

in wet areas leads to soil pugging. Many backcountry walkers are familiar with these slippery cattle tracks several metres wide, that alternate between muddy wallows and mounds of exposed tree roots.

This trampling has an even more devastating effect on wetlands, bogs and streams. Cattle require large quantities of water and enjoy wading and standing in the water they drink. Treading of the stream bed can increase suspended sediments and trampling breaks down the internal water balance of the wetland drainage system. In high-altitude wetlands cattle cause severe damage to sensitive wetland plants, expose the fragile peat soils and can alter the water holding capacity or water yield of the wetland. Turf margins of ponds and tarns can also be severely damaged by cattle trampling. The specialised turf plants may be able to withstand grazing and trampling from soft-footed animals such as waterfowl, but cannot tolerate the concentrated impact of clumsy, hooved mammals.

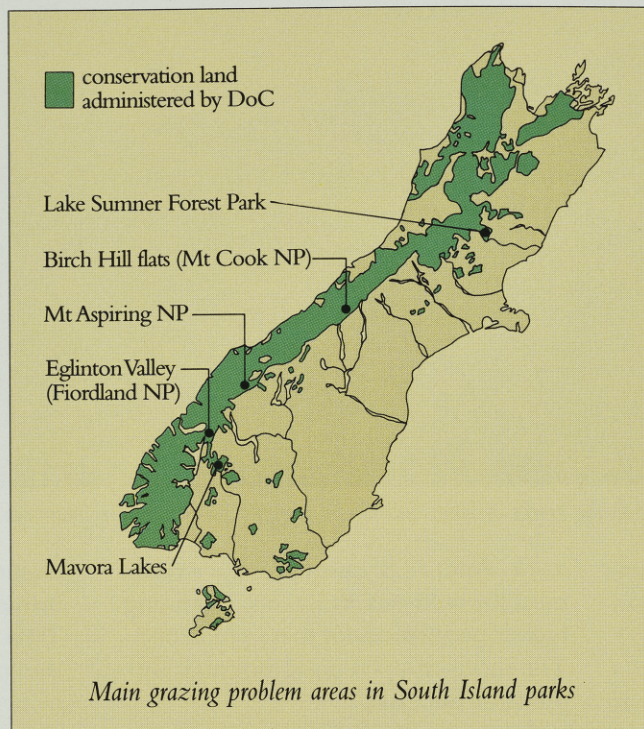
Cattle also affect water quality by excreting directly into waterways. This

leads to nutrient enrichment of the stream or bog and increases the risk of spreading disease-causing organisms. Many waterways within protected areas

are important for wildlife, recreation, and downstream urban and industrial uses. Pollution of these waterways is both unnecessary and unacceptable.

Because introduced grasses dominate many river-terrace plant communities, graziers advocate stock access to control tall grass growth and reduce fire risk. Rapid grass growth occurs in spring and early summer and fire risk reaches its height in late summer and autumn. However, the demand for grazing is usually during the winter. Moreover, the intensity of grazing required to effectively reduce the fire hazard would be ruinous to the grassland vegetation and would devastate adjoining forest margins and wetlands.

The valley floor grasslands of national and forest parks often form long enclaves, extending for many kilometres into surrounding forest. There is increasing concern about the impact of grazing animals on the forest-grassland margin. This biologically rich transition zone suffers most from domestic stock. Fencing is often impractical and usually



have a delicate balance between water quantity and flow and very low nutrient levels. Wetlands in the headwater catchments help maintain water quality in

DoC's grazing policy

R ELEASED FOR comment late last year, this draft policy covers land administered under the Conservation Act 1987 and the Reserves Act 1977. It does not include national parks. The policy statement claims that conservation lands are a significant resource to the farming community, despite the fact that there are only 114,000 hectares of conservation land used for grazing compared with 17.7 million hectares of agricultural land.

The policy proposes that grazing be by licence with a 5-year term and no right of renewal, unless a conservation management strategy or plan is in place which allows for longer licence terms. It also acknowledges that it is either illegal or inappropriate to graze nature or scientific reserves (Reserves Act) and ecological, wilderness or sanctuary areas (Conservation Act). Commercial grazing of goats and deer, or the grazing of land where stock can freely enter adjoining protected areas, will not be permitted.

However, the draft policy does

not go far enough in addressing the major impacts of domestic stock on protected natural areas. It repeats the time-honoured argument that low-grazed vegetation reduces fire risk and assists public access.

Except for stewardship areas where grazing could be permitted in special circumstances, provided there are no significant environmental impacts, grazing should generally only be allowed where there is a direct benefit for conservation. A good example may be the light grazing of native tussock grasslands to prevent the invasion of exotic woody shrubs. In other areas grazing should be phased out. This can often be accomplished without confrontation by letting licences lapse when the current lessee withdraws, or by purchasing a lessee's interest.

It must be remembered that grazing is a privilege on the DoC estate which can be withdrawn where there are unacceptable impacts. It is worth noting that traditional river flat grazing in southern South Westland was recognised by the Government

in the 1989 decision to include the area in the South-West World Heritage area. A process of reviewing the leases and deleting the most sensitive ecological sites is currently underway.

Public access to conservation lands is also threatened under the policy as it proposes that hunters must gain permission from graziers to enter public land covered by a grazing licence. These are often river flats and provide the most practical access to the backcountry. Licence-holders' rights to prevent hunting access have already effectively closed whole valleys to recreational hunting in the South Island. Farmers wishing to graze public land must accept the restraints imposed by free public access.

A copy of Forest and Bird's submission on the grazing policy is available from PO Box 631, Wellington. Submissions closed with the Department of Conservation on 31 March, but members with outstanding concerns should write to DoC's Resource Use Manager at PO Box 10-420, Wellington.