



All of the mountain in the mid-ground, from Lake Ohau to the snow-covered top of Ben Ohau, is proposed as a reserve.

MIKE HARDING

when Ruataniwha station was transferred to the old Electricity Division to enable construction of the upper Waitaki hydro electricity scheme. With the creation of the State Owned Enterprises in 1987 the whole of the run passed to Electricorp with the agreement that all areas not directly required for electricity generation would later be reallocated to the Department of Conservation or Landcorp, depending upon their predominant values.

Forest and Bird believes that the property should now be assessed under the agreed criteria for the allocation of surplus Crown lands. It is clear that much of the area has outstanding conservation values and great recreational potential. A four-wheel-drive track climbs right to the summit of the range providing access and the opportunity to establish a first class tourist safari with magnificent views of the Mackenzie Basin and Southern Alps. There are presently few protected areas in the Ben Ohau Ecological District so protection of any forest remnants, shrublands and intact tussock grasslands assumes a greater importance. Ruataniwha represents an opportunity to protect a wide range of the original vegetation types of the area in one contiguous reserve. Areas of highly modified grassland and the productive pasture on the Twizel flats could pass to Landcorp for farming and the remaining areas, containing high natural values – about 1000 hectares or less than a third of the station

– should be vested with the Department of Conservation as Ruataniwha Reserve.

There is already broad agreement about the protection of key areas. The proposed totara reserve has been fenced and destocked for several years and there is no grazing potential in the beech forest remnant in Gretas Stream. Reservation of the grasslands high on the range would provide an opportunity to remedy the critical lack of protection for the native tall tussock communities that once covered large parts of the South Island high country. As tussock grasslands continue to be eliminated by agricultural development, effective reserves are desperately needed to protect the remnants and to monitor the effects of pastoralism. A Ruataniwha Reserve would be of national significance and would provide sustainable recreation and tourism opportunities for Twizel. These important relics of the original vegetation and the spectacular scenic backdrop to Lake Ohau deserve protection now.

#### References

- Espie P.R. et al. 1984. Mackenzie Ecological Region, *Report for the Protected Natural Areas Programme*. Department of Lands and Survey.
- Molloy B.P.J., Hodder R.A.C. and Cowie D. 1976. *Joint report: Ruataniwha Reserve – Mackenzie Basin*. Department of Lands and Survey, N.Z. Forest Service, DSIR Botany Division.

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## Treasury changes the rules

**E**LECTRICORP inherited Ruataniwha Station in 1988 along with the core assets of its business – the power stations.

The former Electricity Division's lands should have gone through an allocation process, similar to those that were handed over to Landcorp and Forestcorp. However, Treasury officials refused to allow officials from the Department of Conservation and the Ministry for the Environment, and Forest and Bird staff to assess the conservation values of these lands until the weekend before they were handed over.

Thousands of hectares of river beds, lake shores, native forest and tussockland were to be given to Electricorp (they only paid for the generating capacity and plant – the land was free). To save face government ministers agreed that Electricorp's non-core assets would be handed back to the Crown for allocation through the State Owned Enterprises land allocation process.

But as soon as the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment and the Ministry for the Environment stopped playing an active role in SOE land allocation, Treasury changed the rules. Now they are claiming that if the Department of Conservation wants ex-Electricorp land, they have to buy it from the Crown! Does this mean that DoC may have to stop recovery work on the endangered black stilt, nearby, to find money to save one of the best natural areas left in the Mackenzie Basin? ♦

Mark Bellingham

Write to:

Maurice McTigue,  
Minister of State Owned  
Enterprises,  
Parliament Buildings,  
Wellington

and

Rob Storey,  
Minister for the Environment,  
Parliament Buildings,  
Wellington.

Ask them to ensure that the forest and tussock communities of Ruataniwha will be allocated to the Department of Conservation as a reserve, at no cost to the department.