

Top man for Rural Fire

The Fire Service Commission has appointed a director for its new Rural Fire Division. He is Mr Murray Dudfield who took up the post on July 11.

Mr Dudfield recently held the position of Senior Forest Officer (Fire), for the Ministry of Forestry.

He holds a NZ Certificate in Forestry, and his 21 years of forestry experience include senior management responsibility for rural fire in the New Zealand Forest Service and the Ministry of Forestry.

Mr Dudfield was a founder member of the Forest and Rural Fires Association of New Zealand and is currently an executive member of that organisation.

Experience Invaluable

Announcing the appointment, the Chairman of the Fire Service Commission, Hon. Fraser Colman, aid Mr Dudfield's experience would be invaluable to the Commission which became the National Rural Fire Authority on July 1.

Murray Dudfield will manage the Rural Fire Division which is responsible for developing and implementing rural fire policy for the National Rural Fire Authority.

The appointment of two technical officers to the Rural Division is expected shortly.

"The forest and rural fire expertise of Murray Dudfield and his staff will help to make a smooth transition to the new rural fire administration and ensure its success," Mr Colman said.



Murray Dudfield

LETTERS

Community forests

Sir,

There are opportunities for a wide variety of new forests and other plantings, which could be in both urban and rural areas, noted editorial comment in the February issue of NZ Forestry.

The establishment of multi-purpose community forests, in involving a partnership between the public and private sectors, might be one way of taking advantage of these opportunities.

In Britain, the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Commission are now actively promoting the concept of community forests, for which they will jointly provide grant aid.

The proposal is to establish 12 new forests in England and Wales. These would be situated at the edge of, but outside, the built-up area of towns and cities. Each forest would cover an area between 10,000 ha and 17,000 ha, of which perhaps half would be open land or water. Land ownership would be in many hands. The forests would be managed for public access and enjoyment, landscape enhancement and wildlife conservation, as well as for timber production. The motivation is to regenerate derelict land, diversify agricultural use and improve the quality of life for local people and visitors.

The two promoting Commissions are already working alongside local authorities (district, county and metropolitan borough councils) in several areas to set up the first such community forests.

With similar objectives, but on a larger scale, the Countryside Commission on its own is also proposing the creation of a new multi-purpose "national" forest in the English Midlands. This plan would embrace blend of woods, fields, towns and villages and cover an area ranging from 62,000 ha to 100,000 ha, of which around half would be under tree cover, depending on which one of five short-listed sites is finally chosen.

For community forests to become a reality, land would have to be made available for planting, money would have to be found to pay for their creation (over perhaps a generation) and management, and an organisation would need to be established to run them. Clearly, the involvement of business and commerce and of local communities and local government would be essential.

Certainly when, in Thatcherite Britain, the Government is still willing to encourage tree planting with grant aid.

The Ministry of Agriculture is also subsidising farmers to grow trees instead of cereals, with a premium for native broadleaved species like oak, beech and ash.

But, in New Zealand, perhaps the newly-created regional authorities could take the lead in fostering the concept of community forests as one means for promoting economic and environmental goals within their boundaries. The forestry profession would surely lend its support to any broadening of community interest in trees, whilst farmers too might see advantages in diversification.

Eric Bennett

Rothsay, Isle of Bute, Scotland

Compulsory replanting covenant

Sir,

Over the past few months people representing various organisations have been reported in the newspapers as being opposed to the absence of a compulsory replanting covenant in the Crown Forestry Licence. I am not normally one who leaps to the defence of Government policy(!), but I feel that I would like to give fellow members the benefit of my reasoning on the subject. I should like to add that these are my own views and do not necessarily reflect those of the NZ Forestry Corporation for whom I work.

In the 1970s and 80s forestry suffered a lot of antagonism and opposition from some local authorities through proposed changes to their district schemes to 'control' forestry. In particular, Silverpeaks and Clutha Counties in our region both had a repressive attitude to forestry which they thought had either no role to play in the economic welfare of their districts or, at best, should be permitted only on the very poorest land. This attitude was the result of a very genuine feeling amongst Councillors that agriculture was the real wealth of the rural district and that its full potential should be protected. As a result, forestry was permitted as a predominant use only on steep country which could not be farmed profitably.

I attended a number of hearings, the ultimate being for the purpose of sustaining an objection to the Town and Country Planning Tribunal. Amongst other things, a key thrust to my objections was that forestry was another valid use of the land, and that the landowner should be given the freedom to plant a forest crop on his/her land just as he/she already had the freedom to plant (sow) an agricultural crop in the traditional sense of the word - i.e. grain, root crops

or whatever – PROVIDED it was compatible with other constraints on land use such as water and soil control. In other words, provided it met the environmental law constraints, such as they were at the time, then the decision on land use as it relates to forestry or agriculture should be purely at the discretion of the landowner and his/her perception of the relative merits of the alternatives. The trouble was that local authorities thought they knew best about land use and what was good for the individual and the district. But their decisions often did not stack up against their objectives as stated in their district schemes.

Having argued for freedom of the individual to decide whether or not he or she should plant trees on his or her farm, I could hardly condone a policy that would force future forest owners to replant after logging regardless of the

economic consequences of that decision. The only justifications for such a condition would be:

1. If the NZ Forest Service had always been right in its choice of land for forest development. I can assure you that it wasn't, because it was hamstrung with so many conflicting constraints that it was seldom able to optimise in terms of location and site.

2. If there is some overriding reason that the forest estate of New Zealand should not fall below some absolute minimum, such as the current area of the Crown's forest assets. I doubt if this argument can be sustained because:

(a) there is no evidence to suggest that private forests will not continue to exist (and, indeed, expand) in the future;

(b) the Government has no definite policy on how much exotic forest the

country needs for strategic or other reasons. Perhaps it should have such a policy (or strategy) but I am not aware of the existence of one.

So, I maintain that the new owners of the Crown's forest assets should have no more encumbrance on their use of the land than would any other landowner if they had planted it for themselves. Even the Forest Service had areas that they had no intention of replanting after logging, the original planting having taken place in a different era when either land available for planting was scarce (for whatever reason) or where labour for planting was cheap – e.g. the use of the unemployed, or prison labour.

Perhaps members with other views might care to respond?

**Dennys Guild
Invercargill**

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