

committee which meets at least quarterly. The Forest Heritage Fund Committee is chaired by Canterbury landscape architect and Conservation Authority member, Di Lucas. Other members include Masterton farm forester, Jim Pottinger, beech ecologist and forester, Dr John Wardle of Oxford, and nature tourism operator and former Forest and Bird conservation director Dr Gerry McSweeney.

The committee advises Conservation Minister Denis Marshall on whether funding should be allocated to assist with survey, fencing, legal and other expenses associated with putting covenants on forested land so that landowners are not burdened with the costs of protection, or to help DoC or another agency purchase the land. Protection can also be achieved through voluntary leases, management agreements, accords and land exchanges.

The fund's definition of "indigenous forests" includes vegetation of any canopy height where some forest tree species are present, and significant successional vegetation on land previously burnt or logged which has a relatively continuous canopy and where regeneration is occurring.

Forest associations and areas linking forest and aquatic or coastal systems are recognised by the fund. At Pateke, near Awana Bay on Great Barrier Island a covenant has helped to protect 143 hectares of land which includes a freshwater wetland associated with nearby broadleaf forest and stands of kauri rickers. The wetland is home to an estimated 13 per cent of the world's wild population of endangered brown teal.

FOREST AND BIRD'S conservation director, Kevin Smith, says one of the fund's major achievements is that "it has not been blackmailed into paying extortionate prices for land. Often the worst people to negotiate land purchases are people like Forest and Bird members because we make decisions with our hearts. We are not real estate agents trying to get the best bargain."

The committee's hard nosed pragmatism has seen several Forest and Bird branches disappointed when the fund has declined applications to buy particular forested areas because the asking price has been too high. Committee members are determined not to distort rural land values by paying inflated prices. "Every block we purchase influences the price of every other block because land valuation is so closely tied to previous sales," says Gerry McSweeney.

Nor, it appears, will committee members succumb to landowners revving

chainsaws and threatening to log forest unless the fund coughs up the asking price. The committee recently walked away from negotiations over the purchase of a forest block in the Catlins because the sale price was unreasonable. It was later logged.

"We are here to protect as much high-quality forest as we can for the minimum dollars. We are not here as a social welfare department for farmers or foresters who have generally done pretty well out of government in New Zealand," says Gerry McSweeney. "Decisions are made on the ecological significance of an area, not just the immediacy of the threat to it."

The committee uses a range of ecological and commercial criteria to assess each application and weigh up the national and regional importance of the forested land against the costs involved in its protection. The forest's ecological significance (its rarity, representativeness, diversity, and distinctiveness) is a major factor.

"We don't want the lone kahikatea in the cow paddock, but we are interested

in areas of remnant forest which are viable, have a diverse range of species and are distinctive ecologically," Di Lucas says.

Top priority goes to applications where forest is being gifted as a reserve or protected through a covenant with no financial benefit to the owner. Covenants are registered against the title but ownership remains with the landholder. A management regime for the protected land is agreed on and set out in the covenant document. This usually involves a ban on any logging, grazing, earthworks, cultivation, top-dressing and chemical spraying. Noxious plants and pests such as rabbits must be controlled.

Where outright purchase is the only option the fund is more likely to approve a grant towards the purchase price when local authorities or community organisations such as conservation groups are also contributing. The support can also be in the form of practical help such as a commitment to maintain access tracks or revegetation work if this is necessary.

Nga Whenua Rahui

THE KAUPAPA or vision of Nga Whenua Rahui is wider than that of the Forest Heritage Fund. Maori cultural values such as the spiritual or symbolic significance of an area, the tribal landmarks it contains, or its use as a source of cultural materials or medicinal plants weigh equally with ecological criteria when its committee considers applications for funding to help with protection costs.

The \$2.1 million annual budget of Nga Whenua Rahui has been less than half that of the Forest Heritage Fund although a major proportion of privately owned forest, including many of the larger, more ecologically valuable areas, are on Maori land. In its first 18 months Nga Whenua Rahui had commitments to protect some 10,000 hectares of forest with proposals to protect another 10,000 hectares in the pipeline. One of the more significant has been the agreement with the Pohueroro Trust and Te Whanau A Apanui to covenant 5,615 hectares of tawa, rimu, hardwood and tanekaha forest near Te Kaha on the East Coast.

Purchase is not an option for Nga Whenua Rahui because it undermines tino rangatiratanga (sovereignty). Reserves under the Maori Affairs Act 1953 are used instead, or,

more commonly, covenants that include a review of conditions and objectives after 25 years.

"Some people have criticised the review provision but it's all a question of trust and of giving future generations a part in decision making. It allows iwi to exercise rangatiratanga," says executive officer Mike Mohi of Ngati Kahungunu. "After all, the forest has been protected by its Maori owners up till now and the Crown is often only committing itself to putting up a fence which will last 30 years."

Committee chairperson, Tumu Te Heuheu of Tuwharetoa says he is proud of and encouraged by, the flow of applications to Nga Whenua Rahui. "There has been criticism from some quarters that Maoridom is being denied use of their resources. But the number of applications shows that people are interested in the long-term protection of their taonga, providing their identity and beliefs are kept intact." The observance of tikanga Maori in the committee's meetings and procedures and the recognition that negotiating with several hundred owners takes time, is helping Nga Whenua Rahui to overcome the legacy of distrust among some iwi from previous dealings with the Crown over land.