

Managing Our Native Lands

The story of saving the West Coast beech forests is well known. A conservation battle has been fought for as long as it takes a pine tree to mature and it has been won — by the conservationists. Well done everyone. Take a bow and have a celebration. You deserve it. Forest and Bird can take more than modest pride in its achievement. Victories of this magnitude don't happen very often; about once a decade: saving Manapouri, Pureora, South West New Zealand World Heritage....

When the history of the beech conflict is written, no doubt it will record moments of high drama, humour, skulduggery and a seminal event in e-mail history when someone e-nailed himself. Future historians will surely marvel at the sheer effrontery of the incredible claim by Timberlands West Coast that only logging followed by pest control could sustain the forest. It is a claim reminiscent of the American policy of 'saving' Vietnam villages by destroying them. Not only did Timberlands' preposterous policy find favour in some quarters, but people were fooled by the pretence that this strange form of pest control somehow did not come from the public purse.

Historians will note that the campaign's denouncement captured the public imagination and set a benchmark for an incoming Government's environmental credentials.

In the natural way of things, debate will rage on. Let's hope it doesn't linger. Yes, more ancient rimus will be felled in the final chapter, and Forest and Bird doesn't relish that one bit. But it is time to move on. It's time to rise above the detail of the mopping up operations and focus on the big picture — to reflect on more than 100,000 hectares that will be protected in perpetuity. These include one of the world's truly great temperate rainforests, North Okarito, which conservationists first sought for national park status in 1976. The cut-over forests can now become areas for restoring indigenous biodiversity; the forests left to the rain and where kereru can now reassert themselves.

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What's needed now? It is time to extend the hand of friendship to the people of the West Coast. In the not too distant future they will realise that rain forests have far more value as natural monuments and will cherish the forests in much the same way as Forest and Bird does. The West Coast now has a world-class conservation estate and a handsome financial package. It is time to

develop a plan that allows others to enjoy the forests and be inspired by nature in its finest form ... 'au naturel'.

Without delving into the particulars, it is clear that the West Coast forests need an improved status of land classification. Surveying and gazettal procedures could take years if not tackled resolutely. There is no need to spend a whole pile of money and embark on a 'criteria hunt'. The Government simply needs to adopt a policy similar to that which drove the 1986 carve up of Crown land into protective and development categories. In a nutshell; all land with predominantly native vegetation should go to the Department of Conservation. The pine trees should go to local people. The residual land should go to a land bank, and Timberlands ... should go.

DoC needs to lift its game and deliver to its Westland Conservancy a funding package commensurate with the area's values. That \$187 million is to be allocated to conservation, environment, and biosecurity, over the next five years, is pleasing. It represents a significant real increase in expenditure in these areas and I wholeheartedly congratulate the Labour/Alliance Government for its commitment to its election promises and to New Zealand's natural heritage.

Clearly, the new century has got off to a promising start, and Forest and Bird can be pleased with the progress of these long-running campaigns. (Our DoC funding campaign officially began in 1992.) Without rubbing off the gloss, it is not desirable to look at the conservation world through glasses coloured darkly. Further green initiatives are required if we are to turn the tide on biodiversity. We wish to be assured that new conservation money will be spent on operations, not new offices, nor bureaucracy, nor 800-page 'standard operating procedures'.

There is a current trend that identifies and intensively manages representative samples of biological diversity. Good. That needs to be done and good information and techniques will surely derive from such projects. But if there is one key conservation management principle yet to be widely grasped — though widely understood by all those who daily grapple with the issues at the coal-face — it must surely be that all the land must be actively managed all the time, because the agents of decline are everywhere.

That is not an ideal; it is an imperative.
— KEITH CHAPPLE, *National President.*



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