

ACTORS DRIVING FOREST MANAGEMENT

Europe's forest resource faces multiple challenges at the beginning of the 21st century. Amongst other ecosystem services, forests are expected to provide timber and biomass to contribute to climate change mitigation by sequestering carbon, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity, providing habitats for multiple species, and acting as a platform for outdoor recreation and tourism. The level of ecosystem services achieved from forests is dependent on forest management practices.

Forests are expected to provide a broad range of ecosystem services

The research project ALTERFOR explores the potential to optimise forest management models currently in use in different forested areas in European countries. For this reason, the interests of stakeholders in the Case Study Areas and their power resources have been studied. To gain new insight on forest stakeholders' power resources and interests in forest ecosystem services, researchers conducted a stakeholder analysis by interviewing different stakeholders from public, private and civil society, and by reading relevant literature.

Analysis of interests and power resources of stakeholders

For Ireland, The Barony of Moycullen was chosen as the CSA. The barony is located in Connemara, in the County of Galway (Figure 1). The combination of tightening forest regulations, forests that have been managed for a relatively long period of time (in an Irish context), the presence of a viable Freshwater Pearl Mussel population, tourism and recreational usage, and the potential for wind farm development makes the Barony of Moycullen a very interesting case study for the ALTERFOR project.

*Irish case study area:
The Barony of Moycullen*

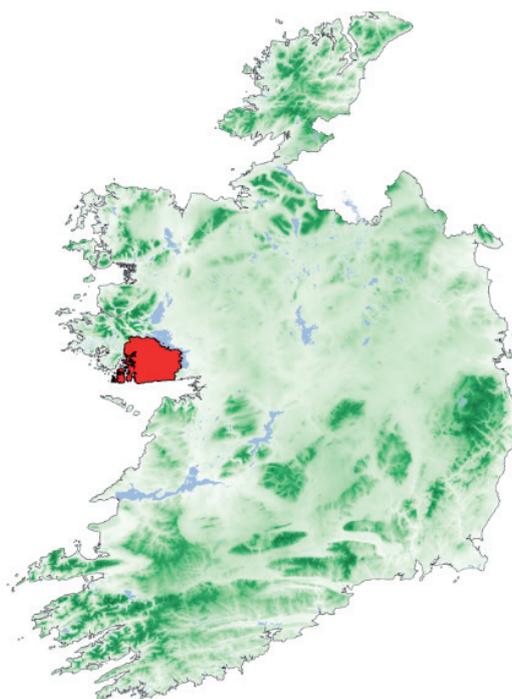


Figure 1: Location of the CSA on a topographical map of the Republic of Ireland



Background

Government-driven afforestation project in the twentieth century

Historically, most of Ireland was under forest cover, but due to anthropogenic influences this fluctuated and was less than 1% in the early 1900s (Forest Service 2008). To establish a viable forest industry in Ireland, the government started a large afforestation project mainly utilising the fast-growing exotic softwoods; Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis* (Bong.) Carr.) and lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta* Douglas). The main purposes of these forests were to produce timber and create jobs in rural areas with high unemployment. Since the early 1980s, government afforestation has ceased and focus has shifted to encouraging private landowners to afforest their agricultural land in exchange for economic incentives (Forest Service 2015b). By 2012, the forest cover had increased to 10.5% (Forest Service 2013) and the ambition is to bring the forest cover to 18% by 2046 (DAFM 2014). Around the turn of the last millennia, social and environmental forest values gained more recognition and legislative protection by the implementation of Sustainable Forest Management and EU Habitats and Birds Directives (DAFF 1996, Forest Service 2015a).

Growing importance of social and environmental values

Conflicting demands placed on forests

Many of the land-use conflicts in Irish forestry relate to stakeholders having different opinions on how the three pillars of Sustainable Forest Management (economic, social and environmental) should be balanced.

Timber production versus biodiversity

The main forest related conflicts in Ireland are between using forests for timber production and using forests for enhancing biodiversity and protecting habitats. Prominent conflicts focus on how forest operations impact water quality and Freshwater Pearl Mussel habitats. One of the Freshwater Pearl Mussel populations identified to have the best chance of surviving, in Ireland, into the future is present in the Case Study Area. Nationally, many Irish farmers are unwilling to afforest part of their land, even if it is financially more beneficial. They see forest ownership as incompatible with their self-identity as farmers, thus diminishing their farming heritage and culture. Many stakeholders from both government and civil society have expressed that they were not against forestry, but did not like the fact that extensive areas of blanket peat had been planted and that the two most common species in Irish forests were non-native.

Misgivings about forestry

Stakeholders from government were found to be the most powerful since they are implementing legislation and thus have a strong coercion power resource. The strongest stakeholder, the Forest Service, approve all afforestation grants, felling licenses and fertilisation applications and thus derive a lot of their power from this. The Forest Service pay out afforestation grants and road construction grants. This alongside government bodies that work to protect the environment give them strong incentive power (protecting the environment appeals to morals). The Forest Service is responsible for the national forest inventory and other government stakeholders record species and habitat status, and keep records of protected features (natural and cultural) which makes them very strong in providing dominant information.

Core role of the Forest Service

Stakeholders from the private market are almost as powerful as government stakeholders but must abide by the law and require approval from the Forest Service to get afforestation grants and felling licenses. Over half the forest estate

is owned by Coillte (the Irish State Forest Company), the rest is privately owned, and thus land ownership and control of the timber resource is the main source of coercion power for market stakeholders. There are private forest companies that offer forest management services and advice to private forest owners, resulting in substantial incentives and dominant information. Some market actors lobby and/or advocate the interests to politicians.

Our study found civil society stakeholders to be relatively weak, but many of them are interested in protecting the environment so their interests coincide with those of many government bodies. Their desire to enhance and protect biodiversity, species habitat, the natural environment, and Irish cultural heritage is their main incentive since it appeals to morals. Many civil society stakeholders tend to engage large parts of the population, resulting in large networks that can identify and report on issues related to habitat degradation from forest operations. They also provide knowledge about species protection, biodiversity and how to enhance the environment. Their engagement with the public can make them very influential in rallying the population around causes when they believe policy changes being made are too drastic.

Forest ownership structure

Actors dominating the market

Engaged civil society actors

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MAKING FOR FUTURE FOREST MANAGEMENT

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Actors driving forest management

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