

How Clonad got reforestation right the first time



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The forester and owner have the advantage of knowing how well the next rotation crop will perform based on the performance of the previous crop. If the previous crop performs well, then it is likely that the forester will recommend replanting with the same species as was illustrated at Clonad woodland, Co Offaly, during a recent field day.

Organised by the Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) in association with the woodland owners, the Irish Forestry Unit Trust (IForUT), the large group was provided with an overview of the site and management plans by Donal Whelan, ITGA and Commercial Forestry Services, and IForUT staff Stacey Bradley, Darryn McDowell and Oisín Meagher

The existing Norway spruce crop in Clonad was planted in 1967 and 1970 in an old woodland site with specimen trees still surviving. Final harvesting has been phased in since 2012 with most of the Norway area to be clearfelled this year.

The owners were tempted to reforest with Sitka spruce which would produce

a higher yield than Norway spruce and also reduce establishment costs as its initial growth outpaces vegetation competition. However, Norway spruce, has provided a top-quality crop, with a standing volume of 600m³/ha. It is

also a species more in tune with the ancient woodland, as



Attendees at a recent field day in Clonad, Co. Offaly heard how Norway spruce planted in 1967 has a standing volume of 600m³/ha. It will be clearfelled this year and reforested with Norway spruce, like the adjacent site (left) while all existing ancient broadleaves will be retained in what is an old woodland site. \ Donal Magner

well as being more frost-resistant than Sitka, according to Donal Whelan. He outlined the reforestation programme, which included broadleaves especially the retention of existing native species.

The name of the woodland – Clonad, or *Cluain Fhada* translates as “long meadow” so vigorous vegetation growth was expected. Yet, despite initial slow growth rates of Norway, vegetation control has been carried out manually, without recourse to herbicides.

The area, planted in 2013 and 2015, is now virtually clear of competing vegeta-

tion. While limited spot application of cypermethrin was required for pine weevil control, Whelan said that a number of decisions were taken to ensure successful establishment. “We planted 2,700 trees per hectare – 200 more than the required number – and opted for larger nursery transplants in terms of size and root collar diameter,” he said.

The woodland has received independently verified forest certification which is demanding on staff resources but is now an inherent part of the IForUT management plan. Whelan paid tribute to Stacey

Bradley who manages the certification programme.

Input

He maintained that one of the keys to the success of the Clonad reforestation programme has been the input by Mick Comerford, forestry contractor, who has worked in private and State forests for decades. “Mick and his colleagues provide continuity as they have strong links with the woodland in Clonad and understand the various operations needed for successful reforestation,” he said.

