forest expansion and a nationwide awareness of the potential of wood products within housing construction.

It is clear that having a sufficient workforce will be critical to realising the Shared National Vision and Forest Strategy and so the recruitment, retention, training, education, upskilling and reskilling of those in the forest sector will be needed to ensure sufficient resources are in place.

The Shared National Vision is designed to provide inspiration and motivation for action across the public and private sectors to deliver what is needed for forests and forestry in Ireland, while acknowledging the many challenges we face. It represents our shared vision of where Ireland can and needs to be by 2050 and beyond, for its trees and forests to have a positive meaningful and lasting impact. See appendix 1 for the complete text.





## A Shared National Vision for Trees, Woods and Forests in Ireland by 2050



By **2050**, Ireland's forests and woodlands will be seen as a **symbol of the transformational social, economic and environmental changes** that were needed to address the climate, biodiversity, housing and health emergencies of the 2020s.

A much larger and more diverse **forest footprint** is being successfully managed to balance and deliver multiple objectives and **benefits for climate, nature, water quality, wood production, people, the wider economy and rural communities.**

It forms a valuable, compatible element of the farming enterprise and is **co-existing** in harmony with urban and other landscapes and valued highly by citizens.



It is also supporting a thriving and growing forest sector, long term quality **employment** for a sustainable workforce, ecosystem services and public, educational and recreational amenities.

"The right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management supporting a sustainable and thriving economy and society and a healthy environment."

There is nationwide awareness and understanding of the multiple benefits of forests. Forestry is at the centre of the circular and

**green economy** with Irish grown timber the material of choice for the substitution of carbon intensive building products for new Irish homes.

Forestry is providing a profitable diversification option for farmers, with people living in rural, urban and suburban communities feeling a **sense of connection and pride** in their local forests and woodlands and the many benefits that they provide.

**Legacy environmental issues** associated with past forestry practices are being successfully addressed, building on improvements already made through enhanced sustainable forest management practices.

The Irish landscape now features a rich variety of diverse, resilient and healthy trees, woods and forests established for multiple purposes and **delivering multiple benefits** for the environment, economy and society on both public and private land.

[gov.ie/forestry](https://gov.ie/forestry)





## Section 5 Objectives, Values and Goals







## Overarching Objectives

The overriding objective between now and 2030 is to urgently expand the national forest estate on both public and private land in a manner that will deliver lasting benefits for climate change, biodiversity, water quality, wood production, economic development, employment and quality of life. This will be a challenge of significant proportions, which will require a whole of society and a whole of government response if we are to succeed.

In support of the Shared National Vision for 2050 three objectives have been identified that are grounded in the three sustainable development pillars and that must be achieved through the Forest Strategy by 2030. These objectives apply equally to all forests, both public and private.

- **People** – Involve local communities and landowners in forest expansion at local, regional and national levels and increase people's employment in, engagement with and enjoyment of forests for the benefit of their livelihood, health and well-being.
- **Planet** – Expand and adaptively restore forest ecosystems as a major national sink and store of carbon and a cornerstone of biodiversity, through the rapid and sustainable expansion of climate resilient and biodiverse forests that support a healthy and high-quality environment.
- **Prosperity** – Continue to grow the economic and employment value of forests as a key enabling element of the new bioeconomy, supporting an innovative, sustainable forestry sector and expanding the use of wood in construction.

## Values

This Strategy is based on the Shared National Vision and its overarching objectives are rooted in the three pillars of sustainability – People, Planet and Prosperity. The development of the Shared National Vision has its foundation in the concept of the right trees in the right places for the right reasons, with the right management – referred to here as the “four R's”. However, the term ‘right’ can have different meanings for different people. Sometimes the ‘right’ tree might be no tree and so it is important to have a common understanding of what is meant by the term ‘right’. A good starting point for this is to identify the values that we associate with forests in Ireland.

Five key values have been identified<sup>18</sup> through which the objectives can be realised and achieved. These are:

- Forests for Climate
- Forests for Nature
- Forests for Wood
- Forests for People
- Forests for Economy & Rural Development

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<sup>18</sup> These values have been identified through the course of Project Woodland and the outcomes of the public consultation and engagement process throughout 2022.











**18%  
forest  
cover**

## AMBITION FOR FOREST CREATION

In 2022 ninety-nine citizens took part in a Deliberative Dialogue on Forestry. This was part of a series of consultations conducted by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to gather the views of people living in Ireland on the reasons why we create forests, the places they are established, the types of trees we plant, and how forests are managed. The event culminated with participants being asked to vote on the level of ambition that the Government should consider for forest creation as it develops its new strategy for forests.

36% of participants agreed that the aim should be to achieve 18% forest cover by 2050 or sooner, while a further 52% agreed that the aim should be to achieve an even greater expansion of forest cover to help combat climate change. Taken together, 88% of participants endorsed a forest cover target of 18 % or more by 2050.

This Strategy aims to create the conditions that will lead to a substantial increase in forest cover. The pace at which 18% forest cover will be achieved will depend on how actively landowners and stakeholders will engage in demand led afforestation schemes.





## AMBITION FOR TREE AND FOREST DIVERSITY

It is clear from the public consultation and engagement process that there is a strong preference for a greater diversity of trees within forests and a greater diversity of forest types across Ireland. It is also clear from scientific evidence that a greater level of diversity of trees and forests is key to ensuring the resilience and productive capacity of our forests for decades to come.

This Forest Strategy below aims to create the conditions that will support the demand for more diverse forests, and one that recognises the contribution that all forest types can make to the delivery of benefits for climate, biodiversity, wood production, economic development, employment and quality of life.

**50%**  
of all new  
**forest**  
establishment  
**native or**  
**broadleaf**





## Strategic Goals

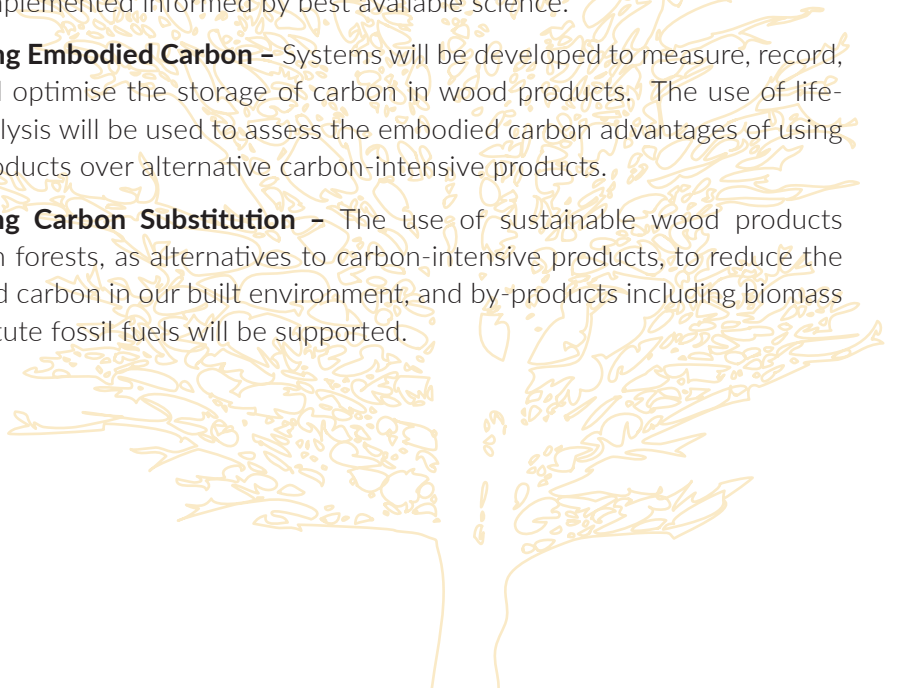
Specific goals have been identified for each of the five value areas (Climate, Nature, Wood, People, Economy and Rural Development). This will help to ensure that their purpose is closely aligned with the things we value most about trees and forests. Balancing the use of these objectives in the planning, creation and management of forests will help to ensure the delivery of multiple benefits in the long term.

### Forests for Climate Goals

The Shared National Vision for 2050 is one where trees and forests will be seen as a symbol of the transformational changes that were needed to address the climate emergencies of the 2020s. Realising this vision and meeting targets set out in the Climate Action Plan will require significant forest expansion, sustainable forest management and using climate-smart mitigation options that capture all of the carbon benefits that trees and forests can provide. The outcomes of the Land Use Review will be instrumental to informing effective land-use policy decisions on the environmental sustainability for Ireland's land use. In the context of forest expansion, this will be a key factor when considering appropriate targets for forest creation and forest cover at a national level and at a more local spatial scale.



- 1. Forest Expansion** – A major expansion of climate resilient and healthy forests following the principles of Sustainable Forest Management and the right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management.
- 2. Carbon Sequestration and Storage** – Irish forests, existing and future, will be planned and managed to optimise their potential as a long-term carbon sink and store. The carbon sequestered and stored in Irish forests will be accounted for, to help to inform climate-smart forestry practices. Legacy impacts associated with forests on peat will be assessed and management decisions will be implemented informed by best available science.
- 3. Measuring Embodied Carbon** – Systems will be developed to measure, record, track and optimise the storage of carbon in wood products. The use of life-cycle analysis will be used to assess the embodied carbon advantages of using wood products over alternative carbon-intensive products.
- 4. Promoting Carbon Substitution** – The use of sustainable wood products from Irish forests, as alternatives to carbon-intensive products, to reduce the embodied carbon in our built environment, and by-products including biomass to substitute fossil fuels will be supported.







## Forests for Nature Goals

This Strategy presents a shared vision for a much larger and more diverse forest footprint. A landscape with a rich variety of trees, delivering multiple benefits and where forestry practices are no longer the cause of environmental issues as they once were in some locations in the past. Supporting nature and biodiversity will be a key driver in forest expansion and forest management, delivering a greater range of ecosystem services and protecting our natural heritage.

1. **Native Forest Expansion** – A major expansion of native forests and improved diversity of native tree species in new and existing forests.
2. **Protecting and Restoring Natural Heritage and Ecosystem Services** – Forestry practices will safeguard and enhance the quality of Ireland's air, water, soils, landscapes, habitats and population of protected species. This includes support and funding for the provision of non-timber ecosystem services.
3. **Forest Biodiversity** – Safeguard and enhance the biodiversity value of our forests in relation to water quality, habitats and species by implementing appropriate measures such as forest redesign, habitat rehabilitation or restoration.
4. **Ancient and Long-established Woodland** – Fully identify, protect and enhance ancient and long-established woodland.
5. **Invasive Species** – Develop, fund and implement strategies to effectively manage and control invasive species of flora and fauna, including invasive deer species, to support biodiversity and sustainability within Irish forests.





## Forests for Wood Goals

The ambition set out in the Shared National Vision is that Irish-grown timber will be the material of choice for new Irish homes by 2050. The role our trees and forests play in providing a source for sustainable and renewable materials is inextricably linked to their role in climate change mitigation. Increasing and promoting, the production and use of innovative long-life wood products will help decarbonise the built environment through its use as an alternative to more carbon-intensive products.

- 1. Supply and expansion at scale** – Continue to increase the supply of sustainable raw material from Ireland's forest resource. A critical component will be efficient and effective licensing and regulatory procedures. Also, investment in research and development in the supply chain, prioritising the employment of innovative technologies.
- 2. Timber and Wood Product Promotion** – Encourage and promote the increased use of wood in the construction sector, with buildings constructed from Irish timber becoming the standard. Irish wood products are envisaged as the substitute material of choice for carbon-intensive building products in the construction of Irish homes.
- 3. Product and Market Development** – Develop new and existing markets for supply and demand of a more diverse range of quality wood and wood products including research and development of new products from wood fibre.
- 4. Quality Assurance and Forest Certification** – There is a market requirement for increased uptake and participation among private forest owners in forest certification with the overall goal of the large majority of Irish timber being certified by 2030.







## Forests for People Goals

The ambition presented in the Shared National Vision is that communities will feel a sense of connection and pride in their local forests and they are providing a profitable diversification option for farmers. It is clear from the public consultation that there is generally a very positive attitude toward forests in Ireland and so it is important we build upon this and extend the meaningful multi-benefits of trees and forests to communities right across Ireland.

1. **Promote Forest Recreation for Health and Well-Being** – Promote the use of and community involvement with our forests for outdoor leisure, recreation and connection with nature. This will include an increased focus on the physical well-being and mental health benefits of forests for our citizens.
2. **Access to our Forests** – Continue to improve public access and facilities in our forests with the agreement of forest owners, according to the principles of Leave No Trace.
3. **Building Confidence and Trust** – Engagement with forest owners, farmers, communities and other stakeholders for more inclusive planning of forests at regional and local levels. This includes recognising and addressing issues that affect communities and working to secure a sense of ownership and pride among Irish people in their forests.
4. **Learning and Awareness** – Deliver education, learning and development opportunities for adults and children, to increase the awareness of the multiple benefits of trees and forests.



## Forests for Economy and Rural Development Goals

The ambition set out in the Shared National Vision is that forestry is at the centre of the circular and green economy; is supporting a thriving forest sector; and is providing long term quality employment, ecosystem services, and public, educational and recreational amenities. Forestry will also support sustainable and inclusive economic growth, using innovative solutions in the just transition to carbon neutrality.

1. **Value** – Increase the overall value of Irish forests and forestry to the economy.
2. **Transition to a Low Carbon Economy** – The forest sector is providing solution-focused supports through sustainable attractive jobs in rural areas in the transition to a low carbon economy. It is also supporting conditions for the development and implementation of a voluntary carbon market, which will recognise the contribution of Irish forests to carbon capture and storage.
3. **Supporting a Thriving Rural Economy** – Irish forests are providing improved income streams to forest owners, farmers and rural communities through the production and mobilisation of wood products, wood fibre and through expanding markets in the supply of sustainable construction and infrastructure materials, modern methods of construction, biomass, tourism, recreation and non-wood forest products.
4. **Supporting the Bioeconomy** – Individual and collective, co-operative enterprise opportunities through forestry will be developed, encouraging diversification and innovation at farm, forest and community level in support and development of the new circular and green economy.







## Trees, Woods and Forests in Ireland, 2030





## Section 6 Strategic Enablers







Realising our Vision and delivering on our Strategy will require a number of system-wide challenges to be overcome. This section outlines what those challenges are and high-level enabling goals to overcome or mitigate these challenges.

## Building and developing trust amongst forest stakeholders

A key overarching and fundamental barrier to change is the often polarised views amongst stakeholders on the role of trees, woods and forests in our society. It has been identified<sup>19,20</sup> that despite previous ambitious forestry and planting targets being in place they were not fully embedded with the public and stakeholders alike and therefore the requisite support and social licence required for success was absent.

The ambition to generate a shared consensus amongst stakeholders has informed the overall aim of the Vision and Strategy. Building and maintaining trust across the range of stakeholders will be required continually and organisational arrangements put in place to facilitate this. Trialing a new plan-led approach to forest expansion will be part of this. Building on the previous work of the Indicative Forest Statement and the outcomes of the Land Use Review and Climate Action Plan objectives the Department will pilot an approach to reach shared agreement on site selection criteria for forest creation within a chosen statutory boundary or catchment area, as appropriate.

**1. New Organisational Arrangements** – Establish new organisational arrangements to facilitate ongoing monitoring, reporting and implementation of the new Forest Strategy (2023-2030).

**2. Effective Communication** – Building on the learning outcomes of Project Woodland public consultation and engagement will continue to be an important tool used to improve transparency, efficiency and effectiveness of regulation and in policy decision-making.

<sup>19</sup> O'Hara, J. (2021). Implementation of the Mackinnon Report Advice to the Minister of State for Land Use and Biodiversity on improving the delivery of forestry licensing processes (2021) FutureArk Ltd. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/forestry-policy-and-strategy/>

<sup>20</sup> Mackinnon, J. (2019). Review of Approval Processes for Afforestation in Ireland. Available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/forestry-policy-and-strategy/>





## Regulation & legislation

There is a range of Irish and EU legislation, together with various international protocols which have a bearing on forest practice in Ireland. Low planting rates in recent years, together with reduced rates of other licensed activities such as felling and road construction, have been attributed to the complexity of the regulatory environment and the associated licensing system. Resolving these issues will be required in order to have a fit-for-purpose regulatory system that facilitates Sustainable Forest Management and strong growth in afforestation, and one that is fully compliant with EU and national legislation. There is a need for a more streamlined system for forest owners, stakeholders, the public and the competent authority, that results in less conflict between what are currently viewed as sometimes competing objectives of nature protection and forest expansion, and one that reduces the overall administrative burden on forest owners.

- 3. Regulatory and Legislative Processes** – Establish an efficient and effective regulatory and legislative system and support structure for forestry management practices and grant aided forestry schemes.

## Land-use planning and community support

Land-use is a crucial climate mitigation measure available to Ireland, but there are significant challenges to be overcome to optimise its potential contribution, as land in Ireland is currently a net source of carbon. Furthermore, habitat loss is one of the key drivers of the current biodiversity crisis and the challenge of protecting Ireland's habitats, species and waters is more important than ever.

Forests, with the right trees in the right places for the right reasons with the right management can maximise carbon stores while also providing other benefits to biodiversity and the environment, including clean air and water. New forest projects must be cognisant that the creation of new forests may have the potential to

negatively impact biodiversity and water quality, and can also be a cause for concern for people in some communities. Planning for the future expansion of our forests at the catchment, landscape or local authority/ regional level can provide opportunities for greater cooperation, trust and collaboration between local landowners, communities and other stakeholders and deliver multiple benefits for society, the environment

and the economy. Identifying the needs and objectives of the farmer and landowner, for example, will be key to meeting the ambition of the shared vision. Establishing, building and developing local partnerships and collaborative structures in this respect can be used to identify the most appropriate places for new forests.

Building and maintaining trust across the range of stakeholders will be required continually and organisational arrangements put in place to facilitate this.







4. **Land Availability and Alignment of Land Uses** – Better integration of trees and forests with other land uses at farm, catchment and landscape level. Create more coherence between agriculture, forest policies and biodiversity supports that result in a closer alignment between traditional agricultural activities and forestry.

## Forest culture

For a variety of historical reasons, a culture where forestry is seen as an integral part of traditional agriculture has been slow to develop in Ireland. In certain parts of the country there is a longer tradition of forestry and greater acceptance, integration and knowledge of the benefits that it brings to local communities. However, for many farmers forestry is considered as an alternative land-use for their most marginal land and is not part of their identity in the same way dairy, beef or crop production may be. Furthermore, the permanent land-use change that conversion to forest land entails can be a significant psychological barrier for many farmers to overcome. While for the general public, a recent survey<sup>21</sup> highlighted that the majority of people are positively disposed to the establishment of more forests, however, the benefits that people tend to associate with forests are in addressing climate change, recreation, enhancement of air quality and contribution to habitats for plants and wildlife, rather than the wood value or economic benefit.

If forest creation targets are to be realised, it will require the support of landowners and farmers in particular, in very large numbers throughout Ireland as well as afforestation on better-quality mineral soil types. For this to happen, forestry will need to become fully integrated with rural communities and part of the farming identity. Incentives to establish forests will be part of the solution, but so too will be engaging with landowners to understand and address the multi-layered issues that go into the forest establishment decision. So too will be generating greater awareness and acceptance amongst the general public of the multiple benefits of forests, including wood production, as well as the need for forest owners to generate an income from their forest.

5. Support **promotion** and **awareness** initiatives that deepen the understanding and cultural acceptance of forestry. Foster co-operation between landowners, to encourage and support the creation of new forests and the sustainable management of existing ones, and empower, inform and equip forest owners, farmers and other landowners and businesses to make informed decisions about forestry.

<sup>21</sup> Behaviour and Attitudes, (2022). Public Attitudes Survey on Forestry – November/December 2021. Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Wexford, Ireland.





## Incentives for forest creation and management

A key barrier to forest creation is the cost of establishment and income forgone in the time it takes for the forest to mature. To overcome this the State has actively encouraged the establishment of forests by farmers, landowners and communities through a combination of grant-aid to cover the cost of establishment and annual premium payments to address income forgone. To realise our climate and biodiversity ambition, incentives will need to be redesigned to strengthen forest creation, sustainable management, and restoration. There also needs to be better alignment between forestry and wider agricultural grant schemes, so that forest creation is not disincentivised.

Forest owners need drivers and financial incentives to be able to provide, in addition to wood and non-wood materials and products, also ecosystem services, through forest protection and restoration, water protection, and to increase the resilience of their forests through the adoption of climate and biodiversity friendly forest management practices.

- 6. Incentives for forest creation and management** – New incentives for the establishment and management of diverse, multifunctional forests that strengthen the economic viability of rural communities, protect our environment and are resilient in the face of climate change.

## Sustainable Forest Management

There are numerous forest management challenges to rapidly increasing forest cover under a changing climate, while also delivering multiple services. These range from the practical, such as the control of invasive plants and animals, the availability of plants and forest reproductive material, to the availability of skilled labour. This is further compounded by the increased complexity of decision-making under a changing climate. In contrast with other landuse sectors, forestry operates over a much longer

planning horizon, where decisions taken today need to take into account the likely climate and associated growing conditions and markets in 50 years, or even 100 years or more, for some forest types.

Incentives will need to be redesigned to strengthen forest creation, sustainable management, and restoration.

Dealing with these challenges will require updated Forestry Standards for Ireland that set out the

regulatory requirements for forestry licensing and government grant aid for forest establishment and management. The development of a shared understanding of the Four R's (Right trees, in the Right places for the Right reasons, with the Right management) is needed, as well as continued development and support for a diverse range of silvicultural systems that follow the principles of Sustainable Forest Management. Investment in the management and control of invasive plants and animals is required, as is investment in the sustainable use and conservation of forest genetic resources, investment in people, ecosystem services and the maintenance of social and environmental values.





- 7. Sustainable Forest Management** – Develop an updated Forestry Standard for Ireland and a shared understanding of the Four R's (Right trees, in the Right places for the Right reasons, with the Right management) as well as continued development and support for a diverse range of silvicultural systems that follow the principles of Sustainable Forest Management.

## Forest Health

Serious threats from pests and diseases are on the increase due to globalisation, trade and the impacts of climate change. This is compounded by climate-related abiotic effects such as fire, wind and flooding. Fortunately, Ireland does not have the range of forest pests and diseases that are endemic on the Continent and further afield. There have, however, been significant outbreaks in recent years, most notably *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (Ash Dieback Disease) in ash and *Phytophthora ramorum* (Ramorum disease) to which larch trees are particularly susceptible. Achieving favorable forest health status also incorporates the need to ensure that our forests are adaptable and resilient to the future climate.

The Department's Plant Health and Biosecurity Strategy sets out the importance of plant health biosecurity for Ireland and identifies the key importance of the role of stakeholders in this regard. Active stakeholder involvement and constructive input is a key enabler to develop fit-for-purpose policies and legislation. Ongoing monitoring and assessment of the health and condition of Irish forests can contribute to their overall resilience and biodiversity and the improved quality of Irish wood products and forest ecosystem services. Improving our knowledge of species adaptability necessitates resourcing of forest genetic research to ensure that suitably adapted reproductive material for our range of commercial and native forests is available for forest establishment.

- 8. Forest Health** – Monitor and assess the ongoing health and condition of Irish forests contributing to the overall resilience and biodiversity of our forests and improved quality of Irish wood products and forest ecosystem services.

## Education, Skills and Careers

Behind the delivery of the many services that forests provide are people with a wide variety of skills. To meet future demands we need to address the skills development requirements of the existing workforce, address the lack of gender balance in the forestry sector, attract a more diverse range of talented people to work in the sector and ensure that appropriate qualifications and training opportunities are available.



It is important to acknowledge that there is already a wide range of skills and expertise knowledge across the forest sector, and there is a clear need to ensure that those working in forestry are valued and recognised as key to the sector's success. However, if the sector is to build on this base and successfully address the value area goals it will need to both retain the current high-quality, knowledgeable and experienced people it has developed as well as attract new ambitious educated and motivated people.

- 9. Education, skills and careers** – Support for training, education and continued professional career path development, to increase the diversity, capacity and capability of the workforce available to the forestry sector. This includes support for education, training and in developing skills needed for the use of wood in construction.

## Research and innovation

Research and innovation are key to realising the ambitious goals of the Strategy.

Research and innovation are key to realising the ambitious goals of the Strategy. However, there are significant barriers around capacity and long-term research capacity in particular. Forest research is currently primarily conducted by Research Performing Organisations (RPOs) and funded through the Department's Competitive Research Funding Programme. This competitive process has increased the quality of research, evidenced by an increase in peer-reviewed publications, and also the variety of RPOs carrying out forest-related research.

However, forest research has a unique dimension – the very long period, by current political, funding and even employment timeframes, over which some research needs to be conducted; measured in decades in some cases.

This highlights the need for continuity, more flexible funding models, good archiving of both subject material and data and, above all, a sense of focus on key factors that could determine land uses, yields and impacts for our lifetime and beyond.

- 10. New Technology, Research and Innovation** – Meet the needs and requirements of forest research and innovation in forest establishment, management, health, supply chain and for the use of timber in construction, through a national structured approach, including support for product innovation, supported by Government policy, and building regulations.







## Section 7 Delivery, governance and monitoring



An Implementation Plan has been developed for the Forest Strategy. This Plan comprises a list of actions, which will enable this Strategy to become reality, and place us on the road to achieving the Vision for 2050.

Specific actions have been developed for each of the identified Enablers and Strategic Goals, broken down by indicative timeframe, lead, key stakeholders and by what means the action will be implemented.

There is a clear need to ensure that those working in forestry are valued and recognised as key to the sector's success.

The Forest Strategy Implementation Plan will include the new Forestry Programme (2023-2027), which will be the main implementation vehicle for the Forest Strategy<sup>22</sup>. The Forestry Programme<sup>23</sup> will facilitate the implementation of these strategic actions and provide a balanced suite of options to incentivise farmers and landowners to establish forests. Supports will be available that reflect the feedback received from society and stakeholders during the public consultation and engagement process. For example, measures will be developed to encourage forest creation, Sustainable Forest Management, and to tackle specific issues concerning biodiversity and water quality.



<sup>22</sup> The Forest Strategy and Forestry Programme will both be subject to a Strategic Environment Assessment/Appropriate Assessment process

<sup>23</sup> The Forestry Programme will be funded in accordance with State aid guidelines and CSP Regulations (EU 2021/2115).





## Governance

Good governance and oversight will be essential to enhancing coherence across the policy domains for forestry-related objectives as forest products and services are increasingly integrated into many other sectors such as energy, conservation, public health and industry. In alignment with the EU Forest Strategy 2030 and the EU forest governance framework, this Strategy recognises the necessity for a multidisciplinary exchange with a variety of stakeholders and for transparency that shows how the goals and objectives are being delivered.

Implementation of the Forest Strategy will need to be coordinated with other Irish Government Strategies and Plans. Following the publication of this Strategy a governance framework will be developed to cover implementation oversight, stakeholder input and engagement, technical issues, research and public engagement. The Structure will include key stakeholders who will provide advice, support and monitor progress on strategic goals and actions.

## Monitoring & Review

Monitoring will be an essential process to track progress for each of the goals; identifying areas where performance is good and where it requires improvement.

A list of key high-level indicators will be identified and developed that will promote accountability and track progress toward achieving the Strategy's list of goals. Effective monitoring of progress will be largely dependent on the best available data from the





value areas related to forests and outlined in the Forest Strategy namely climate, wood, people, nature and economy and rural development.

The indicators will be aligned to the strategic goals but also reflect national and international priorities and policies including:

- The European Green Deal.
- The EU Fit for 55.
- The EU Forest Strategy for 2030.
- The EU Biodiversity Strategy.
- UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- CAP Strategic Plan.
- International reporting requirements related to forests and forestry.
- Food Vision 2030.
- The Climate Action Plan.
- The Programme for Government.
- National Adaptation Framework.
- Ireland's National Policy Statement on the Bioeconomy.
- EU Regulation on deforestation free products.

An updated review of the Implementation Plan will be reported on in 2025.

## Communication

The timeline for this Strategy will also align with a campaign to promote trees, forest creation and forestry to a nationwide audience. It will communicate a message on the multifunctionality and benefits of our trees and forests and promote the new measures and opportunities available under the new Forestry Programme and other initiatives.







# Glossary





**Ancient Woodland** – Areas of woodland believed to have remained continuously wooded since 1660.

**Bioeconomy** – Refers to the parts of the economy that use renewable biological resources from land and sea, such as forests to produce food, materials and energy.

**CAP** – Common Agricultural Policy.

**Circular economy** – The type of economy that uses a more efficient and low-carbon approach. It makes sure that we reduce and reuse products and materials so that less waste is produced.

**Climate Action Plan** – This is the Government's annual plan that sets out how we will meet our climate commitments and reach EU and international climate targets.

**COFORD** – Council for Forest Research and Development.

**Ecosystem services** – A service people obtain from the environment. Ecosystem services are the transformation of natural assets (soil, plants and animals, air and water) into things that we value. They can be viewed as provisioning such as food and water; regulating, for example, flood and disease control; cultural such as spiritual, recreational, and cultural benefits; or supporting like nutrient cycling that maintain the conditions for life on Earth.

**EU Green Deal** – This plan is a roadmap for making the EU's economy environmentally sustainable. It outlines the actions and targets needed to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050.

**EPA** – Environmental Protection Agency.

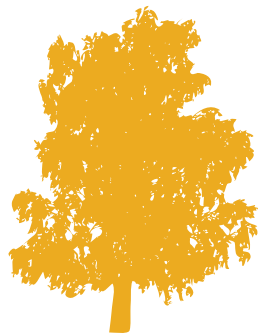
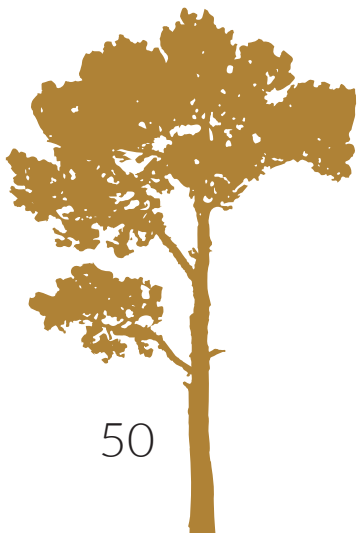
**Forest** – Land under trees with a minimum area of 0.1 hectare and tree crown cover of more than 20 per cent of the total area, or the potential to achieve this cover at maturity. The term forest also includes woodlands.

**Forestry** – The profession embracing the science, art, and practice of creating, managing, using, and conserving forests and associated resources for human benefit and in a sustainable manner to meet desired goals, needs, and values.

**Long-Established Woodland** – Areas of woodland that have remained continuously wooded since the first edition Ordnance Survey maps of 1830-44.

**Silviculture** – The art and science of controlling the establishment, growth, composition, health and quality of forests and woodlands to meet the targeted diverse needs and values of landowners and society on a sustainable basis.

**Sustainable Forest Management** – Stewardship and use of forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, vitality, and their potential to fulfil now and in the future, relevant ecological and social functions at local, national, and global levels, and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems.







# Appendix







## Appendix I – Full text of the National Shared Vision for Trees and Forests by 2050

### THE RIGHT TREES IN THE RIGHT PLACES FOR THE RIGHT REASONS WITH THE RIGHT MANAGEMENT SUPPORTING A SUSTAINABLE AND THRIVING ECONOMY AND SOCIETY AND A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT.

By 2050, Ireland's forests and woodlands will be seen as a symbol of the transformational social, economic and environmental changes that were needed to address the climate, biodiversity, housing and health emergencies of the 2020's. A much larger and more diverse forest footprint is being successfully managed to balance and deliver multiple objectives and benefits for climate, nature, water quality, wood production, people, the wider economy and rural communities. It forms a valuable, compatible element of the farming enterprise and is co-existing in harmony with urban and other landscapes and valued highly by citizens. It is also supporting a thriving and growing forest sector, long term quality employment for a sustainable workforce, ecosystem services and public, educational and recreational amenities.

There is a nationwide awareness and understanding of the multiple benefits of forests. Forestry is at the centre of the circular and green economy with Irish grown timber the material of choice for the substitution of carbon intensive building products for new Irish homes. Forestry is providing a profitable diversification option for farmers, with people living in rural, urban and suburban communities feeling a sense of connection and pride in their local forests and woodlands, and the many benefits that they provide. Legacy environmental issues associated with past forestry practices are being successfully addressed, building on improvements already made through enhanced sustainable forest management practices. The Irish landscape now features a rich variety of diverse, resilient and healthy trees, woods and forests, established for multiple purposes and delivering multiple benefits for the environment, economy and society on both public and private land.





