

Conservation and economics in the Buller forests

AFTER a long period of neglect the conservation importance of the Buller region has quite suddenly come into focus. The National Parks and Reserves Authority decided in May to commission a study for a possible national park in the Paparoas. The Wildlife Service has published a report calling for the preservation of large areas of forests in the region, and independent scientists have submitted recommendations for reserves.

CONSERVATION organisations have given momentum to these initiatives; and there has been a rapid growth of conservation awareness and activity in the Buller region itself after the formation of a joint NFAC-Forest and Bird group there last year.

No less than 76 percent of the Buller County is forest land controlled by the Forest Service. In theory the extensive public ownership of land in the region should offer scope for the preservation of important natural areas and for making wise use of other resources on these lands. However, the Forest Service in its recently published draft regional management plan has chosen to emphasise socio-economic priorities, which it claims are embedded in Government policy.

Economic and social factors will indeed play a major role in decisions regarding the future of natural resources in the Buller, which has in past years been seen as a depressed area. Conservationists need to be aware of the relevant economic facts and consider just how far these can justify the type of use of the region's forests advocated by the Forest Service.

Management plan

The recently published draft management plan for the Buller forests has provoked strong public concern for a number of reasons:

By Guy Salmon

- The plan opposes the creation of a Paparoa National Park.
- The ecological reserves put forward in the plan compare most unfavourably with those recommended by the Wildlife Service and by independent scientists.
- The principal basis for the plan is the intention to maintain the existing timber industry by cutting through almost all the remaining podocarp-rich forest in the short term and by converting areas of native forest to exotic plantations for long-term timber supplies.
- The plan condones the wasteful and destructive logging and utilisation practices current in the Buller timber industry.
- In these and many other respects the plan does not comply with the letter or the spirit of the Government's

The author

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Indigenous Forest Policy, adopted in 1976.

The Society, with other conservation and recreation organisations acting through the Joint Campaign on Native Forests, is seeking two fundamental changes to the Forest Service plan.

First, we are seeking the complete preservation of important natural areas in the Paparoas and north Buller areas which are substantially zoned for timber production at present. Second, we are calling for an end to the wasteful exploitation of the forests, asking instead for the introduction of proper sustained yield management for those forests where timber production is acceptable.

If these desirable measures are to be implemented, they must inevitably cause a substantial reduction in the rate at which native trees are being felled in Buller County. Any reduction in the cut will have an effect on employment. If no compensatory measures are taken, such a reduction could also have an adverse effect on the viability of small rural communities in the Buller.

I believe it is important that conservationists have a clear understanding of the socio-economic effects of measures they propose. Wherever possible, balanced proposals should be advanced for making better use of regional or national resources to provide compen-