area. Last year he was invited to give keynote addresses at conferences in Japan, Chile and the USA. Glenn is currently supervising seven graduate students in forest ecology.

Recently Glenn, along with Andrew Wells and Richard Duncan, had a paper accepted for the Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand on the occurrence of widespread even-aged stand establishment in Westland. They give evidence for periods of greatly increased stand establishment 200-300 and 500-550 years ago. They suggest this may have resulted from massive earthquakes.

Dr David McNeil has also been promoted to Reader. David is a plant physiological who has, in recent years, specialised in perennial nut crops. He is the national coordinator of research for the Tree Crops Association of New Zealand.

Other

Dr Hugh Bigsby is on study leave in Canada until the middle of 1998. In addition Dr Sandhya Samarasinghe and Dr Don Kulasiiri (specialists in timber drying and wood science) are both on study leave during 1998.

Forest and Rural Fire Legislation has been developed over the years to help protect our remaining forests and other areas of vegetation. The Minister and DOC are responsible for the protection of State areas against fire (as well as some private ownerships). Protection of private indigenous forests will largely lie with District Rural Fire Authorities.

There is also forest fire research being carried out at NZFRI with an indigenous vegetation content. Fire has burnt over 20,000 ha of DOC vegetation, including high forest, since 1987 (pers. comm.) and costs have been high — not only in the monetary sense, but ecologically also. Losses have occurred in private indigenous ownership also, but precise figures are difficult to obtain at present.

I have written to the Chairman of the Working Party suggesting some changes to the Draft NZIF Policy as well as to some individual NZIF members, asking for support in rectifying the omission of any policy statement on forest fire.

Hopefully other members will come to the aid of the party?

Neill Cooper

References:

Draft Indigenous Forest Policy

The draft Indigenous Forest Policy has had a long gestation period and has been put together by people with impressive credentials. I do not intend to comment in detail but rather in broader terms.

1. Indigenous forests are subject to change over time for a variety of reasons. Some of these changes can take place over a relatively short period (the death of totara in a number of North Island forests in the 1960s and 1970s), while others can be long-drawn-out affairs (the displacement of silver beech by mountain beech).

Attempts to manage forests as though they are frozen in time and complex ecosystems will remain constant and will in my view only result in failure. The forests which colonised the last Taupo ash shower give us some idea of how resilient and aggressive our forests can be.

Surely the first problem to be tackled is to develop management systems which will ensure restocking following logging. When this is achieved the other forest values will follow.
I suggest that the system of clearfelling and leaving seed trees, as practised in the Alton Valley in Southland, has been reasonably successful in restocking silver beech forests. I would also suggest that ecological diversity will be maximised in forests carrying a range of age classes and forest health will be improved. Have a look at Waipoua Forest which has one of the finest collections of stag-headed trees in the country and compare it with Russell Forest which was logged many years ago and now carries a vigorous kauri/podocarp/tanekaha forest.

The point I am trying to make is that our indigenous forests can be managed to produce a sustainable yield of high-quality timber without impairing other forest values, but rather improving them, provided management systems are not dictated by some undeclared edict to degrade the structure of the soil and the presence and activity of soil biota.

2. The protection of soil fertility and soil stability are two of the more important functions of forests, and to fill these roles forests should be in good condition.

The collapse of the canopy species in parts of the Kaimanawa and Tongariro National Park forests was a timely reminder of the vulnerability of our natural forests. Apart from limited areas in the Kaimanawas these forests were undisturbed by man but the collapse of the canopy was spectacular. In the east where some management was carried out to promote the domination of red beech in the next crop there was no such collapse.

Similarly, I have difficulty in coming to terms with the proposition that ecosystems must not be modified in view of the well-documented propensity of kauri forests not only to cause serious loss of soil fertility but also to significantly degrade the structure of the soil and the presence and activity of soil biota.

It is certain that actively-managed forests would solve most if not all of these problems. If the retention of biodiversity is of real concern I presume the whole systems of terms used in the draft policy. For example, when we talk about indigenous forests do we include areas of seral vegetation, and if so does this have to be totally indigenous or could it incorporate some exotic species?

6. If the policy is going to function there would appear to be a need to have a reasonable number of well-trained and experienced people on the ground. In the light of the present Government’s reluctance to allow any increase in public spending and what is known of the new organisation of the Ministry of Forestry when it is incorporated in the Ministry of Agriculture, it is probable that the policy will become little better than a wish list.

The proposal that the Institute should become involved in monitoring the effectiveness of this policy could raise some quite serious difficulties, not the least of which would be getting people on the ground with the necessary skills to do the monitoring.

I think the Institute could make a greater contribution to indigenous forest management by ensuring that work, which has already been started by way of various trials and management practices, is at least recorded and where possible continued.

At one stage New Zealand was providing technical assistance and leadership in developing management systems for tropical rain forests, which are similar in structure to many of our own forests. This is no longer the case, even though our ex-Prime Minister, Mr Bolger, not too long ago, said that it was by providing this sort of expertise that we could help developing countries in the Pacific.

The draft Indigenous Forest Policy has considerable merit, but in my opinion the first thing which needs to be sorted out is the Forests Act, which as presently written is almost hostile to developing management systems which will ensure sustainable production from suitable areas of these forests, and their retention in a healthy and vigorous condition. This surely must be the primary aim of this profession.

I also suggest that the State, as the owner of 5,061,000 hectares of indigenous forests of which only 142,000 hectares have been allocated for production, hardly demonstrates a commitment to the Resource Management Act.

With the substantial amount of evidence on the ground of the management possibilities of kauri and beech forests, the profession of Forestry has stood on the sideline and let the present position develop without protest. This is surely a very sad state of affairs.

G.M. O’Neill
Lower Hutt

Sharing risks of longer rotations

Sir,

I enjoyed reading Piers Maclaren’s article (November 1997) regarding wood quality. As Maclaren points out, risk can be an important issue in deciding when to harvest. Typically, the plantation owner hears all the risks associated with longer rotation lengths. But what if sawmills were willing to share some of these risks in order to improve wood quality? Let’s consider the following options for a farmer who has just paid cash for a large tract