



MAVORA LAKES

National Reserve or Pastoral Park?

By Les Hutchins*

A unique blend of the stark, barren, mountainous qualities of Lake Wakitipu and the heavily forested mountainous lakes and fiords of Fiordland best describes the Mavora Lakes region.

The North and South Mavora Lakes — set in pristine surroundings of mountains, tussock, scrub and forest — lie in the glacial Mararoa Valley, more than 600 metres above sea level. Passes from the valley run north to the Greenstone Valley and east to the Von and Upper Oreti Valleys.

The main Te Anau-Queenstown highway is a 37 km away, while Invercargill is 140 km to the south-east. The area is especially important to the

people of Otago and Southland because of its fine camping, fishing, tramping and boating. It seems inevitable that it will become more popular with tourists thanks to its strategic location — halfway between Queenstown and Te Anau.

Recently Lands and Survey made public their draft management plan which proposed a “Pastoral Park” concept for these two magnificent lakes and their surroundings. The well presented plan discussed the recreation possibilities and recommended picnic areas, a visitor centre and camping grounds.

It also recommended limited grazing of the valley floor wetlands and tussock. The authors should be congratulated for an excellent document. However, there was one very unfortunate omission; the public were not asked if they wanted the area to be given permanent protection under the Reserves Act 1977, instead of its management as a “Pastoral Park”, which has no legal basis other than as Crown land.

In the past, New Zealand’s mountains and forests have been reserved for national parks and reserves, but little thought has been given to protecting landscapes representative of what the

A red tussock wetland and south Mavora Lake. Many red tussocks have been grazed to extinction by cattle, yet the Pastoral Park management plan proposes continued cattle grazing in this valley. Mavora should be a scenic reserve.

Photo: Barney Brewster

country used to be like — for example, wetlands, tussock, scrub, sand dunes and coastal areas.

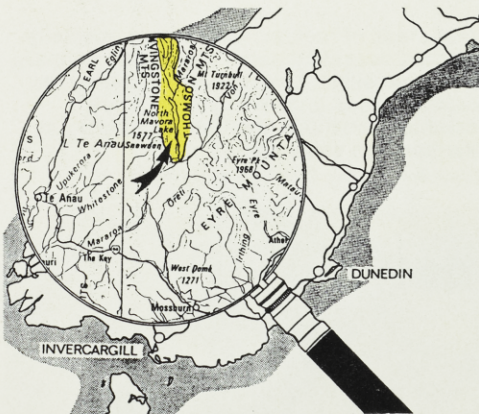
The 1977 Reserves Act says areas representative of New Zealand’s original character should also be reserved. The Mavora Lakes fit the bill precisely.

The area is large — 35,000 hectares — natural in character and virtually unmodified. Given scenic reserve status, the area would then be an ideal candidate for elevation to a National Reserve.

Analysing public submissions on Mavora will be difficult for the decision makers. Although the draft management plan did not ask for public comment on whether the area should be reserved or not, this is clearly an option to be considered, and most submissions have so far favoured such a move. There was also widespread opposition to continued cattle grazing within Mavora, because of damage to vegetation and water quality.

Mavora is a large slice of public land with unique qualities which demand very sensitive management. We have not inherited this land, we have only borrowed it from our children.

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Adapted from Lands & Survey management plan.