



A Quick Guide to **Continuous Cover Forestry Practice** in Ireland



Guidelines for CCF harvest operations



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Skilled harvesting is crucial to CCF management

Skilled harvesting operations, along with care for retained trees and the forest environment, are critical to the sustainable management of permanent CCF forests.

These forests deliver multiple benefits:

- Continuous timber production
- Protection of soil, water and biodiversity
- Recreation opportunities

Harvesting in CCF forests

CCF forests are structurally complex, with multiple tree species, trees of varied ages, heights and sizes, and a dense understorey. Harvest operators therefore require a high level of skill and judgement.

Because CCF forests are permanent, operations must be planned with a long-term perspective, prioritising stand improvement, protecting residual trees and maintaining site conditions. Careful planning and site management are therefore essential.

Operators may be required to make on-the-ground decisions where management objectives and marking intentions must be balanced against operation capabilities, site conditions and the need to protect retained trees, biodiversity features and overall forest ecology.

These guidelines are intended to support safe, practical decision-making while maintaining the objectives of CCF management.



Guidelines

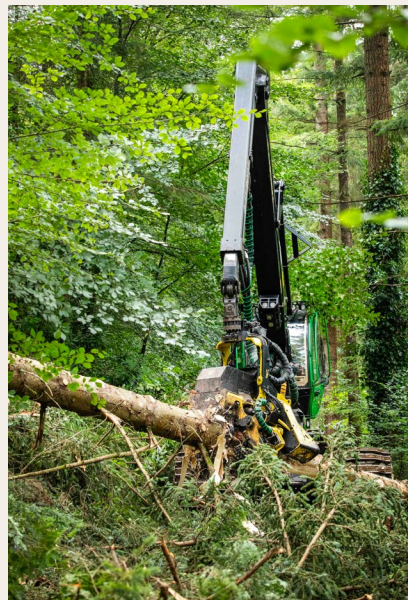
1. Health, safety and site awareness

- Inspect the site and complete a risk assessment, and a methodology and work plan.
- Follow all standard forestry health and safety requirements at all times.
- Expect reduced visibility in parts of the site due to the understorey.
- Continuously assess ground and weather conditions. Adjust work if conditions deteriorate.
- Schedule harvesting in wet or sensitive areas for dry periods where possible.

2. Felling

- Fell trees in line with the marking instructions provided (See over).
- Avoid damage to the crowns, trunks and roots of the retained trees when felling.
- If a marked tree cannot be felled without damaging valued trees:

- ringbark the marked tree (unless it is close to paths or roads) or
- select another poor-quality unmarked tree to fell instead
- If you identify a significant biodiversity feature (such as an active nest) in a tree marked for felling, leave it standing and select an alternative poor-quality tree.
- When processing felled trees, optimise log grades to maximise market return.



3. Extraction

- Restrict extraction and machine travel to racks and headlands.
- Use all available brush to create brush mats and protect the soil.
- Avoid damage to the trunks, crowns and roots of the retained trees.
- Take particular care not to damage trees marked with a white or blue ring or triangle.

4. Deadwood

- Retain standing and lying deadwood unless markings indicate otherwise.
- Leave fallen trees that are in contact with the ground to support habitat and soil fertility. (An exception applies only where a tree has fallen very recently, still has a living crown and has significant economic value.)
- Leave brush on site; avoid whole tree harvesting or stump removal, as decaying wood returns nutrients to forest soils.

5. Understorey management

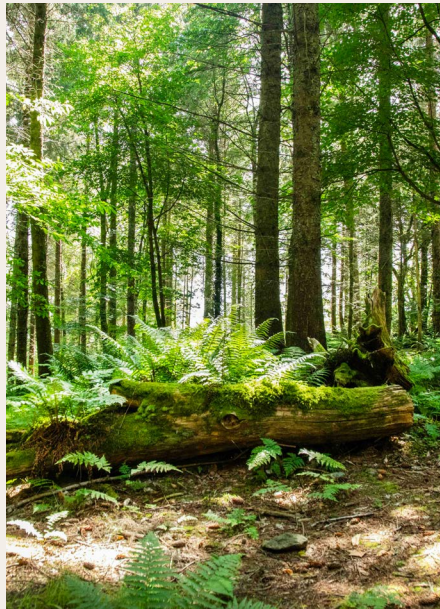
- Minimize disturbance to natural regeneration.
- Protect shrub species, such as hazel and holly; cut shrubs cleanly at ground level (coppice) where removal is required.

Why deadwood matters

Standing and lying deadwood are important features of CCF forests. As it decomposes, deadwood recycles nutrients back into the soil and supports the forest nutrient cycle.

Deadwood also provides habitat and food for many insects, which in turn support forest birds and mammals. Numerous lichens, fungi, mosses and other organisms depend on deadwood.

New standing and fallen deadwood can be created during felling operations.



Tree root system – key points

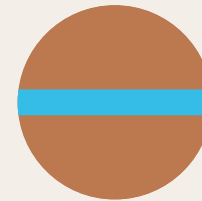
- Tree roots extend outwards in all directions, for distances often in excess of the tree's height.
- Most roots are long, shallow and grow horizontally.
- Over 90% of all roots are found in the upper 60cm of soil.
- Only a small proportion of mature trees have a sizable taproot.

Understanding tree root systems is important for harvester operators. Because most roots are shallow, they are easily damaged by machine traffic, which can affect tree stability, health and long-term forest resilience.

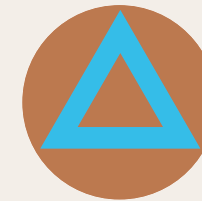


Irish Tree Marking Standard for CCF

Trees to retain – Blue or white paint



Retain for quality timber

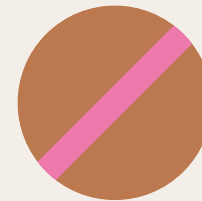


Retain for biodiversity

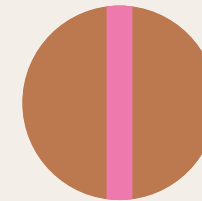


Retain to mark edge of permanent rack or route

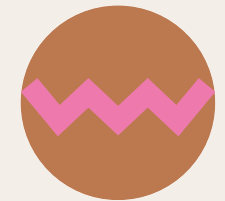
Trees to remove – Pink or orange paint



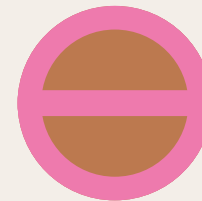
Fell



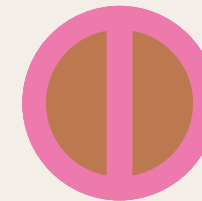
Fell for rack



Ringbark



Fell and leave as fallen deadwood



Fell (cut high) and leave as standing deadwood



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Pro Silva Ireland is a registered charity founded in 2000 to advocate for, and educate on, continuous cover forestry. Part of the wider Pro Silva Europe network, Pro Silva Ireland is an all-Ireland organisation, embracing membership from both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic.

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Other guides in this series:

- What is CCF?
- Benefits of CCF
- CCF and biodiversity
- CCF forests for water
- Understanding CCF transformation
- Tree selection and marking in CCF
- Enrichment planting in CCF
- Light forest operations
- Supports for CCF

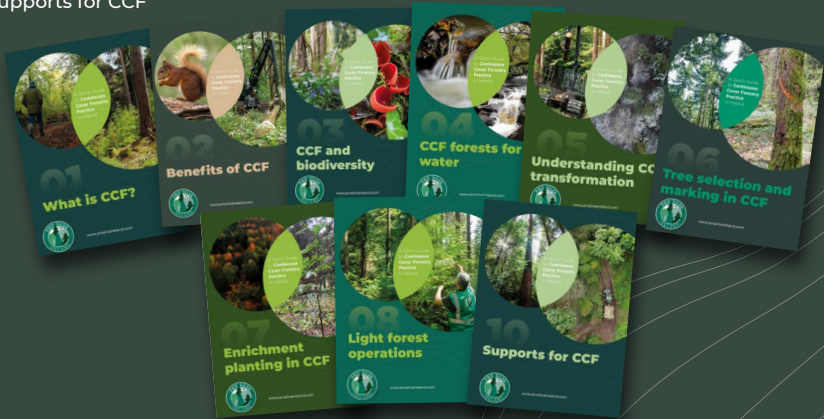
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