



A mere 5 percent of mighty Molesworth at the head of the Wairau River in the north-west corner of the property, includes this high lake-studded basin with Bowscale Tarn (foreground) and Lake Sedgemere (middle distance). It is encircled by the snowy peaks of Turk Ridge and cut by the Awatere faultline. The Strategy Plan proposes to open up to the public this paradise of wetlands, wildlife and tussock landforms. Photo: Quentin Christie, DSIR Soil Bureau

Molesworth — Commerce before Conservation?

For many of our ancestors, the attraction of New Zealand lay in the fact that its mountains, forests, tussocklands and rivers were not the private estates of the aristocracy or a powerful commercial gentry. That tradition is changing, however, as the new Landcorp makes a bid for freehold title of some of our most important high country natural areas, and the spectre of unfettered commercialism rears its head as prefigured in its Act.

The 182,000-ha Molesworth Station is one such nationally important area; earlier this century private enterprise ravaged it and by the 1930s when acquired by the Crown it was eroded and riddled with rabbits. For 50 years it has been closed off to the public while its landscapes have healed through the wise use of taxpayers' monies. Its future now hangs in the balance. Last month, almost at the same time as the much-welcomed Molesworth Strategy Plan was released, Landcorp inappropriately announced that it looked forward to controlling the station — yet the Strategy Plan admits that few of its natural, recreational and cultural values have been identified although preliminary work shows these to be outstanding.

The Department of Conservation is seeking stewardship control of Molesworth; it has already been given responsibility for farm parks on Great Barrier Island and at Te Paki and Puponga — why not Molesworth as well? Certainly Molesworth is much larger, but the farm park concept is equally valid here.

The Government is poised to decide Molesworth's future. This will be done in secret and without any public involvement unless we protest. You can influence this decision. Write to the Prime Minister or your local MP. You are also invited to express your views on Molesworth's future management to Lands and Survey Department, PO Box 445, Blenheim, before November 30.

*Front cover:
Veils of silver mist settle over the forest in the Oparara valley, near Karamea. Maori mythology describes how Papa, mother earth, sheds mists of grief for her lost husband Rangi, the sky, since their son Tane pushed them apart to create a forest world. The mist over the Oparara valley shrouds a magnificent lush forest, loud with bird song, which conservationists have been fighting to protect from logging operations. A government decision on the future of the valley is expected this month. Photo Guy Salmon*