



Left, Denniston Plateau, with Mt William in the distance. Right, the Solid Energy mine has destroyed half of Stockton Plateau, including Mt Augustus and virtually all the habitat for the *Powelliphanta augusta* giant land snail.

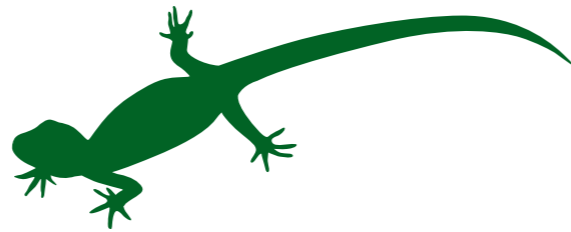
ELECTION YEAR

In 2011 it is a chance to show initiative in protecting our ecosystems for their own sake, and for future generations.

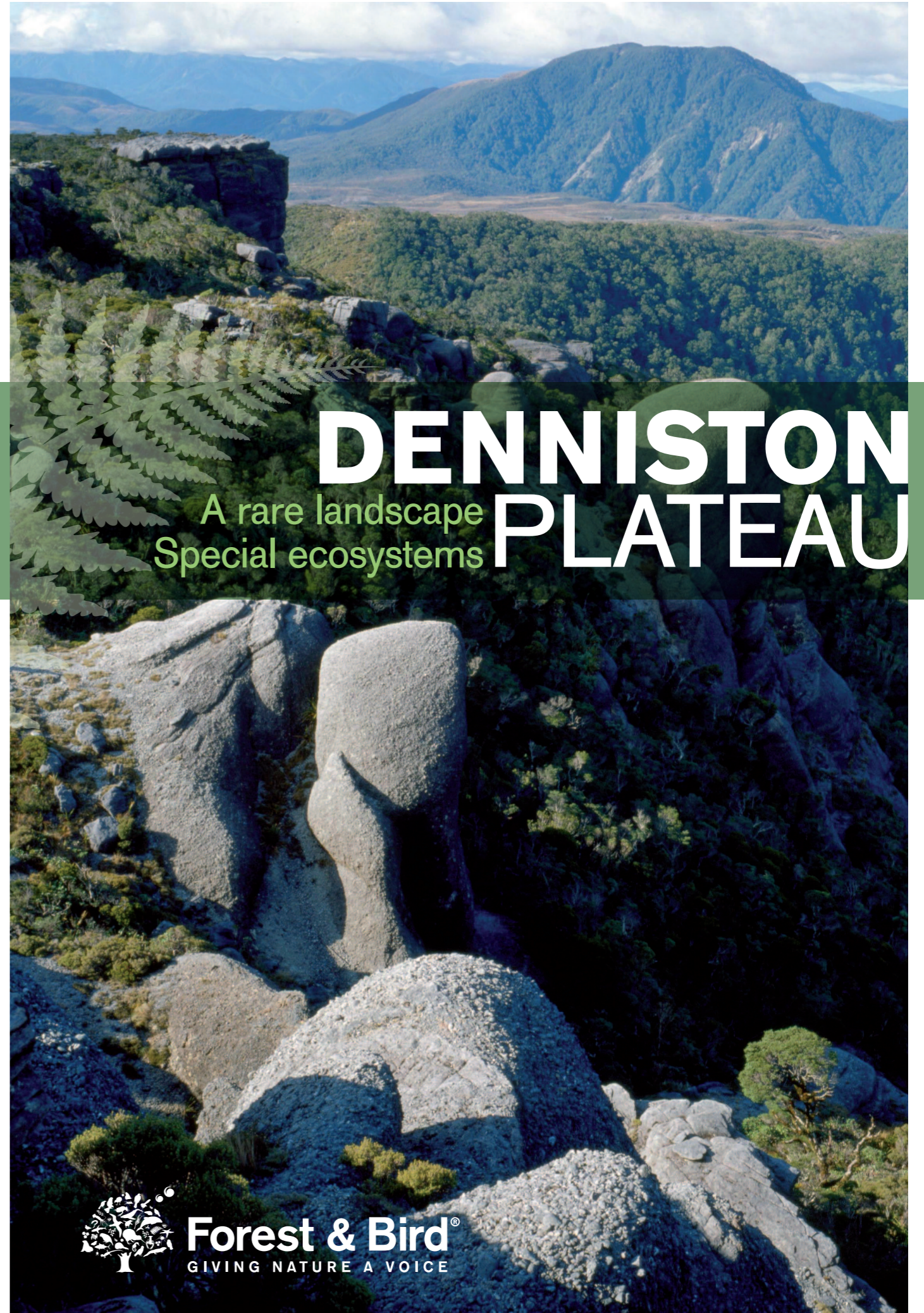
The release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from the removal of coal within its current carbon sink will add to the problem of global warming. Creating the

Denniston Reserve and retaining the coal in the ground will provide a carbon bank for the future as well as protecting these rare and threatened habitats, landforms and species.

Forest & Bird asks political parties to show commitment to this initiative in 2011.



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DENNISTON PLATEAU

A rare landscape
Special ecosystems





Great spotted kiwi, or roroa, are found on the Denniston Plateau.

THE PLACE

Denniston and Stockton plateaus

Formed about 40 million years ago, this outstanding natural landscape is a treasure trove of 18 identified plant communities – from bonsai gardens of pigmy pine, manuka and rata to vast sandstone pavements patterned with stunted grasses; unique stalactite bryophytes in streambeds and gully forests filled with mountain beech, pink pine and mountain cedar. Rare plants inhabit this vast landscape, including red mistletoe, and the threatened tussock, *Chionochloa juncea*.

The plateaus include historically rare ecosystems. Boulder fields of acidic rocks are found in only two places in New Zealand – within Deep Stream catchment and on the upper slopes of Mt Rochfort. The sandstone pavements are more extensive (1500 ha) – and are found in only one other place in

New Zealand. Seepages, flushes and tarns are also historically rare, and the plateaus have some good examples.

Rare and threatened animal species live on Denniston and Stockton plateaus, including great spotted kiwi (roroa), fernbirds, western weka and kaka. But it is the diversity of smaller animal life that characterises the plateaus. Rare giant land snails are found throughout the area, including the nationally endangered *Powelliphanta patrickensis*. Cryptic species such as the West Coast green gecko, ground

weta and freshwater crayfish (koura), inhabit rock crevices, streams and shrublands. Species new to science are regularly being revealed.



The nationally endangered *Powelliphanta patrickensis*.

THE THREAT

Coal mining

This rare ecosystem overlies an extensive coal deposit, known as the Buller coal fields. More than half of the Stockton Plateau has already been mined by Solid Energy, with plans for an expansion of these mines into other areas of the plateau, such as the consented Cypress mine in Happy Valley.

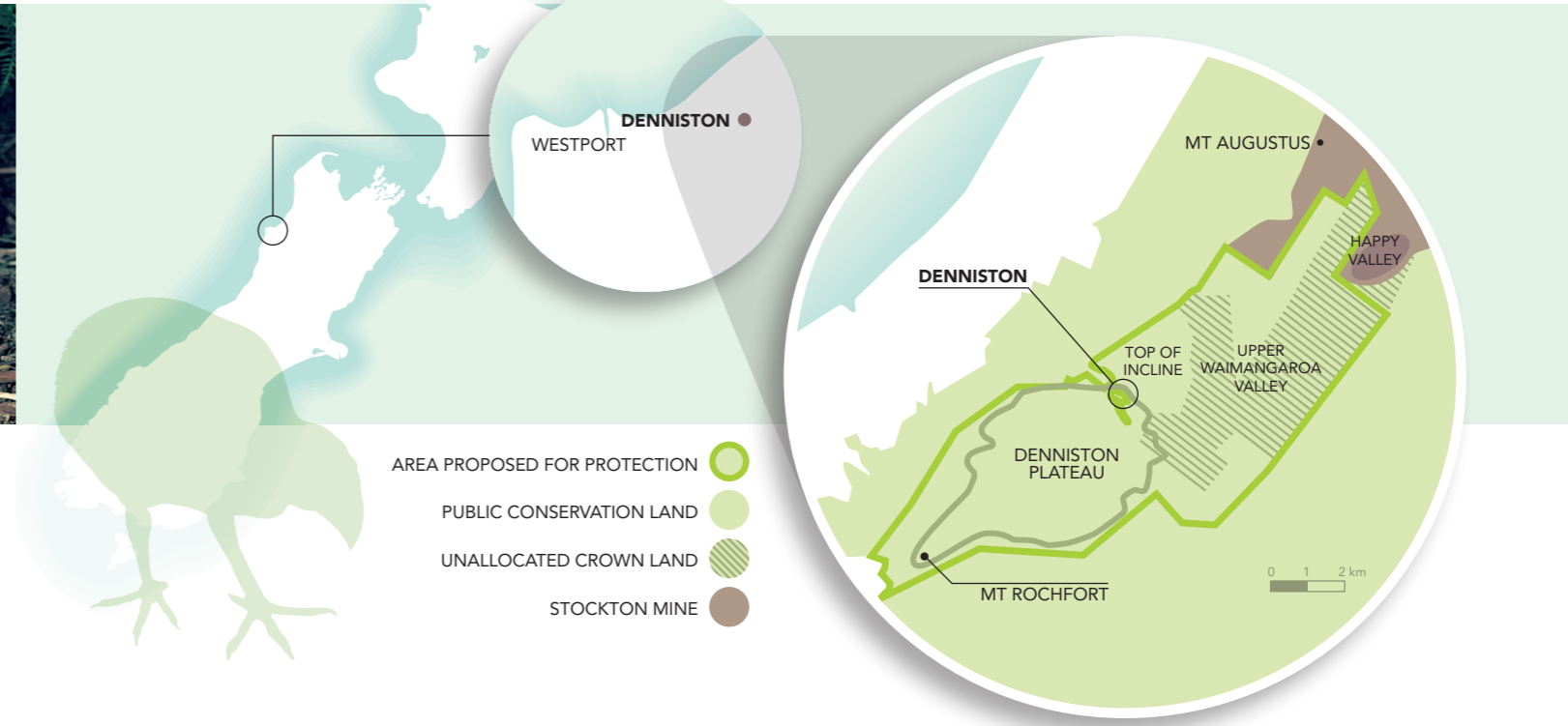
The Denniston Plateau has a history of small underground mining, but has been spared the destruction of habitat through open-cast mining. However, Australian-owned Bathurst Resources have recently purchased several permits on the Denniston Plateau with plans to exploit all of the coal available. The company is currently seeking resource consent for an initial open-cast mine on the Denniston Plateau of 6.1 million tonnes, but has indicated it wishes to mine up to an additional 80 million tonnes from the wider Denniston Plateau and Deep Stream area of Stockton Plateau.

The Westport consent hearing for the 6.1 million-tonne Escarpment Mine Project has just concluded. The applicant is seeking a 12-year mining consent, but 35-year consent for a large coal processing plant and infrastructure on the Denniston Plateau. The company has advised that it is uneconomic for it to build this infrastructure unless it can mine further coal in the vicinity.

The Department of Conservation was not present at the hearing, and the absence caused considerable difficulties with ascertaining the full conservation values of the Denniston Plateau. Furthermore, the applicant company proposes a series of offsite mitigations that involve public conservation land and there was no capacity to scrutinise these proposals at the hearing.

The Department of Conservation will consider an access arrangement for the mine, and a concession application for the coal processing plant. Both decisions will need to be made by the Minister or Ministerial delegation – with the first determination reports expected around August/September.

Because this land has high conservation values and is the only land protected within the public conservation estate on the Brunner coal measures, we urge the Minister to decline all applications.



FOREST & BIRD'S PROPOSAL FOR LONG-TERM PROTECTION

Denniston Reserve, protected under Schedule 4

Forest & Bird proposes a 5900-hectare reserve based on the Denniston Plateau and surrounds. The reserve would protect the natural and historic features, and remain an opportunity for ongoing recreational activity, eg mountain-biking. It excludes current and permitted coal mines, and private land. The key to its protection would be including it within Schedule 4 of the Crown Minerals Act.

A significant amount of information on the high conservation values of the wider Denniston and Stockton plateaus has been gathered over several years, with information being held by the Department of Conservation, mining companies, environmental organisations and through resource consent and Environment Court proceedings.

Our proposal for a reserve based on the public conservation land on the Denniston Plateau is based on the best information regarding important species habitats, ecosystems and rare landforms.

Denniston Plateau

As conservation land, the Denniston Plateau is the best intact example of the ecosystems remaining free of open-cast mining. It includes a 1138ha pakihi wetland of national significance – which is home to the threatened fernbird. It has important habitat for *Powelliphanta patrickensis* giant land snails. The Whareatea River includes the best example of stalactite bryophytes in New Zealand and Australia, and Mt Rochfort is habitat for translocated *Powelliphanta augusta* giant land snails, the rare acidic boulder fields, and *Dracophyllum densum*.

Mt William Range

Mt William Range is known to provide excellent habitat for great spotted kiwi, and is an outstanding natural landscape with expanses of shrublands, tall forest and bluff outcrops. A new species, the Mt William flatworm, has recently been discovered in this area.

Upper Waimangaroa

The Waimangaroa River is the key river flowing to the south of the Stockton Plateau. The gorge is spectacular, with rocky outcrops and several streams draining from the southern slopes of Stockton. These naturally clear and slightly acidic streams are home to freshwater crayfish (koura). It is stronghold habitat for *Powelliphanta patrickensis* giant land snails.

Southern Stockton Plateau and Deep Stream

The southern slopes of the Stockton Plateau reveal some of the best remaining large landscapes of historically rare sandstone erosion pavements and acidic boulder fields. Deeply incised into the southern slopes of the Stockton Plateau, Deep Stream is also important habitat for both great spotted kiwi and *Powelliphanta patrickensis*. The combination of plateau and river gorge provides a wide variety of plant associations.

Benefits

The proposed Denniston Reserve is of sufficient size to provide a continuity of complex landforms, rare ecosystems and habitats that will allow for long-term sustainability. Its shape will allow for effective predator control when/if required, reducing the effects of potential pest reinvasion.