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Bia agus Mara
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Woodland Improvement Scheme 2023-2027 Elements 1 - 5

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Forest Strategy and the Forest Strategy Implementation Plan identified the need to provide support for sustainable forest management with the potential to deliver ecosystem services, environmental and climate benefits, while mobilising the existing timber resource, expanding the value added potential of timber within a growing bioeconomy and support for environmental enhancement of existing forests.

It also highlighted the need for the protection of existing biodiversity through sustainable forest management supporting forest owners in the transition from even-aged forest management to closer to nature forestry while also improving carbon storage and sequestration. The Woodland Improvement Scheme and its 5 different elements give existing forest owners a wide range of support options to sustainably manage the potential of their forests to fulfil current and future relevant demands for wood and non-wood products. The scheme also aims to deliver on the growing of high quality and high value round wood timber for the timber industry, while in tandem delivering on the provision of ecosystem services such as biodiversity, soil, water protection, etc, through the development and implementation of targeted support measures for the provision of non-timber ecosystem services.

The Woodland Improvement Scheme Elements are as follows:

1.2 **Element 1: Thinning and Tending**

This Element will provide two thinning interventions for all broadleaf and broadleaf/ conifer mixed forests regardless of whether or not they are grant aided, where the trees have been planted post 1983. Both interventions are applied for separately using the Form 1 and Form 2 process.

The aim of both thinning interventions is to improve the quality of broadleaf trees, mobilise timber for supply and provide ecosystem services along with financial support to forest owners towards the cost of sustainable forest management works associated with thinning of broadleaf forests and broadleaf / conifer mixtures that meet the required eligibility criteria. The scheme facilitates the enhancement of the environment associated with thinning. Thinning stimulates investment through improvement, protection and development of broadleaf forests for a range of functions, including enhancing and conserving biodiversity, promote healthy tree growth, improve the aesthetics of the landscape, protection of soil and water, improves access for management of the forest. These aims will be achieved through improved felling of poorly formed trees; felling of additional undersized trees to release potential crop trees (PCT); pruning to improve stem quality; thinning or re-spacing to promote growth and management and re-spacing of natural regeneration. Tending also benefits biodiversity by increasing light levels which contributes to the development of shrub and ground flora, through the germination of dormant seed, which in turn increases the forest biota.

1.3 **Element 2: Agroforestry Maintenance**

This element of the Sustainable Forest Management Scheme (SFM) will provide funding for maintenance of grant aided existing agroforests.

The scheme will be made available to private forest owners who wish to carry out maintenance of existing grant aided Agroforestry.

Agroforestry management is operated on a scale of the individual tree (tree by tree silviculture) rather than on that of the stand. Production should concentrate on growing high quality and high value logs. The ground layer must be managed in agriculture and follow good agricultural practice.

Registered Foresters and/or owner should be familiar with the Agroforestry specifications and establishment.

1.4 **Element 3: Continuous Cover Forestry**

This element will provide funding for conversion of existing forests to Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) over a 12 year transitional period. Successful applicants are eligible for three WIS payments (€1,200/ha) for three separate instalments. Applicants may also be eligible for a new annual Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) premium of €150 / ha, with a 7 year duration.

Element 3 will be made available to private forest owners who wish to pursue transformation from the conventional clearfell/ replant silvicultural system (Rotational Forest Management) to CCF. In these cases, a “CCF *Transformation Management Plan*” must feature as part of the forest management plan, to accompany the application.

The scheme is for suitable sites of environmental or landscape significance, where an alternative silvicultural system to clearfelling is clearly stated as being a management objective. In this regard, ecosystem services that serve the wider public interest must be clearly set out in the application habitats map and Transformation Management Plan.

Conifer, broadleaf and mixed forests are eligible. Applications will be considered for this silvicultural system where restructuring of the forest is required to provide conditions for an uneven aged and permanent forest. CCF forest management is operated on a scale of the individual tree (tree by tree silviculture) rather than on that of the stand. Production should concentrate on growing high quality logs, usually produced from very large trees. The understory must be managed to provide space to promote natural regeneration and subsequently maintain control of species composition. Forest manager and/or owner must have recognized training in CCF.

1.5 **Element 4: Coppice and Coppice with Standards**

The art of coppicing must be the ultimate sustainable forest management technique. In a well-managed coppice there is no need for herbicide or fertilizers, no need to disturb the soil or to plant trees. The coppice is entirely self-renewing. (Oaks et al 2010). Forest owners entering this scheme may have multiple objectives for example, conservation, native forest management, provision of fuelwood or to remediate young broadleaf forest with poor form and apical dominance. These objectives will be outlined in the management plan. Most broadleaves have an ability to sprout multiple stems when cut. Forests managed for Coppice are even-aged single-storey crops. Harvesting during the dormant winter season, of trees cut on a regular rotation, resulting in the regrowth of multiple stems from the stump. These stumps sprout vigorously and can grow in excess of 1 to 1.5 metre in the first year and therefore outgrow competing vegetation quickly, although vegetation needs to be managed in the first year or two as brambles and grass can quickly become a problem and compete with new shoots.

A coppice management system mimics the natural system where the effects of a mature tree falling over opens a gap, allowing direct light to reach the forest floor. Dormant seed and bulbs can then germinate creating a creating mass of new vegetation such as primrose, wild garlic and lesser celandine in addition to the germination of seed from nearby trees. In time this creates opportunities for more flora and fauna to colonise the gaps maximising the biodiversity of the forest.

Coppice with Standards represents a divergence from the normal coppice system where standards are identified, marked and retained at the end of the first coppice cycle. In the past standards were usually Oak retained at low stocking density. For the purpose of this scheme about 30% of the stocking can remain. This is to reduce epicormic branching, competing vegetation for new shoots, plus increases the selection of standards that will be reduced during further coppice rotations.

Coppice also offers an opportunity to remediate plots of broadleaf 'trees with poor form or apical dominance. Trees are stumped back and over a two-year period shoots are singled

out. In the first summer of the first growing season the stump is reduced to three to four of the tallest straight shoots. In the second growing seasons summer, the shoots are reduced to one shoot, the tallest, best form, with good apical dominance. These shoots can be 2 - 2.5 metres in height by the end of the second growing season.

This element of the Woodland Improvement Scheme will provide funding for conversion of existing forests to Coppice and Coppice with Standards. Successful applicants are eligible for a WIS payments (€1,200 per ha to a maximum of 3 hectares per application.).

The scheme is for suitable sites of environmental or landscape significance.

Broadleaf and broadleaf / conifer mixed forests (where the conifer element is to be removed) are eligible. Applications will be considered for silvicultural systems where restructuring of the forest is required to provide conditions for the plot to be managed under Coppice or Coppice with Standards. The understory must be managed to provide a space to promote ecosystem services along with a diverse range of flora and fauna.

1.6 **Element 5 Seed Stand Management**

Element 5 aims to support the sustainable use and conservation of Ireland's forest genetic resource, by improving the management and conservation of registered broadleaf and conifer Seed Stands included on the National List of Basic Material so as to increase the frequency, quality and volume of commercial seed production and collection. Element 5 also facilitates the management and conservation of ancient woodland oak stands registered in the category 'Source Identified' for the purpose of gene conservation, so as to increase the frequency, quality and volume of acorns produced and collected for biodiversity-focused planting elsewhere.

Broadleaf and minor conifer seed stands registered on the National List of Forest Basic Material as "Selected" or "Tested" will be considered for funding. The Seed Stand Management Scheme also facilitates the management and conservation of ancient woodland oak stands registered in the category 'Source Identified' for the purpose of gene conservation, so as to increase the frequency, quality and volume of acorns produced and collected for biodiversity-focused planting elsewhere, e.g. native woodland establishment or conservation. For more information on the National Register of Forest Basic Material or to apply for a forest area to be included on the National Register of Forest Basic Material please contact frm@agriculture.gov.ie

Grant-aided seed stands must produce seed, as verified by the Department, at least once during the contract period, or evidence must be provided that due to climatic conditions seeding has not occurred at a level to justify collection.

There is a fixed grant of 100% of eligible costs up to a maximum of €1,200 per ha for both private and public forests.

A PES premium payment (private landowners only) PES 3 Seed stand management will be offered at a rate of €500 per ha for a 7-year premium period. The forest owner will be obliged to maintain the seed stand for 7 years from the date of completion of works. These maybe subject to Ad hoc inspections over the premium period.

Element 5 will be made available to private and public forest owners who wish to manage their forests with seed production as a primary objective. A "Seed Stand Management Plan" must feature as part of the forest management plan, to accompany the application. See Annex 6

The Seed Stand Element is limited to 50 projects up until the end of the Forestry Programme 2023 – 2027.

The maximum area per application eligible for funding is 5ha (10ha for oak) although the total area of the seed stand can be larger.

Registered Foresters and/or owner should be familiar with the Seed Stand Management specifications and complete a Seed Stand Management Plan. See Annex 6 for details.

2. Legal Basis

The Legal basis for the Scheme is established under Section 6 of the Forestry Act, 2014.

- The Scheme is administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and operates throughout the State. The Scheme shall be operational from 20th December 2023 for a period to be determined by the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- The Scheme is 100% Exchequer funded under the following legal framework.
- Is operated pursuant to the European Union guidelines for State aid in the agriculture and forestry sector and in rural areas.
- The Scheme is subject to Council Regulation (EC) No 2015/1589 of 13 July 2015 laying down detailed rules for the application of Article 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (codification) – the Procedural Regulation - (Codification of Council Regulation (EC) 659/1999 as amended), which governs the procedure on recovery of aid.
- Participation in the Scheme is voluntary.

3. State Aid requirements

The incentive effect

This applies only where the applicant is a small/medium enterprise SME. Small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are defined in the EU Recommendation 2003/361/EC) must confirm and declare on the Woodland Improvement Scheme Element 1 - 5, Scheme Application Form that:

“The work described herein, would not have been undertaken if it was not for the financial support provided under State Aid rules. Without this aid, there would be no change to current activities.”

For large companies, documentary evidence must be submitted in relation to the counterfactual (what would happen without the aid) for each of the measures proposed. This involves a credibility check of the counterfactual to establish that the company would not carry out the proposed work in the absence of aid. A counterfactual is credible if it is genuine and relates to the decision-making factors prevalent at the time of the decision by the beneficiary regarding the activity.

Large companies must submit an internal company document (separate to the application form) showing that the company has analysed the viability of the project – with and without aid – and showing the incentive effect. The document must clearly state what would have happened without the support available under this Scheme.

That means that the documentation (internal report) produced by the company must establish that the aid will cause at least one of the following:

- a material increase in the size of the project /activity, or
- a material increase in the scope of the project / activity, or
- material increase in the total amount spent by the beneficiary on the project/activity or
- a material increase in the speed of completion of the project/activity concerned

DAFM will require that the company document shows a credible analysis and demonstration of the incentive effect. The document should contain an analysis which answers the following questions:

- Would the project proceed without State Aid assistance?
- Would the level of project expenditure be less without State Aid support? If so, indicate by how much?

This information should indicate changes in the project size, scope and total spend. Where required, this incentive effect document should be submitted with the relevant Form 1. As part of its evaluation of the application, the Forest Service will assess whether or not the incentive document meets the requirements set out above and is fully compliant with the European Union Guidelines for State Aid in the agricultural and forestry sectors and in rural areas compatible with the internal market in application of Articles 107 and 108 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Proportionality of the aid

Aid granted under this scheme must be proportionate. Support is considered proportional only if the same result could not be achieved with less aid, in other words if the amount of aid is limited to the minimum necessary. The aid amount should not exceed the minimum necessary to render the project sufficiently profitable, for example should not lead to increase its IRR beyond the normal rates of return applied by the undertaking concerned in other investment projects of a similar kind or, when available, to increase its IRR beyond the cost of capital of the undertaking as a whole or beyond the rates of return commonly observed in the sector concerned. For example, the IRR should be comparable with returns experienced by entities which are not large companies. Where the IRR exceeds this reference figure then the application may be refused.

Large Companies must provide documentary evidence that the aid is proportionate. This can be achieved by submitting an IRR and NPV analysis of the investment with aid and without aid with the Form 1. Only applications which are deemed proportionate will be grant aided by the Forest Service.

Transparency

Ireland shall publish the following information on the State aid schemes: the full text of the notified aid scheme and its implementing provisions, the granting authority, the names of the individual beneficiaries, the form (in particular the aid instrument) and amount of aid granted to each beneficiary, the date of granting, the type of undertaking (SME/ large enterprise), the region (at Nomenclature of Units for Territorial Statistics or NUTS level II) in which the beneficiary is located and the principal economic sector in which the beneficiary has its activities, at NACE group level. This requirement only applies to individual aid awards greater than:

- (i) EUR 10,000 for beneficiaries active in the primary agricultural production
- (ii) EUR 100,000 for beneficiaries in the sectors of the processing of agricultural products, the marketing of agricultural products, the forestry sector or activities falling outside the scope of Article 42 of the Treaty.

4. Objectives of the Scheme

4.1 The aim of **Element 1 Thinning and Tending** is to stimulate investment in the improvement, protection and development of young broadleaf forests for a range of functions, including:

- Improve the quality of hardwoods being produced thereby increasing the value of the broadleaf forest for the owner;
- Timber production;
- Encourage healthy tree growth;
- Remove nurse species from conifer/ broadleaved mixtures;
- Enhance and promote range of trees, shrubs, plants, fungi, invertebrate's creating more biodiverse sites and delivering ecosystem services;
- Improving landscape;
- Provide access to manage the forest.

4.2 Objectives of **Element 2 Agroforestry Maintenance** include the following:

- To enhance environmental benefits of existing agroforestry forests by creating new niche habitats for biodiversity;
- Increase the quality and value of standing trees;
- Produce quality round wood for timber production;
- Improve animal welfare;
- To protect and enhance water quality;
- Soil protection and improvement of soil quality and structure;
- Prevention of nutrient run off and soil erosion;
- To promote a more suitable management option in sensitive sites;
- Enhancement develop a range of trees, shrubs, plants, fungi, invertebrate's creating more biodiverse site and delivering ecosystem services;
- Improving landscape;
- To develop skills in agroforestry across the forestry sector to facilitate more wider adoption.

4.3 Objectives of **Element 3 Continuous Cover Forestry** include the following:

- Promote and enhance Ecosystem Services;
- Enhance environmental benefits of existing coniferous forests by opening up the canopy and creating new habitats for wildlife, and improving forests adjacent to water setbacks;
- Create an uneven canopy structure with the aim of producing high quality, high value logs;
- Promote a more suitable management option in sensitive sites;
- Build climate change resilience to protect Irish forest from the effect of pests and diseases;
- Develop skills in continuous cover forestry across the forestry sector to facilitate wider adoption;

- To help develop a forest culture, plus a more permanent and socially acceptable forestry;
- Protect and enhance soil and water protection;
- Improve forest stability to protect from extreme weather events.
- Provide a Regular and continuous economic return.

These objectives will be achieved through improvement felling of malformed trees; felling of additional trees to release potential frame trees; pruning to improve stem quality; thinning or re-spacing to promote growth, management and re-spacing of natural regeneration.

4.4 Objectives of the **Element 4 Coppice and Coppice with Standards** include the following:

- Promote and enhance Ecosystem Services
- Enhance environmental benefits of existing forests by opening up the canopy and creating new habitats for wildlife;
- Build climate change resilience to protect Irish forest from the effect of pests, diseases and extreme weather events;
- Develop skills in Coppice and Coppice with Standards across the forestry sector to facilitate wider adoption;
- To help develop a forest culture, plus a more permanent and socially acceptable forestry;
- Protect and enhance soil and water protection;
- Conserve and protect forest habitats.
- Promote a more suitable management option in sensitive sites;
- Promote and develop fuel wood and coppice product business enterprises.
- To remediate trees with poor apical dominance and form.
- To develop skills in coppice and coppice with standards forestry across the forestry sector to facilitate more wider adoption.
- Regular and continuous economic returns for the Forest Owner.
- Develop more close to nature forest management practices.

4.5 The primary objectives of **Element 5 Seed Stand Management** are to:

- Increase the quantity and quality of appropriate reproductive material for forestry sector.
- Provide for in-situ conservation of indigenous forest genetic resources and dynamic ex situ conservation of important non-indigenous forest genetic resources.
- Promote sustainable forest management practices.
- Develop skills in sustainable management of registered seed stands.

4.6 The overall aim of the Woodland Improvement Scheme will be to support the thinning and tending of 3,250 hectares of broadleaf and mixed forests under the programme 2023-2027.

5.Environmental services

- 5.1 Thinning will open up the canopy through thinning and enable more light to reach the forest floor, thereby allowing plants to re-colonise the forest area, increasing biodiversity. Results from the Irish National Forest Inventory show that forests when managed in this way provide significant biodiversity benefits. In addition, thinning opens up forest areas for walking and other recreational uses and improves the visual amenity of forests. Thinning, by opening up tree crowns to light, also promotes higher levels of tree seed production which favours natural regeneration systems and close-to-nature silviculture, bringing a more diverse species, age and canopy structure.

6. Eligibility

- 6.1 Individuals applying for participation in the scheme must be over 18 years of age and hold a Personal Public Service Number (PPSN). Companies must provide their company registration details (CRO number).
- 6.2 Applicants for technical approval must be the owner, leaseholder or joint manager of the land at the time of the application. Exceptions to this rule will only apply where: (i) the owner is deceased, and their legal representative submits the application; or (ii) the owner consents in writing to the submission of the application in the name of a designated third party.
- 6.3 In order to qualify for payment of woodland improvement grants, the applicant must own, lease or be in joint management of the lands proposed for improvement. Applicants must provide documentary evidence of ownership and of leasing or joint management where relevant if requested, as detailed in the Forestry Standards Manual.
- 6.4 The Department will refuse applications for grant aid where it is found that an application was made by a person other than a person that meets the above criteria.
- 6.5 Every effort should be made by registered foresters to ensure that multiple applications by the same applicant are not submitted. If more than one application is submitted for the same piece of land, the Department may decide to process just one application selected by the applicant within any 12 month period. It is not permitted to apply for more than one Element on the same plot.

7. Grant Aid for Element 1 first and second thinning interventions

- 7.1 A fixed woodland improvement grant towards the costs, subject to the maximum laid down in Annex 1, will be available to private landholders or companies for projects which comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the Woodland Improvement Scheme. Element 1 will comprise of two interventions as follows;
- First Intervention grant of €1,200/ha for all broadleaf forests and all broadleaf/conifer mixtures that meet the required eligibility criteria;
 - Second Intervention grant of €1,200/ha for all broadleaf forests and all broadleaf/conifer mixtures subject to eligibility criteria.
- 7.2 Aid for woodland improvement under these measures will be granted solely in connection with duly justified and substantiated costs; and no over-compensation will take place.
- 7.3 Thinning operations supported under this scheme must have the potential to improve the quality of the crop and be carried out at the recommended top heights as outlined in the thinning and tending schedules in the scheme document for the species described (see Annex 2). Funding will be targeted at the following forest categories on a first come, first served basis for both first and second thinning interventions;
- a. All grant aided broadleaves of plot size including broadleaved mixtures. In mixture crops the stand must be managed with broadleaves as the main component of the potential final crop. It will also apply to forests which have already received one grant aided intervention under the woodland improvement scheme for the purpose of this revised WIS scheme. Forests that have already received a thinning grant will only be eligible for a second intervention grant after a minimum of 4 years following completion of first thinning intervention works on the same area and once the top height has not exceeded 18m¹.
 - b. Non grant aided reforestation sites where broadleaves have been planted post 1983.
 - c. All other young non grant aided broadleaves established without grant aid and broadleaved mixtures where 1st and 2nd thinning interventions take place at the recommended top height as described in the schedules in the scheme document are eligible for funding.
- 7.4 The height rule does not apply to ash forests.
- 7.5 The first intervention must be carried out before the crop reaches a top height of 15m; the second intervention must take place after 4 years of completion of works for the first intervention and before the crop reaches 18m top height (See Annex 2).
- 7.6 Distinct areas of broadleaves greater than 0.2 ha which can be identified on a map as a plot and greater than 18m on top height will not be eligible for grant aid.
- 7.7 In all cases, applicants should only apply for the actual area to be thinned, for example, if a forest owner has 8 hectares of forest but only 3 hectares require thinning, the application

¹ The height rule does not apply to ash forests.

should be for 3 hectares. Areas proposed should not include setbacks / areas of biodiversity enhancement, however setbacks around archaeological sites and monuments may be included in cases where it is deemed that the setbacks need to be cleared of natural regeneration from the planted trees or retrospectively installed to meet current standards. See section 7.11 below.

- 7.8 The fixed grant for the first and second thinning interventions may be claimed immediately after works have been completed (Form 2 and Form 3). All payments of grants will be conditional on the forest being successfully thinned in compliance with the conditions of approval and standards as outlined in the Forest Standards Manual and schedules set out in Annex 2. Any area thinned or tended outside of the approved area will not be eligible for grant aid.
- 7.9 Application for payment of the fixed grant may be made following completion of works, in accordance with the terms of the Approval. The time limit for submission of claims for the fixed grant (Form 2 and 3) will be 12 weeks after date of completion of works. Where a Form 2 is received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission, and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted.
- 7.10 Annex 1 details the grant rate payable under the Scheme. The Minister reserves the right to alter these rates at any time. Beneficiaries of grant aid under this Scheme are required to retain all receipts and invoices relating to work undertaken to thin and tend the forest for a period of 6 years following payment of the fixed grant. The Minister may, at his or her discretion, require the submission to the Department of such receipts and/or invoices at any time during this period.
- 7.11 Support will be available for the following operations:
- Improvement felling of malformed trees;
 - Felling of additional trees to release potential crop trees (PCT);
 - Thinning or re-spacing to promote growth;
 - Management and re-spacing of natural regeneration;
 - Clearing of setbacks around archaeological sites and monument which may have become overgrown with natural regeneration from the planted trees or which should be retrospectively installed to meet current standards;
 - Removal of damaged, disease or dangerous trees; and
 - Removal of invasive species such as Rhododendron and Laurel for the approved WIS area.
- 7.12 This measure is primarily aimed at private forest holders and other private law bodies, and their associations.
- 7.13 Forest owners can participate in the continuous cover forestry element of WIS if they have received one WIS funded intervention. In this case those forests can receive two further tranches of funding when transitioning to CCF. A forest owner who has received a wood land improvement grant and a subsequent woodland intervention grant is ineligible to enter the CCF scheme.
- 7.14 The area under which works have been carried out in relation to subsequent interventions must match the area applied for at second and subsequent Form 2.
- 7.15 Applications will be on first come, first served basis up to the budget ceiling. Once the ceiling is reached support for WIS is deemed closed for that year.

8. Grant aid for Element 2 Agroforestry Maintenance

A fixed Agroforestry maintenance grant towards the costs, subject to the maximum laid down in Annex 1, will be available to private landholders or companies for projects which comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the SFM Agroforestry Maintenance Scheme.

Aid for Agroforestry Maintenance will be granted solely in connection with duly justified and substantiated costs; and no over-compensation will take place.

Operations supported under this scheme must have the potential to improve the quality and value of the crop, with the sole purpose of producing high quality trees along with and producing food through agriculture.

Funding will be targeted at grant aided Agroforests planted since 2014.

The minimum plot size and width applicable under the Afforestation Scheme (see the *Forestry Standards Manual*) will also apply to forests funded under Agroforestry Maintenance.

All sites must be capable of supporting the vigorous growth and sustainable long-term development. This must be achievable without the need for fertiliser input.

Sites subject to severe and persistent threats that could undermine the long-term sustainability of the project may not be accepted.

In all cases, applicants should only apply for the actual area to be managed for Agroforestry.

The fixed grant for Agroforestry Maintenance may be claimed immediately after all relevant works have been completed (*Form 2*). All payments of grants will be conditional on these works being completed in accordance with the conditions of approval and standards as outlined in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and schedules set out in Annex 3. Any area with works carried out, outside of the approved area will not be eligible for grant aid.

Application for payment of the fixed grant may be made following completion of works, in accordance with the terms of the Approval. The time limit for submission of claims for the fixed grant (*Form 2*) will be 12 weeks after date of completion of works. Where a *Form 2* is received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted.

Annex 1 details the grant rate payable under the Scheme. The Minister reserves the right to alter these rates at any time. Beneficiaries of grant aid under this Scheme are required to retain all receipts and invoices relating to work undertaken in general management and thinning of the forest for a period of 6 years following payment of the fixed grant. The Minister may, at his or her discretion, require the submission to the Department of such receipts and/or invoices at any time during this period.

Support will be available for the following operations:

- Agroforestry Management Plan. See Annex 3 for details;
- Removal of Tree Shelters;

- Removal where necessary of tree stakes;
- Erection of Geo textile mesh to protect trees from livestock browsing, fraying, poaching and rubbing;
- Erection of new support stakes;
- Formative shaping;
- Stumping back or pollarding of trees with poor form, plus singling out coppice to select the be form and growth stem there after;
- Improvement felling of malformed trees and enrichment planting of new trees where necessary;
- Pre thinning tree marking;
- High pruning and removal of large branches;
- Thinning or re-spacing to promote growth;
- Deer management and Deer management plan;
- Forest protection (fencing and other measures);
- Clearance of invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron;
- Costs associated with non-commercial tree felling, where appropriate (e.g. tree felling on highly sensitive parts of the site, where alternative, non-conventional techniques are required, including manual felling in riparian zones);
- Woodland edge management;
- Maintenance of open spaces, rides and glades;
- On application, other related operations, as deemed appropriate and as approved by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

This measure is aimed at private forest holders and other private law bodies, and their associations.

An Agroforestry Management Plan must be submitted in support of the Form 1 application for this scheme. See Annex 3 for Agroforestry management plan template.

9. Grant aid for Element 3 Continuous Cover Forestry and Payment for Ecosystem Services

A fixed Continuous Cover Forestry grant towards the costs, subject to the maximum laid down in Annex 1, will be available to private landholders or companies for projects which comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the Continuous Cover Forestry Scheme. The scheme will comprise of CCF Conversion Management Plan that will run for a period of 12 years with three instalments of €1,200/ha occurring at intervals throughout the 12-year period. The first instalment will be at year 1 with the final payment issuing within 12 years from the date of payment of the first intervention. The middle payment can be paid at any stage during the intervening period; schedule of payments and timing of these interventions are to be described within the Conversion Management Plan.

Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium - Pilot

An annual Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) may be offered for existing forest owners who are approved for Element 3 at a rate of €150 per ha, with a 7 year duration.

PES premiums aim to promote the longer-term sustainable management of forests, in particular encouraging forest owners of productive forests to manage their forests with a view to maximising various ecosystem services in the areas of carbon sequestration, fuelwood, the protection of water and soil, forest genetic resource, pest and disease resilience, climate change regulation, the control of floodwaters, pollination, recreation, tourism, education and cultural heritage. In addition, existing forests transforming to Continuous Cover Forestry require continued management to be able to provide the maximum range of ecosystem services.

Maximum area per application of 20 hectares per Forest Owner applies in any 12-month period.

Aid for CCF will be granted solely in connection with duly justified and substantiated costs and no over-compensation will take place.

Operations supported under this scheme must have the potential to improve the quality of the crop and be carried out at the recommended Basel Area. Funding will be targeted at all grant aided conifer, broadleaves of plot size including mixed forest.

Distinct areas of broadleaves less than 0.2 ha or distinct areas of conifers less than 0.5ha which can be identified on a map as a plot will not be eligible for grant aid.

The minimum plot size and width applicable under the Afforestation Scheme (see the *Forest Procedures Manual*) will also apply to forests funded under CCF.

All sites must be capable of supporting the vigorous growth and sustainable long-term development. This must be achievable without the need for fertiliser input. Free draining mineral soils are best suited to CCF. Peats, waterlogged sites and gleys are to be excluded from this scheme, but some shallow peats and gleys may be acceptable on a case by case bases. Sites not capable of growing Sitka Spruce to yield Class 14 are not eligible.

Sites subject to severe and persistent threats that could undermine the long-term sustainability of the project may not be accepted (e.g. sites within a locality of heavily infested rhododendron or within a deer 'hotspot').

Elevations above 300 metres are not eligible as the risk of windthrow increases significantly.

In all cases, applicants should only apply for the actual area to be managed for conversion to CCF.

The fixed grant for CCF may be claimed immediately after all relevant works have been completed (separate Form 2's) as outlined in the Conversion Management Plan. All payments of grants will be conditional on these works being completed in accordance with the conditions of approval and standards as outlined in the Forest Standards Manual and schedules set out in Annex 4. Any area thinned or tended outside of the approved area will not be eligible for grant aid.

Application for payment of the fixed grant may be made following completion of works, in accordance with the terms of the Approval. The time limit for submission of claims for the fixed grant (Form 2) will be 12 weeks after date of completion of works. Where a Form 2 is received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission, and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted.

Annex 1 details the grant rate payable under the Scheme. The Minister reserves

the right to alter these rates at any time. Beneficiaries of grant aid under this Scheme are required to retain all receipts and invoices relating to work undertaken in general management and thinning of the forest for a period of 6 years following payment of the fixed grant. The Minister may, at his or her discretion, require the submission to the Department of such receipts and/or invoices at any time during this period.

Support will be available for the following operations:

- Preparation of a site-specific CCF management plan by a CCF forester;
- Improvement felling of malformed trees;
- Tree marking for thinning;
- High pruning;
- Felling of additional trees to release frame trees;
- Thinning or re-spacing to promote growth;
- Management and re-spacing of natural regeneration;
- Deer management and Deer management plan;
- Enrichment planting where it is necessary in lieu of natural regeneration;
- Ground preparation, where appropriate (e.g. light scarification to facilitate natural regeneration) at an appropriate time of the year to create a good seed bed;
- Forest protection (fencing, tree guards and other measures);
- Clearance of invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron;
- Costs associated with non-commercial tree felling where appropriate (e.g. tree felling on highly sensitive parts of the site, where alternative, non-conventional techniques are required, including manual felling in water setbacks);
- Woodland rejuvenation (including understory and coupe planting, natural maintenance (including vegetation management));
- Woodland edge management;
- Maintenance of open spaces, rides and glades;
- Direct seeding;
- Ring barking and chemical thinning of trees;
- On application, other related operations, as deemed appropriate and as approved by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

This measure is aimed at private forest holders and other private law bodies, and their associations.

Forest owners who have already received one WIS grant can apply for two CCF instalments (the first instalment at year 1 and second and last instalment up to year 12). The application to enter the CCF Scheme can only be made 4 years post 1st thinning.

10. Grant aid for Element 4 Coppice and Coppice with Standards

A fixed Coppice and Coppice with Standards grant towards the costs, subject to the maximum laid down in Annex 1, will be available to private landholders or companies for projects which comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the Coppice and Coppice with Standards Scheme. The scheme will comprise of Coppice and Coppice with Standards Conversion Management Plan. See Annex 5 for details.

Aid for Coppice and Coppice with Standards will be granted solely in connection with duly justified and substantiated costs; and no over-compensation will take place.

Operations supported under this scheme must have the potential to improve biodiversity and the quality of the crop. Funding will be targeted at the following forest categories:

- All grant aided broadleaves of plottable size including mixture forests. In mixture forest stands, must be managed with broadleaves as the main component of the potential final crop. It will also apply to forests which have already received one grant aided thinning intervention under the Woodland Improvement Scheme (WIS).
- Non grant aided reforestation sites where trees have been planted post 1983, including natural regeneration.
- Suitable broadleaf forests where coppicing would benefit the forest both silviculturally and ecologically. For example former coppice sites or Hazel forests that would ecologically benefit from coppicing.

Distinct areas of broadleaves less than 0.2 ha which can be identified on a map as a plot will not be eligible for grant aid.

The minimum plot size and width applicable under the Afforestation Scheme (see the *Forestry Standards Manual*) will also apply to forests funded under Coppice and Coppice with Standards.

All sites must be capable of supporting the vigorous growth and sustainable long-term development. This must be achievable without the need for fertiliser input. Free draining mineral soils are best suited to Coppice and Coppice with Standards.

Sites subject to severe and persistent threats that could undermine the long-term sustainability of the project may not be accepted (or may need a separate management plan (Deer or Rhododendron management plan) on sites within a locality of heavily infested rhododendron or within a deer 'hotspots).

In all cases, applicants should only apply for the actual area to be managed for conversion to Coppice and Coppice with Standards.

The fixed grant for Coppice and Coppice with Standards may be claimed immediately after all relevant works have been completed (via Form 2) as outlined in the Coppice and Coppice with Standards Management Plan. All payments of grants will be conditional on these works being completed in accordance with the conditions of approval and standards as outlined in the *Forestry Standards Manual* and schedules set out in Annex 5. Any area treated outside of the approved area will not be eligible for grant aid.

Application for payment of the fixed grant may be made following completion of works, in accordance with the terms of the Approval. The time limit for submission of claims for the fixed grant (Form 2) will be 12 weeks after date of completion of works. Where a Form 2 is

received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted.

Annex 1 details the grant rate payable under the Scheme. The Minister reserves the right to alter these rates at any time. Beneficiaries of grant aid under this Scheme are required to retain all receipts and invoices relating to work undertaken in general management and thinning of the forest for a period of 6 years following payment of the fixed grant. The Minister may, at his or her discretion, require the submission to the Department of such receipts and/or invoices at any time during this period.

Support will be available for the following operations:

- Preparation of a site-specific Coppice and Coppice with Standards management plan;
- Pre harvest tree marking to identify high quality standards;
- High pruning of standards;
- Stumping back;
- Singling out stumpback trees being remediated, to promote one strong straight stem per stump;
- Deer management and Deer management plan;
- Enrichment planting where it is necessary for future high quality Standard trees;
- Forest protection (fencing, tree guards and other measures);
- Clearance of invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron;
- Vegetation management;
- Maintenance of open spaces, rides and glades to promote diversity;
- On application, other related operations, as deemed appropriate and as approved by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

This measure is aimed at private forest holders and other private law bodies, and their associations.

Forest owners who have already received one WIS grant can apply for Coppice and Coppice with Standards. The application to enter the Coppice and Coppice with Standards Scheme can only be made 4 years post 1st thinning.

11. Grant aid for Element 5 Seed Stand Management and Payment for Ecosystem Services

A fixed Seed Stand Management grant (€1200/ ha) towards the costs, subject to the maximum laid down in Annex 1, will be available to private landholders or companies for projects which comply with the requirements, terms and conditions of the Seed Stand Management Scheme. The scheme will comprise of Seed Stand Management Plan that will run for a period of 7 years.

Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium - Pilot

Private applicants under Element 5 are eligible for a new Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) premium of €500 / ha / year, with a 7-year duration.

PES premiums aim to promote the longer-term sustainable management of forests, in particular encouraging forest owners of productive forests to manage their forests with a view to maximising various ecosystem services in the areas of forest genetic resource carbon sequestration, fuelwood, the protection of water and soil, pest and disease resilience, climate change regulation, the control of floodwaters, pollination, recreation, tourism, education and cultural heritage. In addition, Seed Stands also require continued management to be able to provide the maximum range of ecosystem services.

Aid for Seed Stand Management will be granted solely in connection with duly justified and substantiated costs; and no over-compensation will take place.

Operations supported under this scheme must have the potential to improve the quality of the registered seed stands. The Scheme will support the improvement and management of seed stands which are classified as “Selected”, or “Tested” for the following species:

- Pedunculate oak (*Quercus robur*)
- Sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*)
- Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*)
- Spanish chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)
- Silver birch (*Betula pendula*)
- Downey birch (*Betula pubescens*)
- Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris* L.)
- Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii* var. *menziesii*)

Seed stands for other species may also be funded under the Scheme, on application.

The Scheme will also support the management of sessile oak and pedunculate oak seed stands within ancient woodland, where those seed stands have been registered in the category 'Source Identified' for gene conservation.

The scheme does allow for new seed stands to be registered on the National Register of Forest Basic Material at which point they will become eligible to apply for support. The maximum area eligible for funding is 5ha (10ha for oak) although the total area of the seed stand can be larger.

Application for payment of the fixed grant may be made following completion of works, in accordance with the terms of the Approval. The time limit for submission of claims for the fixed grant (Form 2) will be 12 weeks after date of completion of works. Where a Form 2 is received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted.

Annex 1 details the grant rate payable under the Scheme. The Minister reserves the right to alter these rates at any time. Beneficiaries of grant aid under this Scheme are required to retain all receipts and invoices relating to work undertaken in general management and thinning of the forest for a period of 6 years following payment of the fixed grant. The

Minister may, at his or her discretion, require the submission to the Department of such receipts and/or invoices at any time during this period.

Support will be available for the following operations:

- provision of access paths;
- control of ground vegetation;
- ongoing maintenance (including vegetation management);
- non-commercial thinning/pruning to open up crowns to promote seed production,
- maintenance of documented record of specific operations undertaken to enhance seed production;
- Preparation of a site-specific Seed Stand Management plan by a registered forester;
- Pre thinning tree marking;
- Management and removal of natural regeneration;
- Deer management and Deer management plan;
- Forest protection (fencing, tree guards and other measures);
- Clearance of invasive species such as laurel and rhododendron;
- Costs associated with non-commercial tree felling, where appropriate, tree felling on highly sensitive parts of the site, where alternative, non-conventional techniques are required, including manual felling in riparian zones;
- Woodland edge management;
- Maintenance of open spaces, rides and glades;
- On application, other related operations, as deemed appropriate and as approved by the Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine.

This measure is aimed at public and private forest holders and other private law bodies, and their associations.

12. Conditions of Aid

Where an applicant makes an application for aid that is deemed valid and is approved by the Department, a contract then exists under the Scheme between the applicant and the Minister. The terms and conditions of this Scheme as set out in this document (which may be revised from time to time by the Minister), any circulars amending the scheme requirements, all application forms including Form 1's, letters of approval and, where appropriate, remedial works notifications, form the terms and conditions of this contract. The contract will be identified by the contract number (CN) assigned to it by the Department when the application for approval (Form 1) is received.

Payments will be based on either the area claimed as eligible for payment by the applicant (on Form 2 and 3 and associated maps) or the area determined by the Department to be eligible for payment, whichever is the lesser.

- i. The Department's computerised mapping and payment system (iFORIS) is used by the Department to capture a digital representation of the payment area based on the applicant's claim map. Capturing the claim map in a digital form allows for the accurate measurement and calculation of the payment area. The process of electronically capturing the claim map is referred to as *digitisation*. The digitised area of a contract (i.e. the entire forest) is the sum of the areas of the individual forest plots (excluding biodiversity) comprising that contract number or forest. For each plot contained in an application for payment, the digitised area is the entire area of the forest plot within the perimeter boundary of that plot measured by the Department's iFORIS system.
- ii. The determined area of a contract number or forest is the sum of the areas, determined by the Department to be eligible for payment, of the individual forest plots comprising that contract number or forest. The determined area is calculated by excluding any ineligible areas (e.g. power line corridors, rock, gas lines, ineligible areas of biodiversity).
- iii. The claimed area is the total area of the forest plots specified by the applicant in the application as being claimed for payment of a grant. The claimed area is calculated by the applicant by deducting any part of the plot that is not eligible to receive a woodland improvement grant (e.g. power line corridors, rock, gas line and eligible biodiversity areas) from the digitised area.
- iv. Whichever is the lesser of the claimed area or the determined area is deemed to be the area eligible for payment, known as the payable area. This is the area on which payments of woodland improvement grants will be based, subject to compliance with the requirements of the scheme as regards submission of proof of ownership, if requested.
- v. Applicants are advised to only claim for the area eligible for a thinning intervention.

Where an area delineated as the payable area on a map submitted by the applicant differs from the area specified on the species plot table attached to a map or the area specified on the Form 2 the lesser of these areas will be deemed to be the area claimed by the applicant.

Where a notification (i.e. a remedial works letter) is issued to the applicant specifying remedial works required to bring their forest up to standard, the date specified in that letter by which the works must be completed is binding on the applicant. In exceptional

circumstances, the Minister may grant an extension to that date. Requests for such extensions must be submitted in writing by the applicant and registered forester at least 30 days before the expiry of the original deadline for completion. Failure to complete the specified works to the satisfaction of the Department will result in a penalty, as set out in the document titled *Forestry Schemes Penalty Schedules (DAFM 2023)*.

Grants will be paid only when the entire forest is up to the required standard. If part of the forest fails inspection, payment will be withheld on the entire area until remedial works are carried out and the forest is thinned /and or tended to the required standard.

Where the Department decides that it is not possible to bring the forest, or part thereof, up to the required standard, no further payment will be made for that area. Where the grant and/or part thereof, is not to be paid, the Department may also require repayment of the amount paid in respect of the forest or in respect of the area that does not meet the required standard.

Payments shall be made in respect of applicants who make valid applications prepared by a registered forester and who have thinned or tended their forest in accordance with the pre-approval (i.e. both technical and financial) and in compliance with:

- All relevant EU requirements and national legislation for the time being in force.
- The terms and conditions of this Scheme as set out in this document (and any revisions thereof), any circulars amending the scheme requirements, the application forms, letters of approval and, where appropriate, remedial works notifications.

An applicant must comply with all scheme requirements as detailed in Annex 2-6 and the Forest Standards Manual.

13. Application Procedure

The relevant application forms, as described in this paragraph, are available from the Forestry Division, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford 053 9163400. Alternatively, you can contact the relevant section by email.

Email Addresses	Queries
forestryonline@agriculture.gov.ie	Prior to submission of application
forestryappenq@agriculture.gov.ie	Form 1, WIS approvals, application procedures
forestry.1stgrant@agriculture.gov.ie	Form 2, 1 st and 2 nd thinning grants
felling.forestservice@agriculture.gov.ie	Felling licences

The appropriate application form and all supporting documentation and maps must be submitted to the Department within the timeframes indicated below for each stage.

13.1 Form 1 - Application

Application for approval for all elements under the Woodland Improvement Scheme must be made using the same application form for approval - Form 1. Only 1 element can be selected

per application form. The applicant and a Registered Forester must complete the application form following a site visit and detailed field assessment by the Registered Forester. It may not be possible to approve all Form 1 applications received therefore all Form 1 applications must be approved before the commencement of first or second thinning interventions.

Approval is only valid up to and including the expiry date specified in the letter of approval.

A pre-approval issued under this Scheme may be subject to additional conditions as laid down by the Minister. These may be of a silvicultural or environmental nature or may relate to other requirements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all works are undertaken in compliance with the requirements of the Scheme. The Department accepts no responsibility or liability for costs incurred by an applicant on foot of pre-planting approval or at all.

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the applicant to inform the Department in writing of any proposed material change to the approval issued and to seek approval for any such change before works commence. Failure to obtain approval from the Department for proposed changes may render the pre-approval null and void.

Applications for **Element 2 Agroforestry Maintenance** must be accompanied by a recent Forest Management Plan (completed within the last 2 years from the date of the application).

The following maps and documents shall be included in the application;

- Location Map – depicts ownership boundaries and nearest township
- Species Map
- Habitats Map
- Agroforestry Management plan (Element 2 Agroforestry Maintenance only)

Applications for approval for **Element 3 CCF** under the Woodland Improvement Scheme must be made using the Application for Approval - Form 1. The applicant and a Registered Forester must complete the application form following a site visit and detailed field assessment by a Registered Forester. All Form 1 applications must be approved before the commencement of thinning operations and other operations under this scheme.

Foresters wishing to develop applications under the CCF Scheme must satisfy the DAFM in advance that they have the necessary knowledge and expertise to undertake the specialised work involved in developing and implementing projects. Details of the forester's experience and qualifications must be submitted at Form 1 stage to determine whether the forester has sufficient experience in CCF.

Approval for Forest Management Scheme CCF is only valid up to and including the expiry date specified in the letter of approval.

A pre-approval issued under this Scheme may be subject to additional conditions as laid down by the Minister. These may be of a silvicultural or environmental nature or may relate to other requirements. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that all works are undertaken in compliance with the requirements of the Scheme. The Department accepts no responsibility or liability for costs incurred by an applicant on foot of pre-planting approval or at all.

NOTE: It is the responsibility of the applicant to inform the Department in writing of any proposed material change to the approval issued and to seek approval for any such change

before management operations works commence. Failure to obtain approval from the Department for proposed changes may render the pre-approval null and void.

Applications must be accompanied by a Forest Transformation Management Plan

The following maps and documents shall be included in the application:

- Forest Transformation Management Plan
- Location Map – depicts ownership boundaries and nearest township
- Current Species Map
- Habitats Map

Applications for **Element 4 Coppice and Coppice with Standards** must be accompanied by a recent Forest Management Conversion Plan.

The following maps shall be included in the application:

- Location Map – depicts ownership boundaries and nearest township
- Species Map
- Habitats Map

Applications for **Element 5 Seed Stand Management** must be accompanied by a recent Forest Management Plan (completed within the last 2 years from the date of the Seed Stand Management application).

The following maps shall be included in the application:

- Location Map – depicts ownership boundaries and nearest township
- Species Map
- Habitats Map

13.2 Form 2 - Application for First and Second Intervention Grant

Application for payment both interventions under the Woodland Improvement Scheme must be made using a 'Form 2'. There is a specific Form 2 for the second intervention. The time limit for receipt of the Form 2 in the Department shall be 12 weeks after the date of completion of the woodland improvement works. Where a Form 2 is received after the prescribed period, the applicant must submit a written explanation for its late submission and it will be at the discretion of the Department as to whether or not the application can be accepted. The applicant and their Registered Forester must complete the application following a site visit and a detailed field and forest plot assessment by the registered forester. The application form sets out the requirements to be met to make a valid application. Where supporting documentation could relate to more than one contract, individual copies of the documentation must be submitted with each separate Form 2 claim.

Where a Form 2 application is lodged with the Department within the required 12 week timeframe but supporting documentation remains to be submitted, the application will be held open for a maximum of 2 calendar years from the data of completion of the works. Non-payment of a forester or forestry company for works carried out will be a matter for resolution between the forest owner and the forester or forestry company and the Minister shall bear no liability.

Where supporting documentation could relate to more than one contract, individual copies of the documentation must be submitted with each separate Form 2 claim.

For **Element 3 CCF** the second and final Grant payment, applicants must submit an updated schedule of proposed actions within the Forest Transformation Management Plan with the Form 2.

Form 2 payments will be assessed by comparing the actions taken against the schedule of actions as outlined in the Forest Transformation Management Plan. Where the second and/or third intervention is undertaken outside of the schedule set out in the Conversion Management Plan, this must be justified to the Department as a condition to the form 2 payment being made. Where scheduled actions are not undertaken the Form 2 payment may not be made.

If the area managed is clearfelled prior to the end of the scheme i.e. year 12, the Minister will recoup all grants paid under this scheme. If part or all of the area managed for CCF is windblown and needs to be clearfelled to make the site safe and to recover the blown material, the Minister will not recoup monies paid under this scheme.

Prior to a windblow stand being harvested, a DAFM inspector will need to be notified of the extent of the windblown area. A new Tree Felling Licence for the harvesting of windblown area will be required as per the 2014 Forestry Act.

Element 3 Continuous Cover Forestry Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium Pilot

The first Element 3 Continuous Cover Forestry Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium (€150/ ha) is paid to the applicant alongside the first grant instalment. The relevant application form (WIS Continuous Cover Forestry for Ecosystem Services Premium Form 4) for the second and subsequent WIS Continuous Cover Forestry for Ecosystem Services Premium are posted to the applicant by the Department on an annual basis.

Payment of this premium is contingent on the satisfactory completion of initial works, the satisfactory completion of Form 3 works, and the ongoing management of the forest in accordance with the approved CCF Transformation Management Plan.

Subject to the terms and conditions of WIS Continuous Cover Forestry being met, and the ongoing management of the forest in accordance with the approved WIS Continuous Cover Forestry scheme the Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium payable under WIS Continuous Cover Forestry will be paid on the basis of one each calendar year, commencing in the year in which the first grant instalment was paid.

Subject to and limited by the duration of the contract as defined above, each WIS Continuous Cover Forestry Premium is normally applied for in the year in which it is due for payment. Where such an application is not made within the year, all conditions for eligibility for the premium must be fulfilled and the valid application must be received in the Department within 2 years of the 1st of January of the year in which that particular premium falls due for payment, otherwise the premium payment for that year will be forfeited. For example, a premium due in 2024 must, at the latest, be applied for and paid by 31st December 2026. If premiums have been forfeited or not claimed for 6 consecutive years or more, the contract will be deemed to have been terminated and no further payments will issue under that contract. Payments already made under the contract may be recovered if the woodland has not been maintained to DAFM standards.

Element 5 Seed Stand Management Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium

A new Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) premium pilot has been developed for existing forest owners, that maybe out of premium payments or never received a grant payment for their forest. It is an annual per ha payment of 7 years duration.

Forest owners when receiving approval on certain support Schemes may be able to select one (or more) options in accordance with the management practice selected. Each option will attract a flat rate payment per ha. Payments are based on additional cost incurred and income foregone in relation to the option selected. PES premiums only apply to forest owners of existing (non-grant aided or out of premium) forests with 7 premiums in total.

The first Element 5 Seed Stand Management Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium (€500/ ha) is paid to the applicant alongside the first grant instalment. The relevant application form (WIS Seed Stand Management for Ecosystem Services Premium Form 4) for the second and subsequent WIS Seed Stand Management for Ecosystem Services Premium are posted to the applicant by the Department on an annual basis.

Payment of this premium is contingent on the satisfactory completion of initial works, the satisfactory completion of Form 3 works, and the ongoing management of the woodland in accordance with the approved Seed Stand Management Plan.

Subject to the terms and conditions of Element 5 Seed Stand Management being met, and the ongoing management of the forest in accordance with the approved WIS Seed Stand Management scheme the Payment for Ecosystem Services Premium payable under WIS Seed Stand Management will be paid on the basis of one each calendar year, commencing in the year in which the first grant instalment was paid.

Subject to and limited by the duration of the contract as defined above, each WIS Seed Stand Management Premium is normally applied for in the year in which it is due for payment. Where such an application is not made within the year, all conditions for eligibility for the premium must be fulfilled and the valid application must be received in the Department within 3 years of the 1st of January of the year in which that particular premium falls due for payment, otherwise the premium payment for that year will be forfeited. For example, a premium due in 2023 must, at the latest, be applied for and paid by 31st December 2025. If premiums have been forfeited or not claimed for 6 consecutive years or more, the contract will be deemed to have been terminated and no further payments will issue under that contract. Payments already made under the contract may be recovered if the woodland has not been maintained to DAFM standards.

14. Environmental Considerations

All applications for operational works under the *Woodland Improvement Scheme* will undergo an environment assessment procedure, including appropriate assessment if required, as part of the Tree Felling Licence application process.

15. Other Information

The Department may also, at its discretion, require other forms of technical investigation and reports to be submitted to facilitate its assessment of the project. These may include, in alia, an ecological assessment and report by a suitably qualified ecologist.

16. Consultations and Public Notification Procedure

The Department may consult with relevant consultation bodies including National Parks and Wildlife Service, the National Monuments Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, Inland Fisheries Ireland, the relevant local authority as part of the felling licence process. Other bodies may also be consulted with, as required.

17. Conditionality and Land Use Reconciliation Requirements

As an accredited EU paying agency, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is obliged to carry out checks and controls on all applications.

Conditionality sets the baseline requirements for farmers in receipt of CAP payments and replaces the “cross compliance” requirements in the previous CAP. Conditionality consists of Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) standards as detailed in Annex III of EU Regulation 2021/2115 in respect of the following specific areas;

- the climate and the environment, including water, soil and biodiversity of ecosystems,
- public health and plant health, and
- animal welfare. The conditionality requirements are implemented in two ways:

1. Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs) - these refer to the legislative requirements concerning the climate and the environment, public health and plant health, and animal welfare. These are laid down in legislation and are applicable to all farmers - not just those participating in CAP interventions.

2. Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) - these refer to a range of standards concerning soil, climate change mitigation, habitats, and water. There are nine GAECs in the agreed Regulation. These apply to all farmers receiving CAP support and have been tailored to Ireland based on farm size, farm structures and the specific characteristics of the areas concerned, including soil and climatic condition, existing farming systems and land use.

Further information in relation to Conditionality in general including the relevant SMRs and GAECs, is available from the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine website at [gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) - [Conditionality \(www.gov.ie\)](http://www.gov.ie)

Beneficiaries of this Scheme must ensure that land entered into the scheme is not included, or the subject of a claim, under any other area based scheme administered by the Department. The Minister may impose adjustments, reductions in payments and/or penalties or may recoup money already paid if an application under the scheme exceeds the area approved, and/or overlaps with an area which is the subject of a claim under another area-based scheme administered by the Department.

18. Good Practice and SFM

Adherence to good forestry practice and the principles of sustainable forest management (SFM) is mandatory and applies across all operations of the Scheme.

Health and Safety are of paramount importance in Forestry operations. The Health and Safety Authority have published a number of guides on Health and Safety in the Forestry Sector which can be found on:

http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Your_Industry/Agriculture_Forestry/Forestry/

19. Payment

As the contract under this Scheme is between the applicant and the Department, payment is made to the applicant. However, applicants may mandate grant payments to a registered forester or forestry company using a mandate document that satisfies the requirements of the Minister as set out in the Forest Standards Manual. Such mandates are a voluntary arrangement between the applicant and their registered forester or company. Mandates to other parties e.g. Contractors or Foresters not registered with the Department, will not be facilitated. In the event that a payment fails to be made in accordance with a valid mandate no liability shall be attached to the Minister.

If it is subsequently found that any undue payment or overpayment has occurred in respect of any grant or other payment made under the scheme, the Department will recover the entire amount of the undue payment or overpayment from the applicant, regardless of how the undue payment or overpayment or arose.

The Department may offset the amount owed from any other monies due to the applicant by the Department. The Department may also recover the monies as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

20. Penalties

Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the Scheme, incorporating Forest Standards Manual; circulars amending scheme requirements; and the relevant environmental guidelines and requirements may result in an appropriate penalty or sanction being applied.

Penalties which shall apply to certain specific breaches of the Scheme are set out in the document titled *Forestry Schemes Penalty Schedules (DAFM 2023)* which are a condition of grant aid. Other breaches of the Scheme not specified in the Scheme Penalties Schedules may also incur a penalty. However, all or any failure to comply with the scheme or any breaches of its terms and conditions may result in a penalty.

Penalties may include the repayment of all or part of the grant.

Monetary penalties shall include interest payable at the rate provided for under S.I. No. 13 of 2006. Interest shall be calculated for the period elapsing between a date specified in a

notification to the applicant of the repayment obligation and either repayment or recovery by deduction.

Penalty amounts may be deducted from future payments due to the Applicant under the forestry schemes or from payments due under other schemes administered by the Department. Where monetary penalties are not paid or recovered within the period requested, the Department may take whatever action is deemed necessary for their recovery. The Department may also recover the monies as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

The principle of proportionality will apply. Penalties may be imposed that are, in the opinion of the Minister, proportionate to the alleged breach of the Scheme.

The imposition of a penalty shall not relieve an Applicant of an obligation to comply with an instruction from the Minister to undertake remedial works in respect of a forest.

21. Appeals

The applicant, or a registered forester acting on behalf and with the written permission of the applicant, may appeal against a decision of the Department regarding (i) an application for a pre-approval; (ii) a grant or (iii) a penalty.

Appeals relating to a decision on applications should be made in writing, giving detailed grounds for the appeal, to the Appeals Unit, Forestry Division, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford. In the course of re-examining a decision by a deciding officer, the Appeals Unit shall not be confined to the grounds on which the decision of the deciding officer was based but may decide the question as if it were being decided for the first time.

Appeals relating to a decision on a payment, or the imposition of a penalty may request an internal review procedure within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine. If the applicant is dissatisfied with the decision of the internal review, the person may appeal to the Forestry Appeals Office (AAO) within 3 months of notification of the decision under appeal. The appeal must be made in writing and addressed to the Director, Agriculture Appeals Office, Kilminchy Court, Portlaoise, Co. Laois, R32DTW5.

22. Change of Applicant

The Department must be notified in advance if:

- (a) a grant-aided forest is transferred, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of by the applicant during the term of the woodland improvement contract; or
- (b) a judgement mortgage or an inhibition or similar restriction is placed on the Folio for the afforested land during the term of the contract.

In the event of the death of the applicant i.e. owner, joint owner or joint manager who was claiming the woodland improvement grant, the Department must be notified as soon as possible by the deceased's next-of-kin, legal personal representatives or registered forester.

When notice of a change of ownership is received by the Department, payment will be suspended until a new applicant is registered in the scheme. The new owner will be entitled to apply for the woodland improvement grant.

New applicants must submit all necessary documentation as early as possible and no later than one year after the date of the deed of transfer for the land ownership change, or the date that a deceased applicant's estate is settled. Failure to meet these deadlines may result in a new owner not being admitted to the scheme and the contract will, in effect, be terminated.

In every case, all documentation relating to change of ownership and applications for payments must be submitted before the expiry of the term of the contract. In exceptional circumstances (e.g. delays in finalising a deceased person's estate), the date by which documents must be submitted may be extended at the discretion of the Minister.

All decisions regarding eligibility for payment of grant will be made by reference to the level of compliance with the conditions of the Scheme, including the completion of outstanding remedial works, on the date of the deed of transfer of a forest or the date that a deceased applicant's estate is settled. For example, where remedial works have not been satisfactorily completed by the date of the deed of transfer, the new owner will be responsible for completion of the remedial works and, once satisfactorily completed, s/he will be eligible to apply for payment of grants due for the period after the date of the deed if not already paid.

The Minister will refuse payment of grant to the previous owner(s) if they have failed to maintain the forest to the standard required under the Scheme for the period of the woodland improvement contract under their ownership.

The Department will not divide grant payments according to ownership for part of a year; individual grant payments will not be split or subdivided. The parties to any sale or transfer should take these payments into account in the timing and terms of their legal arrangements and/or contracts for sale.

In exceptional circumstances affecting a change of ownership process, at his or her discretion, the Minister may extend the closing date of a contract subject to such conditions as may be specified by the Minister.

Where a debt is accrued under a contract for any reason and the cause of the debt has existed and/or continued during the ownership of more than one owner, the debt will be allocated in accordance with the amount of overpayment received by each owner; each owner will be responsible for repaying the overpayment s/he received.

Further information about the procedures involved when a grant-aided forest is being transferred, sold, leased or otherwise disposed of during the term of the contract is available at: [gov.ie - Grant-aided Forestry - Change of Ownership or Applicant \(www.gov.ie\)](http://gov.ie - Grant-aided Forestry - Change of Ownership or Applicant (www.gov.ie))

The Minister reserves the right to alter these procedures from time to time.

23. Joint Management Consent

A landowner may enter into a joint management arrangement with an immediate family member to jointly manage the forest and assign the woodland improvement grants to that family member. A joint management arrangement may only be made between immediate

family members, namely the spouse, children, parents and/or siblings of the landowner. Joint Management Consent forms are available in the Forest Standards Manual (on the website under Forestry Publications).

The owner of the land and the applicant are both liable for the repayment of grants paid if the applicant fails to abide by the conditions of the scheme.

A joint management arrangement may be cancelled at any time provided the owner takes over the obligations of the scheme.

24. Right of Entry

The Minister reserves the right to carry out inspections at reasonable times on any land submitted for pre-approval or on any land for which Woodland Improvement grants have been paid or claimed under this Scheme or any other forest-related Scheme. Applicants are obliged to ensure that, where required, adequate access to the land and forests is provided to allow inspections by the Department.

25. Responsibility for Forest Management

Responsibility for the successful thinning and tending and/or other works to a forest rests with the applicant. Where an applicant contracts the services of a third party to harvest and/or manage the forest, and to prepare and submit claims, it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that the third party contracted has sufficient insurances to indemnify the work undertaken. Any issue arising under this contract due to the detriment of the applicant, such as inadequate work, or preparing an inaccurate claim, etc., is a matter for the owner to resolve with the forester.

The inspection of a forest by the Department shall not relieve the Applicant of responsibility for the accuracy of applications submitted, the successful operational works of the forest, or any responsibility to meet the required standards or terms and conditions of the scheme. The Department is not liable for errors (or financial loss) as a result of inaccurate claims or faulty workmanship by the applicant or his/her forester. The Department does not guarantee the success of any thinning and tending works or bear any liability in respect of any forest for which it has granted pre-approval in any circumstances. It is the sole responsibility of the applicant who submits land for woodland improvement that the forest will be successfully completed. If the Department subsequently determines that a forest, or any part thereof, has not been managed in accordance with the schedules in Annex 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 or other schedules as approved on application, the applicant will be required to repay all grants in respect of the woodland improvement or any part of the forest which has not been managed under this scheme as approved.

26. Insurance

Applicants should ensure that their forest has adequate insurance cover against damage from, inter alia, fire, pest, disease and windblow, etc.

27. Failure to abide by the terms and conditions of the scheme

Where, for the purposes of obtaining payment under this Scheme, the applicant or a person acting on their behalf knowingly makes a false or misleading statement or withholds essential information, the applicant's participation in the Scheme may be terminated and all or part of the aid paid shall be repaid.

Where an Applicant or a person acting on their behalf fails to abide by the terms and conditions of the Scheme, or there is any material change in the circumstances of the applicant which would be in conflict with the letter or the spirit of the Scheme, the applicant's participation in the Scheme may be terminated and all or part of the aid paid shall be recovered by the Department. The Department may offset the amount owed from any other monies due to the applicant by the Department or it may seek to recover the amount as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

The obtaining of aid under the Scheme by fraudulent means by the applicant or others acting alone or together may render such persons liable to prosecution.

28. Overpayments made in relation to a scheme contract

Where any overpayment is made due, inter alia, to over claim or over declaration by the applicant or their agent, or to error or miscalculation by the applicant, their agent, or the Department, the money overpaid may at the discretion of the Minister be recouped from the applicant who received the overpayment. Such recoupment will be decided on a case by case basis, taking into account any mitigating factors, including culpability.

Amounts to be recouped may be deducted from future payments due to the Applicant under the forestry schemes or from payments due under other schemes administered by the Department. Where debts are not recovered within the period specified, the Department may take whatever action is deemed necessary for their recovery. The Department may also seek to recover the amount as a simple contract debt in a court of competent jurisdiction.

29. Review of Financial Aids

The Minister reserves the right in his or her absolute discretion to vary, where occasion so demands, the amount of financial aid wherever specified in the Scheme.

30. Procedures

The Minister reserves the right to alter from time to time the procedures to be followed in the operation of this Scheme.

31. Tax Clearance Requirement

It is a condition of this Scheme that all grant-aided activities shall be conducted in compliance with the laws of the State relating, inter alia, to tax and employment. Proof of compliance, such as the provision of Tax Clearance Certificates, may be required by the Department.

32. Value Added Tax

All grants paid under the Fixed Grant Scheme are exclusive of VAT.

33. Data Protection - Data Protection Notice

33.1 Part A: Information applicable to all the Departments

customers:

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is fully committed to keeping all personal data, submitted by our customers, fully safe and secure during our administrative processes. All necessary technical measures have been put in place to ensure the safety and security of our systems which hold this data. The staff of the Department are also considered customers of the Department from a Data Protection perspective and may exercise their rights in the same way.

Transparency and openness in the use of personal data held is important to the Department and therefore we aim to fully inform all our customers about the purpose(s) that their data will be used for and why, where it may be shared elsewhere and why and how long their data may be held for by the Department. Information on the rights of the customers will also be provided.

The current legislation for Data Protection in Ireland is the Data Protection Act 1998 as amended by the 2003 Data Protection Act. The General Data Protection Regulations (EU 2016/679) will come into effect on 25 May 2018.

Information in relation to the operation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is available on the Department's website <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/ef9f6-data-protection/>. For further details on the Forestry Division Privacy Notice, please click [here](#).

The Data Controller for the collection of all personal data in the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the Minister for DAFM, as the legal entity.

The Data Protection Officer can be contacted as follows:

Data Protection Officer
Data Protection Unit,
Corporate Affairs,
Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
Grattan Business Park,
Dublin Road,
Portlaoise,

Co Laois

Personal data processed by the Department will only be used for the specific purpose (s) as outlined when the data is collected and will only be used in accordance with the Data Protection legislation in force.

Rights of the Individual in relation to personal data held by the Department:

When you, as a customer, provide personal data to the Department you have certain rights available to you in relation to that data. These rights are as listed below and can be exercised by contacting the Data Protection Officer, as detailed above.

Currently the customer has the following rights (up to May 2018):

- The individual has the right to access to their data.
- The individual has the right to rectification of their data.
- The individual has the right to erasure of their data.
- The individual has the right to lodge a complaint with the Supervisory Authority.
- From 25 May 2018 onwards all customers will also have the following additional rights:
 - The individual has the right to restriction of processing
 - The right to data portability
 - The individual has the right to object to processing
 - The individual has the right to withdraw consent if they previously gave it

33.2 Part B – Information specific to the personal data being collected

The following data is specific information in relation to the personal data processed for Element1, Woodland Improvement Scheme

SPECIFIED PURPOSE:

The purpose for collection and use of the data shall not extend beyond Element 1 and 2, Woodland Improvement Scheme, and the objectives of this scheme as outlined. This may include future surveys to determine the level of forest management activity undertaken following participation in the scheme.

The organisers\administrators and facilitators undertake to treat all information, particularly personal data as confidential and to comply with all directions of DAFM with regard to the use and application of all and any confidential information.

LEGAL BASIS:

The decision to participate in the Woodland Improvement Scheme and consequently send your contact details to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is entirely your decision; there is no legal basis compelling you to send the Department your contact details.

RECIPIENTS:

Organisers\administrators, facilitators and participants/nominees should be aware that all the information supplied on applications and in any supporting or related documentation shall be made available to any other Department or Agency solely for audit and evaluation purposes and as appropriate, and that the results of which may be made public. No individual will be identified.

All information held on the Department systems may be made available to the DAFM or to any other Department or Agency where required, for scheme evaluation and statistical purposes, the results of which may be made public. No individual will be identified.

In accordance with the European Union Guidelines for State aid in the agriculture and forestry sector and in rural areas, data of beneficiaries of funding under the Forestry Programme 2023 – 2027 will be published and may be processed by auditing and investigating bodies of the European Union. This information will be published on the Department's website and will include the full text of the notified aid scheme and its implementing provisions, the granting authority, the names of the individual beneficiaries, the scheme type and amount of aid granted to each beneficiary, the region at Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics level II in which the beneficiary is located and the principal economic sector in which the beneficiary has its activities, at NACE group level (Statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community). This will only apply to beneficiaries where the cumulative aid amount granted at financial approval is greater than €10,000 for beneficiaries active in the primary agriculture production and €100,000 for others for the amount of aid granted at the time of financial approval discounted at the rate at the time. Such information will be published after the granting decision has been taken and will be kept for at least 10 years and shall be available for the general public without restrictions. These records must be maintained for 10 years from the date of award of the aid and must be provided to the Commission upon request.

Information supplied to the Department may be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Acts 1997 and 2003. All personal data will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Acts 1988 and 2003.

TRANSFERRED OUTSIDE THE EU:

Data will not be transferred outside the EU.

RETENTION PERIOD:

Data collected for this purpose will be held by the Department only as long as there is a business need to do so in line with the purpose(s) for which it was collected. After this time it will be marked for destruction and will be destroyed in line with internal guidelines or guidelines for destruction received from the National Archives Office or associated permissions received from them

DATA PROVISION BEING STATUTORY OR CONTRACTUAL OBLIGATION:

Submission of signed application forms confirm acceptance of the terms and conditions of the scheme and constitute acceptance of a contract between the Department and the applicant who is responsible for the successful completion of all works.

The applicant and foresters are required to supply data in support of the scheme to confirm involvement in forestry and Element 1 and 2, Woodland Improvement Scheme and to enable the Department to process payment following the successful completion of all works.

Incorrect or incomplete data or failure to supply data may result in exclusion from the scheme.

AUTOMATED DECISION MAKING:

Certain personal data provided in support of this scheme will be processed automatically for the purpose of cross checking personal details on the Departments Customer Care and Account systems to enable the processing of payments.

INFORMATION FROM THIRD PARTY:

Data supplied by Third Parties will be treated in the same manner as data supplied directly from customers.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is fully committed to keeping all personal data submitted by its customers, fully safe and secure during administrative processes. All necessary technical measures have been put in place to ensure the safety and security of the systems which hold this data. Department staff are also considered as customers of the Department from a Data Protection perspective and may exercise their data protection rights in the same way.

34. Further Conditions

The Minister may at any time lay down further conditions under this Scheme.

35. Forestry Act, 2014

All forests are protected by the Forestry Act, 2014 (and any Act that succeeds or replaces that Act), which controls felling of trees. Under this Act, with certain exceptions, it is illegal to cut down any tree, grant-aided or not, unless a Felling Licence has been obtained from the Department.

Applicants must also ensure that a valid felling licence is in place for any felling to be carried out under the WIS. The treatment area under the WIS must be spatially consistent with the associated TFL identified on the Form 1 application.

Felling licence enquiries should be made to the Felling Section in Johnstown Castle, Co. Wexford.

Annex 1

Grants Payable

Maximum Grant Levels

	Fixed Grant - €/ha (per treated hectare)
Element 1 Thinning and Tending - First Thinning Intervention	€1,200
Element 1 Thinning and Tending - Subsequent Thinning Intervention*	€1,200
Element 2 Agroforestry Maintenance	€1,200
Element 3 CCF First Instalment	€1,200
Element 3 CCF Second Instalment	€1,200
Element 3 CCF Third Instalment	€1,200
Element 4 Coppice and Coppice with Standards	€1,200
Element 5 Seed Stand Management	€1,200

	Premium - €/ha (per treated hectare)
Element 3 CCF Payment for Ecosystem Services	€150
Element 3 Seed Stand Management Payment for Ecosystem Services	€500

*Areas which have already received payment under the Woodland Improvement (Element 1) Scheme for a past thinning operation are eligible to apply again for a second intervention grant.

Annex 2

Silvicultural Guidance for Tending and Thinning of Broadleaves

Elements 1 and 2 of the Woodland Improvement Scheme applies to broadleaf forests and broadleaved mixtures that are suitable for tending or thinning. Area and width criteria as per the Afforestation Scheme apply. Grant aid for the treated area is available for either tending or thinning operations depending on which is the most appropriate to the site (i.e. it is not necessary to carry out both sets of operations for grant aid.)

Broadleaf sites and crops vary. Alternative silvicultural systems to those outlined in the tables below may be proposed where they provide value for money. Any alternative method must be provided with a similar level of detail to that provided below, in advance, in writing and attached to the Form 1.

The tables below refer to Potential Crop Trees (PCTs). These are the better trees in the forest (in terms of vigour, straightness, quality and freedom from diseases etc.) that are evenly distributed in the forest so that they will potentially form the final crop of high value trees after a number of thinning operations. There are some operations which although desirable are not mandatory. The primary purpose of the scheme is to reduce the number of stems per hectare and allow the development of potential final crop trees (PCT).

The following points apply to the Woodland and Improvement Scheme and associated schedules;

- It is not necessary to cut, stack and extract timber to roadside. However felled trees must be left in a safe and orderly manner with no trees left hanging up
- There is no requirement to spray coppice re-growth from cut stumps
- PCT trees and trees to be removed must be marked in the thinning control plot. However there is no requirement to mark PCTs in the entire forest for tending operations. This requirement will now also extend to the first thinning operation. However it should be noted that marking of PCT trees in subsequent thinning operations is desirable to ensure the best stems are managed and identified during the crop's development. The location of all thinning control plots must be marked with an "X" on the claim map.
- It is not mandatory to mark all trees for removal where selection and harvesting is carried out by chainsaw by experienced operators. However if harvesting machines are to be used all broadleaved trees to be removed must be marked.
- Harvesting and forwarding machines must be selected to match the site and crop conditions to limit damage to remaining trees and soils
- The removal of diseased trees (other than trees infected with *Chalara*) in poor crops can take place over successive tending and thinning operations
- In some conifer/ broadleaved mixed crops it may be desirable to remove all conifers in one operation. Where this is silviculturally desirable it must be stated in the preapproval application and must be approved in advance of the operation taking place
- Areas of the forest that are poor in quality and untreated must be mapped out and not claimed as part of the treated area. Untreated areas are not eligible for grant aid. Where untreated areas are less than plot size it is acceptable to reduce the gross area by the equivalent amount by entering an "exclusion" in the plot table on the Form 1 and 2 application for example, in a 10 ha plot, an area of 8 ha is treated, in this case the claimed area is 8 ha and 2 ha is recorded in the plot table as an "exclusion". The payable digitised area is 8 ha (10 – 2 ha).

Table 1: Pure stands of Ash / Sycamore / Norway Maple / Alder

Grant	Top Height	Operation
<p>1st Thinning Intervention</p>	<p>Average 8 -15m</p> <p>Tending should coincide with the shading out of the lower 3-4 metres of side branches.</p> <p>In cases where initial stocking was low or where there were many failures side branch suppression and consequently tending will be delayed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> At thinning stage the current stocking should be reduced by 40 to 50%. <input type="checkbox"/> A line of trees to be removed every 7 to 10 lines for access purposes is advised (not mandatory). <input type="checkbox"/> Marking of 300-400 PCTs (potential crop trees) per hectare at this point is advised (not mandatory). <input type="checkbox"/> At least 2 strong competitors around each candidate PCT should be removed <input type="checkbox"/> Wolves, diseased and cankered trees and weaker trees should also be included in the trees to be removed. <input type="checkbox"/> The trees to be removed should be marked (not mandatory outside of control plots where harvesting is by chainsaw). <input type="checkbox"/> Pruning may be necessary but should concentrate only on the removal of disproportionately large side branches and forks of candidate PCTs. <input type="checkbox"/> Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) <input type="checkbox"/> Cut trees should be delimited and stacked. Alternatively they can be windrowed in a safe manner allowing free access through the site.
<p>2nd Thinning Intervention</p>	<p>Average 12-18 m</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Consider identifying using a ring of paint approximately 300 potential crop trees per hectare (not mandatory) <input type="checkbox"/> Carry out a heavy crown thinning favouring selected trees removing 2 to 3 competitors to PCTs, approximately 20-25% <input type="checkbox"/> Consider removing any live branches remaining (or dead branches that haven't fallen off) up to 6 metres on PCTs shall be removed by pruning. (or less than 6 metres where 6m of straight stem is not available) <input type="checkbox"/> Cut trees should be delimited, cut into lengths and stacked <input type="checkbox"/> Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)

Table 2: Oak / Scots Pine or Oak/European Larch

Grant	Top Height	Operation
1 st Thinning Intervention	<p>Average 8-15m* (oak)</p> <p>*Nurse trees must be removed if they begin to dominate or interfere with the height and crown development of oak regardless of the height of the oak and the amount of trees to be removed.</p>	<p><u>Mixtures (initial stocking 1250 conifer, 3300 oak)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two conifer lines in every three to be taken out and other conifers should also be removed where they interfere with the height and crown development of the oak. • Ring barking or chemical thinning of some trees may be appropriate in certain situations. • Where present, oak wolves (i.e. trees in the upper canopy (dominant/co-dominants) with defective stems and large, rough lateral branches) should be removed. • Retain sub dominants to reduce epicormic branching. • Artificial pruning may be required where form is poor and should concentrate only on the removal of disproportionately large side branches and forks. • Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) <p><u>Pure Oak Crops (initial stocking 6600 trees/ ha)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No tending required just 1st thinning. (see below) <p><u>Pure Crops. (initial stocking < 2500 trees /ha)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No tending required just 1st thinning. (see below)

2 nd Thinning Intervention	Average 10– 18m (oak)	<p><u>Mixtures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove the remaining conifers when they begin to dominate or interfere with the height and crown development of the oak. Consider identifying using a circle of paint approx 300 - 500 candidate PCTs. (not mandatory) Remove strong competitors to the candidate PCT (normally one or two competing co-dominant per PCT) □ Remove wolves. Ensure suppressed trees and any understorey trees near PCT candidates remain to limit the development of epicormic branching. A very small proportion of Scots pine and larch may be left in situ where appropriate Establish thinning control plots (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) Ring barking or chemical thinning of some trees may be appropriate in certain situations. <p><u>Pure Crops (initial stocking 6600/ha)</u> □</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish racks every 14 20m. Remove strong competitors to the candidate PCTs. (one or two competing co-dominant per potential final crop tree) Remove oak wolves, Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) <p><u>Pure Crops (initial stocking □ 2500 trees /ha)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First thinning in these crops will not take place until the crop has reached a top height 13-15 metres, estimated at 30-35 years of age) Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)
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Table 3: Beech / Scots Pine or European Larch

Grant	Top Height	Operation
1 st Thinning Intervention	<p>Average 7-15m*</p> <p>*Nurse trees must be removed if they begin to dominate or interfere with the height and crown development of the beech regardless of the height of the beech and the amount of trees to be removed.</p>	<p><u>Mixtures (initial stocking 4400 beech, 833 conifer).</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two conifer lines in every three to be taken out and other conifers where they interfere with the height and crown development of beech. Ring barking or chemical thinning of some trees may be appropriate in certain situations. Where present beech wolves (i.e. a vigorous poorly formed tree) should be removed. Artificial pruning may be required where form is poor and should concentrate on the removal of disproportionately large side branches and forks Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) <p><u>Pure Crops (initial stocking 6600 trees/ ha)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No tending required just 1st thinning. (see below). <p><u>Pure Crops (initial stocking < 2500 trees /ha)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No tending required just 1st thinning. (see below).

2nd Thinning Intervention	Average 12-18m	<p><u>Mixtures</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remove all lines of conifers where beech trees have reached 10 metres in height or when they begin to dominate or interfere with the height and crown development of the beech. Consider identifying using a circle of white paint approx 400-500 potential final crop trees per hectare and carry out a crown thinning On exposed sites 10% of conifers should be left in groups to provide shelter to remaining beech crop. Some nurse trees may be allowed to grow to full rotation. Remove strong competitors to the potential final crop trees. (one or two competing co-dominant per potential final crop tree) Remove wolves, crooked and badly forked stems within beech lines Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) Ring barking or chemical thinning of some trees may be appropriate in certain situations. <p><u>Pure Crops</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish racks every 14-20 m. Remove strong competitors to the candidate PCTs. (one or two competing co-dominant per potential final crop tree) Remove beech wolves Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)
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Table 4: Thinning Schedule Cherry

Grant	Top Height	Silvicultural Operations
1 st Thinning Intervention	Average 6-15m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify using a circle of white paint approx 200 potential final crop trees per hectare and carry out a crown thinning (non-mandatory) Crowns of cherry should not be touching after thinning Maintain 40% live crown Remove diseased trees Prune selected final crop trees before branch diameter is greater than 3 cm. Green pruning of cherry is necessary every four years on good sites up to a minimum height of 6 metres, where available. Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (≈ one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)
2 nd Thinning Intervention	Average 8-18m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to release 200 final crop trees from competitors High prune branches leaving 40% of a live crown on PCTs

Annex 3

Element 2 Agroforestry Management Plan

1. Management Objective

Please give a brief outline of the historical management to date on the area?

Describe the Long Term Vision for the Agroforest and the Management Objectives for the next 10 Years. This should include any agricultural or non-timber objectives relating to ecosystem services, recreation etc.

Long Term Vision for the Forest:	
Medium Term Objectives (next 10 years – grant period)	
Eco System Services Objectives	

2. Schedules of actions

Describe the proposed management actions to be implemented over the ten year grant period. Where the actions are specific to certain plots then list the plots where this action is planned

Year*	Plot No.	Proposed Actions	Estimated Cost of Action

*Year 1 is the year in which works are completed

Non-Timber Forest products	
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2. Potential for Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF)

Describe the potential for CCF on the property under the following headings:

Opportunities, including ecosystem services, how will actions proposed develop these potential services	
Constraints and Persistent Threats	
Management Approach addressing these threats	

3. Indicative Schedules of actions

Describe the proposed management actions to be implemented over the twelve year grant period. Where the actions are specific to certain plots then list the plots where this action is planned. Action may be subject to review at the Form 2 stage.

Year*	Plot No.	Proposed Actions	Estimated Cost of Action

*Year 1 is the year in which works are completed

Annex 5

Element 4 Coppice and Coppice with Standards Conversion Management Plan

1. Management Objective

Please give a brief outline of the historical management to date on the area?

Describe the Long Term Vision for the forest and the Management Objectives for the next 10 Years. This should also include any non timber objectives relating to ecosystem services, recreation etc.

Long Term Vision for the Property:	
Medium Term Objectives (next 10 years)	
Timber Production Forecast	

2. Potential for Coppice and Coppice with Standards. Describe on the property under the following headings:

Opportunities	
Constraints	

3. Schedules of actions:

Describe the proposed management actions to be implemented. Where the actions are specific to certain plots, then list the plots where this action is planned

Year*	Plot No.	Proposed Actions	Estimated Cost of Action

*Year 1 is the year in which works are completed

2. Potential for Seed Stand Management

Describe the potential for Seed Stand Management in the forest under the following headings:

Constraints	
Opportunities	

3. Schedules of actions

Describe the proposed management actions to be implemented over the ten year period. Where the actions are specific to certain plots then list the plots where this action is planned

Year*	Plot No.	Proposed Actions	Estimated Cost of Action

*Year 1 is the year in which works are completed

Annex 7

Penalties

As detailed in the *Forestry Scheme Penalty Schedules (DAFM 2023)*

Annex 8

Definitions

For the purposes of this Scheme:

- ‘Applicant’ means a person who has applied for Approval under the Scheme or has planted woodland following an Approval under the Scheme;
- ‘Approval’ means a Woodland Pre-Approval granted by the Minister;
- ‘Application, Pre-Woodland Improvement Approval – Form 1’ means an application for the Minister’s approval to carry out improvement works under the terms of all current legislation, guidelines and the conditions of this scheme.
- ‘Application – Woodland Improvement Grant – Form 1’ means an application for approval to receive a woodland improvement grant for thinning and/or tending works within the terms of the WIS.
- ‘Application – Woodland Improvement Grant – Form 2’ means an application to receive a woodland improvement grant following the successful thinning and/or tending works within the terms of the Pre-approval.
- ‘Application – Woodland Improvement Grant – Form 3’ means an application to receive a woodland improvement grant following the 2nd successful thinning and/or tending works within the terms of the Pre-approval.
- ‘Appropriate Assessment’ means an assessment in accordance with the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 (S.I. No. 477 of 2011)
- ‘Completion Date’ means the date the woodland improvement works are completed.
- ‘DAFM’ means the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- ‘Department’ means the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.
- ‘Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)’ means an assessment in accordance with the Forestry Regulations 2017 (S.I. No. 191 of 2017), as amended.
- ‘Farm’ or ‘Holding’ means all the land parcel production units in the State (owned, leased or rented) that are under the control of the applicant.
- ‘Farmer’ is defined as a person who carries out an agricultural activity such as ‘the rearing or growing of agricultural products including harvesting, milking, breeding animals and keeping animal for farming purposes’.
- ‘Forest’ is as defined in the Forestry Act, 2014, - “land under trees with (a) a minimum area of 0.1 ha, (b) tree crown cover of more than 20% of the total area, or the potential to achieve this cover at maturity”.
- ‘Forestry Environmental Guidelines’ means the following publications as amended from time to time: ‘Forestry and Water Quality Guidelines’; ‘Forestry and Landscape Guidelines’; ‘Forestry and Archaeology Guidelines’; ‘Forest Biodiversity Guidelines’; ‘Forest Harvesting and the Environment Guidelines’; ‘Forestry and Aerial Fertilisation Guidelines’; ‘Forestry and Forest Protection Guidelines’; Otter Guidelines and ‘Forestry and Freshwater Pearl Mussel Requirements’. The Minister may, from time to time, amend the guidelines or add further guidelines to this definition.
- Form 1 – application for WIS 1st and 2nd grant approval.
- Form 2 – application for WIS 1st and 2nd grant payment.
- ‘Immediate Family Member’ means Spouse, Parent, Brother, Sister, Son or Daughter.
- ‘Joint Management Consent’ means consent submitted by the owner of specific lands consenting to the payment of grants and/or premiums to an immediate family member who jointly manages the forest.
- ‘Lease’ means a term of years absolute in possession for at least 40 years from the commencement date of the contract under the Scheme.

- 'Minister' means the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine
- 'Penalty Schedules' means the schedules outlined and described in the "*Forestry Schemes Penalty Schedules (DAFM 2023)*" document.
- 'Plantation' means a plot or number of plots on the same holding, planted in a single planting season and the subject of a single application.
- 'Plot' means an area of one species or a species mix.
- 'Scheme' means the *Woodland Improvement Scheme 2023-2027*.
- 'Registered Forester' means a qualified person named on the Register of Foresters and Forestry Companies, available from the Department.
- 'Sustainable Forest Management' means the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economical and social functions, at local, national and global levels and that does not cause damage to other ecosystems.
- 'The Department' means the Forestry Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.



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