

Press release 20 August 2013

Save Fiordland campaigners and Conservation Board warn of further destructive development in World Heritage wilderness if Fiordland monorail approved

If plans for a destructive monorail through Snowdon Forest World Heritage wilderness in Fiordland are approved by conservation minister Nick Smith, it will create a legal right to further destructive development in the Greenstone or Caples valleys, say campaigners at Save Fiordland and Otago Conservation Board.

If the monorail across Snowdon Forest is given the go ahead, then there is a legal right for similar schemes to be developed in the Greenstone and Caples valley, also in the World Heritage wilderness area. This legal right is written into the Ngai Tahu Deed of Settlement. The Otago Conservation Board has raised a concern that this could mean a monorail or road up the Greenstone Valley or a gondola up the Caples valley, both stunning wilderness locations.

Gordon Bailey, chair of the Otago Conservation Board and parks manager at Queenstown Lakes District Council, said this issue is a concern of the Board and the position of the Board.

Ngai Tahu owns the Greenstone River flats, and there is a surveyed road route that links the flats with the Hollyford via the Department of Conservation backcountry Howden Hut on the Routeburn Track.

The Greenstone and Caples valley are beautiful, remote wilderness valleys and fishing locations of national importance and also in hunting recreation areas. They are popular valleys for trampers with tramping trails that connect to the world famous Routeburn Track.

Clause 5.3.1 in the Ngai Tahu deed of settlement states that if the minister permitted the undertaking of "any development of any form of road or railway" through the Snowdon conservation area, the minister would not withhold consent, under clause 5.1, for "any proposed development of the same kind or a similar kind" by "the landholder on the land".

This applied if the area affected by the first development had "ecological and recreational values of equal or greater significance" to the other development, and the landholder's proposed development had "no greater impact" on the environment than the permitted development.

The proposed Snowdon Forest monorail is not a low impact, eco scheme. It would destroy thousands of trees in the remote Kiwi Burn valley, currently only used by trampers, anglers and hunters. It would mean the construction of a parallel maintenance road, as well as concrete pylons to take the monorail across wide, wilderness river beds. For safety, to prevent tree fall on the track, it would also mean a wide swath of destruction of trees, including precious red beech trees that can grow to be more than 30 metres tall, hence requiring a minimum 30 metre clearance either side of the monorail if safety is put first.

Bill Jarvie, chair of Save Fiordland, said: "Regardless of whether the Ngai Tahu would ever have any plans to develop similar projects, people need to be aware that the Minister may well be unwittingly giving long term approval to two or three destructive projects, not just one, if he says 'yes' to the monorail. For this reason, it is vital that he says 'no'."

Call to action

To support Save Fiordland, go to www.savefiordland.org.nz or visit us at SaveFiordland on Facebook, then write to Nick Smith objecting to the monorail.

Notes for editors

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About

Save Fiordland is a not for profit incorporated organisation working to preserve Fiordland's wilderness and World Heritage status.