

# **Ireland's Native Woodland Strategy: Progress, Critical Mass & Momentum**

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'20 Years A-Growing'

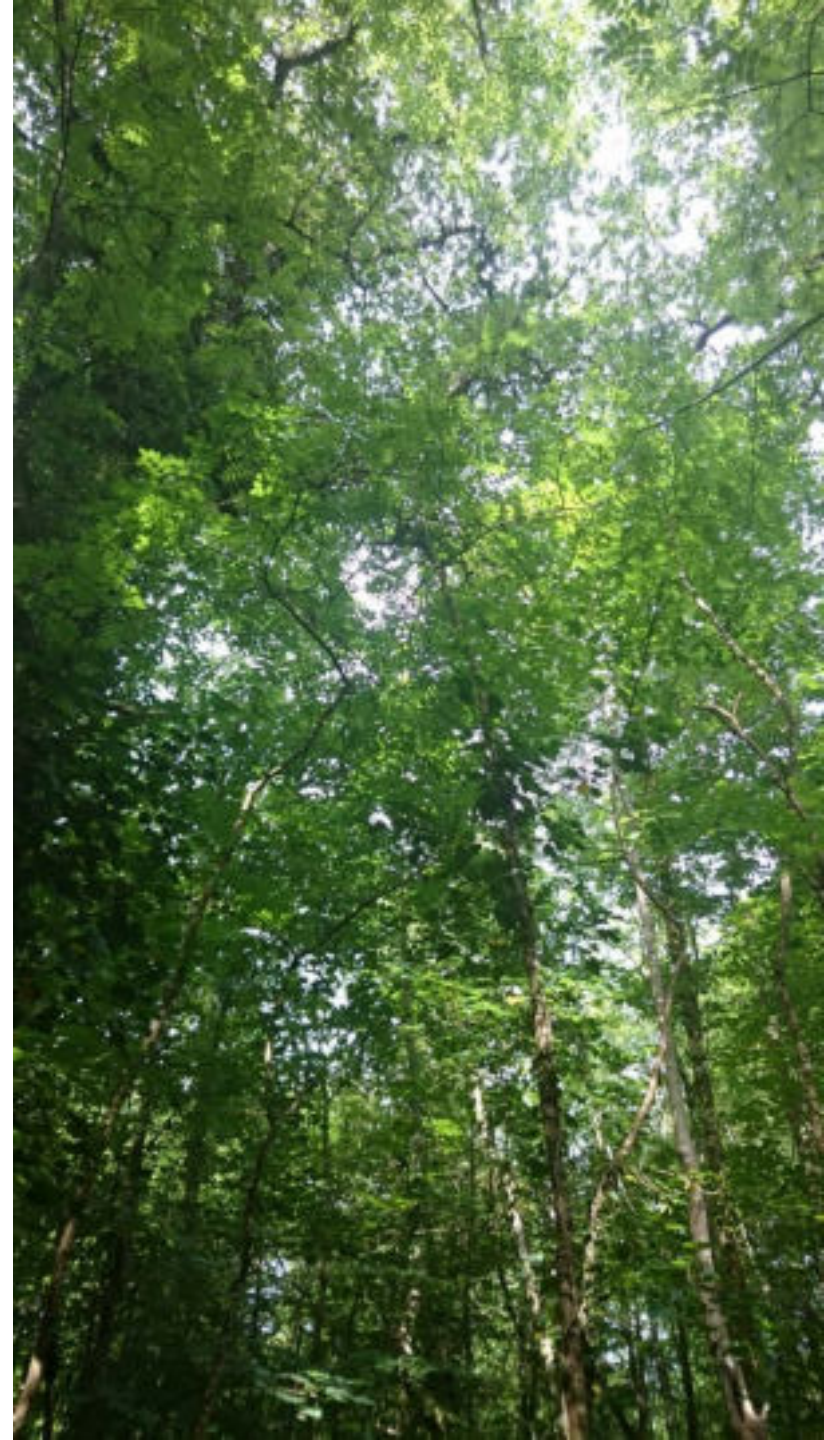
National Native Woodland Conference

Glenview Hotel, Delgany, Wicklow

30<sup>th</sup> April – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2018



An Roinn Talmhaíochta,  
Bia agus Mara  
Department of Agriculture,  
Food and the Marine



Despite their natural, historic & cultural status & 'beacons of light' (creation of protected areas, pioneering research & public advocates)...

...the 'story' of native woodlands up to the late 1990s is not a happy read

Centuries of clearance & 'mismanagement'(\*) – both historical (e.g. oak monocultures) & more recent (e.g. replacement with conifer plantations)

Valueless 'scrub' that occupied a blindspot in the public's mind...

\* Ecologically, from today's perspective







However, sparked by key visionaries & the Millennium, various initiatives in the late '90s / early '00s:

- Woodlands of Ireland
- People's Millennium Forests Project
- NPWS National Survey of Native Woodlands, 2003-08
- Coillte's Old Woodland Survey
- National Native Woodland Conference, 2004
- Woodland restoration by NPWS
- Coillte Priority Woodland LIFE project
- DAFM's Native Woodland Scheme package(\*), launched late 2001

\* NWS Establishment & NWS Conservation

This strong focus on native woodlands has carried through to today...

...with the work of Wol & the ongoing funds under NWS key drivers

Both support – and are supported by – a dense & intricate 'mycorrhiza' of stakeholders, initiatives & applications

Entire effort underpinned by owners & their willingness to invest their land



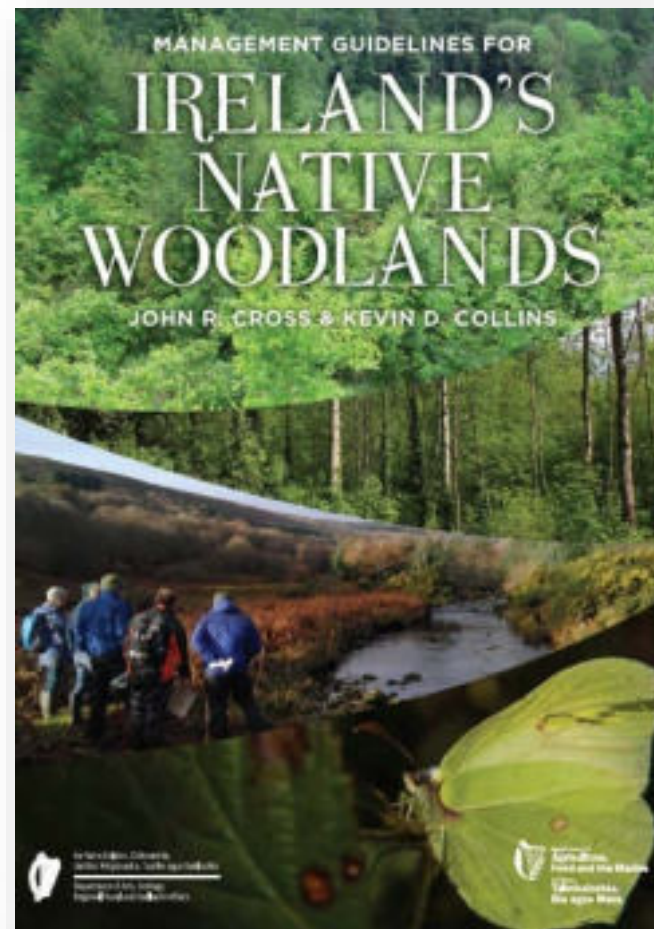


## Key aspects of NWS:

- Shared ownership: developed & operated in partnership with Wol, NPWS, Heritage Council, Inland Fisheries Ireland & others
- Flexibility – afforestation, restoration, conversion
- Strongly targeted, e.g. NWS Cons. & water
- NWS Est: highest grant & premium rate under the Affor. Scheme
- NWS Cons: unique 7-year premium for private owners
- Now 'mainstream', e.g. NWS Est. now part of the Affor. Scheme as two of 12 GPCs → mixed projects
- Slots into regulatory framework, including Land Types of Afforestation, Environmental Requirements for Affor., EIA & AA procedures, Felling & Reforestation Policy (incl. Refor. Objectives 'CCF' & 'BIO')



- Supported by ‘mandatory’ & optional training & by technical publications, e.g. Wol Info. Notes & NPWS / FS-DAFM Management Guidelines (Cross & Collins, 2017)
- Wood production, where appropriate & using CCF
- Increasing awareness within the water sector of potential in WFD
- Key component of KerryLIFE (Freshwater Pearl Mussel)
- Ongoing evolution with input from Wol & other partners. Most recently (Cir. 05/2018), new Scenario 5 (Pioneer Birchwood) for NWS Est. & revised ‘Form 1’ for NWS Cons.



**A scheme tailored for more sensitive sites / parts of sites, allowing farmers & other landowners to be involved in developing woodlands that contribute to protecting & enhancing the sensitivity in question**

Overall collective effort is driving native woodland expansion in Ireland & is pioneering new opportunities, particularly in the areas of water & natural capital.

E.g.

- NWS Cons., April16 – March18: 40 applications, 274 ha
- NWS Est., Jan17 – April18: 237 applications, 1,263 ha
- Scenario 5, Woodland for Water measure, Woodland Fund, this Conference

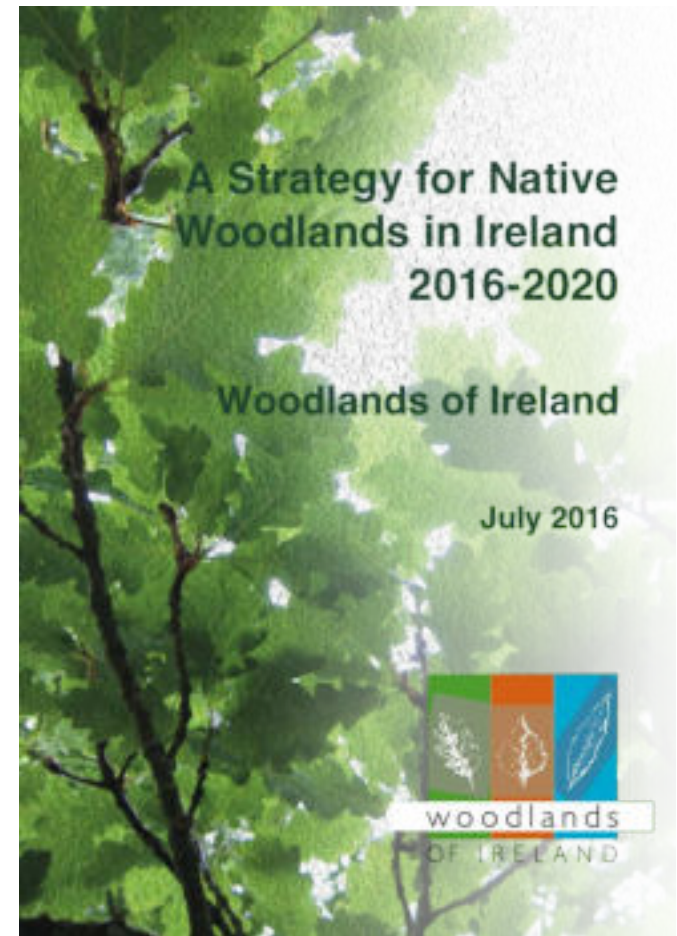


**Have we reached the critical mass needed to achieve the targets set out in the National Strategy for Native Woodland in Ireland?**



## Wol Strategy for Native Woodlands in Ireland 2016-2020

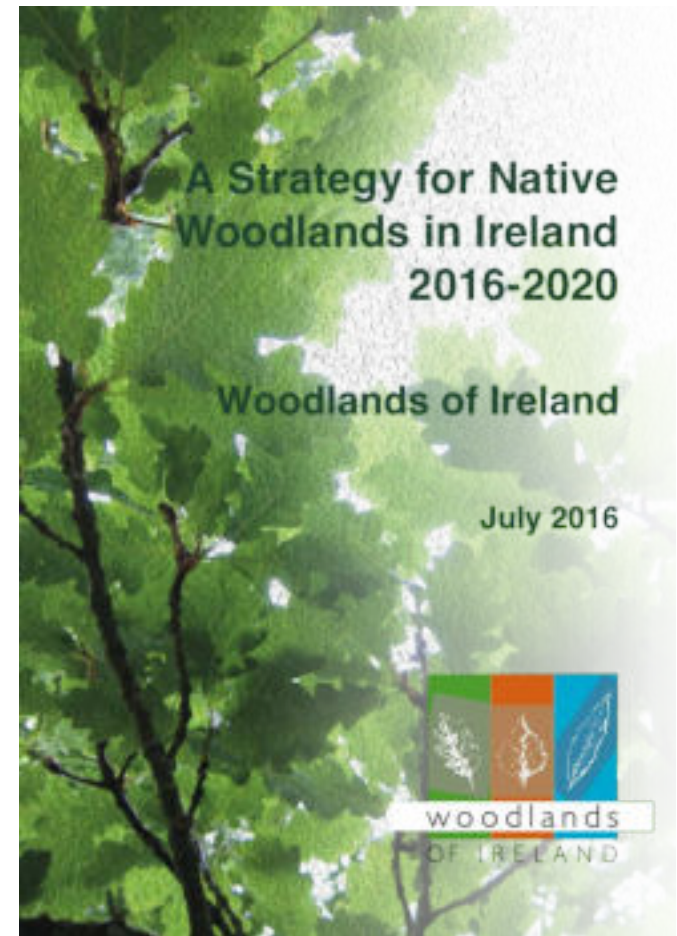
- Promotion of ecosystem service values of native woodlands
- Promote utilisation of available & potential finances to strategically conserve & expand resource
- Promote strategic creation of protective native woodlands for water quality & flood mitigation
- Promote management of native woodland using CCF to realise high quality, indigenous wood
- Advocate for the incorporation of non-timber uses (e.g. habitat linkage, water protection, carbon, recreation, health) into planning & management





- Ensure climate change & invasive species are considered taken in policy, legislation, planning & management
- Support adaptive measures & research to counteract tree pests & diseases that threaten native woodlands
- Call for native woodland research to underpin future sustainability
- Integrate native woodland wood & non-wood values into the Natural Capital agenda

*Via* close coordination of stakeholders, including public bodies, eNGOs & private sector; & funding under the Forestry Programme 2014-2020 (with provision for 2,000 ha under NWS Cons. & 2,700 ha under NWS Est.)



Tee-ed up to succeed, if we can address ongoing shortfalls & capitalise on opportunities. E.g.

- Continue to shift the perception of landowners & foresters regarding the value of native woodlands & encourage engagement in NWS
- Shift the perception of ecologists, environmentalists, planners, etc. regarding the scope of 'forestry' & how native woodlands can be used for other agendas
- Realise the potential of native woodlands to contribute to farm enterprise, financial & otherwise
- Continue to link in with wider environmental, social & economic agendas, (water, biodiversity, landscape, tourism, health & wellbeing) to widen the 'stance' of the native woodland sector.





- Boost research exploring the values of native woodland
- Ensure that professional capacity match the complexity of native woodland management (e.g. site operations, CCF, deer)
- Address existing legislative, policy & support pinch-points (including the ongoing refinement of NWS)
- Ensure that supports are broadened out to include other sources & are effectively targeted at creating & expanding opportunities (Woodland Fund...?)
- Expand the availability of native planting material & increase resilience to climate change, pests & diseases



Will future observers see the ongoing effort on native woodlands as:

- the first half of a boom-bust cycle, or
- a sustainable, iterative process leading us towards the achievement of targets set out in the National Strategy for Native Woodland in Ireland, for 2020 & beyond?

**I say the latter, given the increasingly nuanced & multi-faceted nature of Ireland's native woodland sector**

