

# WOODCHIPPING : A SCOURGE ON

In recent years significant progress has been made in New Zealand forest conservation. Yet, the whine of the chainsaw and the menacing growl of heavily laden logging trucks are still common sounds in our rainforests. With awesome efficiency, the woodchip industry is rapidly eliminating large tracts of South Island beech forest and Central North Island tawa forest.

New Zealand is a willing party in an international trade in rainforest destruction. We are contributing to the greatest ecological disaster since the last Ice Age. World-wide, rainforest destruction poses a threat to civilisation ranking alongside nuclear war and destruction of the ozone layer. It is also a major contributory cause to global warming. This will result in environmental disruption that may make a considerable portion of our planet uninhabitable to all but the simplest of life forms.

Rainforests are one of the world's most complex ecosystems. They support an incredible array of life forms. The impact on the world's biota from their destruction is almost beyond comprehension. Thirty hectares of rainforest are destroyed every minute and as a consequence several species of plants and animals become extinct each day. This rate of species extinction has not occurred since the mass extinctions that marked the end of the Dinosaur's reign on earth.

***The companies couldn't give a hoot for sustained yield management and logged areas are not replanted to regenerate the forest.***

## Rainforests Under Siege

Rainforest destruction is most extensive in the tropical rainforests of indebted, third world countries. Woodchipping and log exporting are truly international scourges. However, the temperate rainforests of relatively affluent countries such as Australia and New Zealand are also under siege. In both rich and poor countries, logging companies annihilate whole forests as they strive to feed the insatiable appetites of the Japanese and Korean pulp and paper industry.

Throughout the world, conservationists and public environmental agencies have raged impotently against the industry. Governments have generally avoided their environmental responsibilities and have allowed the development of a one-way traffic from the world's rainforests to the pulpmills of the East. International agreements exist to stop the trade in endangered species; but the international woodchip industry, which endangers more species than any other activity, operates with impunity.

The horrendous consequences of woodchipping have been well documented. The Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society believes that bold initiatives now need to be



*The lovely Tahakopa Valley has been a significant source of wood for the chipmill. Since this photo was taken in 1977 most of the distant hills have been cleared. Photo: Fergus Sutherland.*

taken to end this international scourge. We will be asking the Government to take a stand, just like it did in declaring New Zealand nuclear-free, and ban the export of indigenous woodchips and unprocessed indigenous timbers. This could be achieved through a simple amendment to the Customs Act. Forest and Bird and the Maruia Society have embarked on a nationwide campaign to achieve this ban. Unless the Government acts quickly, the cancer of woodchipping will continue to spread through New Zealand's remaining unprotected native forests.

## Taxpayer Subsidies

Woodchipping is the major threat to New Zealand's rainforests. The industry did not arrive here until the late 1960s and since then it has been plagued with financial difficulties. It only managed to gain a foothold here through generous direct and indirect taxpayer subsidies, including cheap supplies of State Forest logs.

Indigenous woodchip exports have increased dramatically in recent times. Export tonnages have risen sharply since 1984. Most of the increase comes from the clear-felling of native forest on private land.

Chipmills using indigenous wood operate at Richmond near Nelson, Awarua near Invercargill, and at Kinleith in the Central North Island. The Nelson mill is the biggest and has mainly drawn on beech forest from private land near Nelson. From time to time it has been kept going with cheap supplies of beech timber from West Coast State forests. It also scavenges far afield for private forests from Marlborough, Murchison and from the Maruia, Inangahua and Grey Valleys of the West Coast.

The Southland mill has been a blot on the Southland landscape since 1981. It takes kamahi, rata and beech from forests in the Catlins, Hokonui and throughout Western Southland.

These two mills operate in conjunction with large Japanese corporations that take all the chips. Elders-NZ Forest Products operate the third mill as part of their Kinleith complex. It consumes tawa logs from the clearfelling of native forests on the Mamaku



*Minister of Customs Margaret Shields: a giant step for conservation if she amends the Customs Act to ban woodchip exports.*

Plateau and from forest remnants on farmland in the Bay of Plenty and King Country. The chip is processed on-site and used in producing certain types of paper. Forest and Bird is currently holding talks with the company to explore ways of accelerating the changeover from tawa to plantation-grown eucalypts as a hardwood pulp source.

Both the South Island woodchip export mills suffered setbacks recently. The Labour Government's decision to protect a network of reserves and wildlife corridors in North Westland and their decision earlier this year to protect the virgin forests of Western Southland's Dean and Rowallan forests have reduced the potential woodchip resources. Sustained-yield requirements for the remaining State forest indigenous production forests in both areas have further