



Local people have formed FORKS — Friends of the River at Kakahi — and seek a conservation order for the Whakapapa River which flows through Tongariro forest.

Photo: G McSweeney



public meeting in Owahango township on 17 April 1984. It describes itself as "probably more representative of a local community than any other group of its type in New Zealand today". A quick check of its members confirms this — a Taumarunui County and Taumarunui Borough councillor, community councillors from the townships of National Park and Owahango, a representative of the local Outdoor Pursuits Centre, tourism, deerstalking and tramping club representatives and members of the Forest and Bird King Country branch.

The chairman of the committee, Alan Bradbury, a local farmer and Federated Farmers office holder, sees this broad base as one of its major strengths.

The committee is promoting the idea that a Forest Park could have a number of uses. Forest production would not dominate, as the Forest Service appears to wish; more emphasis would be placed on tourism, education and conservation of native forest.

For a brief time in October last year the issue hit the headlines when the Minister of Forests, Koro Wetere, approved a two-year planting programme which involved the clearance of 600 hectares of Tongariro State Forest near the Outdoor Pursuits Centre. The promotion committee was outraged. They had previously received assurances from the Forest Service and

*"The committee's demands might be seen as too radical by Forest Service bureaucrats."*

from politicians on both sides of the House that no development was to occur until after a management plan was produced for public comment.

Their protests were given wide coverage through both radio and newspapers and resulted in the calling of a snap debate in Parliament.

Later that day after the intervention of the Prime Minister, the clearance decision was reversed. Tongariro Forest had been granted a temporary reprieve while a management plan was produced which is due out later this year.

In some areas it is too late. Tony Harrison, an instructor at the OPC, says that over the years he has watched trees that had become friends tumble one by one. The low point was reached when a Forest Service bulldozer was working down from the Mangetepopo Gorge, an area regarded by the Service itself as having "high potential" for outdoor education. The bulldozer carried on right up to the river, leaving debris choking its formerly clear waterway.

To Tony and others at the OPC, such behaviour does not seem "sensible".

While the Forest Service admits a mistake was made, Tony believes that none of the forest close to the OPC should have been touched.

"It's a heartbreak to see trees which we knew personally. Now they are left on the ground. At least they could have used them," says Tony, who conducts classes in environmental interpretation with some of the 2500 young people who visit the OPC each year.

One of the arguments advanced by the Forest Service for clearing the 600 hectare Ketetahi block was that the area was little but gorse and blackberry — a patently untrue assertion. In fact it is ideal for OPC activities such as compass work, exploration and camping.

The park promotion committee also sees value in this type of land for what it is proposing. It believes that, given the opportunity, it could transform the southern King Country into a carefully planned tourist area. Skiing, fishing, hunting, tramping and rafting are already attracting people from throughout New Zealand and overseas to the region. The committee also sees possibilities in horse trekking, a "Raurimu railways special" showing visitors the famous railways engineering feat, and home hosting to enable visitors to meet locals.

Alan Bradbury says that the committee's demands might be seen as too radical