

Forest & Bird celebrates Minister's Fiordland tunnel decision

Title

Forest & Bird (BirdLife in New Zealand) applauds the Conservation Minister's decision today to reject the controversial proposal to build an 11km tunnel in dual World Heritage Site Te Wahipounamu in Fiordland and Mt Aspiring national parks. Forest & Bird Advocacy Manager Kevin Hackwell says Dr Smith's decision is fantastic news for New Zealanders who value our high conservation areas. "Fiordland is one of those very special places that attracts visitors from all over the world. To cut through 11km of mountain under the Routeburn Track to fast-track a limited number of wealthy tourists to Milford Sound would have been a disaster for the surrounding environment and the local communities that depend on through traffic. "We would have lost nearly 8ha of forest at the Hollyford Portal and risked acid from tunnel spoil leaking into waterways within the national park. "To do so in an area with World Heritage status sends the absolute wrong message to international visitors. We'd be saying New Zealand is more concerned with making a quick buck, than protecting the centuries-old forests and timeless landscapes that the tourists come to see," Kevin Hackwell says. Forest & Bird congratulates the Stop The Tunnel group for its well-organised campaign against the proposal. "We only hope now, the Minister will make a similar decision when considering the proposal to build a monorail through Snowdon Forest in Fiordland." Kevin Hackwell says the impacts of the proposed monorail are even greater and would violate the World Heritage area. "If the monorail goes ahead, we'd see at least 67ha of wildlife-rich forest cleared. This is mostly old-growth lowland red beech forest that supports habitats of 18 threatened species, including long-tailed bats, mohua and kaka." Dr Smith said Riverstone Holding's application for a monorail through Fiordland's Snowdon Forest is still being processed.