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"(Re)Interpreting Exotic Plantation Forestry in 1920s New Zealand"

Roche, Michael

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Environmental historians who have contributed to the understanding of "econationalism in New Zealand and within the sub-area of forest history have shown how deforestation produced a preservationist impulse and an exotic afforestation response to timber famine. My own work, in partial contrast, has tended to explore the largely unsuccessful efforts at indigenous forest management for production in the nineteenth century as well as suggesting that the large-scale afforestation boom of the 1920s and 1930s was a departure from the anticipated direction of state efforts when the Forests Department was established in 1919. Previously I have argued that the New Zealand State Forest Service under its first director L. M. Ellis initially favoured an orthodox state forestry model anchored on sustained-yield management of indigenous forests, and only later turned to large-scale exotic plantations, in order to forestall a projected timber famine by 1965, and to buy time to enable the mechanisms for regenerating indigenous forests to be understood. This paper looks more closely at Ellis' initial statements about the role of plantation forestry and suggests that a partial change of interpretation is needed. (Text from author's abstract)

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