



ROB BROWN

New Zealand enters the twenty-first century with a logging scheme more suited to the nineteenth.

Centuries-old native trees are being felled, on the West Coast of the South Island, by a Government-owned company which pays only a peppercorn royalty for the timber it logs.

This portfolio of pictures, by conservationists active on the West Coast, shows some of what is being lost as Timberlands moves in, logging rimu and beech.

Along with the community of independent research scientists, and Government advisory bodies, Forest and Bird has opposed the felling of beech and rimu trees in this region on economic and scientific grounds.

The science of the 'sustainable beech management' scheme has been convincingly challenged by the Academy of the Royal Society of New Zealand, a body made up of the nation's most eminent scientists; and by Landcare Research, the Government's own scientific research company.

In business terms, the profitability of Timberlands West Coast is also questionable. The company benefits from extraordinarily low royalties paid per tree; also the Government's reluctance to make it pay a dividend. As a State-owned corporation, or

At risk from the Timberlands beech plan are the red and silver beech forests on the east bank of the Maruia valley, near Springs Junction. More than 90 percent of the 13,000 hectares of Maruia are pristine, old-growth forest which the Department of Conservation has described as having 'outstanding wildlife habitat values'. These forests are home to several species threatened with extinction, such as kaka, blue duck, parakeets, falcon and several native fish species. Overall, the Department of Conservation has identified that 92 percent of the 132,000 hectares of native forest which Timberlands controls has 'high' or 'medium' conservation values deserving protection.

as a prospect for sale, Timberlands is an anomaly in free-market terms.

The oddity of Timberlands West Coast arises in part from the West Coast Forest Accord, signed in 1986, which provided for a transition from native forest logging to an industry based largely on plantation forests. Forest and Bird was among the interested parties which signed the agreement. At that time, approximately half the exploitable lowland forest from the Buller to Okarito in South Westland was protected as conservation lands. The other lowland native forests were subsequently allocated to Timberlands.

Since the Accord was signed over a million cubic metres of native logs have been felled by Timberlands as part of its 'transition' to felling exotic plantations. Adequate plantation pines are available but, because of the high value of rimu, Timberlands has postponed the changeover to pine in the Buller. Elsewhere, with just a few exceptions, the

For every tree logged and taken to the sawmill, another two trees are felled and left to rot on the forest floor. This process is part of an 'improvement felling' regime to cull 'defective stems' to improve future timber prospects. Claims by Timberlands that the beech scheme involves logging 'an average of one tree per hectare per year' is seen by Forest and Bird as 'a cynical public relations slogan'. In the Maruia forests, 51 trees are felled per hectare of which 35 are 'felled to waste' and left to rot.



EUGENIE SAGE