



Irish Sika Deer and the European Forest Risk Facility

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Deer pose significant challenges to natural regeneration in mixed species forests through damage caused by their selective browsing and bark stripping. Management of their populations is essential for the development of resilient forests suitable for the changing climate, with increased storm and fire resilience, and improved biodiversity. As a result, in many areas of Europe, wildlife management is increasingly more of a silvicultural issue than a matter of hunting.

This topic was among topics addressed in the EFI's FRISK-GO project and was considered ideal for an Exchange of Experts between Germany and Ireland. Ireland has previously participated in successful professional exchanges for wildfire management support.

IRISH WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Forests and woodlands in Ireland are home to the introduced sika deer (*Cervus nippon*), fallow deer (*Dama dama*) and the native red deer (*Cervus elaphus*). Population densities for all species vary greatly across the country, but have reached very high levels in some places. Within these areas, the level of damage to woodlands, conservation areas, forest plantations and agriculture is of concern to land users and forest managers.

These species are traditionally managed through hunting, with walk-and-stalk as the preferred method. However, this places a relatively high amount of stress, disturbance and pressure on the deer populations

relative to culling rates. This is due to wildlife populations responding by becoming shy and nocturnal, taking cover in woodlands and forests, where they cause high levels of damage and other management difficulties. Further to even more difficult hunting conditions, the reproduction rate of deer can even increase under such pressure.

The planned exchange visits to Baden-Württemberg will focus on silvicultural issues for various altitudes and forest types, from lowland riverine forest to mountain forests. The exchanges will greatly benefit German forest managers who will learn from the Irish expertise on Sika deer as well as on invasive plant (tree) species.

GERMAN WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Forest managers in Germany and Baden-Württemberg in particular, have long-established expertise in wildlife management. For example, the adaption of deer policies over the past 15 years resulted in the new

Wildlife Management Act of Baden-Württemberg (April 2015). Wildlife management techniques have been adapted to high-population densities, shooting seasons have been synchronized across a range of species to reduce hunting pressure (shooting seasons), and wildlife biology facts are increasingly being applied during the decision making process instead of animal trophy quality considerations.

German forest managers have a wealth of experience to share with their Irish counterparts. A great many issues will be considered, including deer census, hunting techniques, interval hunting, guided tourism, adapted silviculture practices, continuous cover forestry, etc. Special attention will be given to the relationship and mutual effects between wildlife population and silviculture and habitat management. The influence of deer species on natural tree regeneration and tree species composition is of absolute relevance, especially in light of climate change and the need to adapt and develop future resilient, robust, mixed forests.

The Exchange of Experts will begin in late 2015 and continue during 2016. It will involve mutual exchanges of forest managers and researchers to various regions where they will participate in a variety of activities such as training seminars, workshops and operational management.

New boost with

Exchange of Experts

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The concept of short-term exchanges of experts between European Union countries, known as an Exchange of Experts (EoEs), has been around for a number of years, with people in civil protection roles able to spend up to two weeks abroad sharing professional experience. This model has now been used for other roles in the forest sector, with positive results.

An EoE offers a wealth of opportunities, such as on-the-job training, new experiences, fast-tracking of expertise, shared lessons, inspiration for new research and a solid base for cooperation and assistance in times of crisis. Such an exchange can also help support existing networks, institutions and groups by providing more opportunities for cooperation and networking.

EFI's FRISK-GO project, which ran from 2013–mid 2015 to investigate the feasibility of the 'European Forest Risk Facility', arranged several EoEs. For this project, the EoE was widened to include forest managers and researchers that deal with forest risk, although the link to civil protection remained prominent, as required, and the exchanges focused on storm and fire-related

issues.

Feedback from participants and evaluation by the project team revealed that the EoE concept provided great value. The exchanges were cost-effective and the return on investment has been manifold for FRISK-GO and its network, as well as for participants. The networking aspect proved to be particularly valuable, since forest risk management teams across Europe were otherwise only meeting by chance.

When possible, FRISK-GO also used other funding sources to complement the EU-funded EoE. This created the opportunity to host exchanges on forest risk topics unrelated to civil protection, which has been named 'EoE Forest'.

EoE FOREST

EoE Forest has now been used successfully as a cooperation and exchange tool in other EFI projects, namely the INTEGRATE + and In-Tree projects.

These exchanges are very flexible and can serve an array of topics and purposes, from fire and storm risk management to biotic risks and drought. They can cover

operational management or strategic and policy-relevant content, and can range from a purely political or scientific perspective down to practical training on chainsaw use for storm-felled timber.

Given the very positive results and developments so far, this exchange is likely to continue within the future European Forest Risk Facility.

EFIATLANTIC Regional Office and State Forest Administration of Baden-Wuerttemberg (ForstBW) and many others were instrumental in providing specialists and support for the EoE Forest. We sincerely thank them for their valued efforts!

The FRISK-GO project ended in July 2015. The Executive Summary, Business Plan, case studies and EoE reports are all available at www.friskgo.org. It is envisaged to have a FRISK Secretariat and FRISK Regional Nodes established and running by January 2017.



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