**SIF Policy on Semi-natural Woodland**

***Issue:***  
Ireland was once largely covered by different types of natural woodland. Today, it is generally accepted that there are no remaining examples of this native ‘wildwood’, that is, woodland which has remained untouched by human influence. However, semi-natural woodland is closely associated with these natural woodland types. It can be defined as “a stand of trees made up of native species, of local provenance, which has not been planted”. The area of semi-natural woodland in Ireland has been estimated to be 100,000 hectares. This resource requires professional management and is highly valued for the following reasons:

Biodiversity:  
Because of its diversity in terms of species composition and structure, semi-natural woodland has enormous significance for wildlife, biodiversity and nature conservation.

Cultural and Genetic values:  
Semi-natural woodlands represent a direct link to Ireland’s native “wildwood” forests that once covered the whole country. They are a remnant of ecosystems which once dominated this island. They are also a resource of indigenous genetic material which requires conservation and which may potentially be used for future planting programmes.

Landscape:  
Semi-natural woodland is an intrinsic element of the Irish landscape and in this regard, has a high aesthetic value.

Research:  
Semi-natural woodland is a research resource for the study of natural woodland processes and a control for the study of the influence of man on the environment.

Most of Ireland’s semi-natural woodland resource has been over-exploited and has suffered at the hands of agriculture and commercial forestry. Today, semi-natural woodland is still a neglected and diminishing resource, about which we have little information on location, ownership, composition and classification. While a proportion of our semi-natural woodlands are protected under current legislation, a far larger proportion of privately owned semi-natural woodlands lies outside this protected sphere and urgently requires protection and specialised management.

***The Society of Irish Foresters’ Position***

* The Society of Irish Foresters recognises the many values of semi-natural woodland as listed above.
* The Society of Irish Foresters advocates the establishment of a vegetation based classification system for and survey of semi-natural woodland which would provide the basis for their future management.
* The management of semi-natural woodland is a very specialised area. Training, education and awareness for landowner and land advisor alike are key to the future of semi-natural woodland.
* The Society of Irish Foresters supports the introduction of the new Forest Service grant schemes, the Woodland Conservation Scheme and the New Native Woodlands Scheme, which encourage owners of semi-natural woodland to manage and conserve their woods using best practice.
* The Society of Irish Foresters recognises the potential of semi-natural woodland to contribute to local employment, through the revitalisation of traditional woodland management practices.
* The Society of Irish Foresters supports the establishment of new native woodland area, through the planting of local native stock, where possible.
* The Society of Irish Foresters recognises the potential of semi-natural woodland to contribute to the principles of Sustainable Forest Management, particularly through its contribution to biodiversity and structural diversity. Of particular importance is the management and conservation of semi-natural woodland within commercially managed plantations and riparian areas.