

REPORT ON FIELD INSPECTION OF CONCESSION

Licensee: John Cowan, Haast River valley

Inspection Date: December 23, 2015

Purpose: Annual monitoring

Persons present: Andrew Wells

Background:

Since the previous monitoring of this license in 2011, the entire Haast valley grazing area downstream of the Landsborough confluence has been incorporated into the one concession document. This includes the area on the true right of the lower Haast River that was previously leased to John Nolan.

Area covered by this inspection:

This inspection looked at the area on the true left of the Haast River, from the Haast River road bridge upstream to the Landsborough confluence. The true right was not inspected, as the river was too high to cross without a boat.

Fencing:

The 3 wire electric fence still runs from Clarke Bluff for most of the length of the true left of the license area adjacent to State Highway 6. This was in good sound condition and well maintained. On the day of inspection John was spraying weeds along the whole length of fencing.

The large area of yards and fencing at Sunny Flat is well maintained.

No new fencing was observed.

Historic sites, Maori sites, Cultural values:

There are no known historic sites in the license area, or sites of high cultural value.

Recreation access:

This remains unchanged since the previous inspection. Boaters and road users have a number of gated access points to the river scattered along the length of the license area.

It is challenging to cross the electric fence in most other places, but it is unlikely that this would restrict recreation access because most of the logical places for crossing the fence have gates in place.

OTHER ISSUES**Compliance with conditions:**

Stock are now permitted in the former 'Area B' of the Haast Valley, and were observed there during the inspection.

A total of about 110 cows were observed on the day of inspection over the license area.

It appears that conditions in the inspected areas are being complied with. No vegetation removal or earthworks were observed, and there was no evidence of the area having been overstocked.

Impact on conservation values:

The type and magnitude of effects of the grazing regime remain limited to those that would be expected from a long history of extensive grazing. These are the depletion of understorey palatable species in forest patches and margins, some minor tracking and pugging of soils and riverbeds, and an occasional small area of more severe damage to soils and hardwood vegetation in places where stock camp.

Overall, the magnitude and extent of these impacts on conservation values is considered to be minor and of a nature to be expected from the activity. There was no evidence of increased impacts since the previous inspection.

Other:

In the previous inspection, unauthorised vegetation clearance was observed on the lower true right of the license area. At the time, John Nolan was also seeking approval to clear

shrubland in his license area on the true right, and this license area has now passed to John Cowan.

Given this history, it would be prudent to carry out an inspection of this portion of the true right of the Haast River in the near future.

Other activities e.g. Roads, tracks, buildings, bridges, rock protection

The several 4WD vehicle access tracks onto the license area remain open and clear, with sound gates in place.

The Roaring Billy track entrance gate is in good condition, and electric fence hazard is marked.

Haast River Safaris still maintains a gate and access track to the river just upstream of Roaring Billy Falls. Their other access point near Mossy Creek remains unused due to unfavourable river flows.

The collapsed hut at Sunny Flat and scattered building materials are still there.

Is hay or silage being cut?

No (although there is potential for this activity to be undertaken around Sunny Flat).

EFFECTS ON

Soil:

Low levels of pugging were observed along stock access tracks that traversed forest patches throughout the license area. Grassy flats had only very localised areas of pugging, and ponds and wetland areas were little affected. There were occasional areas on the edge of forest patches where the Haast River flowed hard against the bank, where more severe damage to soils was observed. This was especially obvious in the Douglas Bluff area.

Overall, the level of effects on soils was lower than expected. This may reflect the extensive nature of grazing, and the tendency for stock to move fairly widely over the license area rather than stay on single small flats and forest patches.

Vegetation:

At the time of inspection, there was abundant lush grass over most of the area inspected. Sunny Flat in particular had very long grass. The area around Macpherson Creek and up to Douglas Bluff was an exception to this, and was quite eaten out when inspected; John Cowan confirmed that stock had been on that flat for several weeks continuously.

Isolated native plants on the flats and riverbeds (mainly toetoe and coprosma species) showed generally minor levels of browse, with an occasional exception of heavy browse on some individuals.

The effects of grazing on forest margins and forest patches appeared to be similar to previous inspections. Moderate browse of palatable shrubs was evident throughout, along with a depletion of saplings of favoured species in the understorey compared with ungrazed forest outside of the license area. Lots of seedling regeneration of favoured species was observed, but significantly fewer saplings of these species, due to browse.

Abundant regeneration of canopy species was observed. This included kahikatea, broadleaf, miro and silver beech. Seedling regeneration was also observed on the old River Safaris track near Mossy Creek, with many silver beech and kahikatea seedlings on disturbed ground.

The impacts of stock browse on vegetation appeared more noticeable where forest patches abut grassy flats and less pronounced where the forest abuts gravel and river. This is presumably because stock spend more time sheltering and grazing in forest areas that adjoin the main grassy flats.

There was evidence of cattle having pushed over and killed a few scattered individuals of coprosma and *Hoheria glabrata* in the Douglas Bluff area, but this was very limited.

The large patch of hardwood forest at Sunny Flat was in similar condition to previous inspections. Quite abundant regeneration of *Plagianthus regius* (seedlings and saplings) was observed in places, including on the forest margins and into the grassland. This suggests that the level of grazing is not hindering regeneration of this valuable forest type.

Overall, effects of grazing on vegetation have remained at a level consistent with extensive grazing. The primary adverse effects are still the depletion of understorey species in forest patches, and browse of native species on river flats. Impacts have remained at levels to be expected for the activity.

Weeds:

Gorse does not appear to have spread upstream from about Thomas Bluff, but remains abundant downstream of there.

Isolated clumps of blackberry were observed throughout, but do not appear to have increased in abundance.

Pasture weeds were present throughout – ragwort, thistle, lotus and foxglove.

Waterways:

Rivers and creeks were running clear when inspected.

The several ponds were all in clear condition, and damage to soils and vegetation around their margins was very minor – only occasional hoof prints.

Fisheries:

No known adverse effects of grazing on the fisheries.

Areas downstream of the road bridge are known whitebait spawning areas, and these should be assessed in a separate inspection.

Fauna:

The grazing regime is having no known effects on fauna. However, it is possible that stock disturb ground nesting birds at times.

Pests:

The grazing regime is having no known effects on pests in the area. The concessionaire is not undertaking any formal pest control programmes.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The license area inspected appears to have been well managed since the previous inspection, and there are no more than the expected levels of adverse effects from the grazing. Conditions of the license appear to have been complied with.

It is recommended that the results of this monitoring are communicated and discussed with

John Cowan.

It is also recommended that the area of license recently acquired by John Cowan on the true right of the Haast River is inspected soon, to ascertain its current condition and ensure license conditions are being complied with.

Community Relations Officer: Andrew Wells

Date: 31 March 2016