

From: Treasurer Kiltyclogher Community Council [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday 8 February 2019 10:52
To: rses
Subject: RSES - Forestry & Woodlands

I refer to Section 5.9 of the Draft RSES dealing with Forestry & Woodlands. This section as drafted is seriously deficient in outlining a proper vision for forestry in the region. I write from North Leitrim where extensive plantations have been established since the 1950's so the community here has had decades to evaluate forestry.

The draft states "Our forestry is diverse in its make-up".

This statement is false. Forestry as promoted by government policy is focused on a single alien species (Sitka Spruce) with token provision for a small percentage of diversity. It is largely in the hands of a semi-state company & corporate investors with little return to the host communities.

"Coniferous forest comprises around 3.7% land cover type in our region, with transitional woodland-scrub making up approx. 4.5%. This is below the national level of 10.7%".

No sources are cited for these claims. The reality (recently acknowledged by the Forest Service) is that Leitrim is now the most heavily planted county in the country. Other areas within the region (North Roscommon is an example) also have afforestation rates far in excess of the figures quoted.

"The Region's forests are also of value in terms of biodiversity and climate change, through the sequestration of carbon in our forests (and bogs), recreational value and also tourism potential".

No-one familiar with forestry in Ireland could make the claim that the typical forest here is of value in terms of biodiversity. The opposite is the case. Typically forestry takes land which has been farmed in a low-intensity manner with hedgerows and species-rich grassland sustaining rich biodiversity and converts it into what has been appropriately termed a spruce desert.

The claim that forests are of value in terms of carbon sequestration is also without solid basis. The land typically planted in this region has a high peat content & in its natural state stores large amounts of carbon. The disturbance involved in afforestation actually releases this carbon.

As for "tourist potential" I would certainly not envy the marketeer tasked with convincing potential tourists that dispiriting spruce deserts will provide them with a worthwhile holiday experience. Forestry is taking our rich natural landscape with its obvious appeal & converting it into a degraded monochrome.

Where the draft does mention some of the adverse effects of forestry it deploys terms such as "seen to be adversely impacting" & "the perception that". The negative effects of government afforestation policy on rural communities & on the environment are all too real; they are no mere "perception".

The draft proposes a Regional Fora/Working Group. Is there any reason for affected communities to believe that such a group would better represent their concerns than the Forest Service does operating at national level? Forestry must be brought under the regulation of Local Government; there is no justification for continued exemption from the planning process.

The draft proposes 3 policy objectives. The first 2 deal with designated peatlands & worked out bogs & are not relevant to forestry policy. Indeed this is not the only section of the draft where different issues are jumbled together. For example Section 5.7 is headed "Natural Heritage" but deals with archaeological & built heritage and not with natural heritage at all.

Policy Objective 103 calls for "A Regional Fora to be established to set out a framework for sustainable afforestation across the Region that enables government policy to grow the sector and that addresses community concerns and perceptions."

Can this be amended to read "To make local government the lead agency in forestry regulation so that forestry development is sustainable, is beneficial to host communities, enhances the scenic amenity & biodiversity & to ensure that farming and rural communities are not displaced by afforestation".

Regards,
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