



Environmental Statement

**To support a Deforestation project at Annaghilly North,
Roslea, Enniskillen, BT92 7AY**

(Ref: ERA20/21-88)

Dated: August 2021.

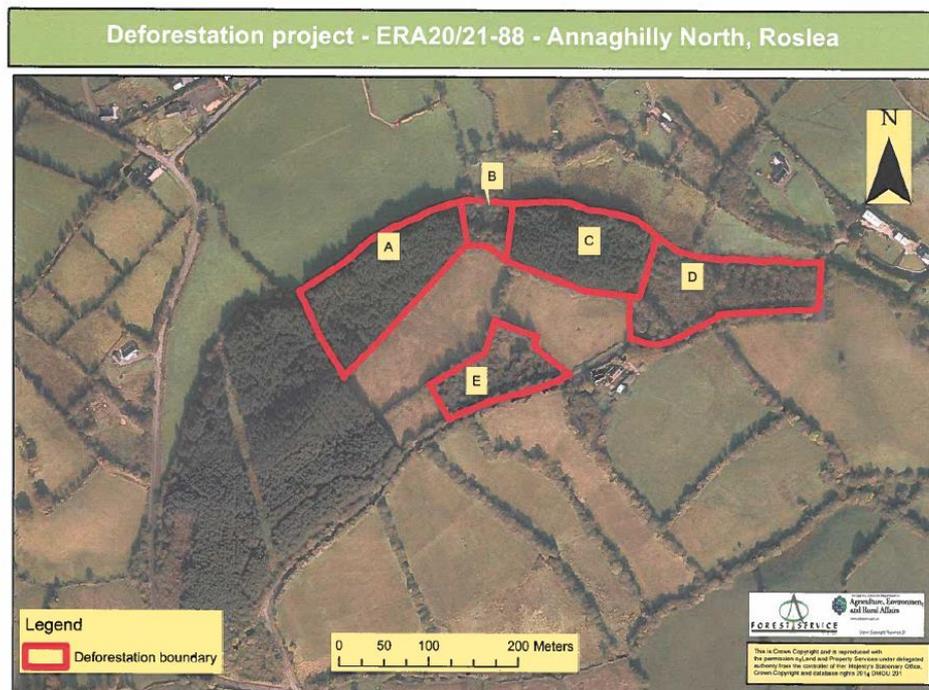
Brian Malcomson, MICFor

Site location

Annaghilly North, Roslea, Enniskillen, BT92 7AY, County Fermanagh.

Description

This Environmental Statement is to support a deforestation proposal.



Blocks D & E were felled by the previous landowner and not replanted. The current owner who was unaware of his obligations bought the landholding and converted the area felled by the previous owner to agriculture. These blocks extend to 1.36ha & 0.78ha respectively.

The applicant wishes to deforest a further 1.47ha of conifer forest as shown in the attached supporting map (Blocks B & C). The project timescale is as follows:

- 1) Harvesting of standing timber – March-April 2022
- 2) Recovery of brash/de-stumping – April-May 2022
- 3) Drainage, fencing, ploughing & resowing – May/June 2022.
- 4) Replanting of 5m riparian buffer – November-December 2022

Harvesting will be carried out using mechanised harvester and forwarder. All timber would be felled, cut-to-length and extracted to the roadside stacking area. All timber would be supplied to local sawmill and energy wood markets. Within the deforested area brash recovery would take place including roadside chipping of material. Stump removal/de-stumping would then be carried out using excavators, allowing stumps to dry for grinding and recycling. Finally, new field drainage and fencing would be installed, ploughing and resowing.

A table of key issues has been added to the Analysis section of this Environmental Statement which includes mitigations to ensure negative impacts of the proposal are not significant. A summary statement has been added at the end of the document.

Current Setting

This existing plantation is composed of Sitka spruce with a small component of mixed broadleaves along the watercourse. Planting occurred in the 1990s and conifer trees have now reached commercial maturity.

Soils are predominantly brown earths and fertile. The site is gently sloping to the north towards the watercourse.

The site is surrounded to the north, east and south by agricultural fields. There is an adjacent block of Sitka spruce to the west which is remaining.

There is a watercourse along the northern boundary of the site.

Though not found to be present currently, past surveys in the wider region have shown presence of otters, badgers, red squirrels, and a variety of breeding waders and raptors. There are no designations within the proposal boundary. The nearest designated site is Slieve Beagh-Mullaghfad-Lisnaskea SPA/Natura 2000, 2.5km northwest.

Surveys

In order to identify current constraints and key issues a number of field surveys were conducted, desk-based research was carried out and consultations made as listed below.

Field Surveys-

A site walkover was conducted by Brian Malcomson, Senior Forest Manager for Scottish Woodlands Ltd, on the 4th of August 2021. During this site walkover, evidence of protected species was investigated including foraging or feeding evidence and droppings as well as surveying for nest sites, dreys, setts or other resting places. Site conditions were verified in terms of operational restrictions, ground conditions and access. The site in its entirety was surveyed during this time. Results of these walkover surveys are included in the Key Issues Table found within the Analysis section.

Desk-Based Surveys-

Aerial photography review, including the wider landscape

National Biodiversity Network review

Landscape Character Assessment review

NIEA Natural Environment Map Viewer review

Topography and hydrology review via digital terrain models and satellite data

ASSI/Natura2000 Site Citation reviews

Consultation-

Department of Agriculture Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA Forest Service),
Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA), Mid Ulster District Council

Key Issues

Based on information obtained during the surveys and consultation, the following list of key issues was developed, and further analysis was carried out as noted.

- Size and Design of project
 - The proposal falls above the threshold of 1ha in regard to the Environmental Impact Assessment (Forestry) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 (as amended)
 - The proposal was scaled down and a landscape review carried out
- Water Quality
 - The proposal falls within the catchment of the Upper Lough Erne ASSI/Natura 2000/SAC/SPA which is highly sensitive to changes in water quality, especially sediment loading relating to de-stumping and agricultural restoration proposed as part of this project.
 - A drainage assessment was carried out to identify extent of hydrologic connectivity and risk to the catchment.

Analysis

This section evaluates the findings and considers the proposal's impact on the environment. Analysis includes assessment of alternative proposals along with the key issues and overall levels of significance of the proposal. Analysis was carried out by Brian Malcomson of Scottish Woodlands Ltd. A description of competency and qualifications for each individual is included in the appendix.

A key issues table has been added starting on page 6 which outlines the overarching results of the analysis. Some analysis has been more detailed such as the Drainage Assessment guiding the key issue findings for Water Quality, this and other detailed assessments have been included in the Appendix in full.

Alternatives

The project, as detailed in the Description section of this Environmental Statement, is to support a deforestation project. To fully evaluate all options, additional alternatives were considered though only the preferred alternative was carried forward. Alternatives are listed below along with a brief statement as to the rationale for each.

1. 1.47ha of conversion from forest to agriculture with no restocking (Felled area not to be re-established) and a 5m wide riparian strip replanted (Re-establishment) with oak.
 - a. This is the Preferred Alternative as it considers the value of the land for agriculture (which is greater than the value as forest) and preserves a proportion of woodland for environmental benefit (riparian habitat). This was driven by a change in landowner objectives to recapture highly productive ground and fertile ground for agricultural purposes. Value as agriculture includes soil productivity, local economic contribution of utilising arable ground, and social value of maintaining agricultural jobs and local traditional land use. There is also a landscape value of reducing linear

edges with isolated conifer plantations and an amenity to replanting woodland with broadleaf trees. This alternative represents a good balance between value and land use change.

2. 1.47ha of felling and restocking as approved under licence (FL2017/18-29).
 - a. This is the Default Alternative. This alternative would fell and replant the site as conifer/broadleaved woodland. This alternative does not reflect the landowners' objectives to recapture agricultural value of the site and is heavily weighted only to amenity value. Therefore, it is not the preferred alternative.
3. 1.47ha of conversion from forest to agriculture with no restocking (Felled area not to be re-established).
 - a. This is the Deforestation Alternative as it proposes to maximise agricultural value and de-forest the entire site. This alternative does not represent a fair balance between value and land use change.
4. Not carrying out any felling on site.
 - a. This is the No Action Alternative as it proposes not to fell the forest. This alternative was not chosen as it does not capture any value of the current plantation and over time would result in environmental degradation associated with windthrow and increased risk of disease as trees senesce (aging and decay).

Significance of Effects

In order to determine the extent and potential significance of effects of this proposal on the environment, the following criteria were applied as part of this assessment:

- The sensitivity of features/issues within the site itself and wider area:
 - Highly sensitive= nationally designated site, rare or distinctive feature in the national context, considered susceptible to small changes
 - Medium sensitivity= valued locally, local designation, rare or distinctive feature regionally, tolerant of moderate change
 - Low sensitivity= commonplace, not designated, potentially tolerant of noticeable change
 - Negligible sensitivity= already fundamentally changed, tolerant of noticeable change, currently characterised by active changes
- Magnitude of change and extent of woodland removal
 - High magnitude= a noticeable change over a wide area or an intensive change over a limited area
 - Medium magnitude= small changes over a wide area, or noticeable change over a limited area
 - Low magnitude= very small changes over a wide area or small changes over a limited area
 - Negligible magnitude= no discernible change
- The overall determination of significance was guided by the chart below.

Magnitude of Change ▼	Sensitivity			
	High	Medium	Low	Negligible
High	Major	Major	Moderate	Minor
Medium	Major	Moderate	Minor	None
Low	Moderate	Minor	None	None
Imperceptible	Minor	None	None	None

Each feature potentially impacted by the proposal has been included in the Key Issues Table on the following page with details of the assessed levels of significance.

Key Issues Table				
Key Issues/Features	Detail of likely impact	Actions taken to address issues (mitigations)	impact following mitigation	Significance
Water Quality-SAC	There is a watercourse along the northern boundary of the site. Sedimentation of the adjacent on-site watercourse and degradation of aquatic habitat. This feature is Highly Sensitive with a potential Medium Magnitude of change resulting from the proposal.	Carry out drainage assessment (see Appendix 4), maintain existing vegetated buffer around site boundary. Where needed, install drainage leading away from the roadside drain during operations with suitably sized silt traps/settling pools. These will be maintained throughout the de-stumping process to ensure surface flow cannot reach roadside drains.	Risk of surface flow from the site transporting sediment to the adjacent watercourse and downstream more than 13.0km to the sensitive aquatic habitat of the Upper Lough Erne ASSI/Natura 2000/SAC/SPA is negligible following mitigation.	None, there will be no adverse effect on the integrity of the site following mitigation.
Size/scale and design of project, landscape impact	This site is visible as part of a wider conifer block on the landscape from a moderate distance. Removal of Blocks B & C will have a negligible effect on the landscape. The project is relatively small in the wider landscape scale, which is large with moderate views in most directions. Sensitivity of the landscape is low and the magnitude of change is medium.	The proposal to de-forest the entire site has been reduced with some replanting of broadleaf trees along the watercourse along the northern boundary. Stump removal and brash removal will aid in both conversion to agricultural ground, but also reduce the negative visual impact that	Following removal of the conifer and some replanting of broadleaves the site will improve fit within the local setting of lowland farmland and character of the Newtownbutler & Roslea Lowlands.	None, there will be no net adverse impact from the removal of part of the conifer plantation on the landscape.

		forestry residue has over the medium term.		
Soils, agriculture vs forestry, land use change	Current land use for forestry would change to agriculture. De-stumping and brash removal would result in ground disturbance. Sensitivity is negligible as it was already fundamentally changed from agriculture to forest, and this is the first rotation of non-native tree species. Magnitude of change is medium due to the noticeable change over a limited area.	The proposal originally converted all the land to agriculture however the presence of an aquatic watercourse was considered to identify areas where forest value was greater in terms of environment. Mitigations under 'Water Quality' would also apply to this feature/key issue.	Reducing the area of conversion to only those locations where agricultural value is higher than forestry limits the extent of negative impacts from conversion. Though there will still be loss of forest cover, the forest cover lost is not of significant environmental value (non-native even-aged forest) and represents some negative impacts in its current form. On balance the impact of the proposal is low.	None, there will be no net adverse effect from the change in land use.
Designated Sites	There are no designations within the site or within a distance that would be ecologically impacted by the proposal. To the northwest 2.5km is Slieve Beagh-Mullaghfad-Lisnaskea Natura 2000/SPA, to the southwest 13km is the Upper Lough Erne ASSI/Natura 2000/SAC/SPA and to the southeast is the Local Wildlife Site of Annahone Lough. As such there is no risk of impact related to designated sites. Sensitivity and magnitude of change are negligible.	None required	N/A	None
Badgers	There was no evidence of badger activity during walkover survey. As	Pre-commencement walkover to be carried out	N/A	None

	such there is no risk of impact related to this feature. Sensitivity and magnitude of change are negligible.	to ensure site conditions have not changed.		
Red Squirrels	There was no evidence of red squirrel activity during walkover survey. As such there is no risk of impact related to this feature. Sensitivity and magnitude of change are negligible.	Pre-commencement walkover to be carried out to ensure site conditions have not changed.	N/A	None
Priority species-waders	Wader breeding sites have been identified in past surveys at 1.3km from the site boundary. As such there is no risk of impact related to this feature. Sensitivity and magnitude of change are negligible.	None required	N/A	None
Heronries	A heronry has been identified in past surveys at 4.7km from the site boundary. As such there is no risk of impact related to this feature. Sensitivity and magnitude of change are negligible.	None required	N/A	None
Priority Habitats	There are no priority habitats within the site.	None required	N/A	None
Otter	There was no evidence of otter activity during the walkover survey. As such there is no risk of impact related to this feature.	Pre-commencement walkover to be carried out to ensure site conditions have not changed.	N/A	None

Summary/findings

This project, proposing to fell and partially replant a 5m wide riparian buffer at Annaghilly North, Roslea, Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh, BT92 7AY, will result in conversion of productive ground from forestry back into agricultural use and replanting of a small 5m riparian buffer of oak woodland. The project was not found to be detrimental to the environment over a short or long term period and does not put vulnerable environmental features at risk with the mitigations as proposed. Due to this the proposal is thought to be less than significant.

Appendices

1	Authors Qualification
2	Regulatory and Best Practice References
3	Harvesting, Brash Recovery & De-stumping Plan
4	Drainage Overview Plan

Appendix 1 Authors Qualifications

Brian Malcomson, *Senior Forest Manager, Scottish Woodlands Ltd*

- Member of the Institute of Chartered Foresters, HND Forestry, Technical Certificate (Arbor A)
- Brian has worked in commercial forestry for 17 years as an operative and forest manager in Northern Ireland. Over that time he has developed experience with operations planning and implementation, working on a variety of projects including large scale deforestation and restructuring involving managing protected and sensitive species and sites. He is a competent work site manager and undergoes continuing professional development in a variety of forestry topics.

Appendix 2 Regulatory and Best Practice References

The operations proposed in this Environmental Statement are designed to comply with the following rules, regulations and best practice standards.

UK Forestry Standard

Practice Guide 'Managing forest operations to protect the water environment'

Conservation (Natural Habitat, etc.) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007

Appendix 3 Harvesting, Brash Recovery & De-stumping Plan





Scottish Woodlands

Harvesting, Brash Recovery & De-stumping Plan

Manager:
Contractor:

Created On: 17/09/2021

Legend

SCDB_Current

<all other values>

Harv_Contract

- Fell
- Fell-Windblow
- Thin
- Extraction
- Brash-Burn
- Brash-Removal
- Mulch
- Prune
- Stump Removal



Scale: 1:1,544
Scale Corrected As

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Appendix 4 Drainage Overview Plan

Drainage Assessment

A detailed assessment of site topography, vegetation and hydrology was carried out to determine risk of surface flow transporting sediment to a watercourse and downstream to the Upper Lough Erne ASSI/Natura 2000/SAC/SPA.

There is a watercourse along the northern boundary of the site. The site is at least 13km from the Upper Lough Erne ASSI/Natura 2000/SAC/SPA.

Overall drainage is south to north with a relatively gentle gradient of less than 10% average slope.

The image below shows the general site layout as an annotated aerial photograph.



The site is hydrologically active and therefore has the potential to cause diffuse pollution during deforestation works. Therefore, it is important that mitigation sediment management is implemented.



Photo Left. Looking along the watercourse (east) along the northern boundary of forest. The area to the right of this photo provides a flat area for the creation of a settlement sump for the cut-off drain to run in to. it would be important to leave as much of the existing ground vegetation intact to provide further filtration before run-off reaches the watercourse.

Operational Considerations and Proposed Actions

In order to further reduce risk of surface flow transporting sediment into the watercourse along the northern boundary both operational timings and site drainage planning has been considered.

Timings are as noted below:

- Harvesting will be carried out using mechanised harvester and forwarder during March-April 2021
- Once all timber harvesting would be complete, brash recovery would commence. This would involve extracting the brash to the roadside stacking area using forwarder then chipping of all brash at roadside for the local energy wood market. This would require to be completed April-May 2021.
- Then de-stumping would be carried out (April-May 2021) using excavator diggers. The stumps would be extracted to roadside where they would be piled to dry out for a period of a few months then they would be recycled using a tub grinder.
- Though not part of the forestry project proposed, it is anticipated that during May-June 2021, the ground would receive field drainage, new fencing, ploughing and resowing.

During all the scheduled operations existing plough scores/open drains would be identified and sediment netting installed as an additional mitigation measure to ensure no surface flow transports sediment off site.

Prior to and during de-stumping and brash removal, a shallow cross drain will be constructed parallel with the main watercourse to ensure any surface drainage is directed away from the watercourse and allowed to settle in a settlement sump where it will cause no harm to aquatic life.

Site will be regularly monitored for ground disturbance and water quality and appropriate mitigation measures applied if required.

The site supervisor shall check the site daily. All observations shall be recorded.

Scottish Woodlands Ltd holds the following accreditations and has prepared and implements a strong suite of best practice operations as part of its QUEST (Quality, Environment and Safety Toolkit) Guides.

- SGS 9001
- SGS 14001
- OHSAS 18001
- Forest Management – SGS FSC
- Forest management – SGS PEFC
- Chain of Custody – FSC
- Chain of Custody – PEFC
- FISA Membership
- ROSPA Membership

Specific QUEST references applicable to this operation are listed below relating to drainage management, these are available upon request:

- Guide 1.01 Worksite First aider and First Aid Kit Content Requirements.
- Guide 3.10 Planning the Safe Stacking of Timber
- Guide 5.01 Planning Work Near Protected Species or Protected Wildlife Sites
- Guide 5.05 Planning Work Near Red squirrels.
- Guide 6.01 Diffuse Pollution
- Guide 6.02 Monitoring Water Quality
- Guide 6.03 Silt Traps, Silt Fence and Filter Zones
- Guide 6.04 River and Drain Crossings
- Guide 6.05 Temporary Log Bridges
- Guide 6.06 Harvesting Ground Damage
- Guide 6.08 Forest Road Works
- Guide 6.09 Forestry Fuel and Oil Storage
- Guide 6.10 Oil Spillage Kits and Incident Response
- Guide 6.11 Measures to Help Prevent Burst Hydraulic Hoses
- Guide 6.14 Contractors Guide to the Appropriate Disposal of Scottish Woodlands' Controlled Waste