



Top: The chainsaw treatment for *Pinus contorta*, Flock Hill Station, Canterbury. Note in the background the seed source of the pines, Forest Service research plots in Craigieburn Conservation Park. High country farmers are as unhappy as conservationists about the spread of such pines. Photo: Mike Harding

Middle: *Pinus contorta* grows prolifically on the slopes of Mt Ruapehu. If these seedlings are not removed, the pines will soon crowd all the other plants out. Photo: Gerard Hutching Bottom: Volunteer removing tall *Pinus contorta* from Castle Hill Station, Canterbury, well known for its limestone rock-studded landscape. Photo: Mike Harding



While agencies and individuals debate the spread of trees and who should be held responsible, we live with a legacy of past New Zealand Forest Service zeal which established exotic species trial plots throughout the country. Many of these plots are the seed sources of current wilding spread and, now that the Forest Service no longer exists, no one is willing to take responsibility for cleaning up the mess. And, to accentuate the problem, the ideology of the Forest Service has re-emerged within the new Ministry of Forestry where some staff are actively promoting afforestation of high country lands.

### Tussock Grasslands Threat

Foresters continued advocacy for exotic tree planting, particularly in the South Island high country, poses a continued threat to the open tussock grasslands that form such a distinctive part of this landscape.

Concern over wilding spread has been expressed by botanists and conservation agencies such as the Nature Conservation Council for many years. Control efforts by volunteer groups such as Forest and Bird continue but in most cases have only a local effect on what is an extensive problem. While the arguments rage over who is responsible, the trees continue to grow and produce seed, the seedlings grow into seedling trees themselves, and the spread slowly advances across scenic landscapes, overwhelming vulnerable native plant communities and important agricultural land.

It is important that the concern over wilding spread is not seen as an anti-tree campaign. The planting of trees is obviously a worthy activity especially while the removal of forest cover continues throughout the world and atmospheric carbon dioxide levels increase. The debate is not about the planting of trees but rather about the type of trees, the appropriateness of the site, and the subsequent management of the plantings. Managed plantations are a resource. Unwanted and uncontrolled trees are weeds.

Identifying a problem is one thing; finding a solution is another again. While there have been some successes in controlling wilding pines, most notably Tongariro National Park, the area involved was relatively small and the commitment by park staff and volunteers was high. However, an entirely different approach is required in areas not perceived as important, or difficult of access. Former Forest and Bird executive member David Appleton, recently remarked on the problem in the Kaweka Conservation Park: "Our members attempted to totally clear *contorta* from several hectares of ridges but were leaving many small ones behind as they moved up. On bare tops they were creating mini avalanches as small trees were pulled from the

