

Defining High Conservation Forests in Ireland (HCVF)

As part of its nature conservation and biodiversity management programme Coillte is in the process of defining and identifying areas of high conservation value on its estate. A workshop was convened in January 2008 facilitated by an independent company, ProForest, working with natural resource management and specialising in practical approaches to sustainability in forests. From this workshop an interim definition of High Conservation Value Forests in Ireland has been prepared.

A major part of the designation process is the circulation of this interim definition for further comment and refinement to a broad range of stakeholders before the definition is finalised.

You are invited to comment on the attached interim definition of High Conservation Value Forests in Ireland.

All comments should be sent to pat.neville@coillte.ie to arrive no later than Tuesday September 30th 2008.

Best wishes
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More information may be found at:

www.coillte.ie

www.proforest.net

<http://hcvnetwork.org/>

www.fsc.org

Defining HCVF in Ireland:

Outcomes of working group convened by Coillte - 7 January 2008

1. Introduction

The Republic of Ireland has yet to develop a widely accepted interpretation of what constitutes High Conservation Value Forest (HCVF). The purpose of developing an interpretation is to ensure sites meeting the FSC definitions of HCVF can be consistently identified and managed. This should inform both certified forest management companies and their stakeholders as to what is required under Principle 9 *in practice*.

The FSC certification standard requires the identification and management of attributes of High Conservation Value. The requirement is set out in Principle 9 of the standard. These High Conservation Values are outlined in generic terms but, need to be interpreted in a given national context.

To initiate this process, a workshop was held on 7 January 2008 in Co Wicklow to discuss the HCV definitions. The aim of the workshop was to produce an initial set of definitions that can be carried forwards by further expert consultation. It is hoped that these definitions can be used by companies such as Coillte to meet the current FSC draft standard for Ireland.

2. Methodology

A one-day technical discussion group was convened at Coillte headquarters on 7th Jan 2008. A list of the participants is included as Appendix 1. The discussion was facilitated by ProForest Ltd (UK) whose team included Anders Lindhe who developed much of the HCVF process for the FSC.

The workshop began with a brief explanation of HCVF which provided a guide to the six generic HCVs (this presentation can be made available upon request).

This was followed by a process of discussion of each of the six HCVs in the Irish context using the guidelines set out in the HCVF Toolkit Part 2¹. The HCV's were discussed in turn both in working groups and in plenary session. The emphasis throughout was on the FSC's description of HCVs as *exceptional or critical ecological attributes, ecosystem services and social functions* as well as the significance of *potential or actual threat*. Note was also made of the current UKWAS standard applicable to both Britain and Northern Ireland.

¹ The High Conservation Value Forest Toolkit, Part II: Defining High Conservation Values at a national level - a practical guide. Available from www.proforest.net

A presentation of a checklist that is widely used as a tool for assessing stands for HCVF and biodiversity value was then given.

Finally draft definitions of potential HCVFs were discussed prior to their being sent on for further expert consultation.

3. Results

3.1. The six high conservation values and initial definitions for Ireland

HCV1

Description of the value:

Forest areas containing globally, regionally or nationally significant concentrations of biodiversity values (e.g. endemism, endangered species, refugia).

Interpretation:

In the Irish context EU and national designations such as Special Areas for Conservation (SACs), Species Protection Areas (SPAs) for birds and National Heritage Areas (NHAs) will be used to denote areas with significant concentrations of biodiversity values.

Further consideration:

Further consideration should be given to areas known to hold significant concentrations of threatened, endangered or protected species that are *not* currently identified in one of the above designations. For example, areas known to contain significant populations of red squirrel. Additional consideration will be given to concentrations of other red-listed species as data becomes available. It is suggested that National concentrations of species listed by IUCN as Endangered or Critically Endangered will always be considered potential HCVs. Other information of nationally protected species should be reviewed on a case by case basis.

www.iucnredlist.org/search/details.php/40658/all

HCV2

Description of the value:

Forest areas containing globally, regionally or nationally significant large landscape level forests, contained within, or containing the management unit, where viable populations of most if not all naturally occurring species exist in natural patterns of distribution and abundance.

Interpretation:

It was decided that this type of HCV is ***not present*** in Ireland. Indeed it was thought to be extremely rare in Europe, with only forests such as Bialowieza in Poland, being in this category.

HCV3

Description of the value:

Forest areas that are in or contain rare, threatened or endangered ecosystems.

Interpretation:

This HCV will be denoted by priority habitats recognised under the EU Habitats Directive as being critically rare. These ecosystem types include:

- Designated alluvial woodland,
- Designated bog woodland,
- Designated woodland associated with limestone pavement and
- Designated yew woodland
- Designated western Blanket Bog habitat
- Designated midland Raised bog habitat

Many of these HCVs are protected as SACs and some as NHAs, but the latter process has yet to be completed for woodlands in Ireland.

Therefore, in addition, some sites not identified under the EU Habitats directive will be considered HCVF. This may include ***some*** other examples of Old Woodland Sites, for example semi-natural oak ash woodlands (some of which are included in alluvial woodlands).

www.heritagecouncil.ie/publications/habitats/8.html

Further consideration:

Once the NHA process has been completed for woodland areas, the completed list of NHA woodland sites will be included as HCV3. Any harvesting planned for such sites must only take place after an appropriate ecological survey, if one has not taken place.

HCV4

Description of the value:

Forest areas that provide basic services of nature in critical situations (e.g. watershed protection, erosion control).

Interpretation:

No forest areas in Ireland were identified that fulfil this value. While some water catchments in the Republic of Ireland are important for the conservation of salmon or fresh water pearl mussel, these are not critical for the *provision of the service* per se. conservation measures are already in place that address these aspects, and such catchment areas appear adequately protected under existing legislation and practice.

HCV5

Description of the value:

Forest areas fundamental to meeting basic needs of local communities (e.g. subsistence, health).

Interpretation:

This HCV does not appear to occur in the Irish context. No forest areas were identified that are *fundamental* to meeting the basic needs of local communities. Compare for example forest areas in tropical countries on which certain indigenous forest dwelling peoples depend for food, water and medicines and who have little or no alternative.

Further consideration

In some cases Irish forest areas surround streams that provide water supplies to individual houses. This is sometimes found on the Coillte estate. These forest areas were not considered to be HCVF, as they are:

- a) very small scale and localised
- b) identified and protected as part of normal operational management

HCV6

Description of the value:

Forest areas critical to local communities' traditional cultural identity (areas of cultural, ecological, economic or religious significance identified in cooperation with such local communities).

Interpretation:

Examples of cultural sites found in forests in Ireland (such as archaeological sites, monuments and Mass rocks) are rarely considered *critical* to local community's traditional cultural identity.

Further consideration

Listed archaeological features are already marked and mapped by Coillte. These sites may be considered HCV sites, but are in practice already protected during forestry operations and again are unlikely to be *critical* to local communities cultural identity .

3.2. Summary

Draft Working definitions for HCV in Ireland	
HCV1	<p>In the Irish context species and concentrations of species covered by EU and national designations such as SACs, SPAs, NHAs as well as Red list species.</p> <p>Until it is clarified what additional basis will be used to denote a concentration of threatened species, the precautionary approach should be taken wherever data on the distribution of red list species is available.</p>
HCV3	<p>Ecosystem types covered by statutory designation (SACs, SPAs and NHAs) and any woodland with such a designation should be regarded as an HCV as should priority woodland types namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• alluvial woodland,• bog woodland,• woodland associated with limestone pavement,• yew woodland, <p>as well as rare bog habitats e.g. designated western blanket bogs and midland raised bogs. Oak/ash woodland with semi-natural characteristics outside the priority types may also be considered as potential HCVF.</p> <p>As the process of designation is not complete in Ireland, potential NHA's i.e. those with strong characteristics of these priority woodlands will also be considered.</p>

3.3. Follow up actions

Implications and suggested actions for Coillte:

General

- a) HCVF draft policy needs to be drawn up.
- b) HCVF areas need to be identified and added to a GIS map layer and areas now not HCVF to be withdrawn.
- c) An assessment matrix (such as that demonstrated by Anders Lindhe) should be considered as a means of Coillte staff surveying Coillte sites for HCVF and biodiversity.
- d) Monitoring systems need to be put in place/checked to ensure that HCV values are maintained e.g. existing EIA procedures implemented on the ground.
- e) Excision policy updated to protect HCVF.

- f) This discussion document to be sent on to a panel of experts and then the IFCI.

HCV1

- a) All SPAs, SACs, NHAs relevant to rare and endangered species as well as habitats where concentrations of other red list species are known need to be identified.
- b) Where data on red listed species is available and appears to indicate concentrations of those species these sites should be considered potential HCVF. Please note that this designation should be based on existing information available for red list species.
- c) Ensure that policies in place such as that for the hen harrier cover all HCV species.
- d) Ensure policies are known and implemented.

HCV3

- a) All SPAs, SACs, NHAs on Coillte and need to be identified as HCVF,
- b) All non designated old woodland sites which have already had an ecological survey need to be re-assessed to see if they have characteristics of priority woodlands and are potential NHAs
- c) All un-surveyed old woodland sites (e.g. non continuous woodlands) need to be surveyed to ascertain whether they have HCV values
- d) All harvesting sites for 2008 that have potential HCV (e.g. old woodland sites) require surveying prior to harvesting

4. Conclusions

Only two of the six HCV values were found to be present in Ireland's forest areas. These were HCV1 (concentrations of biodiversity values) and HCV3 (threatened or endangered ecosystems). However the locations and extent of these HCV areas was thought to be fairly limited. This is due to the semi-natural state of most woodland areas, their small and highly fragmented nature, and the fact that many woodlands were established (planted) relatively recently.

In addition to a wider agreement on these conclusions, work must now be carried out to refine what elements of the identified HCVs genuinely fall into this category, for example the information that is available concerning the extent and distribution of red list species in Irish forest habitats.

Appendix 1: Workshop Participants

Name	Institution
Tom Bolger	UCD
Sasha Bosbeer	GMIT
John Cross	NPWS
Tim Crowley	Coillte
Willie Crowley	Contract Ecologist
Michael Delaney	Coillte
Kevin Donnellan	Coillte
Eamon Drohan	Coillte
Orla Fahy	Forest Service
Simon Levy	ProForest
Anders Lindhe	ProForest
Declan Little	Woodlands of Ireland
John McLoughlin	Tree Council
Gerry Murphy	Coillte
Philip Murphy	Coillte
Pat Neville	Coillte
John O Sullivan	Coillte
Sean Quealy	Coillte
Gerry Riordan	Coillte
Tim Rayden	ProForest
Alistair Pfeifer	Coford
Padraig O Donoghue	Coillte
The following were invited but could not attend due to short notice.	
Victor Buckley	Office of Public Works
Anja Murray	An Taisce
Mark Wilson	Hen Harrier University College Cork

Sandra Irwin	PlanforBio University College Cork
Fidelma Butler	University College Cork
Daniel Kelly	Trinity College Dublin
Jerry Wray	Birdwatch Ireland
IPCC	Irish Peatland Conservancy Council
Fran Igoe	Shannon River basin
Jim Ryan	NPWS
Emmet Byrnes	Archaeologist Forest Service
Noel Foley	Forest Service
Geoff Hamilton	Irish Red Squirrel Survey