

Keeping forest harvesting on track

As timber volumes increase, the emphasis should be on greater planning to deal with wood mobilisation, writes ITGA's Donal Whelan

The volume of timber forecast to come from forests in Ireland next year is just over four million m³, including 870,000 m³ from private forests. This represents a 25% increase over 2015, when 3.2 million m³ was harvested.

Planning for mobilising this output from private forests has already commenced and must continue to ensure we maximise the return to timber growers and to the State. It is more important than ever for forest owners to plan their harvest whether thinnings or fellings. A good management plan will bring together the following planning elements:

- Installation of inspection paths in forests.
- Construction of forest access roads. Planning permission may first be required to improve existing access and construct new access. A new single consent system for access is to be introduced.
- Application for roading grant.
- Application for thinning grant in broadleaved crops.
- Drafting management and related plans for harvest and timber measurement.
- Application for felling licence.
- Timber sale including sale agreement/sale contract addressing compliance requirements including health and safety, insurance, indemnity issues, protection of special site features..
- Monitoring of sale and harvest including timber sale dispatch procedures and timber security, as well as follow-up work.

Timing

The timing of selling timber is critical as timber prices fluctuate. An individual forest owner cannot control the timber market, but if access and felling licences are in place, the forest owner is in a good position to sell when timber prices are favourable.

Many forest owners are now planning their harvest five years or more in advance. Under the new Forestry Act, there is a revised felling licence application procedure which seeks additional information and can take between one and four months before a licence is granted after the application is submitted. This time period needs to be taken into account by growers in their planning.

In order to assist growers in the thinning, felling and the timber sale process, the Forest Service is now circulating the template tree sales agreement (TTSA) as drafted by the Irish Timber Growers Association (ITGA) to those in receipt of felling licences.

The TTSA is a sales agreement/contract template for growers to adapt to their particular timber sale. It provides a sale agreement structured under various headings. It is

always prudent to use a good contract and get professional advice before embarking on a timber sale. The TTSA is also available on www.itga.ie/downloads.asp.

In relation to timber prices, there is good information available from the ITGA, Teagasc and the *Irish Farmers Journal*. In 2015, ITGA launched the Wood Price Quarterly (WPQ), which is now available to all growers on the www.itga.ie website and is included in the annual *Forestry & Timber Yearbook*.



➤ Donal Whelan is technical director of the Irish Timber Growers Association.

The importance of certification

Ireland exports 80% of its timber products - sawn, timber and panel-board. Export markets require such products to be certified. Under the two main international certification schemes FSC and PEFC, timber processors can take in a maximum of 30% of uncertified wood in their log supply to be permitted to label their output as certified.

In the coming years, many timber processors will be taking in more than this proportion of wood from private forests and hence the pending critical need for certification.

As timber processors source increasing quantities of roundwood from privately owned forests, a project to facilitate group certification is under way with an international consortium led by Commercial Forestry Services Ltd, in partnership with The Forestry Company, UK Forest Certification Ltd and the Soil Association Certification Ltd (UK).

There are two participating forestry groups in the project, which is funded by Forest Service. It is intended that this project will be completed in May 2018 and will deliver the tools for other forestry groups, forestry companies and individual foresters to organise forest owners for the purpose of gaining certification.