

Forestry grant and premium schemes

Donal Magner

State funding for forestry has changed in recent years, favouring afforestation, roading and broadleaf tending over other support measures, especially reconstitution grants. Grant aid is no longer available to forest owners who replant after fire and storm damage. During 2012, support for reconstitution of crops damaged by deer and frost was also removed although the Forest Service plans to review these schemes. During the year, the NeighbourWood scheme was reintroduced.

Overview

The changes announced by the Forest Service in 2011 to afforestation grants and planting specifications are still in operation. These were made to maximise the area planted in a cost effective way to ensure a viable support programme. A twin approach was adopted whereby funding cuts were made to some grant premium categories (GPCs) and reduced stocking rates for some broadleaves to reduce the cost of establishment but not the area planted.

Stocking

The reduced stocking densities of oak, beech and alder will result in savings for the grower in plant and establishment costs without a negative impact on plantation performance but growers need to ensure that they minimise plant losses in the establishment phase.

Alder stocking will reduce from 3,300 to 2,500/ha while oak and beech reduce from 6,600 to 3,300/ha. Although the grant for oak is cut from €6,470 to €5,000/ha, it will be possible to establish a crop at this level of funding because plants required have been reduced by 50% and there are knock on savings in operations such as cultivation, planting and vegetation control. Grants have been adjusted accordingly (Table 1).

To protect newly established forests, growers are encouraged to choose IS436 certified fencing stakes and strainers (see panel page 34).

The various grant aided schemes are included in the Forest Service Forestry Schemes Manual and this should be consulted along with other Forest Service publications such as the Code of Best Forest Practice - Ireland and the suite of environmental guidelines. A summary of the various schemes is available in the following pages.



The information provided on the forestry grant and premium schemes is correct as at November 2012.

The availability, approval conditions and funding of some schemes may change during 2013 so readers are advised to check the following sources for information:

- Forest Service (www.agriculture.gov.ie/forests-service)
- ITGA (www.itga.ie)
- The Irish Farmers Journal (www.farmersjournal.ie)
- Teagasc (www.teagasc.ie/forestry)

All schemes are operated by the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Marine and Food.

The Forest Service is the national forest authority responsible for forest policy, regulation, administration of afforestation and other forestry grant and premium schemes along with, forest protection, control of felling and promotion of research in forestry and forest produce.

Table 1: Afforestation Scheme: revised grant rates (€/ha) effective from 1 January 2011

Grant / premium category (GPC)	1st grant	2nd grant	Total grant	Additional fencing allocation IS436 posts	Alternative fencing allocation (non IS436)	Total available funding
1. Unenclosed all species	1,500	500	2,000	400	350	2400
2. Sitka spruce / lodgepole pine	2,200	700	2,900	400	350	3300
3. 10% diverse	2,250	750	3,000	400	350	3400
4. Diverse	2,500	800	3,300	400	350	3700
5. Broadleaves	3,600	1100	4,700	500	450	5200
6. Oak*	3,800	1200	5,000	500	450	5500
7. Beech*	3,800	1200	5,000	500	450	5500
8. Alder*	2,400	800	3,200	500	450	3700

Source: Adapted by D. Magner from Forest Service (2011).

Application process

Approval

All proposed forestry developments must receive the prior written approval of the Forest Service.

Following completion of the relevant operations, formal applications for payment of the Afforestation Grant, Premiums and second Instalment Grants must be made by the applicant.

Form I - preplanting approval application

Form I applications must be completed by the applicant and a qualified forester whose name is included on the Register of Approved Foresters. This register is available on request from the Forest Service. Form I needs to accompany a number of enclosures including, location map, certified Species Map, Biodiversity Map, Cultivation Plan, Forest Service acknowledgement sheet and a number of reports where relevant such as Calcium carbonate tests and drainage survey report.

If there are any environmental considerations identified, the application is simultaneously referred to the relevant prescribed body. Certain sites in this category require a process of public consultation.

If the site is greater than 2.5 ha a notice of the application is published in the local press.

If the proposed development is greater than 25 ha the application is referred to the Local Authority for observations. If the site is greater than 50 ha an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.



All applicants must submit a management plan at Form 3 stage for plantations which are 10 ha or greater or where over 5 ha of broadleaves have been planted. The plan needs to outline clearly proposed management plans to year 10.

Table 2: Afforestation Scheme: premium rates (€/ha) (new approvals) effective 1 January 2011

Grant / premium category (GPC)	Farmer	Non-farmer
1. Unenclosed – all species	155	126
2. Sitka spruce / lodgepole pine	369	181
3. 10% diverse	427	181
4. Diverse	454	181
5. Broadleaves	481	195
6. Oak	515	195
7. Beech	515	195
8. Alder	481	195

Source: Adapted by D. Magner from Forest Service (2010).

If an approved forester fails to identify specific considerations, the referrals may be delayed.

Form 2 - 1st grant and premium application

The first instalment of the afforestation grant and first premium are due for payment on completion of the initial site operations and submission of a completed Form 2. The application must be completed and signed, at the time of submission, by both the applicant and the approved forester to whom pre-planting approval is issued.

Form 3 - 2nd instalment grant application

The second instalment afforestation grant is due for payment four years after the completion date of the plantation. Application for second instalment grant may be liable for an on-site inspection. An application for payment (Form 3) must be completed and signed by both the applicant and the approved forester at time of submission.

Forest management plans

All applicants must submit a management plan at Form 3 stage for plantations which are 10 ha or greater or where over 5 ha of broadleaves have been planted. The plan needs to outline clearly proposed management plans to year 10.

Form 4 - subsequent premium application

The farmer rate of premium is payable for a period of 20 years and the non-farmer rate for a period of 15 years. All premiums subsequent to the first premium are applied for by completing a Form 4 which issues to the applicant annually from the Forest Service. At the end of year 10 the applicant must submit an updated species map and management plan for the subsequent 10 years.



The Forest Service is encouraging those intending to plant to choose IS436 certified fencing stakes and strainers. Growers who opt for IS436 will receive an additional € 50 per hectare for IS436 fencing and € 150 for deer fencing.

The Forest Service April 2011 circular outlined a number of conditions for grant aid: “To qualify for the higher IS436 grant rates all fencing posts claimed must be certified to this standard. Where part of the fencing claim contains non IS436 material, the entire application will be assessed at the non IS436 grant rate.” The circular also states: “All applications for grant aid must be clearly identified outlining the location of each fence type and length erected in metres on a biodiversity map or a separate “Fencing Map” as described in the revised mapping standards.”

To receive the higher grant an “IS436 Fencing Post Certificate must be completed and attached to the Form 2” when making a grant application. Samples of the required fencing certificates are available from the Forest Service. Only companies that are certified by the NSAI to produce IS436 are entitled to reproduce this certificate. The standard ensures full traceability.

SUMMARY OF GRANTS FOR HARVESTING ROADS

Category	€ /linear metre	Density (metre/ha)
Harvesting Road	45	25
Harvesting Upgrade or Extension as defined.	45	15
Management Road	n/a	n/a

Grants of up to 80% of eligible costs incurred in the construction of a forest road are available subject to the maximum described above. The Minister reserves the right to alter these rates.

Self assessment companies and approved foresters

The applicant and a forester whose name is included on the Forest Service Register of Approved Foresters must complete all Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3 applications. Any application not signed by the applicant and approved forester will not be accepted. The register includes both foresters employed by the companies approved under the Forest Service Self-Assessment Scheme and private consultants. Private consultants wishing to be included on the Register of Approved Foresters must complete an application form, available from the Forest Service, which includes a signed undertaking that they will comply with the Forest Service Guidelines. In addition they must have Professional Indemnity Insurance.

SUPPORT SCHEMES

The following support schemes or back up measures provide funding for a range of activities designed to conserve and restore woodlands and in the case of established crops, add value to forests commercially, economically and silviculturally.

Forest road scheme

Limited grant aid is provided for the construction of harvesting roads which are in accordance with the Code of Best Forest Practice and Forest Service environmental guidelines. See also COFORD forest roading manual.

Harvesting roads: Successful applicants to this scheme need to show that the forest area to be roaded is due to be thinned and the 20 m threshold per ha may not always apply. In order to facilitate harvesting, access by timber trucks is essential. The economics of road building dictate that roads are constructed just before harvesting.

In order to assess a harvesting road application the following criteria are used:

- Timber must be ready for harvesting within five years (now reduced to one year).

NeighbourWood Scheme



This scheme was reintroduced in 2012. The scheme funds the development of attractive close-to-home woodland amenities (or 'neighbourwoods') for public use and enjoyment. The scheme is available to local councils, private landowners and others, working in partnership with local communities.

Funding can be provided to Local Authorities and other groups to improve existing woodlands, to develop new woodland areas and to install suitable recreational facilities such as paths, signage and educational facilities. Ideally, sites proposed under the scheme should be located in or near villages and towns to maximise the social, recreational and educational benefits of the Neighbourwood as it develops as part of the local landscape. The Scheme provides financial support under the following elements:

Element 1: Supports the silvicultural enhancement of existing neighbourwoods. Maximum grant: €4,500/ha

Element 2: Supports the establishment of new neighbourwoods. Maximum grant: €5,500/ha

Element 3: Supports the installation of recreational facilities. Maximum grant: €4,000/ha for the first 10 ha and €2,500/ha thereafter up to a maximum of 40 ha.

- The length of road that will be grant aided is based on the area of the plantation and the presence of existing harvesting roads.
- Grant aid will not be given in excess of 20m/ha or €571.40 /ha.
- Applicants may build roads in excess of 20 m/ha to harvesting standard but grant aid cannot exceed € 571.40 /ha.
- Existing roads may require upgrading at the time of harvesting and may be grant aided.

Reconstitution of woodlands

This grant is under review and applies when damage to a plantation is as a result of natural causes. It no longer applies to plantations damaged by fire and wind. The scheme was discontinued also in 2012 for reconstitution of plantations damaged by deer and other mammals, and frost.

If grant aid is introduced, it will only be provided where the plantation had been well managed and maintained up to the time it was damaged. Examples of natural causes that most often affect plantations include frost, disease and windblow. In the case of windblow a reconstitution grant is normally allowable where the windblow occurs before the plantation reaches two-thirds of the reduced age of Maximum Mean Annual Increment.

Grant rates up to a maximum of € 3,297/ha for conifers and € 7,604/ha for broadleaves.

NeighbourWood scheme

This scheme was reintroduced in 2012 (see panel).

Native Woodland Scheme

The establishment element of the Native Woodland Scheme (NWS) was revised by the Forest Service in 2011. Procedural changes were designed to streamline applications and make the scheme more user friendly. The NWS – Establishment is a grant package to support growers in developing new native woodlands on greenfield sites. The NWS – Establishment offers farmers a biodiversity-focused grant package alongside the Afforestation Scheme. The revised scheme may be a suitable option in areas deemed generally sensitive from an environmental, landscape or amenity perspective, including greenfield sites near or adjacent to existing designated woodlands and other important habitats.

When the NWS was originally launched, it had two separate elements: conservation of existing woods and establishment of new native woodlands. The second element has

now undergone a major revision to make it more user friendly. Using a new site appraisal framework, the applicant and forester identify the native woodland type for the site, link it to the corresponding Grant and Premium Category (GPC), and submit the application on that basis. Under the revised scheme, the input of a NWS ecologist and the development of a detailed native woodland plan are no longer required.

The actual grant and premium rates are the same as the standard Afforestation Grant & Premium Scheme except the GPCs reflect the scheme's focus on native species. While the scheme is biodiversity orientated, the production of quality hardwoods is encouraged under the scheme, using continuous cover forestry techniques where compatible.

The scheme is implemented by the Forest Service, in partnership with Woodlands of Ireland, National Parks & Wildlife Service, and the Heritage Council. Growers interested in the scheme should contact their local registered forester or the Forest Service, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford (lo-call 1890 200 223 or e-mail forests-service@agriculture.gov.ie).

Broadleaf thinning/tending

The Forest Service operates a Broadleaf Thinning/Tending scheme. Grant aid of € 750/ha is available to tend and thin plantations.