

Woodland Improvement Scheme

(Thinning and Tending)



Woodland Improvement Scheme (Thinning and Tending)

1. Scheme Outline and Legal Basis

- a) This scheme has been amended to limit funding for woodland improvement work associated with tending and thinning of young broadleaves planted post 1980. Funding may also be provided where brashing is required to facilitate manual application of fertiliser where aerial fertilisation is not possible.
- b) This document represents the administrative provisions for the implementation of the Woodland Improvement Scheme as approved under the National Development Plan 2007 to 2013 and in accordance with State Aid Decision 162/2007.
- c) Woodland activities, including uprooting and felling of trees are subject to the provisions of the Forestry Act, 1946, as may, from time to time, be amended or replaced.
- d) This scheme provides Woodland Improvement grants for the improvement, protection and development of woodlands and forests.
- e) The Scheme shall be administered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine and shall operate throughout the State.
- f) The National Exchequer will fund this Scheme
- g) The Scheme shall come into operation on **01 February 2008** until **31 December 2013**.

2. Objectives of the scheme

The aim of the scheme is to stimulate the improvement, protection and development of woodlands and forests for a range of functions, including:

- i. healthy tree growth,
- ii. landscape enhancement,
- iii. soil protection and water protection.

3. Eligible Operations for Woodland Improvement

- The same silvicultural and environmental standards as for afforestation are applicable.
- The elements below refer to activities that may be carried out under the Woodland Improvement Scheme.

Thinning and Tending (Fixed Grant)

- Improvement Felling of malformed and over mature trees
- Felling of additional trees to release potential crop. (PCT)
- Pruning to improve stem quality

- Thinning or re-spacing to promote growth
- Management and re-spacing of natural regeneration.

Improving Access for Manual Fertilisation (Cost Based Grant)

- Cutting brash paths through plantations to improve access for manual fertilisation where aerial fertilisation is not possible. Costs associated with the cost of fertiliser and its application are not eligible

4. Grant Rates

- A fixed grant is available for tending and thinning operations as outlined in Annex 1. A cost based grant is available for operations associated with brashing to facilitate the manual application of fertiliser where aerial fertilisation is not possible. The Minister reserves the right to alter these rates from time to time.
- Evidence of costs expended and receipts for items purchased must be retained and produced on the request of the Minister for all cost based elements of this scheme e.g. brashing
- For audit purposes, recipients of grant aid under this Scheme will be required to retain invoices relating to work undertaken for a period of 6 years.
- The maximum grant will be €750 per hectare with a cap of €20,000 per application.

5. Woodland Improvement Conditions of Aid

- Payments shall be made in respect of applicants who make a valid application, prepared by a registered forester and have carried out the woodland improvement work to their plantation in accordance with the stipulations of their pre-approval and in compliance with: -
 - All relevant national legislation for the time being in force,
 - The Department's specifications for registered foresters,
 - The terms and conditions as set out in this document and the application forms,
 - The requirements set down in the Forestry Schemes Manual, where applicable;
 - Forestry Schemes Mapping Standards
 - The principles of Sustainable Forest Management,
 - The Forest Service Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland,
 - The Forest Service Environmental Guidelines.
 - Conditions of Felling Licence where applicable and relevant.

6. Application Procedure.

The relevant application forms, as described in this paragraph, are available from the Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford. Lo-call 1890 200 223 or email forests@agriculture.gov.ie.

6.1. Application for Approval – Form 1

Application for approval under the Woodland Improvement Scheme must be made using the Application for Woodland Improvement Approval - Form 1. The applicant and a Registered Forester must complete the application for all areas greater than 2 ha. It is not mandatory to have a registered forester complete the application for areas 2 ha or less. The application form sets out the requirements to be met to make a valid application.

All proposed work must receive the prior written approval of the Forest Service

6.2 Application for 1st Woodland Improvement Grant - Form 2

The grant application for payment of the Woodland Improvement Grant must be made using 'Form 2'. The applicant and a Registered Forester must complete the application for all areas greater than 2 ha. The application form sets out the requirements to be met to make a valid application.

7. Payments.

The Department may pay grants to Applicants via Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT). Applicants may mandate the payment of grants to an alternative payee using a mandate document that satisfies the requirements of the Minister.

8. Pre-Woodland Improvement Approval

A pre-approval issued under this Scheme may be subject to additional conditions as laid down by the Minister. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that the plantation is compliant with the requirements of the scheme.

9. Penalties

- a) Failure to comply with the terms and conditions of the Scheme, incorporating The Code of Best Forest Practice – Ireland, and the current suite of environmental guidelines may result in an appropriate penalty/sanction being applied.
- b) Monetary penalties, which shall apply to certain specific breaches of the Scheme, are the same as the Afforestation Scheme and are set out in that scheme document but other breaches of the Scheme not specified in that document may also incur a penalty.
- c) Penalties may include the repayment of a 1st Instalment Grant.
- d) Monetary penalties shall include interest payable at the rate provided for under SI No. 13/2006. 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 deduction.
- e) Penalty amounts may be deducted from future payments due to the Applicant under the Forestry Schemes or from payments due under other Department schemes. Where monetary penalties are not paid or recovered within the period requested, the Department may take whatever action is deemed necessary for their recovery.

- f) The principle of proportionality will apply. Penalties, which in the opinion of the Minister are proportionate to the alleged breach of the Scheme, may be imposed.
- g) 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 plantation.

10. Appeals

- a) An Applicant, or his/her contractor, may appeal a decision of the Minister's regarding an application for a Pre-Approval, a Woodland Improvement Grant, or a penalty.
- b) An Appeals Committee hears all appeals made. Appeals should be lodged with the Department's offices at Johnstown Castle Estate, Co. Wexford.

11. Right of Entry

The Minister reserves the right to carry out inspections at reasonable times on any land receiving grant aid under this scheme or any other forest related schemes. The Applicant is obliged to ensure that, where required, adequate inspection paths through the plantation are provided.

12. Responsibility for Forest Management

- a) Responsibility for the successful management of forests rests with the Applicant. Where an Applicant contracts the services of a third party to undertake the management of the forest, it is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure that the third party contracted has sufficient insurances to indemnify the work undertaken.
- b) The inspection of a plantation by the Minister shall not relieve the Applicant of responsibility for the success of the plantation as described in the sub-paragraph above.

13. 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 his/her behalf, knowingly makes a false or misleading statement or declaration or withholds essential information, his/her participation in the Scheme may be terminated and all or part of the aid paid may be reimbursed.

Where an Applicant or a person acting on his/her behalf, fails to abide by the terms and conditions of the Scheme or if 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, his/her participation in the Scheme may be terminated and all or part of the aid paid shall be reimbursed.

The obtaining of aid under the Scheme by fraudulent means by the applicant or a person acting on his/her behalf, or others may render such persons liable to prosecution.

14. Review of Financial Aids

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

15. Procedures and Conditions

The Minister reserves the right to alter the procedures and conditions to be followed in the operation of this Scheme. Such changes shall be notified in writing, prior to taking effect and providing reasonable notice of such changes to Registered Foresters and Registered Forestry Companies.

16. Tax Clearance Requirement

a) General:

It is a condition of grant aid 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.

b) Tax Clearance:

Payment of financial aid as provided for in this Scheme may be subject to the condition that a tax clearance certificate from the Revenue Commissioners be furnished before a payment is issued.

c) Value Added Tax:

Applicants and their Agents shall comply with all requirements of VAT law. Where an Applicant is registered for VAT, grant aid will be paid exclusive of VAT. Where an Applicant is not registered for VAT, the grant will be paid inclusive of VAT.

17. Information and Data Protection

The Minister reserves the right to make information available to the public regarding the areas covered by the Scheme including the number of participants, farms, historical and archaeological sites, hectares covered etc. while continuing to observe the terms of the Data Protection Act.

18. Good Practice

Good forestry practice is mandatory across all operations of the Scheme. Conditions for good forestry practice are published in the Code of Best Forest Practice - Ireland

19. Cumulation of Agriculture State Aids

Any Applicant who has received payments under the Business Expansion Scheme (**BES**) and/or the Seed Capital Scheme (**SCS**) tax incentives must make the necessary declaration on the application form.

Annex 1

Grant and Premium Levels.

Maximum Grant Levels.

	Fixed Grant - €/ha (per treated hectare)
Thinning and Tending	750

Felling Licence **Forestry Act 1946**

It is an offence to uproot or to cut down any tree unless the owner has obtained permission in the form of a Felling Licence from the Forest Service. Application for a Felling Licence is made on a felling notice form. These forms are downloadable from the Forest Service Web site, go to 'Forest Service' on www.agriculture.gov.ie, or Lo Call 1890 200 223 or e mail forests@agriculture.gov.ie, or from a Registered Forester, or from a Registered Forestry Company.

Annex 2

Silvicultural Guidance for Tending and Thinning of Broadleaves (Woodland Improvement Scheme)

This element of the Woodland Improvement Scheme applies to young broadleaved woodlands (planted post 1980) 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.

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

Grant	Top Height	Operation
Tending	<p>Minimum 8 m</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"> • At tending stage the current stocking should be reduced by 40 to 50%. • A line of trees to be removed every 7 to 10 lines for access purposes is advised (not mandatory). • Marking of 300-400 PCTs (potential crop trees) per hectare at this point is advised (not mandatory). • At least 2 strong competitors around each candidate PCT should be removed • Wolves, diseased and cankered trees and weaker trees should also be included in the trees to be removed. • The trees to be removed should be marked. • Pruning may be necessary but should concentrate only on the removal of disproportionately large side branches and forks of candidate PCTs. • Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) • Cut trees should be delimbed and stacked. Alternatively they can be windrowed in a safe manner allowing free access through the site.

Thinning	12-15 m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify using a ring of paint approximately 300 potential crop trees per hectare • Carry out a heavy crown thinning favouring selected trees removing 2 to 3 competitors to PCTs • 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) • Cut trees should be delimitated, cut into lengths and stacked • Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)
----------	---------	--

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

Grant	Top Height	Operation
Tending	<p>*8-10 m (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 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 (\approx 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)

Thinning	10 – 12m (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. Identify using a circle of paint approx 300 - 500 candidate PCTs. 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 (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) <p><u>Pure Crops (initial stocking 6600/ha)</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 oak wolves, Establish thinning control plots in line with the above, prior to thinning operations (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) <p><u>Pure Crops (initial stocking \approx 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 (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)
----------	-------------------	--

Table 3: Beech / Scots Pine or European Larch

Grant	Top Height M's	Operation
Tending	<p>*7-8</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 of 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 (\approx 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).

Thinning	12-15	<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. • Identify 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 (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m) <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 (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)
----------	-------	--

Table 4: Thinning Schedule Cherry

Grant	Top Height M's	Silvicultural Operations
Tending	6-8	<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 • 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 (\approx one per homogenous unit, 20m by 20m)
Thinning	15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to release 200 final crop trees from competitors

Annex 3

Definitions

For the purposes of this scheme:

- **‘Applicant’** means a person who has applied for Approval under the Scheme or has carried out woodland improvement following an Approval under the Scheme;
- **‘Approval’** means a Woodland Improvement Scheme Pre-Approval granted by the Minister;
- **‘Application, Pre-Woodland Improvement Approval – Form 1’** shall mean an application for the Minister’s approval to improve a woodland under the terms of all current legislation, guidelines and the conditions of this scheme.
- **‘Application – 1st Woodland Improvement Grant – Form 2’** shall mean an application to receive a Woodland Improvement Grant following the woodland improvement within the terms of the Pre- approval. Thinning and tending operations are paid on a fixed grant basis. Cost based grants apply to operations associated with providing access for hand fertilisation on case-by-case basis subject to a maximum of €750/ha.

- **‘Registered Forester’** shall mean a person qualified and registered with the Department under the Department’s Registration of Foresters and Forestry Companies as set out for the purpose of the Forestry schemes.
- **‘Code of Best Forest Practice - Ireland’** is a Department listing of all forestry operations and the manner in which they should be carried out to ensure the implementation of Sustainable Forest Management in Ireland, as agreed at the Third Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, Lisbon, 1998.
- **‘Completion Date’** shall mean the date the woodland improvement works are completed, (or verified by the Forestry Inspector). This date shall be the base line date by which all subsequent payments are based.
- **‘Department’** shall mean the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine
- **‘Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)’** means the process of examining the environmental effects of a proposed development, if carried out, would have on the environment.
- **‘Forest Service Environmental Guidelines’** means the following publications of the Forest Service, as may be 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’; and ‘Forestry and Aerial Fertilisation Guidelines’; and ‘Forestry and Forest Protection Guidelines’. The Minister may, from time to time, add further guidelines to this definition.
- **‘Minister’** shall mean the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Marine.
- **‘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.
- **‘The Forest Service’** shall mean the Forestry Division of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine
- **‘Scheme’** shall mean the Woodland Improvement Scheme as amended in 2009- Circular 6-2009 issued on 31st March 2009.
- **‘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.

Annex 4

Woodland Improvement Scheme Revision History

Recent Revision	Date	Title	Circulation
Circular 6-2009	31 st March 2009	Schemes	Registered Foresters