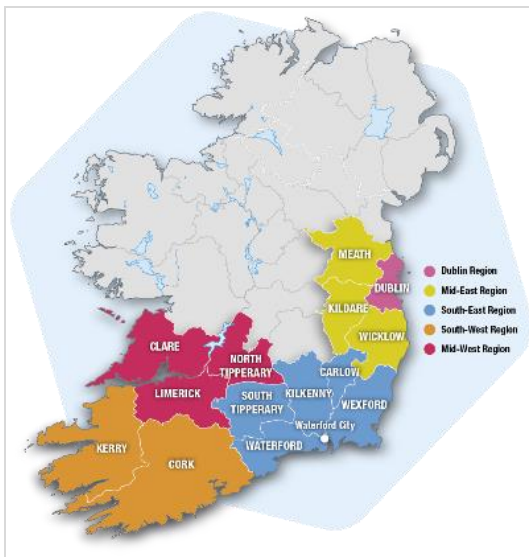


## Focus on South Eastern Ireland

### Background

The Southern and Eastern region of Ireland spans across 13 counties from County Kerry in the south west to County Meath in the east and comprises 36,414 km<sup>2</sup> or 53% of Ireland's total area. Just over 73% of Ireland's population lives in the Region.

The total forest area in the Region is 348,233 ha, which represents 9% of the area of the Region and 53% of total forest cover in the country.



Climate, soil and biophysical conditions in the Region are quite variable. In the south west the landscape is characterised by mountain ranges and poor soils, while in the east better quality soils are found. The main forest species are Sitka spruce and/or a mixture of Sitka spruce and Japanese larch.

Private forests account for 47% of the forest area in the Region. Most of this area was planted after 1990 by farmers in response to generous incentives and subsidies co-funded by the EU and the Irish government. Hence most of the forests have not gone through an entire rotation yet. Current harvested material in private forests is from early thinnings rather than from clearfell.

### SIMWOOD's work in the region

As the private forests established in the past two decades in the Region mature, it is expected that timber production from such forests will account for an increasing proportion of the total annual roundwood production in the Region.

The mobilisation of this increased roundwood production will be challenging. The owners of these "new" forests are "new" owners who have limited experience or knowledge of forest management. Their forests are small, and often inaccessible, which makes economic mobilisation challenging.

The work in SIMWOOD will focus on new owners and on identifying means of making mobilisation more financially attractive by supporting them during harvesting and/or demonstrating methods of increasing harvesting output.

### Regional Learning Labs

The first RLL took place in October 2014.

Representatives of various interest groups were invited to voice what they considered to be the main barriers to wood mobilisation in the Region. In addition, all were invited to identify existing and possible future solutions to address the barriers and facilitate wood mobilisation.

It was through this meeting that pilot projects evolved with the purpose of building initiatives to raise knowledge of alternative thinning methods (Pilot Project 1) and to support forest owners in the harvesting process through forest owner groups (Pilot Project 2).

### Pilot Projects

#### Pilot Project 1

The first pilot project concerns mobilising additional wood fuel from conifer first thinning and consequently additional revenue.

In many cases, first thinning is considered a loss making operation, especially in conjunction with road building. Therefore many forest owners cannot afford to thin their plantations.

In forests located on well-drained sites that are typically found in the Region, there is the potential for more biomass to be removed during the thinning

operations, which would lead to greater wood mobilisation and greater income for those forest owners.

The greater incomes achieved should in turn make thinning more financially attractive to those owners who have yet to decide to thin their stands. The lack of knowledge about thinning and the often unattractive returns associated with first thinning have prevented many of them from mobilising their wood to date.



*Photo: Daragh Little*

There is evidence that once a forest owner has carried out a first thinning, there is much greater likelihood that they will continue to harvest.

The pilot project involves demonstrating to owners the thinning approaches that can result in greater volumes of biomass being removed.

Work has been carried out on one site in the model region to test 3 methods of harvesting, cut to length, integrated and whole tree harvesting.

Analysis has been carried out on the relative outputs of each and associated costs. Lessons learned from this study will be integrated into future sites to make the system more efficient.

A field day was undertaken in April 2015 in conjunction with Teagasc, Worrell Harvesting and Waterford Institute of Technology to show forest owners these methods.

Some additional investigation into methods of harvesting and selling the timber is envisaged.



*Photo: Daragh Little*

Work to date has focused on thinning and getting the output to roadside; the most efficient means of getting the felled material to the end user will be included as part of the project.

Work will also be carried out on site selection (soil types, time of year for harvesting, etc.) to come up with a solution that generates more volume while not damaging the site or local environment. It is also important to increase knowledge amongst forest owners and practitioners of methods of sale and construct appropriate contracts.

Creating a system of sale that is simple and easy to understand is an objective of the pilot project where both parties are clear on the expectations and outputs.

The production of a decision support tool is also envisaged to help forest owners/foresters choose the most appropriate method of harvesting for their forest.

### **Pilot Project 2**

In this pilot project, the aim is to develop a sustainable producer group to engage private forest owners towards the mobilisation of timber in the Region.

The Irish SMEs will implement a series of measures to engage forest owners, promote best practice, cluster forest activities and mobilise timber into a range of markets.





Photos: Alex Kelly

A number of activities will form the basis to this project including:

- engaging with private forest owners in collaborative initiatives;
- knowledge transfer through workshops, leaflets and training courses;
- clustering forest activities for economy of scale, facilitating processing and delivery directly from site to increase forest owner profits;
- standardising forest activities, timber processing and sales to provide transparency and promotion of established best practice using the ecosystem services framework;
- developing market supports such as depots to collect timber from clusters of smaller sites to increase critical mass for processing, delivery and contracts.

Note:

One of the Irish SME's started in the project as the Wexford Wood Producers, but has since merged with three other producer groups to form the Irish Wood Producers, which was launched in June 2014.

The IWP is also part of Danone's global Ecosysteme project, which supports sustainable supply chains. Danone installed a large biomass boiler in the region and the project aims to source biomass from local forest owners.



Photo: Alex Kelly

### Who to contact in the region

The SIMWOOD local team includes staff from University College Dublin; Alex Kelly at The Irish Wood Producers and Daragh Little at Forest Enterprises Ltd.

To get involved in SIMWOOD's activities, please contact:

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