

Report on attendance to the 7th International Forest Vegetation Management Conference

With the assistance of the CAWS Early Weed Scientist Travel Award, Carol Rolando recently attended the 7th International Forest Vegetation Management Conference held in Valdivia Chile, from the 7th to 10th November 2011. Carol presented a talk on the work Scion is conducting on behalf of the forest industry to find cost effective chemical and non-chemical control strategies that are compliant with FSC certification standards. The title of her talk was: "Meeting the goals of certification in New Zealand plantation forests" and the main ideas presented are summarised below:

Prohibition of key herbicides used for vegetation control in plantation forestry together with a continued requirement to reduce use of chemicals means certification requirements continue to dominate vegetation management research in New Zealand. Investigations into cost-effective alternative, non-chemical, or reduced chemical, management systems utilising herbicides less harmful to the environment, mycoherbicides, cover-cropping and (or) biological control offer potential solutions. However, in an industry driven by profit financial viability remains central to the choice of certification compliant vegetation control systems. A series of trials were implemented on Pinus radiata in New Zealand to investigate management systems that reduce reliance on current, prohibited herbicides and also integrate chemical control with oversowing or biological control to suppress the growth of key competitive woody weed species. Specifically, trials have been implemented to test: 1) the potential of the biocontrol agent Cleopus japonicus to reduce competition of Buddleia davidii during the first three years of tree establishment in the Central North Island and 2) the potential of oversowing with grasses used in conjunction with certification compliant herbicides, to suppress germination of Cytisus scoparius (broom). These trials are discussed together with reference to their costs, benefits and uptake in a certification compliant forest management system.

The conference was attended by approximately 30 people comprising scientists and industry representatives from Chile, Sweden, United States, Canada, Ireland, France, Argentina, Japan and New Zealand. The work presented by Carol, and her colleague Michael Watt from Scion, on FSC certification generated considerable interest and was the focus of much discussion. However, the overall lack of papers around certification was disappointing, raising questions pertaining to the impact of certification on different forest management systems globally. With the exception of a synopsis paper by Nick McCarthy (Lecturer, Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland), papers given by Carol Rolando and Michael Watt were the only that dealt with FSC issues. In this regard it was difficult to evaluate how the research being conducted by Scion compared to other regions, particularly around (i) evaluating the cost of FSC certification, (ii) determining if bans to certain chemicals are justified and (iii) identifying alternative weed control methods to banned herbicides. However, despite these shortcomings, useful aspects of the conference that emerged were as follows:

- Carol Rolando had a series of discussions with Nick McCarthy that centred on comparing with other countries how NZ is responding to FSC certification pressure. In particular, they examined the possibility of collecting data on vegetation management cost structures from other countries to compare the economic feasibility of different types of weed control used across regions. Such an analysis would provide insight into the drivers that result in the disparate methods of weed control used within plantation forestry throughout the world. The analysis could also possibly be used as further justification to FSC for New Zealand's current position around use of herbicides. This topic has motivated a TRANZFOR funded visit in June to the UK and Europe by Carol Rolando to further investigate the impacts of certification on forest vegetation management practices at an international level and compare these practices to solutions being used to meet the goals of certification in New Zealand.
- During the conference field trip useful discussions with Chilean managers were also held around the impact of FSC on weed control methods there. It appears that they are changing their herbicides to FSC compliant alternatives, and are currently using Fordor (isoxaflutole) – a product that is not available in New Zealand.

In summary, the conference was very useful in that it provided an opportunity to interact with other forest vegetation management scientists and also highlighted that the impacts of certification are dependent on a number of factors acting outside of direct treatment cost – a factor we hope to investigate at an international level. Carol Rolando would like to take this opportunity to thank CAWS for their financial support for her attendance to the IFVM 2012.