

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

### *A National Forest System*

There can be few countries in the world in which so distinct a line is drawn not only between the various functions of forests, but also between forests on the basis of their method of establishment, or species composition. While the historical basis of the prevailing attitudes which make such distinctions as those between forests for recreation and other forests, and forests composed of exotic species and those of native species can be readily explained, their perpetuation in modern times is surely anachronistic and a symptom of the immaturity of our national attitudes to land and its use (an ailment implicitly identified also by John Purey-Cust in his review of *Land Alone Endures* on page 237 of this issue.)

Foresters are heirs to a long and distinguished tradition of holistic land management, and were practising multiple use long before it became a catch-cry of other professions. It is therefore strange that the forestry profession should continue to promote by its actions and decisions what can be categorised as the "convenient pigeonhole" approach to management and administration of land.

While the Institute has itself made some progress toward the ideal of devising a single strategy for forestry (refer to "N.Z. Forest Policy" approved at the 1979 Annual General Meeting and published with the Constitution), foresters as individuals, the sector itself, and the institutions which comprise it continue to differentiate unnecessarily between exotic and indigenous forests, between the various classes of forest land, such as State forest and State forest park, open indigenous forest and amenity areas, and to erect such problems as zoning systems which require the identification of single predominant uses even where several uses may be compatible and equally valid. An outstanding achievement of the 1974-5 Forestry Development Conference was the formulation of one Indigenous Forest Policy for State forest land, and it is envisaged that the forthcoming 1981 Forestry Conference should formulate an equivalent policy of strategy for exotic forestry; but is this differentiation really necessary and what does it achieve?

### *Exotics vs Indigenous*

The continued use of the term "exotics" (which in some quarters has almost perjorative connotations) for the management of forests of introduced species (usually radiata pine) under

plantation conditions, does nothing to promote a more realistic view on the part of the New Zealand public of forests as an integrated land use capable of fulfilling needs other than materialistic. The indigenous forests and their very real values gain an unnatural attraction, and yet paradoxically it is the exotic forests which in many places provide the nearest resource of forest capable of meeting these needs of the community.

Botanists have long given less attention to the exotic element of New Zealand flora, even to the extent of excluding it from the official "Flora". In a thoughtful preface to Volume III of the *Flora of New Zealand*\* (reviewed in this volume of the *Journal*), A. J. Healy and Elizabeth Edgar discuss the peculiar attitude taken in New Zealand towards exotic plants ("Invaders are never popular. The aggressiveness, colonising ability, and the apparent capacity of an ever-increasing number of adventives to compete with, and even replace, some indigenous plants and communities made a strong impression on the early botanists."), quoting Raven and Engelhorn†:

One of the most fascinating and controversial themes that runs through the literature of New Zealand botany concerns the interplay between the native flora, essentially that of an oceanic island, with the alien flora . . . . In our opinion, there is no scientific justification for continuing to treat the alien flora of New Zealand as something apart from the native flora. There is no other country in the World in which all plants that reproduce themselves by natural means are not regarded as a part of the flora . . . . ,

and concluding that there can no longer be any justification for maintaining the fiction that exotics (adventives) are not an integral part of the flora. If the natural science of botany has given us this lead, is there now any reason why the applied science of forestry should hesitate to follow?

### *Categories of Forest*

For a number of valid reasons, State forest in particular has come to be classified under a range of headings, some of which have been quoted above. The common thread in the justification for each category has been the promotion of multiple-use management, and the removal or overcoming of existing legal impediments to this, usually involving the question of public use. However, there has been a revolution in attitude and policy toward

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\**Flora of New Zealand*, Vol. III, A. J. Healy & Elizabeth Edgar, Govt. Printer, Wellington, 1980.

†*N.Z. J Botany*, 9: 218-9 (1971).

the public use of forest land generally, and we must now ask ourselves whether the continuation of such "pigeonhole" categories is not counter-productive, tending to fossilise public attitudes toward the values and potential uses of particular pieces of land, not in accord with the actual value of the land, but according to the particular label it has been given — exotic, indigenous, State forest, forest park. The very process of labelling has inevitably created confusing anomalies and distinctions. We must now stand back, evaluate what we have, and attempt to devise a system which

- encourages and promotes a universal appreciation of and attitude toward forests for the particular qualities and potentials that each one possesses by its nature, and not by its label;
- permits and promotes public use of forests according to capacity to meet needs, rather than according to the forest's status as conferred or implied by an artificial title;
- promotes a better public understanding of the common functions of all forests, whether native or exotic; the emphasis may change according to dominant species, but the protection and amenity values can be very similar, although the popular conception of exotic forests would not admit this;
- enables a more rational attitude to the management and distribution of funds to forests according to need and capacity, rather than label;
- promotes also within the managers themselves a renewed single *esprit de corps* and enthusiasm which the current system is in danger of losing.

In other words, is it time for the abolition of all labels and the creation of a single system of national forests at least for the land currently administered as State forest? Should other Crown forest be part of this system? And should the 1981 Forestry Conference be devising a universally applicable forest policy?

#### *Forest and Mountain Land: Tenure and Use*

New Zealand has been extremely fortunate to have retained such a large proportion of its land within public ownership, although inevitably that which remains to the public sector is generally the land which has been least attractive to the freeholder, and which possesses the most constraints to management: bush and mountain are the dominant elements. Perhaps inevitably,

too, the public land has inherited a bewildering array of administrative agencies, classifications, and agencies having no administrative responsibility but an interest in and responsibility for some particular aspect of the use of such land.

The major mountain and forest land administering agencies of government are the N.Z. Forest Service and the Department of Lands and Survey. Broadly speaking, the Forest Service administers forested land set aside many years ago in recognition of its timber values, or, in an early recognition of protection values, as climatic reserves, much of which until relatively recently was still looked upon as a potential resource of additional land for farm development. The Forest Service writ extends in some cases over non-forested land on valley floors, or alpine grasslands and barrens. Lands and Survey, on its own behalf or for other bodies such as National Parks Authority, also administers extensive areas of mountain land forest, predominantly under an umbrella of Reserve designation, such as scenic reserve or national park, conferred to protect some amenity or conservation value. This department also has major responsibilities for a great deal of mountain land (some of which is forested), which has never been alienated or "taken up" for settlement, or which far-sighted lawmakers of a previous era determined should remain in the public domain, although held under long leases, in order that the public interest in the well-being of the land could be protected.

Despite the contradictions, paradoxes and overlaps in function and administration, the various agencies have served New Zealand well enough in the past. Over recent years, as public interest in and use of the mountain and forest land have increased, and as awareness on the part of scientists, managers and politicians of the important role those lands play in maintaining the physical and economic integrity and viability of the lowlands has increased, it has become more difficult to overlook these inherent inconsistencies.

Accordingly, we should welcome a recent statement by the Minister of Lands and Forests (7 October 1980), that he has directed those two departments to jointly assess the administration of Crown land under their control, expressing the hope that such an assessment would "lead to rationalisation of land holdings and the possible establishment of spheres of influence".

How far should such a rationalisation go? What are the principles on which it should be based? And if there is a case for unscrambling some of the knots in the tangled patterns of real estate created by past policies and inherited from previous eras,

is there also a case for rationalising the distribution of Crown land among administering agencies according to function, or land capability, rather than tradition? One logical division might recognise:

- (a) Mountain land capable or potentially capable of sustaining pastoral production under range management systems, whose retention in the public domain is warranted.
- (b) Land within national parks or other forms of reserve whose importance and values warranted their retention as a special category of land.
- (c) Other mountain land, forested or not, whose principal management function was protection of soil and water values, but which should be managed under a multiple-use philosophy which would recognise recreation, wildlife protection and the potential for productive uses such as honey, fur or wild animal recovery as valid uses of the land.

Foresters would regard their skills and training as particularly appropriate to the management of category (c).

What are the arguments against such an approach? They seem principally to reduce to the proposition that two or more are better than one; that the involvement of several agencies generates more enthusiasm, more effective management and more spending (although there is now abroad a widespread fear that the natural recreation resource in particular is inadequate to sustain such competition). If the argument against is not valid, however, then we are morally obliged to ask whether it is only administrative structures which stand in the way of a rationalisation by function. If this is so, then however laudable the objectives of the Minister's exercise may be, it can be but regarded as tinkering to little avail with a much more fundamental problem.

### *Financial Management in the Forest Service*

Following the expression of concern by the Controller and Auditor-General in his March 1978 report on the question of financial management in the N.Z. Forest Service, a subcommittee of the House of Representatives Committee on Public Expenditure, popularly known as the McLean Committee, investigated and reported to the House on 20 August last.

The inappropriateness of the traditional government funding and accounting procedures to many Forest Service activities has long been of concern to officers of that Service, and it is refresh-

ing to have these difficulties recognised officially by a Committee of the House. There can be no major dispute with four of the subcommittees' recommendations, which relate to accounting reform. However, the recommendations relating to future structure and management of the Forest Service are contentious. While the proposed remedy, the erection of a company structure for that part of the Service managing exotic production forests, and for the Commercial Division, separately or together, may cure the ills of financial management, it is reasonable to suggest that such drastic medicine may lead to dieback in other parts of the organisation and its functions.

There is undeniably a need for the institution of a financial management system which will provide a better basis for commercial decision-making, and for day-to-day management efficiency. The problems of using conventional accounting systems for the estimation of profitability in such a long-term activity as forestry are the subject of debate in the private sector (indeed, the Forestry Council has just completed a thorough study of accounting methods in plantation management); the addition of the constraints which characterise the methods of budgeting and control of central government provide an impossible handicap. And yet one wonders whether the financial management problems are peculiar to the Forest Service, and not at least in part a manifestation of a malaise to which all bureaucracies, particularly State departments operating in a trading capacity, can from time to time fall prone, a failure to define closely the levels and degrees of responsibility for financial management within the organisation. And taking it further still, whether the methods of government budgeting and financial control are still appropriate to the objectives and functions of a modern parliamentary democracy in the Westminster model.

The report itself hints at a major part of the existing problem when, discussing the need for the proposed companies to be able to recognise goals other than pure profit, it suggests that these can be recognised by *making such objectives explicit* and incorporating them in the company's Memorandum of Association. (While the report recognises such non-profit goals as meeting the New Zealand market demand and providing guaranteed supplies to large processing companies, it neglects to mention the important social roles that State plantation forestry has been and is called upon to meet, such as regional supply, local employment, relief of unemployment, and relief or repair of situations arising through ill-advised agricultural and pastoral land use, such as

noxious weed infestation or soil erosion.) Surely a major part of the present difficulty lies in the failure to define explicit objectives at all levels?

The use of land is basic to the New Zealand economy and to its way of life. The strategies for the aspect of forestry identified by the report as requiring to be managed separately as a company (*i.e.*, the plantation forests) are themselves as much a matter of faith as of predictive planning in absolute terms — and in the agricultural sector, too, the element of faith must also be required to justify the present price levels of agricultural land. New Zealand can grow wood well; wood is a fundamental commodity likely to be in increasing demand; we have resources of suitable land and a need to diversify our productive export base. This is a rationale as well suited to management under a State umbrella as to any company structure, provided the impediments to efficiency can be removed.

In the interests of promoting a healthy, multiple-use attitude toward New Zealand's land, a preceding editorial in this issue argued for the removal of artificial distinctions between categories of forest land, not the creation of them. Some medicine is required to cure the Forest Service accounting ailments, but surgery is not indicated. The various limbs are basically sound; amputation would in the long run lead to greater problems. The sub-committee is suggesting the use of a power saw to drain an abscess, whereas a delicately applied scalpel (commonsense and a dash of management theory) would be better.

#### *Westland Forest Management: There is No Perfect Solution*

The Forest Service has just published two reports\* giving details of the form which it is proposed that forest management in Westland should take. They represent the culmination of a debate which has raged at varying levels of intensity since 1970. The Forest Service, and those who administer the forests of Westland, have been in an extremely difficult position (and are indeed not yet out of the woods). They have had to defend a very difficult middle ground from the assaults of Coasters who reasonably resent the intrusion of "outside" values and outsiders, the effect of which is to damage if not destroy a distinctive, and to them valuable,

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\*Draft North Westland Regional Management Plan: NZFS, Wellington, Nov. 1980.

South Westland Forest Management Proposals: NZFS, Wellington, Nov. 1980.

lifestyle, and from the cogently reasoned arguments of those whose education and global perspectives enable them to see the Westland forests, particularly the lowland forests, as a remnant, irreplaceable and unique example of temperate rain forest, the preservation of which should not be compromised to prop up what they see as a shaky, and in any event doomed, economy.

In North Westland the problems are in forest terms ephemeral; podocarp logging can be phased out by *ca.* 1995 and replaced by radiata from already established plantation forests. In South Westland the problem is intractable:

- the podocarp resource, if managed for sustained yield, would allow an annual cut of some 20 000 m<sup>3</sup>;
- agreements for the annual supply of 80 000 m<sup>3</sup> run until *ca.* 1990;
- if those agreements are taken up in full, and from the forests in the northern part of the South Westland region currently regarded as accessible, then the sustainable level of cut from 1990 will be in the order of only 10 000 m<sup>3</sup> p.a., will be more unfavourably located with respect to markets, and will have a greater component of a less desirable species, kahikatea (because the proportion of this species in the forest increases from north to south).

The Forest Service, bound by the government's instruction that the commitments for supply should be examined by the Indigenous Forest Timber Advisory Committee, and the government's acceptance of that body's report (reproduced in the plan) has obviously found itself in a cleft stick. There is, however, no avoiding the fact that, in South Westland, management of the forests to meet the committed levels of wood supply will make the continuation of forest-based industry from 1990 difficult if not impossible. The prospects would be enhanced if the much reduced wood volumes were able to be compensated for by a higher value — in other words, a greater degree of local processing and manufacturing, replacing volume by quality.

But if a change to existing practice is the only hope for the future, how much greater would be the chance of success if the podocarp cut could be progressively and rapidly reduced to a sustainable level over the next 2 or 3 years? Podocarp management for sustained yield is feasible if it is done carefully and sympathetically. Appropriate management would be much easier to justify and implement were the products of greater intrinsic value. Surely it would make economic sense to provide for the

existing industry that assistance in retooling, retraining and marketing required to maintain employment, turnover and profitability (for that is the essential problem, not wood supply) on the basis of the sustainable yield, than to incur the inevitable social costs involved in total shut-down 10 years hence?

The South Westland plan provides for the transfer of a major part of Waikukupa State Forest to Westland National Park. Such transfer is admirable and will ensure the proper balance between lowland and mountain land in the park. Transfer of the remainder of the forest, valuable to each camp for precisely the same reason — its excellent podocarp stands (equally valuable for management and conservation) — will continue to be a focus of debate. It will be difficult to justify its retention for management unless the industry changes suggested above are rapidly implemented.

These draft plans highlight yet again a major deficiency in the present practice of public planning (and in parenthesis, it should be remarked that, whatever the deficiencies are, foresters remain well ahead in the field of encouraging public participation in major issues of the day; criticism of the Forest Service's endeavours in the field must be tempered by the fact that it at least affords an opportunity for such criticism). Too often, as in this case, the transformation of basic data to draft proposal remains unexplained. And yet it is this transformation upon which most interest is focused. A system is required in which the relative weighting accorded to the parameters involved in determining, for example, what forest should comprise a production zone, is fully set out in order that the decision made can be the subject of sensible comment. A necessary corollary of this, since sensible comments will almost inevitably produce alternative proposals, is that there is a stage prior to the formulation of a draft plan; this is the derivation and publication, not only of the planning method in such a form that it can be interpreted, but of a series of alternative options. The Westland draft plans have omitted this stage, and the omission is to be regretted.