

## CHAPTER 21

### Native Woodland Scheme

#### 21.1 Background

This scheme has been developed over a number of years under a partnership involving the Forest Service, Woodlands of Ireland, Dúchas, The Heritage Service, Regional Fisheries Boards, the Heritage Council, Coillte, COFORD and others. Due to its innovative nature, the scheme is subject to ongoing development and review, and various measures are being put in place to support its implementation, including training and monitoring initiatives. Woodlands of Ireland, a group representing all stakeholders with an interest in native woodlands in Ireland, is involved in promoting the scheme and inputting into its development.

The Native Woodland Scheme is an innovative package aimed at protecting and expanding Ireland's native woodland resource. Such woodland is of prime biodiversity value but has suffered from centuries of clearance and neglect. There are two elements under the scheme, each with its own grant levels and premiums:

#### 21.2 Element 1: Native Woodland Conservation

Native Woodland Conservation is aimed at restoring existing woodlands to native woodland status. Candidate woodlands include existing native woodlands in need of work such as deer fencing or rhododendron clearance, semi-natural woodland with non-natives such as beech and sycamore earmarked for gradual removal, or existing conifer crops in areas where conversion to native woodland will be of particular ecological value (e.g. along rivers and streams).

#### 21.3 Element 2: Native Woodland Establishment

Native Woodland Establishment is aimed at developing new native woodland on open sites. Sites of particular relevance under this element are those located beside existing native woodlands or in areas along streams and rivers. The sensitive development of native woodland cover on these sites will link up existing habitats and will help create a network of native woodlands across the landscape.

#### 21.4 Silviculture

In order to minimise site disturbance, operations such as mounding, herbicide application and fertilising are to be carried out only where ecologically appropriate and at the minimum level required to achieve successful woodland development. Similarly, natural regeneration of trees is also encouraged, where it represents a viable option to planting. All planting stock used must conform to seed provenance and origin conditions specific to the Native Woodland Scheme. Particular emphasis is also placed on matching the species list to the particular native woodland type that would occur on that particular site type. Using close-to-nature silvicultural techniques, some level of timber production is also encouraged, where compatible with the overriding biodiversity objective.

#### 21.5 Grant Rates and Further Details

Further details of the Native Woodland Scheme, including grant and premium rates, procedures and standards, etc., are contained in a separate Native Woodland Scheme brochure and in the Native

Woodland Manual: Procedures, Standards and Decision Support for the Native Woodland Scheme, both available from the Forest Service. The requirements relating to the provision of vouched invoices and tax clearance certificates for contractors employed to carry out the work, are the same as those which apply under the afforestation grant scheme.