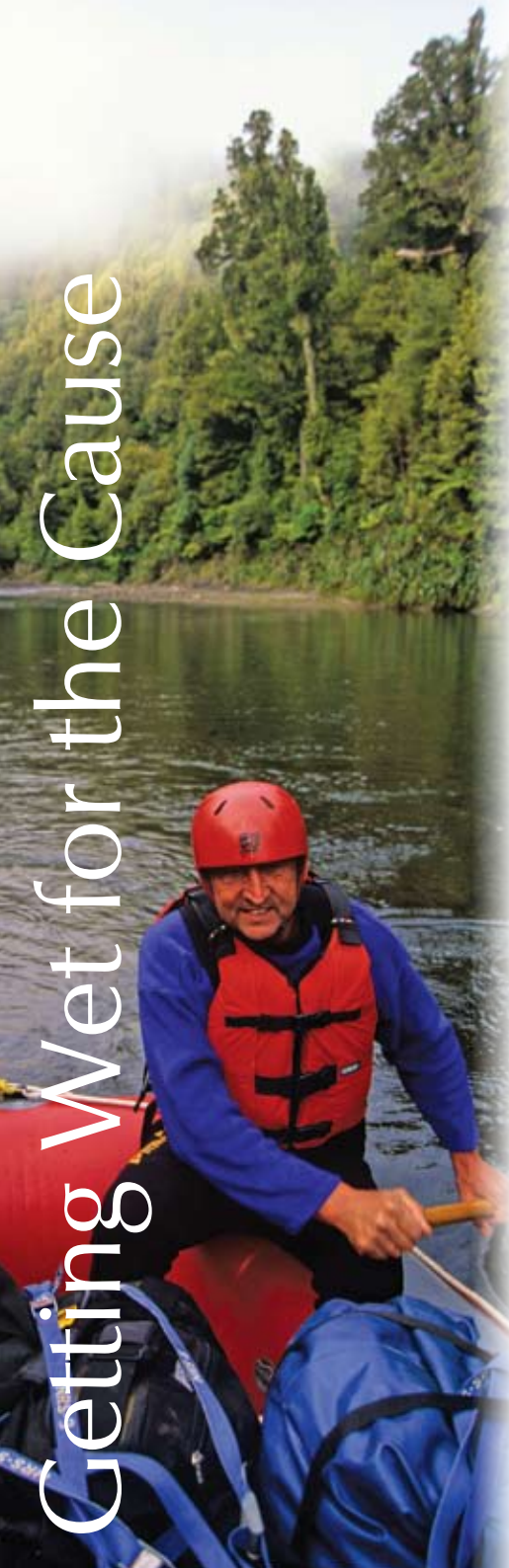


Getting Wet for the Cause



In previous *Bulletins* Quentin Duthie reflected on his Mokihinui River trip and provided some history of wild river campaigns. In this article he looks at the economic value of wild rivers and a new Wild Rivers Campaign.

Wild rivers are the arteries of our wild and natural places, with their own intrinsic ecological and riverscape values. But wild rivers do not just provide opportunities for recreational or aesthetic inspiration – their benefits are economic too.

Wild rivers provide essential ecosystem services and many support substantial downstream economic activity. Wild rivers transport fresh water, falling as rain and snow in the headwaters, down to the lowlands where we live. The unmodified nature of many of our mountainous catchments means that the water is of high quality. Unobstructed rivers are also conduits for sediment and rock that bolster the coastline against sea erosion.

Wild rivers generate significant direct economic benefits, mainly through tourism. The whitewater tourism industry based in Murchison (population 624) is worth \$23 million dollars to the local economy each year. New Zealand is increasingly recognised as an international whitewater destination. Indeed, a recent Air New Zealand in-flight magazine showcased our wild rivers as a stage for whitewater adventure tourism. However, five of the rivers featured in that article are currently under threat.

The indirect tourism benefits of wild rivers are even more significant. A recent travel article in an Australian newspaper, the *Byron Shire News*, described the West Coast's main attractions as 'those nature has provided' and named 'the banks of the untamed Mokihinui River' as a favourite spot. While a dollar value can be placed on the direct tourism benefits of wild rivers, their contribution to the natural beauty that attracts tourists in their hoards is immeasurable.

Of course, there are other economic values competing for our rivers, ones that undermine their wildness. Rivers are also potential sources of hydro-electricity or water irrigation. Both these usually involve damming the flow to create a storage

reservoir. Even a run-of-the-river hydro project will involve an intake structure and reduced river flow. Irrigation uses power to move water uphill, and plans for large-scale water storage on conservation land are emerging.

Presently, New Zealand has 5000MW of hydro-electric generation capacity, with increasing demand for more. Hydro contributed 52.3% of electricity generation in 2008. While this was lower than average due to low water inflows, hydro remains the backbone of our power generation. At current demand rates we need about 150MW more power each year – a Mokihinui every six months. At that rate, we will run out of dammable rivers within about 12 years, begging the question: then what? The answer is renewables like wind and solar, but also acting smarter, planning strategically, improving efficiency and simply consuming less. So why not undertake these measures now and save our remaining wild rivers?

Few major catchments in New Zealand are unaffected by hydro or irrigation. The four largest catchments in the country – the Clutha, Waikato, Waitaki and Waiau – have all been significantly modified, along with scores of other rivers. Only four of the 16 large natural lakes in the South Island are undammed and retain unimpeded fish passage. And the Hurunui River is the last one on the South Island east coast to run from mountains to sea without a dam or significant irrigation takes. Our remaining wild rivers are survivors.

Because of the fundamental alteration to the wild riverscape, dams can be generally regarded as irreversible – at least in terms of restoring natural landscape. In the United States, over 600 dams have been deconstructed in the past 10 years to restore river ecosystems for the benefit of migratory fish. While these attempt to restore their natural state, the scarring of a large dam is in effect permanent.

Yet, storing water to create electricity and irrigate food

production can be appropriate. There is potential to use the water resource appropriately on some of our already modified rivers, for example, and some hydro schemes like the Stockton proposal actually enhance the quality of the Ngakawau River. For these reasons we must focus on what constitutes a wild river.

The Wild Rivers Campaign, of which FMC is a part, considers that a wild river flows from its source freely through a largely unmodified landscape. These include all rivers on public conservation land. Wild rivers therefore have few noticeable human impacts – no dams, abstractions or diversions – and both the water quality and ecological health is likely to be high. And, importantly for FMC, wild rivers are part of our natural and recreation heritage and should be available for enjoyment.

In the Wild Rivers Campaign, FMC has joined with a number of recreation and conservation organisations including Forest and Bird, Fish & Game and the Recreational Canoe Association. Together we want to assert that wild rivers are not renewable and that New Zealand's remaining wild rivers must be protected as national treasures for future generations.

We believe that:

- Wild rivers need the same protection as national parks
- New Zealand's energy future does not need to sacrifice our remaining wild rivers
- Wild rivers are free to be enjoyed by everyone

Trampers, Ruamahanga River gorge, Taranua Forest Park. Photo: Shaun Barnett



- New Zealanders are passionate about wild rivers, which are central to our national identity and international reputation.

Unfortunately, we cannot rely on the Department of Conservation (DOC) to lead the way in protecting our remaining wild rivers. DOC has not initiated any Water Conservation Orders (WCOs) in the past 10 years, despite this being the main legal mechanism to protect a wild river. DOC agrees that WCOs provide strong protection, but doesn't have an appetite for using this mechanism and has no intentions to initiate any in future. While DOC's efforts to influence regional plans have helped protect freshwater fisheries, they can't prevent direct threats to wild rivers. So, campaigning for wild rivers falls on groups like FMC, along with our allied organisations independent of Government.

The Wild Rivers Campaign will unfold over the next few months, and tramping clubs will be asked to become actively involved. A 'day on a river' is being planned for November, a website with informative and practical material is being developed, and we're engaged in various campaigns to protect individual wild rivers. Together we can achieve secure and durable protection for our remaining wild rivers.

There are a few easy things you can do immediately. The last few issues of the *FMC Bulletin* have had articles on wild rivers: their enjoyment, values, threats and the campaign to save them. Drop off copies of these *Bulletins* in huts. The November issue of *Forest & Bird* will be completely focused on wild rivers and can be distributed likewise.

The New Zealand Recreational Canoeing Association recently published a 'Black Issue' of their magazine listing 20 popular white-water rivers under threat. FMC would like to establish a list of all New Zealand wild rivers enjoyed by our members, and describe their values and the threats to them. We've started a list (see below), and invite your feedback. We encourage clubs to send in photos and stories of what makes these rivers special.

For more information contact FMC on wildrivers@fmc.org.nz



Which Rivers to Protect?

The National Water and Soil Conservation Organisation's 1983 list of protected rivers:

North Island

Motu, Tauranga-Taupo, Waitahanui, Waimarino, Mohaka (to Willow Flat), Rangitikei (excluding Moawhango), Whanganui (and Manganui a te Ao), Huka Falls, Waitomo Stream, Waipakihi, Manawatu Gorge, Waimara, Rangitaiki (Wheao to Murupara).

South Island

Big, Heaphy, Karamea, Upper Buller (to Newton Flat), Fox, Bullock Creek, Pororari, Grey (to Lower Gorge), Ahaura, Otira, Waitangi-rotu, Okarito, Cook, Ohinetamatea, Paringa, Haast (including the Landsborough and Clarke), Arawhata, Cascade, Awarua, Hollyford, Arthur and all other Fiordland rivers, Wairaurahiri, Clinton, Eglinton, Upper Mararoa (Mavora Lakes), Oreti, Matukituki, Lochy, Greenstone, Dart, Rees, Shotover, Pomahaka, Ahuriri, Ashburton, Rakaia, Waimakariri, Upper Hurunui, Ada, Clarence, Pelorus, Motueka (to Dove River), Pupu Springs.

The Federated Mountain Clubs proposed additions from 1985:

North Island

Otaki, Tauherenikau, Waiohine, Ngaruroro, Ruakituri, Raukokere, Whakatane, Kauaeranga.

South Island

Aorere, Mokihinui, lower Buller, upper Taramakau, Hopkins, MacLennan, Catlins, upper Rangitata.

Since then threats to the Nevis, Waitaha, Buller rivers (or their tributaries) and other rivers have shown the need to expand this list. So which would you add? Please email your ideas for additions, with a description of why and some reflections on your experience of that river to: wildrivers@fmc.org.nz



Quentin Duthie looks over the Landsborough River, West Coast. Photo: Richard Davies