



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

Forestry Opportunities Map

“The right trees in the right places for the right reasons”



December
2024

Amendments

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1. Introduction

An Indicative Forestry Statement (IFS) was developed and published by the Department of Agriculture, Food, and the Marine (DAFM) in 2008 to assist in planning future afforestation. This update to the original IFS, now referred to as the Forestry Opportunities Map, incorporates new environmental considerations and associated mapping layers relevant to the Forestry Programme 2023–2027. The updated Forestry Opportunities Map provides high-level national guidance on land suitability for afforestation, supporting the establishment of forests for various purposes, including timber production, environmental enhancement, climate change mitigation, forest industry development, alternative off-farm income generation, and opportunities for tourism and recreational use.

The Forestry Opportunities Map is consistent with and feeds into the Land Use Review (Phase 1 and 2) which forms part of the Programme for Government. The objective of the Land Use Review is to ensure that optimal land use options inform all relevant Government decisions and to provide an evidence base to determine the environmental, ecological and economic characteristics of land types across Ireland.

The environmental considerations incorporated into the Forestry Opportunities Map align with environmental legislation relevant to afforestation, particularly Schedule 1 of S.I. No. 191/2017 (transposing Annex IIA of the EIA Directive), as well as the State Aid conditions underpinning the Forestry Programme 2023–2027. The Forestry Opportunities Map opportunities map identifies opportunities for additional forest planting in Ireland, as well as areas where new planting would be unsuitable for various reasons. The map aims to guide and promote sustainable forest development and is consistent with the Government's recently published Forest Strategy for the sector. The Forestry Opportunities Map complements the information presented in the strategy and can be used to plan for “the right trees in the right places for the right reasons”.

2. Aim of the Forestry Opportunities Map

The primary aim of the Forestry Opportunities Map is to provide high-level national guidance on the suitability of land for afforestation. The Forestry Opportunities Map employs a map-based approach, integrating various spatial datasets that account for a wide range of environmental receptors, opportunities, and constraints. The map identifies areas most suitable for planting, primarily based on environmental considerations and soil productivity. The environmental spatial data incorporated into the map has been sourced from a range of state organisations, including the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), the Fisheries Boards, Teagasc, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Local Authorities.

Component Map Layers of the Opportunities Map include (see also page 7):

- NPWS Designated Sites: Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), National Heritage Areas (NHAs), Proposed NHAs, Special Protection Areas (SPAs), and National Parks.
- Water Bodies: Streams, lakes, and reservoirs (sourced from the EPA landcover map).
- Existing landcover including urban areas and waterbodies: From the EPA landcover map.
- High Nature Value Farmland: Identified by Teagasc.
- Source Protection Areas and Drinking Water Abstraction Points: Mapped by the Geological Survey Ireland (GSI).
- High-Status Objective Waterbodies: Data from the EPA.
- Freshwater Pearl Mussel Catchments: Data provided by the NPWS
- Potentially Fisheries-Sensitive Areas: Compiled in consultation with the Inland Fisheries (see Forestry Scheme Manual, July 2024).
- Potentially Acid-Sensitive Areas (see Forestry Scheme Manual, July 2024).
- Areas with bird species of high conservation importance: Spatial data compiled from the NPWS and BirdWatch Ireland.
- National Monuments / Architectural Heritage: Data from the National Monument Service.
- Soils data: Provided by Teagasc
- Forest Productivity Map: Developed by Teagasc.
- Existing Forest Cover: Information from DAFM and Coillte.

2.1 Forestry Opportunities Map Categories

The Forestry Opportunities Map has been developed by compiling, reclassifying, and overlaying various map layers within a Geographic Information System (GIS). The Forestry Opportunities Category Map integrates relevant spatial datasets representing a range of environmental considerations. The environmental consideration layers included in the Forestry Opportunities Category Map have been carefully selected, reclassified, and combined to ensure consistency with the State Aid conditions underpinning the Forestry Programme 2023–2027.

Each spatial dataset used in the compilation of the Forestry Opportunities Category Map has its own origin, compilation scale, recommended use domains, and associated spatial and attribute errors, which vary by dataset. To streamline GIS data processing, individual vector layers were converted into raster datasets at a 10-metre resolution for reclassification and recombination. The Forestry Opportunities Category Map was produced as the final output from the GIS data processing exercise (see page 9).

The spatial layers used in compiling the Forestry Opportunities Category Map are also available to Registered Foresters via DAFM's online licence application system, iNET. These environmental consideration spatial layers facilitate the checks and field-based assessments carried out by Registered Foresters when preparing afforestation pre-approval applications for submission to DAFM. The field assessments or surveys, where required, focus on key environmental sensitivities or receptors (refer to DAFM's Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (June 2024) and Land Types for Afforestation: Soil & Fertility (June 2024)).

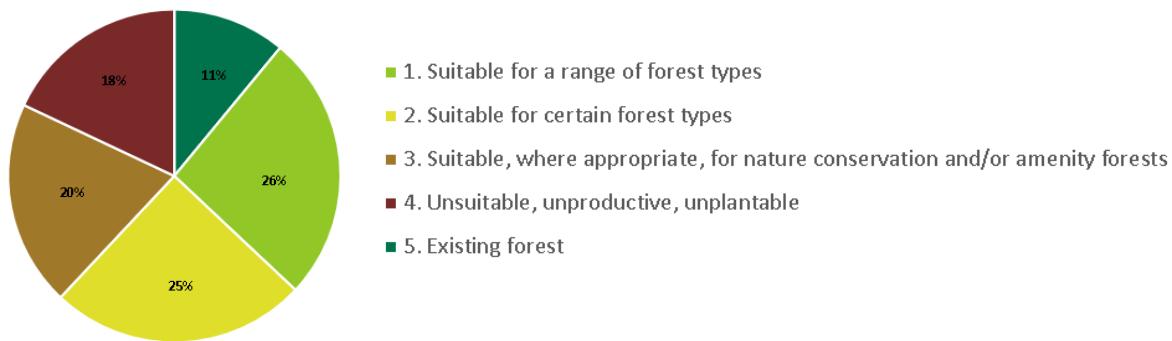
It should be noted that for specific afforestation projects, detailed examinations or site surveys at the land parcel or local level scale (i.e. individual fields proposed for afforestation) may be required by Registered Foresters. Such site assessments or surveys can also include site inspections conducted by the DAFM Forest Service Inspectorate. These inspections assess the physical characteristics (e.g., soil type, elevation, slope, hydrology), ecological features (e.g., protected habitats or species), and heritage elements (e.g., archaeological sites or protected buildings) at or in the vicinity of the proposed site to determine its suitability for forest establishment.

Five broad Forestry Opportunity Map Categories have been identified as potential opportunity and constraint areas for forest development. The Categories are linked to the consultation system for afforestation development operated by DAFM (Table 2 below). The five Forestry Opportunity Categories are described as:

- 1 – “Suitable for a range of forest types”,
- 2 – “Suitable for certain forest types”,
- 3 – “Suitable, where appropriate, for nature conservation and/or amenity forests”,
- 4 – “Unsuitable, unproductive or unplantable”
- 5 – “Existing forest”

The percentage of the national area in each of the five categories is present in Figure 1 and Table 1 below.

Figure 1. Forestry Opportunities Map Categories and associated percentage national area



Note: National area (7,027,438 ha) includes the Shannon Estuary and lake areas.

Table 1. Forestry Opportunities Map Categories and associated percentage of national area

Forestry Opportunity Map - Categories	Area (ha)	% Area
1 - Suitable for a range of forest types	1,809,319	26%
2 - Suitable for certain forest types	1,784,262	25%
3 - Suitable, where appropriate, for nature conservation and/or amenity forests	1,429,848	20%
4 - Unsuitable, unproductive, unplantable	1,227,786	18%
5 - Existing forest	776,223	11%
	7,027,438	100%

Table 2. Description of Forestry Opportunities Categories, Environmental Considerations and / or Designations and the Application Process associated with each Opportunity Category

IFS Category	Description	Environmental Considerations and / or Designations	Application Process ^a
Category 1^b "Suitable for a range of forest types"	Areas identified as being the most suitable for afforestation where no significant environmental designations exist and where soil types indicate that trees will grow satisfactorily. See also, Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (June 2024) and Land Types for Afforestation: Soil & Fertility (June 2024).	Area with no significant environmental constraints to afforestation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DAFM, Forest Service Inspection Procedures Adherence to the requirements set out in the Environmental Requirements for Afforestation, Forestry Schemes Manual and Land Types for Afforestation: Soil & Fertility. Consult with DHLGH if archaeological records of monuments and places are recorded or discovered. Consult with Local Authority in areas of 25 ha or more. Appropriate Assessment Screening carried out on all applications. EIA screening procedure applied for all afforestation applications (EIA at discretion of DAFM, Forest Service - mandatory on areas of 50 ha or more). Formal public consultation for all afforestation licence applications by way of DAFM's online Forestry Licence Viewer.
Category 2 "Suitable for certain forest types"	Areas where at least one environmental consideration (such as potentially fisheries sensitive area) exists. Specific field surveys (e.g. for wetland areas, breeding waders) may be required where spatial interactions with environmental considerations for this category occur. For more details on the consultation system associated with specific environmental designations and related field survey requirements see the Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (June 2024) and Land Types for Afforestation: Soil & Fertility (June 2024).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High Nature Value Farmland - Teagasc Farmland bird hotspots - Birdwatch Ireland Hen Harrier Article 12 Breeding Distribution Range - NPWS Potentially Fisheries Sensitive Areas - DAFM Potentially Acid Sensitive Areas - DAFM Wetland Areas - Wetland Survey's Ireland Potable water receptors / areas i.e. NFGWS and Uisce Éireann abstraction points, Zones of Contribution and Source Protection Areas Fresh Water Pearl Mussel 6 km Zones Breeding wader protection areas (Dunlin, Golden Plover, Lapwing, Redshank, Snipe) - Birdwatch Ireland. Fresh Water Pearl Mussel Catchments - NPWS High Status Objective Waterbodies - EPA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process as for "Suitable for a range of forest types" and, in addition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consultation with relevant authorities (such as Inland Fisheries Boards, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Local Authority, Uisce Éireann).
Category 3 "Suitable, where appropriate, for nature conservation and/or amenity forests"	Areas where environmental designations (such as Special Areas of Conservation) exist. Specific field surveys may be required by where spatial interactions with environmental considerations for this category occur. For more details on the consultation system associated with specific environmental designations and related field survey requirements see the Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (June 2024) and Land Types for Afforestation: Soil & Fertility (June 2024).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pNHAs, NHAs, SACs and National Parks - NPWS National Monuments Service Archaeological database^c (point and areal database) - DHLGH National Inventory of Architectural Heritage database - DHLGH Composite Peats database - Teagasc/ EPA/Tailte Éireann , Connolly and Holden, 2014. Irish Semi-natural grasslands - NPWS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process as for "Suitable for a range of forest types" and, in addition: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> consultation with the relevant authority (such as Regional Fisheries Boards, NPWS, Local Authority, National Monument Service).
Category 4 "Unsuitable, unproductive or unplantable"	Unsuitable areas are those areas which are inconsistent with the State Aid conditions underpinning the Forestry Programme. Unproductive areas are those areas where it is considered that trees are unlikely to grow satisfactorily for reasons including low soil fertility, exposure, rock outcrops etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SPAs - NPWS FPM Top 8 Catchments - NPWS Landcover (unplantable areas) - EPA / Tailte Éireann: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Artificial Waterbodies Exposed Rock and Sediments Marine Water Rivers and Streams Transitional Waterbodies Other Artificial Surfaces Lakes and Ponds 	N/A

	These areas also include unplantable areas i.e. waterbodies, buildings, hard surface areas such as roads or pavements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ways Amenity Grassland Coastal Sediments Mudflats Buildings • Areas of less than YC 14 • Spatial data for bird species of high conservation importance • Blanket and raised bogs, including organic soils that meet certain depth criteria as outlined in Forestry Programme 2023-2027, Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (June 2024) and Land Types for Afforestation: Soil & Fertility (June 2024). 	
Category 5 "Existing forest"	Areas comprising existing private, Coillte and state owned Forest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DAFM private forest spatial database • Coillte forest spatial database 	N/A

^a All afforest licence applications submitted to DAFM for afforestation (whether grant aided or non-grant aided) must be completed by a qualified forester whose name appears on The Register of Foresters maintained by DAFM. Afforestation licence decisions can be appealed through a formal appeals process which is administered by the Forestry Appeal Committee (FAC).

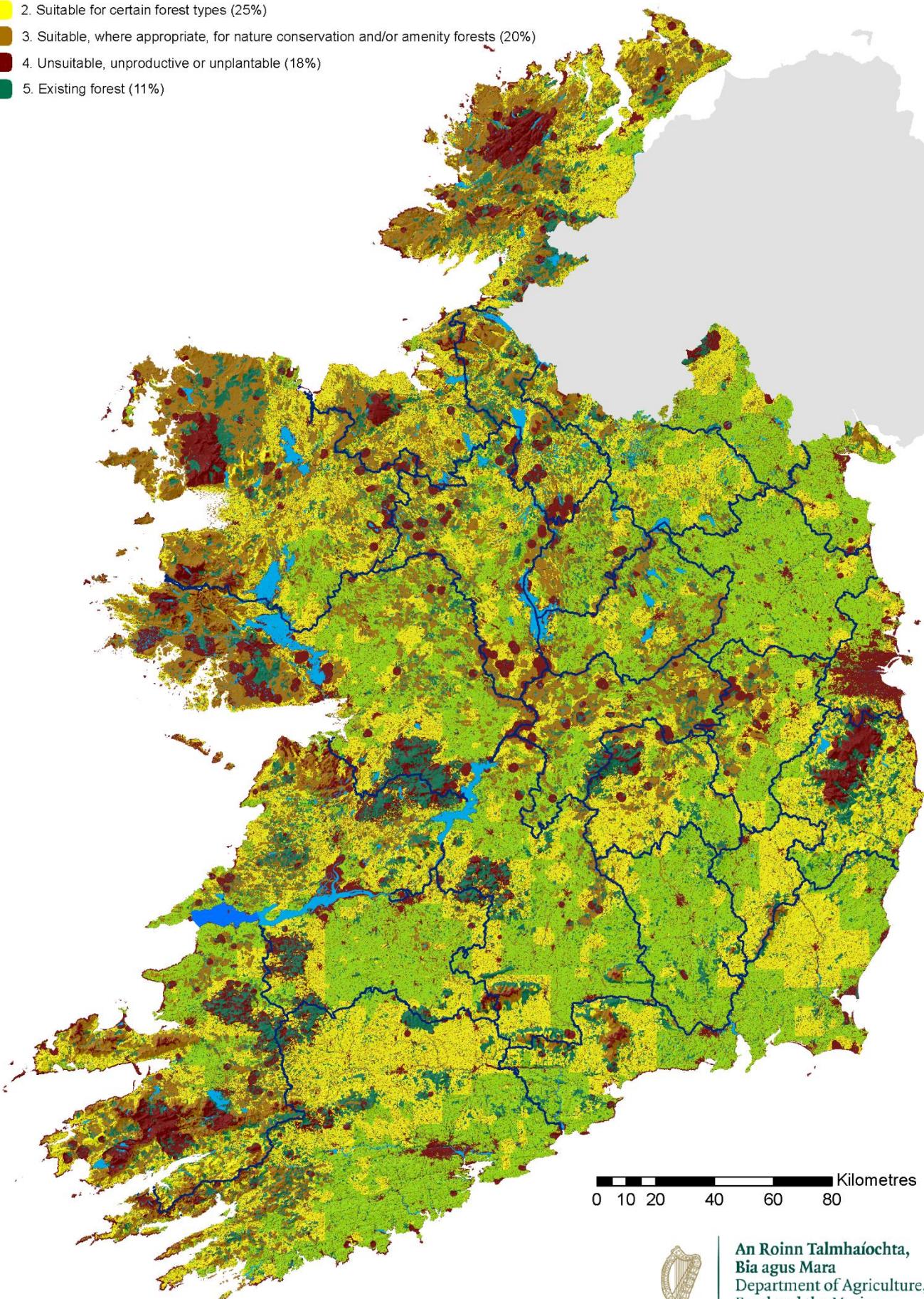
^b Categories 1-5 include land areas where forest land use has been classified as a “pressure” further to monitoring of water quality carried out under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Category 1 also includes WFD “at risk” waterbodies (lakes, rivers) and WFD waterbodies where ecological status has been determined to be “bad to moderate”. See also Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (June 2024).

^c Sites of archaeological interest occur in each of the Categories 1-4 as well as 5. Advice is sought from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, whenever a site listed on the Records of Monuments and Places (RMP) is situated within or adjacent to an area proposed for planting.

For IFS Categories 1-3, landscape sensitivity, recreational and amenity value for proposed afforestation areas is considered in the context of information contained within the relevant County Development Plan(s). Registered foresters are also required to identify the potential of afforestation projects to impact on any locally important amenity that may not be officially designated but still used and enjoyed by the local community (see also the Environmental Requirements for Afforestation (June, 2024)). The relevant County Council Development Plan(s) must be also be consulted by Registered Foresters in relation to Architectural Conservation Areas and Records of Protected Structures.

Forestry Opportunities Map - Map Categories

- 1. Suitable for a range of forest types (26%)
- 2. Suitable for certain forest types (25%)
- 3. Suitable, where appropriate, for nature conservation and/or amenity forests (20%)
- 4. Unsuitable, unproductive or unplantable (18%)
- 5. Existing forest (11%)



1:1,650,000

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