

Protecting Ireland's forestry investment

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The Irish State has invested in afforestation over many decades and now has a valuable forest industry which makes a significant contribution to social and economic wealth in terms of the growing, harvesting and processing of timber and other forest products, as well as providing significant rural employment in the forestry sector. There are many biotic and abiotic threats to this resource and it is vital that this multifunctional forest resource is protected.

The populations of both deer and grey squirrel appear to be ever increasing causing significant damage to young plantations and creating difficulties for forest owners particularly in relation to broadleaves and diverse conifers.

In early 2010 a large spate of forest fires was experienced that destroyed over 1,000 ha of forests on public and private lands. A multi agency group has since been set up to examine policies that can be put in place to minimise fire damage in future years.

Phytophthora ramorum

2010 will also be remembered as the year *Phytophthora ramorum* was found to be causing significant damage in Japanese larch forests following its detection in July by the Forestry Inspectorate in Co. Tipperary. Previously, *P. ramorum* had only been found in rhododendron in forest areas. The Inspectorate subsequently conducted a national aerial and ground survey of Japanese larch stands with the assistance of the Air Corps and Coillte staff to ascertain the geographic spread in Ireland. By November the disease was found to be generally confined to the south and south east of the country but it will be 2011 before the overall position can be fully assessed.

The common name for *P. ramorum* is sudden oak death, as first described in the USA, but this is somewhat a misnomer in a European context as European oak species have not been seriously damaged. Japanese larch though appears to be particularly susceptible affecting all age classes and causing significant dieback and deaths. Significantly Ireland and the UK are the only countries worldwide where *P. ramorum* has been found on Japanese larch.

As well as ongoing surveys the key challenges are to ensure that the sanitation felling, haulage and processing of infected material is carried out in a manner that will prevent the further spread of the disease. In recognition of the uncertainty of the



Cormac O'Flynn and Ken Bucke, Forestry Inspectors, conducting aerial inspections of larch stands.



*Removal of infected trees carried out by the Northern Ireland Forest Service. This operation needs to be carried out as soon as possible after *P. ramorum* is detected.*

Infected Japanese larch with visible wilting of young shoots and foliage, which turn yellow (right) and later become blackened before shedding.

Trees may also have bleeding cankers on the bark (below).



situation a policy decision was made in November 2010 to suspend Japanese larch as an approved species under the Forest Service afforestation schemes and also for reforestation under the Felling License system.

Pest and disease threats in the EU

In the EU and worldwide there are many additional non-native pest and disease threats. For example there is ongoing damage to spruce plantations in continental Europe from bark beetles including the eight-tooted spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*). Pine Wood Nematode (*Bursaphelenchus xylophilus*) has caused extensive damage to pine forests in Portugal and has had a huge impact on its forest industry with widespread sanitation felling and movement restrictions on wood and wood products. Threats from outside the EU also include non-European *Pissodes* weevils, non-European bark beetles, bud worms (*Acleris* spp.), conifer rust diseases (*Cronartium* spp.) and oak wilt disease (*Ceratocystis fagacearum*). New and emerging threats include, Asian and citrus long horn beetles (*Anoplophora* spp.), emerald ash borer (*Agrilus planipennis*), ash dieback disease (*Chalara fraxinea*) and *Phytophthora kernoviae* (detected in Co. Cork in 2008).

Overall Forest Service policy in the forest protection area is to maintain a healthy forest environment by ensuring good management, identifying risks and maintaining a sustained commitment to measures which prevent the entry and establishment of destructive forest pests and diseases.



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