

subject to numerous exceptions on economic and regional employment grounds.

In Whirinaki it did stop, while Pureora, with its endangered kokako, was put under a logging moratorium.

The new dispensation was to be 'selection logging' for what was called 'sustained yield management', allowing the increment by regeneration and growth each year to replace that year's cut. The yield from Whirinaki was to be lowered to only 5,000m³ annually from 1984; though rather more is currently taken, mainly from the Easter wind-throw of 1982.

Selection logging varies hugely in its impact. North Whirinaki in the mid '70s saw some horrid examples of it, which the Forest Service is today ashamed of. There were also disastrous experiments in Westland — proclaimed in their day as the new step forward — where, after five years' windthrow from root and canopy damage, the forests had to be clearfelled. Wind was blowing down 40% more than the projected growth increment.

In the North Island, at both Tihoi and Whirinaki, logging trials were adversely reported on, and the technique thrown into doubt, by the Service's own Forest Research Institute.

Today, Forest Service is claiming to have improved its selection logging, by the use of smaller and less damaging tractors. But periodic logging, at volumes of up to 30%, repeated after 30 years is still the policy for Whirinaki under the 1981 Management Plan. The corridors are to be planted with young rimu that it is hoped will regenerate in the light-gaps left by logging. The greater part of the rich, dense lowland forest is still regarded as merchantable. Only small fractions have been placed in reserves.

The great defect shown in sustained yield management is that it is unlikely to work, at all events, because of the unbalanced age structures of these ancient forests. The oldest trees alive today go back to the legendary First Canoe, coeval

with Richard Coeur de Lion. Trees of middle age at Whirinaki date from the Wars of the Roses.

Over the last 200 years, there has been a regeneration gap that no amount of planting will effectively close. Unlike a pine forest or a fishery, where sustained yield management is easy enough, the time-spans at Whirinaki are beyond human policy or manipulation.

The Forest Service are fond of pointing to logging with regeneration planting as an enlightened procedure to restore forests where the giant trees are declining, dying and falling down. But with each entry for another selection, more of the superb canopy trees will be lost, until only a low adolescent profile remains: a giant forest no more, but a managed plantation like one of the projected Northland forests of sub-mature kauri.

If the podocarp giants were really in decline, we might have little choice — on those sites — but to watch them go, cherishing them meanwhile for perhaps the century or more most of them would still be with us. There would be the poignancy of knowing they wouldn't always be there. But still — with nature's long and mysterious providence — more would appear somewhere else, in a forest that is a changing mosaic in space and time.

Forest Service's dogma is that today's giant podocarps are a first generation, after the last Taupo eruption (1800 B.P.), and are now in decline. They attempt to justify this from Professor McKelvey's pioneering studies of podocarp succession. Properly interpreted, there need be no argument with his findings, as Dr John Ogden has tried to show in a forthcoming chapter on the history and ecology of Whirinaki. He has shown how complex the facts are, and how much is still unknown. But what we do know, or can reliably surmise, gives no support to the Service's official theory and practice.

Above all, replanting in selection lines seems highly unlikely to bring back a forest.



A small glade of pure matai astride a stream near the Otupaka frost flat.

A koromiko stands above the red-brown *Dracophyllum* and cream coral lichen on the Waione frost flat.

