

the farming community of Southland.

In Otago the review of the Mt Aspiring National Park management plan has prompted further discussion of grazing in the park's backcountry valleys. Farmers claim that they secured agreements that grazing would continue when the park was established. However, no one has been able to produce any such written agreements or binding undertakings. Cattle continue to graze in the park despite severe local damage to forest and stream margins and strong opposition from conservation and recreation groups. Despite the obvious impacts and the concerns of park users, expressed through submissions to the management plan review, DoC staff continue to reassure farmers that their right to graze the park will continue.

In Mt Cook National Park the grazing of the Birch Hill flats by sheep is being promoted in response to the problem of stock trespassing into the park from the adjoining Tasman riverbed. Potential impacts of stock have been countered by arguments about the difficulty of fencing the park boundary. Little thought has been given to the cause of the problem – stock straying from Glentanner Station onto the Tasman riverbed – or to monitoring of potential impacts of stock on the grasslands and shrublands of the national park. Ironically, Glentanner has probably benefited more than any other high country farm from the neighbouring national park as the station has successfully diversified into tourism enterprises.

National parks were set aside to protect vulnerable indigenous ecosystems from the depredations of introduced animals and to allow, where appropriate, public use. The Reserves Act 1977 has the primary purpose of protecting representative examples of the indigenous flora and fauna of New Zealand, particularly from the effects of introduced animals. As a country we have a proud record of setting aside important natural areas, but



Cattle browsing has reduced this metre-high broad-leaved snow tussock, in the proposed Torlesse conservation park, to a stump. Repeated browsing will kill the plant.

MIKE HARDING

protection of those areas from introduced grazing animals is far from satisfactory. And, despite the fact that the vast majority of the countryside has been dedicated to pastoral production, there is continued pressure to compromise protected land for grazing.

The integrity of the country's national parks and reserves is at stake. While the uniqueness of New Zealand's natural environment and the curiosities it contains are extolled by tourist brochures, the agents of habitat destruction, introduced animals, are tolerated in the country's main nature tourism destinations.

If sheep and cattle and rural landscapes are what tourists come to see there are over 17 million hectares of farmland to satisfy that demand. If it is the unique and

Mavora Lakes



ROGER SUTTON

North Mavora Lake looking towards the upper Mararoa valley. Forested margins along the western side of the lake are being slowly killed by cattle. Mature trees are dying and there is no regeneration.

THE SOUTHLAND Conservation Board is about to take on the bull by recommending that Landcorp's cattle be removed from the flowing red tussock grasslands of Mavora Lakes Park.

The Mavora cattle were once described by the now-defunct Land Settlement Board, as a "scenic dimension in an otherwise stark mountain landscape". Now there is a new body in charge and the board will soon announce the long overdue review of the management plan and call for public submissions.

At stake is the future health of the red tussock grasslands, cushion bogs, and beech forests of the park. Recent reports by botanists, Dr Bill Lee from DSIR, and Professor Alan Mark from Otago University, point to the damage caused by cattle.

On the other side of the fence Federated Farmers claim that the results of five years of monitoring are

inconclusive, and that more damage will be done by removing the cattle because of increased fire risks and rank grass smothering the remaining native herbs.

These claims were refuted by Professor Mark who said that once cattle are gone the palatable native herbs will be given a chance to establish.

There are now very few opportunities left in New Zealand to protect lakes, red tussock grasslands and wetlands. These once dominated much of Southland's landscape. Mavora Lakes with its dramatic combination of high mountains, blue lakes, red tussocks, and olive green beech forests is of immense importance for nature conservation and outdoor recreation and deserves the highest protection. It is imperative that the cattle are removed as soon as possible.

Sue Maturin

distinctive indigenous plants, animals and landscapes of this unusual land that excite visitors then let us be sure we protect them fully from the effects of domestic stock. The challenge now lies with the conservation boards and DoC to phase out all grazing of domestic stock in national parks and to ensure that the new grazing policy for other public conservation lands does not compromise their ecological and recreational values. ♦



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