

Certification challenges discussed at Clonad forest field day

Forest certification was the main topic at the recent field day in Clonad Wood organised by the Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) in association with the Irish Forestry Unit Trust (IForUT), owner of the 142ha woodland in Co Offaly.

The field day, limited to under 50 participants - in accordance with COVID-19 guidelines - explored the implications of certification.

Certification verifies that forests are managed according to the principles of sustainable forest management (SFM) by two independent certification bodies - Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC).

The field day heard that in Ireland, Coillte and Northern Ireland Forest Service forests and an increasing number of private forests, including IForUT, are certified.

Owners of small forests are not able to bear the cost of certification, but

some are now joining group schemes to provide economies of scale.

All the main sawmills have chain of custody certification which allows them to use the FSC or PEFC brand on their products. A spokesperson for one of the sawmills stressed the importance of achieving nationwide certification.



Brendan Lacey, chair, ITGA, and CEO, IForUT

"Currently, under the certification scheme, timber processors can process a maximum of 30% of uncertified wood from sustainably managed sources and still achieve chain of custody certification," he said.

"However, many sawmills are now close to this limit and most will exceed it over the coming years as private log supply is forecast to exceed certified supply."

The challenges and op-

portunities in achieving certification were addressed by Sarah Standish of IForUT and Donal Whelan, forest manager with Commercial Forestry Services.

Standish, who specialises in certification, outlined management planning and the various measures including health and safety standards required to comply with forest certification.

Brendan Lacey, CEO of IForUT and ITGA chair, outlined the positives of certification including enhanced professional reputation of forest owners as tangible proof of good forest stewardship.

"Legal compliance with statutory requirements provide a structure and process to follow," he said.

"Certification can provide enhanced market access," but referring to the 10ha Norway spruce stand in Clonad, he outlined some constraints.

"The final harvest in this stand has been deferred to 2026 and 2028 to facili-



Donal Whelan outlines the sustainable forest management plan for Clonad with Ray Keegan, John Guinan, Woodland Managers Ltd, and Darryn McDowell, IForUT.

tate age restructuring," he explained.

"Given prices have increased by around 75% since 2019, we will now be at risk of lower prices when it does come to harvest, which is likely to happen when the licensing crisis gets sorted. This is a cost

of certification which can put constraints on flexibility around harvest timing in volatile market periods."

He acknowledges that Clonad has a high public recreation value, especially as it is located close to Tullamore, but asks: "Will forest owners be compensated

for these non-timber values where there can be a real cost and price loss?"

He also points to increased management costs. "IForUT has hired two people this year because of an increasing compliance workload in achieving and retaining certification."