



Chairperson's report Pro Silva Ireland AGM 2023

Opening Remarks

We approach the end of another growing season for Pro Silva Ireland. This is a moment now for me to review some of our many achievements together. For a small, but growing organisation, we have indeed had an outstanding year that is perhaps noteworthy for the many new members and international friends who have joined us in our mission to promote sustainable forestry for both people and nature in Ireland.

Before reviewing our many activities and events, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge our valued members. It is the dedication, support and spirit of volunteering from all our members that drives our group forward. It is the membership that hold up a platform for our voluntary committee to advocate for the development of continuous cover and closer to nature forestry across all of Ireland.

On behalf of Pro Silva Ireland, I would like to extend our gratitude to DAFM for supporting a number of initiatives during the year, not least the international meeting in June 2023. This support has been an important validation of our work and enabled us to reach more people and partner with other stakeholders on a range of new projects.

Liam Byrne

Pro Silva Ireland Activities Oct 2022-Sept 2023

Field day and AGM 2022 in Ballyhaise

The Autumn Field Day took place across two forest properties in Co. Cavan on Oct 1st, 2022. Firstly, Kevin O'Connell hosted Pro Silva Ireland at Teagasc's Ballyhaise College and demonstrated excellence in CCF management across a range of small plots.

Then, after lunch we made a short journey to Coillte's Oakwood property, which is managed primarily for biodiversity as part of Coillte BioForest project. The Coillte team, led by Janice Fuller, and assisted by Manus Crowley, demonstrated how CCF management can greatly improve biodiversity while allowing for timber production.

On behalf of Pro Silva Ireland, I would like to thank all our hosts on the day.

Webinar

Jonathan Spazzi treated us to a fascinating talk on the belowground ecosystem, connecting symbiotic fungal networks with forest resilience through Close-to-Nature management in



November last year. This webinar had a very high attendance and can still be viewed through our *NEW* website.

Training

Pro Silva Ireland, in conjunction with DAFM, ran the second WIS CCF training course for foresters in November. This 2-day course is designed to assist foresters in facilitating the CCF element of the Woodland Improvement Scheme and provide greater knowledge of CCF.

A tree marker course for students of UCD was facilitated by Pro Silva Ireland and delivered by Ted Wilson in January of this year. This was great opportunity to engage early with the future managers of our foresters.

Spring Field Day 2023

Our Spring Field was held on April 22nd, 2023, and demonstrated how neighbouring forest owners are making a collective effort to practice CCF across a significant number of properties near Cadamstown, Co. Offaly.

With support of Pro Silva member and consultant forest Pádraig Dolan, the attendees saw how the owners have adopted CCF management to build resilience forests that can produce quality timber while protecting and enhancing local ecosystems. Among the attendees was Minister Hackett, who expressed a wish to expand her own interests in CCF management.

Pro Silva Ireland is very grateful to the host owners and Pádraig for facilitating this well-attended day.

Workshops

Pro Silva Ireland continued to run field-engagement workshops with various stakeholders throughout the year, creating an awareness around sustainable forestry practices.

The effectiveness of these workshops was highlighted by reference to CCF management and deer control in the Dáil Chamber (Debate, vol. 1041, No 5, 6 July 2023) by Jennifer Whitemore after attending a workshop with East Wicklow Rivers Trust, led by Faith Wilson and Paddy Purser.

Thanks to all who participated in and help facilitate these productive workshops over the past 12 months.

Summer Afternoon Field Event

Padraig O'Tuama took the lead in delivering our first regional open event near Leamlara, Co. Cork on Friday 25th August. The day demonstrated the transformation of an 8.8Ha forest to an irregular structure, utilising the CCF and RUS schemes. Thanks to Padraig and our host owner for helping to facilitate this event.



Collaboration and engagement

Pro Silva Ireland and members of the committee continue to participate in numerous collaborative endeavours with other forestry stakeholders, including DAFM, Teagasc, Coillte and forest owner groups, as well as individuals, all with a view to promote CCF throughout the country.

I'd like to take the opportunity here to mention the ForestMooCForChange programme, which is a new EU-wide online training course on CCF that has just been launched, which highlights the collaborative nature of CCF education across Europe.

And going even further afield, Paddy Purser and Manus Crowley had the honour of contributing (over zoom) to a session as part of the Māori forestry-led seminars that were held recently. Thanks to Cathy Fitzgerald for making this New Zealand connection and we look forward to future interactions between proponents of sustainable forest management on these two Island nations.

Pro Silva Annual International Meeting 2023

In June, Pro Silva Ireland had the prestigious honour of hosting the Annual Meeting of International Pro Silva organisations in Co. Wicklow. This meeting takes place each year and is hosted by one member country of the Pro Silva family. Hosting the event in Ireland was a great honour and a challenge, but one that we rose to in style.

We welcomed delegates from 22 countries for the annual business meeting, followed by a series of field trips showcasing CCF in Ireland. We chose the title Transforming Forests and Forest Cultures in a Changing World as our theme, demonstrating our advances in the practice of CCF since our founding 23 years ago. This was an important opportunity to thank the many colleagues who have hosted us in our study tours over the years.

A full meeting report can be found on our website and thanks to our many local stakeholders for their contributions during the meeting.

CCFG study tour to Ireland

Most recently, at the end of September, Pro Silva Ireland hosts our colleagues from the UK, continuous cover forestry group, on their annual study tour. Having the privilege to host a visiting study tour demonstrates the progress of CCF in Ireland and were very complimentary, stating:

“We learnt a lot about ways in which we can work with policy makers and with land owners and forest managers to develop a vision for the future of forestry in Britain in which CCF becomes a key delivery mechanism”.

Irish Deer Management Strategy Group

While PSI are always greatly enthusiastic of all initiatives aimed at expanding and diversifying our forest estate, we realise the greatest impediment to this, in most parts of the country, is the ever-increasing deer populations. We welcomed the establishment of the Irish Deer Management Strategy Group this year and had the opportunity for several committee



members to provide their expert input to the working groups. While acknowledging the difficulties in fully implementing all recommendations, we welcome the progress made to date and look forward to even more progress in the coming year.

New Forestry Programme

It is great to see, at last, the start of the New Forestry Programme that provides many choices for forest creation, including a new CCF forest type. Enhanced support measures for management of CCF woodlands, for reforestation, and for promotion and education, will hopefully be announced in the near future.

This New Forestry Programme marks a significant breakthrough in the mainstreaming of CCF in National Forest policy and we would like to acknowledge the support of all our members in achieving this.

Future events

Next week, on the 12th October 2023, 34 members are travelling to Denmark for four days to visit a variety of forests. This is the largest study tour to date and is another example of the growing interest in sustainable forest management systems and CCF among our members.

We'd like to extend our sincere gratitude to Pro Silva Denmark for hosting us and we look forward to an informative and fun filled trip.

Entertainment

The well renowned Pro Silva House Band continued to perform throughout the year. In particular, our international guests were thoroughly entertained, with many joining in with the festivities. A massive thank you to Manus Crowley, Sean Hoskins, Jonathan Spazzi and Séan O'Conláin for keeping us up singing well into the wee hours.

Closing Remarks

Reflecting on the past year, and indeed my four years as Chairperson of Pro Silva Ireland, it is the great work of our dedicated committee members and others that has made it possible to achieve and deliver so much. Despite being a group of volunteers, these people worked tirelessly in a professional manner on behalf of the members. Their efforts are greatly supported by Pro Silva Ireland's administrator, Olive Leavy, who brings tremendous skill, experience and enthusiasm. On behalf of the membership, I would like to convey our thanks to all the team who has contributed to the continuing success of Pro Silva Ireland.

Growth in Pro Silva's activities has been the result of demand and increased awareness of CCF. It is important to remember the grass-roots work that Pro Silva Ireland has been delivering for over 20 years. We have quietly but steadily been engaging new members, new practitioners



and new supporters through demonstrating our growing skills and experience in CCF. People are drawn to CCF as a sound business and environmental approach to sustainable forestry because they see good forestry in practice – “seeing is believing”. Maintaining our links to members, sharing our common beliefs and values, and also sharing our technical knowledge are absolutely critical to expanding CCF on suitable sites across Ireland and further enhancing our collective knowledge and skills.

Undoubtedly, the new DAFM Forestry Programme is a tremendous boost for continuous cover forestry in Ireland. We now have the support and commitment from government to promote CCF as a strategy that increases the resilience of productive forests to threats from climate change, pests and diseases. At the heart of the new programme is an opportunity to engage with forest owners and develop our skills base. Continuing support for management planning, tree marking, forest operations, deer control, and much more, are vital as we move forward.

Finally, just as in a well-managed forest, there has to be a process of regeneration and renewal for all organisations. It has been one of the great privileges of my life to serve as chairperson of Pro Silva Ireland at this exciting and transformative time. Welcoming esteemed colleagues and friends to Ireland this summer, hearing their views and impressions of our achievements, leaves me with nothing but pride in our group and all its dedicated members. I am confident that Pro Silva Ireland will embrace the future with passion and strength, and continue to advocate for sustainable forestry that delivers for our forestry sector, woodland owners, communities and the environment.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh
Le Meas

Liam Byrne