

The fate of WESTERN SOUTHLAND FORESTS

Kaka, yellowheads and parakeets will suffer if the Forestry Corporation takes control of Southland's forests reports Gerry McSweeney, Society Conservation Director

Logging of the state-owned beech forests of Western Southland is both unecological and environmentally disastrous and should cease once legal commitments are met. That clear message from the Department of Conservation (DoC) was put to the Forestry Corporation during the debate over who should control Western Southland's Dean, Rowallan and Longwood State Forests.

DoC's campaign to protect these forests centres around a strong plea from the Wildlife Service — now part of DoC — which wants "all the remaining virgin forest (including old cutover with a regenerated canopy) excluded from timber production areas" and allocated to the Department of Conservation. These low altitude beech and rimu forests contain nationally important populations of yellowhead, kaka and yellow-crowned parakeet — birds declining and now regarded as threatened. To survive, they need large areas of the most diverse and rich lowland forest types which are the areas most keenly sought by loggers.

Bird surveys in Rowallan by Dr Eric Spurr of the Forest Research Institute have shown that yellowheads disappear completely from logged beech forest and do not return to regenerated forest even 25 years after logging. Like kaka and parakeet, yellowheads confine themselves to mature forests with dead trees. They have recently disappeared from the northern South Island and their last stronghold is lowland forests from near Haast down to Western Southland.

Rowallan forest is being clearfelled in a "beech management" operation to supply

logs to mills in nearby Tuatapere and a large volume of chipwood to the Awarua chipmill near Invercargill. Contracts expire on 31 July 1988. Were all the forests managed on a sustained yield basis, only about 15 jobs would be involved in managing and processing. In fact there need be little social impact if logging stops, because a massive volume of pine is coming on stream in this region. Already one Tuatapere mill has chosen to substitute exotic pine to replace part of its beech entitlement.

Current logging in Rowallan costs the Forest Service about \$¼ million annually according to a 1986 Joint Campaign on Native Forests study. Hoping for better economic results to justify their land grab, the Forestry Corporation conducted another economic analysis. Their report is still secret but their staff admit it showed the logging to be "economically unattractive". Corporation district manager for Southland, Denny Guild, admitted in a recent interview that "the operation had not made a profit for the Forest Service", and that under a more efficient corporation it "would never be a money spinner." (*Southland Times* 20/3/87). Nevertheless, Forestry Corporation are still pushing for title to Dean Rowallan and Longwood.

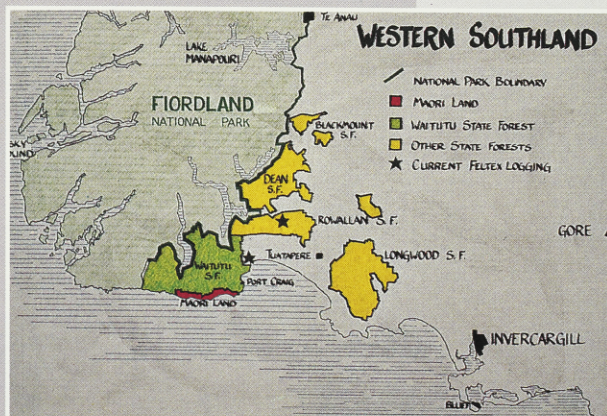
DoC will need all the help we can give it to save these forests. Dean and Rowallan State Forests adjoin mountainous Fiordland National Park and the Waitutu State Forest. Their lowland forests and special wildlife all deserve protection as part of the South-West New Zealand World Heritage Area. 🦜



Virgin forest, Rowallan State Forest. Characteristically these forests have short fat rimu scattered through extensive silver beech on rolling marine terraces. Photo: Gerry McSweeney

WORLD HERITAGE UNDER THREAT

On Monday 16 March the Government deferred any final decision on future allocation of the Western Southland forests until 31 March 1988. Meanwhile, the forests will remain in Crown ownership although ominously they will be managed by the Forestry Corporation who have been charged with meeting log supply commitments to mills. The remaining forests must be permanently protected in DoC. Only with your support and pressure on the Government over the next 12 months can we make sure this happens.



Western Southland State Forests. Waitutu State Forest is being considered by Government for addition to Fiordland National Park. Dean, Rowallan and Longwood forests all deserve permanent protection. Courtesy of Native Forests Action Council.