

Crown Pastoral Land Tenure Review

Lease name : LOWER CASCADE

Lease number : PH 002

Conservation Resources Report - Part 4

As part of the process of Tenure Review, advice on significant inherent values within the pastoral lease is provided by Department of Conservation officials in the form of a Conservation Resources Report. This report is the result of outdoor survey and inspection. It is a key piece of information for the development of a preliminary consultation document.

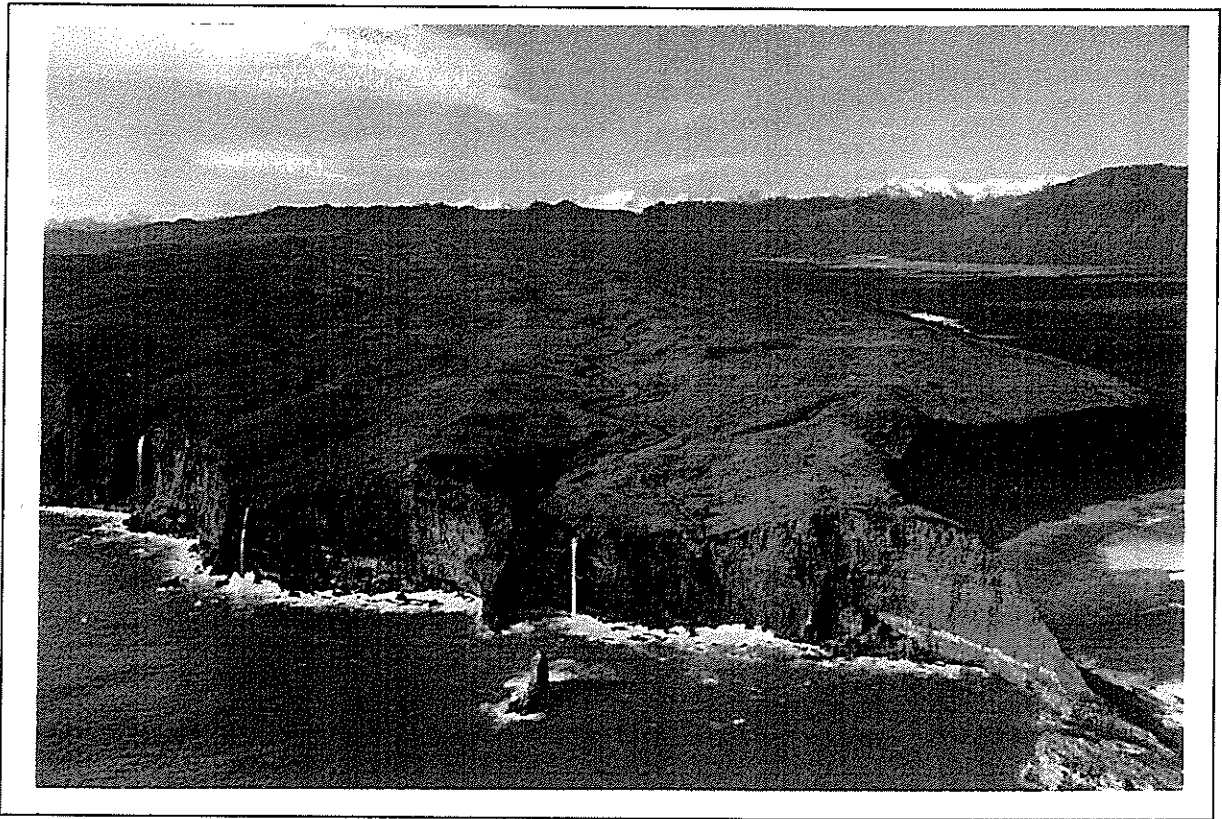
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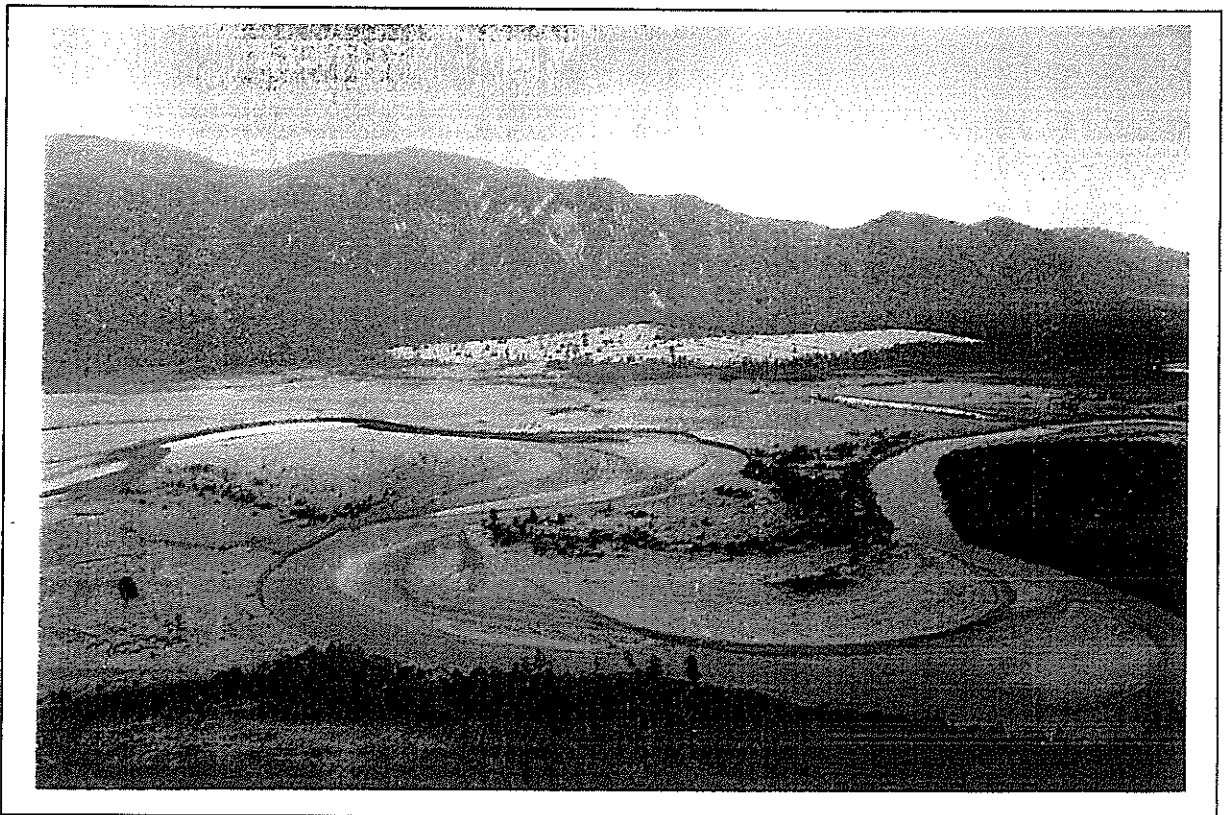
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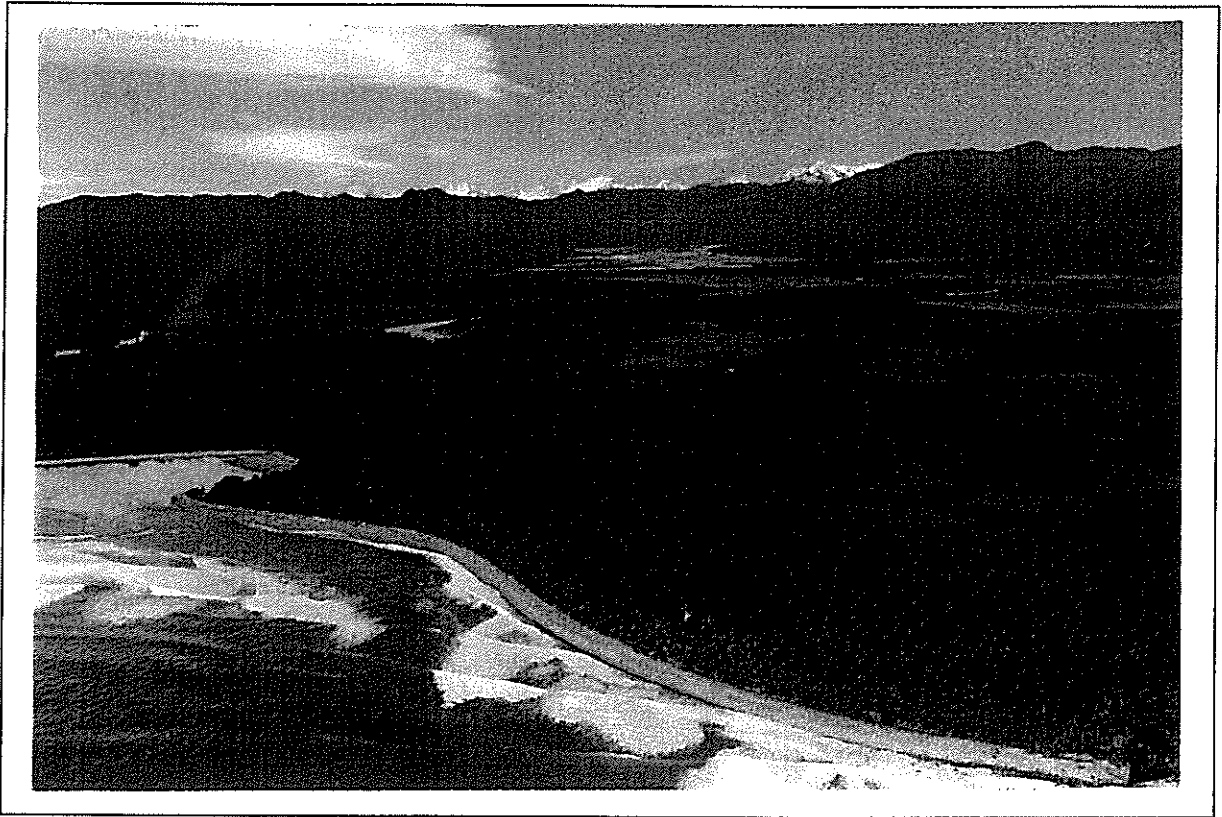


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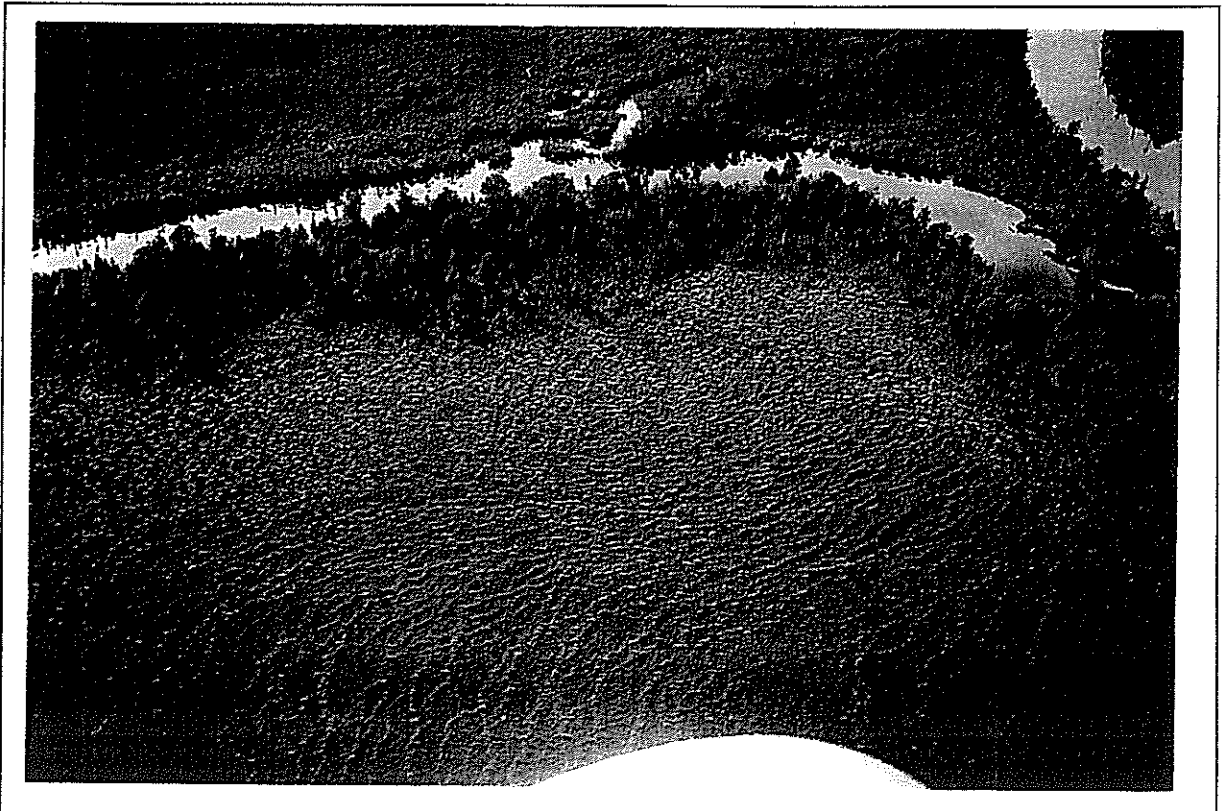


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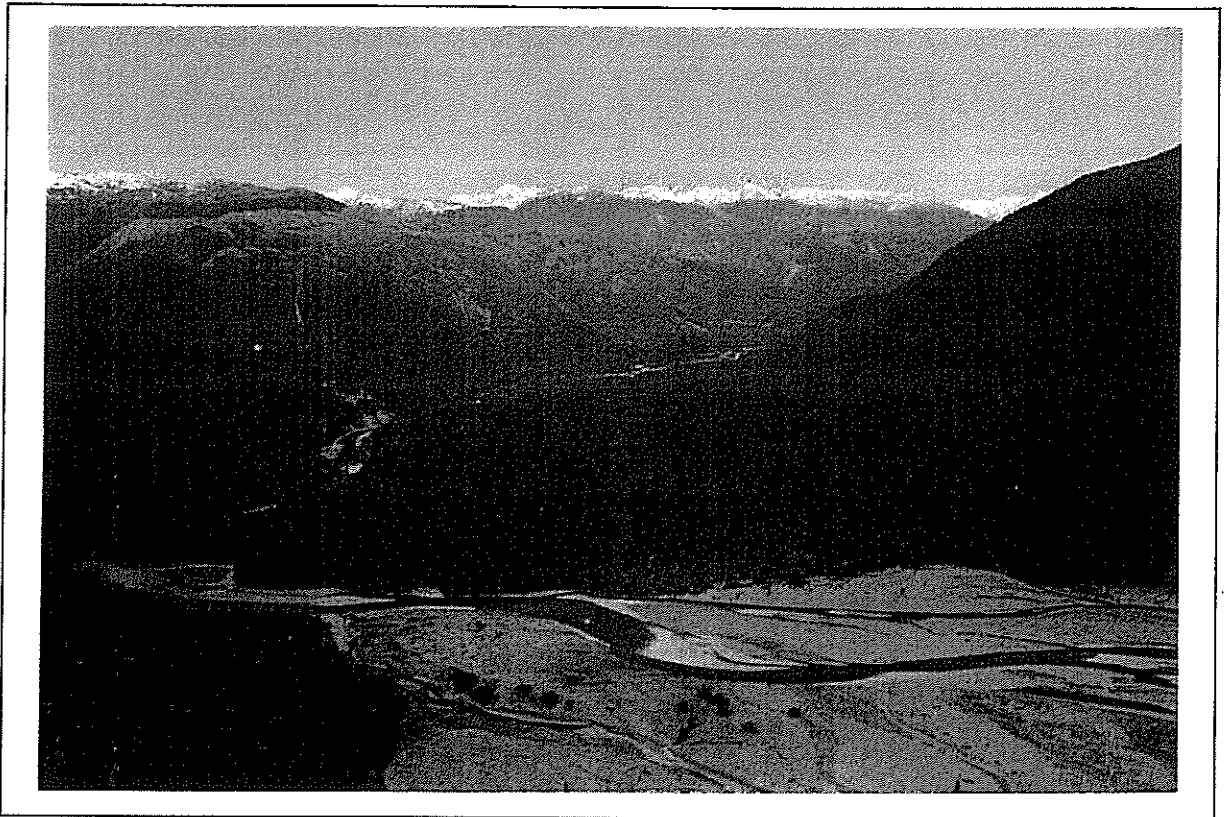


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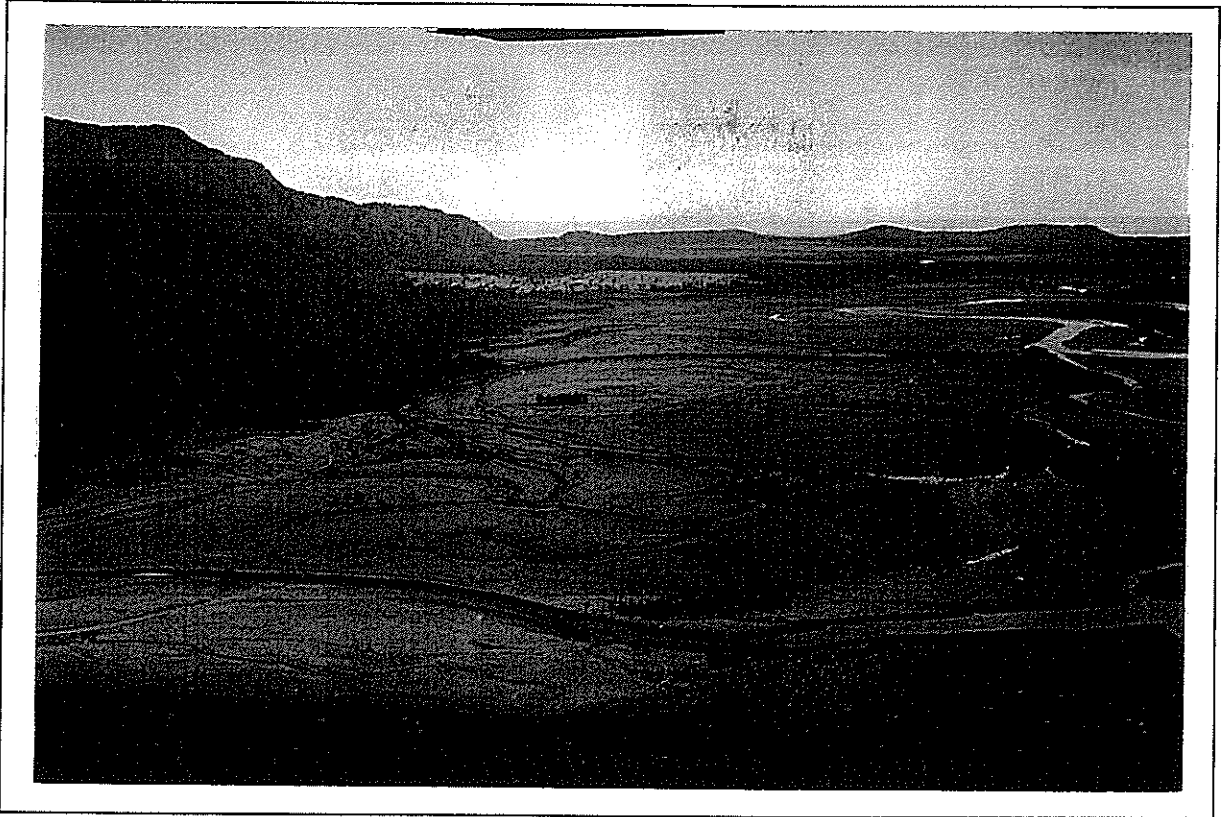
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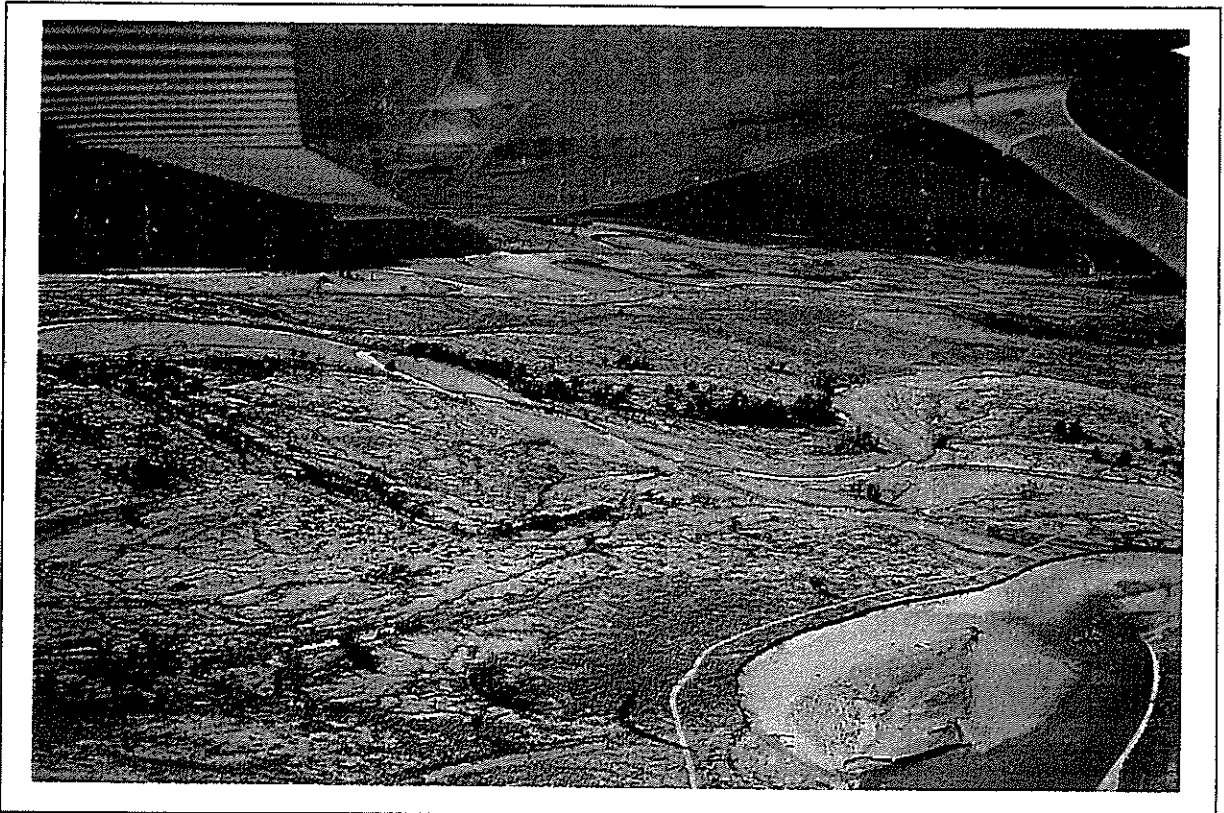
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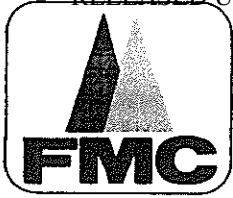
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PASTORAL LEASE TENURE REVIEW

Preliminary Report on
Recreational and Related Significant Inherent Values

LOWER CASCADE

August 2003

Compiled for Federated Mountain Clubs (FMC) of NZ (Inc.)
by Dr Michael J S Floate, High Country Consultancy,

**RECREATIONAL AND RELATED SIGNIFICANT INHERENT
VALUES ON LOWER CASCADE**

**A Preliminary Report to FMC based on field inspection
and other research to assist in the Tenure Review Process**

August 2003

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Fig. 1 Lower Cascade pastoral lease is one of only two such leases in Westland and both are situated deep within the Te Wahi Pounamu World Heritage Area, in the Cascade valley. The leasehold land is bounded by the Cascade river to the north and stretches from about 5km inland from the mouth of the river to the boundary with the Upper Cascade pastoral lease, some 10km inland from the river mouth near Cascade Point.

Fig. 2 The leasehold land is almost entirely confined to low-lying river flats which are entirely below 100m above sea level. Consequently much of the property is poorly drained, subject to flooding and marginal for farming. Situated as it is within the World Heritage area it would be better returned to full Crown ownership to be managed for conservation and recreation purposes.

Fig. 3 The Cascade River forms the northern boundary while the Bam Bay - Cascade Road follows the southern boundary along the foot of the range which includes Mt Eggeling. This range is part of the World Heritage area and is clothed in native Beech-Podocarp forest. The tortuous meanders in this reach of the river are themselves spectacular geological features, totally different from the braided rivers of the east.

Fig. 4 The Bam Bay - Cascade road provides important recreational access to the west coast at Bam Bay. It is frequently subject to severe flooding as can be seen by the massive size of the driftwood in this picture. Although this access is important, it is not always available as a major ford over the Cascade River has to be crossed just upstream of the eastern boundary of Lower Cascade.

Fig. 5 There is a whitebaiter's camp beside the airstrip at the river mouth, and the lower reaches of the Cascade are an important whitebait fishery. In order to maintain this fishery it is important that the margins of the river and its tributaries, meanders and ox-bow remnants are kept as nearly as possible in their natural state. Land drainage and farm development would have serious adverse effects on vital whitebait habitat.

Fig. 6 The two Cascade pastoral leases are surrounded by a vast natural area of protected conservation land. It is anomalous and inappropriate that marginal farmland should exist in such a setting. Beyond the leasehold land, the Cascade River valley leads to the right up to the Red Hills, beyond which can be seen the mountains of Mt Aspiring National Park and the Main Divide.

Fig. 7 Some rather better drained areas have been improved. However, soil fertility is low and leaching losses are high under the heavy rainfall regime of the west coast. To maintain sustainable pastoral use, these losses must be replenished by fertiliser application but the costs of cartage are high to such a remote place. This is probably not worthwhile but without replenishment the system cannot be ecologically sustainable.

Fig. 8 Much of the land is at risk from flooding and changes in the course of the river. Evidence of past river changes is provided by the remains of ox-bow loops and other traces of former river channels. Such features add to the geological interest, but also indicate the instability of such flood plain landscapes. They also provide important habitat for whitebait.

Fig. 9 The river flats are also at risk of exacerbated erosion due to trampling and pugging by cattle. Such effects can lead to the formation of new waterways by floodwaters following channels created by animal pressures. Cessation of grazing would eliminate these adverse effects and allow a return to a situation where natural geological processes can run their normal course.

Fig. 10 There is an area of about 100 ha which has been cleared by felling and root raking. This is one of the few parts of the property which, with appropriate inputs, might be capable of being managed sustainably. It is however, so small that it would not provide an economic unit and would be better managed for conservation and allowed to revert to forest.

Fig. 11 This view shows the mouth of the Cascade River, west of the Lower Cascade pastoral lease, with remote beaches, sand dunes and wetlands. This is protected conservation land and indicates what the natural landscape might be like in the absence of attempts to farm marginal land. In the distance is the coastal route to Bam Bay and beyond.

Fig. 12 Recreational interest in the Cascade usually focuses on a trip to Barn Bay, or on whitebaiting. There is however, some magnificent coastal scenery near the mouth of the river which includes sand dunes and spectacular cliffs with vertical waterfalls plunging into the sea. This is the seaward end of the Cascade Plateau which is a fascinating geological area in its own right, derived largely from ultramafic materials from the Red Hills.

Fig. 13 A large part of Westland and Fiordland has now been recognised as Te Wahi Pounamu, South West New Zealand World Heritage Area on account of its outstanding natural values, landscapes and unique geology. Views like this one, looking up the Arawhata River from the Jackson River Road towards the Main Divide, are typical. It is anomalous and inappropriate for marginal farmland to be included in such a landscape.

Fig. 14 Cattle grazing around the edges of bush are currently doing physical damage to the soils and margins of waterways, and preventing regeneration of native forest trees. If any of the area should become freehold it will be necessary to protect bush edges to permit regeneration of native species.

INTRODUCTION

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This report has been prepared following the Early Warning Meeting in September 2002 at which the properties entering the tenure review process in 2002 were introduced. Part of the property was inspected at the time the Upper Cascade pastoral lease was visited, and an aerial inspection was carried out in August 2003. This report is based on those inspections and other information as explained below, and is offered as a contribution to the statutory consultation process undertaken by the Department of Conservation (DOC).

The Report focuses on those features of the property which are known to be important for public recreational interests. It should be noted that while much of this interest focuses on access, the natural and landscape values of the areas concerned have a fundamental impact on the recreational interest in the property and greatly influence the quality of recreational experience enjoyed. It is for this reason that reference is also made to the inherent natural and landscape values in this Report.

METHODS OF SURVEY AND ASSESSMENT

A partial inspection was made when the Upper Cascade was visited in September 2002, and an aerial inspection was carried out in August 2003. This report is based in part on those inspections and in part, on information gathered from other sources. The other sources include studies of topographical and Land Use Capability (LUC) maps, consultation with recreational user groups and a knowledge of the landscapes acquired from other trips in the general area. Use has also been made of the Draft West Coast Conservation Management Strategy (1999).

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF LOWER CASCADE PASTORAL LEASE

The Lower Cascade pastoral lease is one of only two pastoral leases in Westland (Fig.1). The Lower Cascade is a small pastoral lease of only about 1,200ha situated in the valley of the Cascade River. It stretches for about 5km, from its western boundary about 5 km inland from the river mouth to its boundary with the Upper Cascade lease some 10km inland from Cascade Point. There is road access off the Jackson River Road which provides access via the Martyr Homestead to a ford across the Cascade River near the western boundary between the two pastoral leases, and thence down the road to Bam Bay. Access is also frequently gained by jet boat.

Pastoral leasehold land is almost entirely confined the low lying river flats which are all less than 100m above sea level (Fig. 2). Consequently much of the property is poorly drained and prone to flooding. In fact the high point on the property is at 26m close to its western boundary. Water frequently lies on the surface. The Cascade River forms the northern boundary of the lease which is very long because of the series of very tortuous meander loops in this stretch of the river (Fig. 3). Dee Creek marks the extreme the south western corner of the property.

The Cascade run was first taken up by McFarlane in 1885 in the days when Charlie Douglas was working in the area. The Upper and Lower Cascade pastoral leases were originally a single entity but were divided into two leases in recent times. They have been grazed for over a hundred years.

In answer to an enquiry from the FMC Bulletin editor in 1988, DOC stated that *"Government decided that the area had values which precluded allocation to Landcorp, therefore the area (Cascade Valley) is actively managed by Landcorp in association with this department."*

There is a very important recreational route down the true left of the Cascade River. This is the Bam Bay Cascade Road which provides recreational access to Bam Bay and beyond (Fig. 4). The road roughly follows the southern boundary of the lease. There is also an important whitebait fishery at the mouth of the river but this is well to the west of the lease boundary. Access to the whitebaiter's camp on a prominent meander at the river mouth, is usually gained by air or by jet boat (Fig. 5).

The Cascade River is important for whitebaiting. The river below the confluence with the Martyr River is the main whitebait fishery. Partly, this is due to the lack of farming development which means that the main whitebait habitat along the margins of streams is relatively undisturbed. Any attempt to control the river, as part of developing the flats, could result in downstream changes which could affect the wetlands. Similarly, works to improve soil drainage would have adverse effects on natural values, and on fish habitat.

The two Cascade pastoral leases are surrounded by a very extensive area of land managed by DOC (Fig. 6). It includes very large areas of former State Forest and Westland and Aoraki/Mt Cook National Parks to the north, and Mt Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks to the east and south. The whole area has now been recognised as the Te Wahi Pounamu South West NZ World Heritage Area. As such, one has to question the appropriateness of marginal farming in such a situation. If it can be shown that marginal farming is ecologically unsustainable, there is a strong case for the whole property to become conservation land, and for it to be integrated into the surrounding conservation land. The two Cascade pastoral leases are presently an incongruous 'island' in the middle of this vast area of natural heritage land (Fig. 6). Tenure review presents an ideal opportunity to resolve this anomaly.

All these factors combine to suggest that the best use of the property in the future would be for conservation and recreational purposes.

Productive values

The use of the Lower Cascade pastoral lease has mainly been as rough grazing with limited potential for improvement as much of the land is wet and poorly drained, especially in the middle one third of the property and in the vicinity of the extensive meander loops. There has been some improvement of the better drained areas in recent years (Fig. 7).

The property carries a small herd of Hereford cattle. The soils are not only wet but are also of low fertility, and because of the high west coast rainfall, leaching losses of essential nutrients are high. Maintenance requirements are therefore high and so too is the cost of cartage of the proportionately large amounts of fertiliser required. The low carrying capacity of the land would probably not justify the application of fertiliser if it were not for other enterprises and off-site grazing operated in association with this lease.

It is therefore probable that if this pastoral lease was operated as a stand-alone farming system it would not be economic to replace the nutrients removed in animal products. If this was the case then the system must lead to the depletion of soil nutrient reserves and could not be sustainable in the long term.

Much of the property is also at risk from river changes as the ground is characterised by old ox-bow loops and other evidence of past meanders over most of the flats (Fig. 8). As well as being at risk from river changes much of the property is also subject to flooding which is so severe at times that fences would be swept away (Fig. 4). While land drainage might improve the pastoral potential of the land it would be expensive and lead to deterioration in the whitebait industry. It is possible that the economic value of this industry is more significant than the farming value of the land.

The river flats are at risk of exacerbated erosion due to trampling and pugging by cattle (Fig. 9). This could lead to exaggeration of potential river channels and their scouring and growth in the next flood event.

There was formerly some 300 to 400ha of native scrub and bush in the southwestern corner of the property. Much of this area is somewhat better drained than the lowest lying areas, and some 100ha has been cleared by felling and root raking (Fig. 10). Pasture development has been attempted between the windrows of slash and tree stumps. There is also an area of improved pasture between the airstrip and the eastern boundary of the property.

However, the area of the property which has the greatest productive value and/or potential is so small that it may be an uneconomic unit. It probably only survives as farmland because it is managed in association with other enterprises and off-site grazing. It seems therefore, that freeholding would not "*promote the management of the land in a way that is ecologically sustainable*", as required by the Crown Pastoral Land (CPL) Act, 1998. It should also be noted the freehold disposal of reviewable land is subject to S24 (a) and (b).

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND POTENTIAL

The recreational significance of the property lies in its position between the south end of the Jackson River Road and the West Coast (Figs. 1 and 6).

There are opportunities for mountain bike travel down the Barn Bay Cascade 'road' (actually a lightly gravelled 4WD track, Fig 4) to Barn Bay provided conditions are suitable to ford the Cascade River opposite the confluence with the Martyr River. There are also opportunities for experienced tramping parties to explore the west coast southwards towards Big Bay, some 24km further south (Fig. 11). Trips down the Cascade and eastwards over the Cascade and Carmichael Plateaux (Fig. 12) and the Stafford River and Smoothwater River to Jacksons Bay are possible, but such trips are not for the faint hearted.

Public recreational use of the area includes fishing and the lower Cascade is a major whitebaiting area. In winter there is an influx of both commercial and non-commercial whitebaiters, some flying in and others gaining access down the river (Fig. 5).

There is scope for some interesting canoeing on the Cascade alongside some magnificent beech-podocarp forest on the true left of the river (Fig. 3 and background Fig. 10) although the forest is closer to the river a little further upstream on the Upper Cascade pastoral lease. The river also provides an excellent trip to the sand dunes and beaches at the mouth of the Cascade River where there is magnificent coastal scenery including spectacular cliffs and vertical waterfalls plunging directly into the sea (Figs. 5, 11 and 12). Hunting can be good along the bush margins at times.

FMC believes that the recreational significance of this property (and other leases in the tenure review process) should be assessed not only on its present usage but also on its potential. This is because current usage is much less than its potential for a number of reasons. We understand that at present there is no secure public access to the Barn Bay - Cascade 'Road'. Another reason could be that because of the current land tenure under pastoral lease, access to parts of the Cascade has not been easy in the past so the recreational use of the Lower Cascade pastoral lease is less than it might have been if these impediments did not exist. Availability of one or more of the huts on the property for recreational accommodation would also be likely to increase the numbers of people using and enjoying the Cascade. There is thus significant potential for greater use, and it is the full range of possibilities which should be considered during this tenure review.

Public access on foot and mountain bike trips to Barn Bay, for extended tramping trips further south, for canoe/kayak trips on the Cascade River, secure public access for hunting and whitebaiting, and the protection of habitat for whitebait are the main priorities for recreation in this tenure review.

SIGNIFICANT INHERENT VALUES AND THEIR IMPORTANCE FOR RECREATION

This report focuses on those features of the Lower Cascade pastoral lease which are known to be, or could become important for public recreational interests. The two Cascade pastoral leases are however an isolated 'island' of marginal farmland with significant inherent values of their own within a much larger area of outstanding natural value (Figs 1, 6 and 12). The leases are surrounded by a very extensive area of conservation land which includes large areas of former State Forest and the Westland and Aoraki/Mt Cook National Parks to the north, and Mt Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks to the east and south. Because of its outstanding natural values, the whole area has now been recognised as the Te Wahi Pounamu South West NZ World Heritage Area. FMC believes that there is a strong case for the whole area of these two pastoral leases to become conservation land, and for it to be integrated into the surrounding conservation land. The two Cascade pastoral leases are presently an incongruous 'island' in the middle of this vast area of natural heritage land (Figs. 6 and 12). Tenure review presents an ideal opportunity to resolve this anomaly.

It should be noted that while much of the recreational interest focuses on access, the natural values and landscapes of the areas concerned all have a fundamental impact on the recreational value of the back country. In the case of the Cascade, this includes the spectacular meanders in the Cascade River, the river flats themselves especially the wetlands close to the river which are so valuable as whitebait habitat, and the values of remnant bush and shrubland. The views to be had from the journey to and along the coast (Figs 11 and 12) also greatly influence the quality of recreational experience enjoyed.

The entire area of the Te Wahi Pounamu South West NZ World Heritage area is renowned for its internationally outstanding landscapes. This Heritage Area includes spectacular rivers such as the Arawhata and the Cascade. The former provides a magnificent view from the Jackson River Road looking up the valley to the mountains in Mt Aspiring National Park (Fig. 13) while the Cascade provides a similar

panorama including the Red Hills and the Main Divide (Fig. 6). There is an opportunity through this tenure review to remove the anomaly of an 'island' of marginal farmland from within this vast natural landscape.

There is good beech-podocarp forest on the eastern and western margins of the Upper Cascade lease, and that forest continues down the valley sides to the coast (Figs 1, 3 and background Fig. 10). Adjacent to the Lower Cascade lease it is further from the river than is the case on the Upper Cascade lease. It does however, still constitute the framework for the valley landscape (Figs. 1 and 5).

On the modified grasslands and lower lying areas there does not appear to be much vegetation with significant inherent value. Scattered among these modified grasslands there are however, the remnants of islands of bush which presumably once clothed the better drained parts of the river flats. Some of these bush islands include beech while others include a diversity of shrubs. There are also scattered specimens of manuka which may represent more extensive stands or could be a recovery stage after early settlers fires. Whatever their origin, all these patches of woody species add diversity to the scene and hold potential to revert to forest conditions in the absence of grazing.

The low lying areas, with remains of river meanders and ox-bow lakes and wetlands, provide vital habitat for whitebait. Development of such areas by drainage and pasture development would have serious adverse effects on the whitebait population.

Although much of the property has severe limitations due to wetness and could not support ecologically sustainable pastoral use, there are small areas which, with appropriate development and maintenance, might be capable of being managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable (CPLA 1998 S.24). However, although such areas might appear to be suitable for freeholding, they are so small that they probably cannot be managed in a way that is economically viable or ecologically sustainable, as discussed above. FMC believes that the entire property should be returned to full Crown ownership and control, because of its existing outstanding natural landscape and riverscape, and also because of its potential to revert to its natural ecological origins. Such an outcome would be much more in keeping with the vast surrounding area of the Southwest New Zealand World Heritage Area Te Wahi Pounamu.

AREAS TO BE PROTECTED

For the reasons discussed above, which include the significant inherent values of wetland, river, bush and landscape, and the public enjoyment of those landscapes, FMC believes that the entire property should become conservation land. This would enable the entire Cascade River catchment from the mountains to the sea. to be protected as conservation land. Very few major New Zealand rivers are protected in such a way or even have the potential to be so protected. Full catchment protection has major benefits for ecosystem processes that cross boundaries between sea, river and land. Furthermore, lowland wetlands are one of our most under-represented ecosystems.

It not only does the land itself deserve to be protected for its very significant inherent values but we also believe that very little of the property could be managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable. This area is too small to constitute a viable farming unit and the whole lease should therefore, be restored to full Crown ownership and control and be managed for conservation and recreation purposes.

Even the boggy areas which are currently degraded have significant potential for recovery as the Carex sedges have been selectively grazed under pastoral management and have significant potential for rapid recovery when grazing pressure is removed.

It is appropriate that this opportunity through tenure review be used to resolve the anomaly of pastoral leasehold land within such a large area of Conservation Land, Te Wahi Pounamu World Heritage Area.

ACCESS REQUIREMENTS

If the whole property becomes conservation land, some of the access problems will be resolved. There is, however, still the problem that rights of public access over the Jackson River Road are not clear. Some maps show this as a 'Private Route'. This needs to be resolved, and public access provided if there is to be full enjoyment of the magnificent resources, values and landscapes of the Cascade Valley and the route to the

DRAFT WEST COAST CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (CMS)

The features of the Cascade identified in the West Coast CMS include the following:-

- The Cascade is proposed as a mainland habitat island. The proposal covers an area of 120,000ha in the Cascade and Pyke ecological districts.
- An area of 2590ha of the Cascade River flats is held in two pastoral leases.
- At 120,000ha the Cascade is one of the last great areas of lowland wilderness in New Zealand.
- If it was developed, the proposed Hollyford to Cascade road would have a significant effect on existing remote experience recreation opportunities. One of the last remaining extensive lowland recreation opportunities free of development would be lost.

The identified issues include:-

- Parts of the Cascade pastoral lease contain significant natural resources.
- The site is valuable as an accessible lowland wilderness and a buffer to more remote wilderness in Mount Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks.
- Potential for mainland habitat island, covering a variety of ecosystems.

The objectives set in the CMS include the following:-

- To preserve the natural resources and visitor opportunities of the Cascade.*
- To seek an appropriate status for all land in the Cascade that reflects the significant natural and recreational resources present.*
- To ensure that the Cascade's value as one of the last large lowland wilderness areas in New Zealand is protected.*
- To maintain the remote experience opportunity provided in the Cascade.*

The achievement of these objectives would include the following actions:-

- Seek to protect the ecosystems, species and recreational values of the Cascade Pastoral Leases through the tenure review process of the Land Act.
- Protect the wilderness values and remote experience opportunity of the site.

See Appendix for greater detail.

SUMMARY OF FMC RECOMMENDATIONS

FMC strongly recommends that the Lower Cascade pastoral lease should be the subject of whole property purchase and return to full Crown ownership and control. This pastoral lease, together with its neighbour the Upper Cascade pastoral lease, should become an integral part of the South West NZ World Heritage Area, Te Wahi Pounamu, and be managed for conservation and recreation purposes.

Our reasons for this recommendation are as follows:-

- The leases singly or combined do not cover a large area and would not be excessively expensive to buy out. The value of this addition to the public conservation estate would far outweigh the cost.
- The presence of the pastoral leases in the Cascade, and inside the World Heritage Area, as a small 'island' within a vast area of public conservation land (both former State Forest and the nearby Mt

Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks) is an anomaly which should be corrected.
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- Tenure review provides an excellent opportunity to correct this anomaly.
 - Whole property purchase would enable the protection of the entire Cascade catchment as conservation land, from the mountains to the sea. This is important, as there are very few opportunities to secure protection over entire catchments from source to sea.
 - Whole property purchase would achieve all the objectives set for the Cascade in the Draft CMS for the West Coast.
 - The land which is currently grazed is almost certainly not being managed in a way that is ecologically sustainable. This is because it has already been grazed for over a hundred years and significant nutrient replenishment with fertilisers would be required to balance farming and leaching losses. Today, the cost of fertiliser, and its cartage to the Cascade, would almost certainly not be justifiable in relation to the production benefits to be derived from such land.
 - There are dangers of river erosion being exacerbated by the trampling and pugging effects of cattle on the river flats. Trampling and pugging also lead to the destruction of valuable whitebait habitat. These dangers would be obviated by the cessation of grazing.
- Return of the entire pastoral lease to the Crown would enable public use of one or more of the huts for recreational accommodation and significantly enhance the recreational value of the Cascade.
- It is probable that the value of the Cascade for its whitebait industry and recreational value, and for all its other natural values is greater than its value for marginal farming.

If however, any of the existing leasehold land becomes freehold there will be a need to protect areas of significant inherent value, and to protect the edges of native bush to permit the regeneration of native species.

The margins of the rivers, streams, ox-bow lakes, meanders and wetlands will need to be protected to preserve their value as whitebait habitat. It will be necessary to protect the river margins from stock damage by fencing. FMC doubts that this is feasible because of costs and the high risks of flood damage.

Legal access (for foot and mountain bike use) along the marked road is required with scope to realign the legal road if the river moves.

CONCLUSIONS

The tenure review of the Lower Cascade pastoral lease is important as it provides an opportunity to enhance the recreational opportunities and use of the Cascade River, and other recreational opportunities in the general area of southern Westland. It is also an opportunity to improve the quality of recreational experience on those lands by recognising and protecting the significant inherent values of the bush, the river and the landscape values described above.

Most of all, tenure review provides an opportunity to achieve all of the objectives set out for the Cascade in the Draft West Coast CMS, and to resolve the anomaly of an 'island' of marginal farmland within a vast natural landscape recognised as the World Heritage Area Te Wahi Pounamu.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FMC is grateful for assistance from authorities in making the assessment possible. The site inspections were carried out with the runholders consent, and FMC is grateful to the staff of DTZ New Zealand Ltd. for making the appropriate arrangements.

APPENDIX: Draft West Coast CMS (1999)

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The Cascade is proposed as a mainland habitat island in Chapter five of this CMS. The proposal covers an area of 120,000ha. in the Cascade and Pyke ecological districts. It includes part of Mt Aspiring National Park, stewardship land and surrounds the pastoral lease on the Cascade River flats.

Cascade contains a high diversity of vegetation on complex geology, including the most extensive ultramafic communities in New Zealand. Due to low possum numbers, the area supports healthy populations of mistletoe. The vegetation provides diverse habitats which are home to a rich avifauna. The Cascade is one of the mainland strongholds for kaka. The rivers and in particular the Cascade River provide habitat for a number of native fish species. The Cascade River is a very important whitebait fishery river in New Zealand. A number of the river's tributaries have been closed to whitebaiting to ensure the sustainability of the fishery.

The natural features and resources of the Cascade site are very distinctive, and further exploration may find new features.

Possums are absent from some remote areas and present in very low densities through much of the site, but gradual invasion from the south and localised population build-up is taking place.

An area of 2590ha. of the Cascade River flats is held in two pastoral leases. Most of the area covered by the leases has a long history of being grazed.

At 120,000ha. the Cascade is one of the last great areas of lowland wilderness in New Zealand. There have been proposals put forward to establish a road from Cascade through to the Hollyford. This would make a remote area more accessible and could have numerous effects on the wildlife and fragile ecosystems. The construction itself would cause loss of habitat, weed infestation and could irreversibly damage near pristine freshwater systems. The country is flood prone, so to avoid flooding of the road it would be necessary to build embankments. This would require a local gravel source, possibly taken from river systems whose present natural character is of a high standard. With gravel translocation comes the risk of moving species into areas in which they do not belong. Similarly, a road into any areas always offers the potential for increased weed and animal invasion. Currently, pests are limited to feral deer, hares and possums, with limited gorse, marram grass, ragwort, scotch thistle, tutsan and blackberry in the Cascade river mouth area. The proposed Hollyford to Cascade road would have a significant effect on existing remote experience recreation opportunities regardless of the alignment. One of the last remaining extensive lowland recreation opportunities free of development would be lost. The whole valley system (and the wider area) would change from an extensive remote recreation area to an accessible backcountry area. This would have flow-on effects on any opportunities within the catchments. The mechanisms that may be used to provide for any proposed new road are discussed in 8.2.5, Utilities and easements.

Issues

1. Parts of the Cascade pastoral lease contain significant natural resources.
2. A road through the Cascade would impact on the character of the site and have adverse effects on the natural resources of the site.
3. The site has low possum densities but is being invaded by possums from the south.
4. The site is valuable as an accessible lowland wilderness and a buffer to more remote wilderness in Mount Aspiring and Fiordland National Parks.
5. Much of the site's natural resources are unknown.
6. Potential for mainland habitat island, covering a variety of ecosystems.

Objectives

- i. To preserve the natural resources and visitor opportunities of the Cascade.*
- ii. To seek an appropriate status for all land in the Cascade that reflects the significant natural and recreational resources present.*

iii. To ensure that the Cascade's value as one of the last large lowland wilderness areas in New Zealand is protected
"PROTECTED UNDER THE OFFICIAL INFORMATION ACT"

iv. To maintain the remote experience opportunity provided in the Cascade.

Action

The Conservancy will:

- a. Seek to protect the ecosystems, species and recreational values of the Cascade Pastoral Lease through the tenure review process of the Land Act.
- b. Carry out possum control operations to ensure numbers remain low enough to protect the biodiversity of the site.
- c. Protect the wilderness values and remote experience opportunity of the site, and adopt the precautionary approach, (in recognition of the lack of knowledge of the site's natural resources) when any development proposals are being considered.
- d. Continue investigation and assessment of ecosystems and species in Cascade, in order to better understand its natural resources.
- e. Consider any proposal for a road link between Hollyford and Cascade if and when a requiring authority puts forward a designation proposal. Any such consideration must ensure that the protection of the natural and historic resources and visitor opportunities, in particular the Cascade's value as one of the last large lowland wilderness areas in New Zealand, remain the primary objectives of the land administered by the Department within the Cascade.