

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

THE SAVE LEITRIM CAMPAIGN



This is not a story about the indigenous people of the Amazon rainforest who are fighting to protect lands from large multi-national companies and speculators, who are displacing them and destroying the environment. No, this is about the indigenous people and all who come to live in our small rural communities, villages, and the small towns of County Leitrim, which defines who we are as a people on the island of Ireland.

Save Leitrim was founded by a group of like minded people from across the county, on a cold winters night in January 2018. *Save Leitrim* is shouting STOP to the relentless exploitation and decimation of Ireland's most rural county, by the Government's subsidised afforestation programme. This Forestry Policy is destroying the social identity, economic viability and the environment of County Leitrim.

Leitrim people have survived famine and war but this onslaught by outside speculators is the greatest threat to the indigenous people and all who have come to call this beautiful county their home.

In 1841 the population of Leitrim was over 155,000, today it stands

at 32,044. No county in Ireland has suffered such a decline in population. We all accept that the Great Famine and emigration have taken their toll on the population, but we still had the land.

Today there are 145 townlands out of a total of 1,488 with nobody living in them and over a hundred more with five or fewer residents. Some townlands are between 70% and 100% under forestry, mainly Sitka Spruce.

The Government's Forestry Policy would be seen by many as a death by a thousand cuts while others say it as a form of ethnic cleansing, by using the euro rather than the bullet on the indigenous population in their townlands.

Today the people of Leitrim see first hand the detrimental impact which the last six decades of afforestation have had on rural communities, with the closure of small schools and threatened closure of up to 10 more schools within the next decade. We have witnessed the loss of GAA clubs, other sporting organisations, small businesses, post offices, pubs and shops, many more will be lost if the coniferisation of our county is not stopped.



Back: Brian Smith, Denis McCaffrey, Gerry Dolan, Jim McCaffrey & Pat Munday. Front: Sean McLoughlin, Gerry McGovern, Edwina Guckian & Justin Warnock.

Leitrim is Ireland's most afforested county, with 18.9% of farmland planted, according to Government figures released recently, which our group would strongly dispute, as we believe it is much higher.

A large percentage of the land under forestry in the north of the county is owned by Coillte which is a state body. Most of this planting took place between 1950 and 1990 but in south Leitrim the forestry lands are mostly privately owned. Today the small farms are being bought by vulture funds, investment funds, pension funds, insurance funds, etc., and these companies are of no economic benefit to the county. These plantations are fully subsidised by the Government. In the recent budget, the Minister for Finance allocated another €100,000,000 of Irish taxpayers money to continue the land grab in Leitrim and the west of Ireland. The use of taxpayers money is wrong, especially at a time when over 10,000 people are registered as homeless and over 700,000 people waiting for hospi-

tal appointments and children waiting for life-altering operations.

Leitrim farmers or their sons or daughters cannot compete against these vultures, as it is just a game

of monopoly to them, as was seen at a local land auction when one forestry company outbid another. The speculators can source millions from the European Investment Bank to buy land for forestry at a time when Irish banks will not lend money to young farmers to buy farmland to rear livestock. This is all facilitating rural decline.

A 50 acre farm can be bought by outside interests for €250,000 and will receive a 100% grant to fence, drain and plant the land and an annual Forestry Premium payment for 15 years of €12,500 which will be paid into a bank account, possibly in another part of the world. The average farmer in Leitrim will receive €6,000 Basic Premium payment and all monies will benefit the local economy.

Over the past 9 months, *Save Leitrim* have been active in objecting to all forestry applications, we are currently appealing 20 decisions to grant forestry licences and as many more in the pipeline.

Save Leitrim are proactive in highlighting the subsidised destruction that forestry is doing to our county. Join our struggle, find us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter under *Save Leitrim*.

Save Leitrim have a number of core principles which include:

- **To stop the exploitation and the decimation of our county by the Government's Forestry Policy.**
- **To secure a future for Leitrim's children and future generations in our rural communities.**
- **To change the model of afforestation and introduce sustainable Agro-forestry and High Nature Value grassland schemes.**
- **To protect our environment and to stop any further loss of habitats, which is contributing to the terminal decline of many species of endangered birds, including Curlew, Hen Harrier, and Meadow Pipit.**
- **To demand planning permission for all forestry developments which would ensure that no home or property would succumb to a forest fire.**
- **To protect the water quality of our streams, rivers, and lakes which continue to be polluted by the vast amounts of herbicides and insecticides used by forestry companies.**
- **To protect our remaining heritage from destruction by continued afforestation.**
- **To protect the €54,000,000 that Leitrim farmers contribute to the rural economy of this county annually.**
- **That communities would be consulted before any afforestation licence would be granted.**