

# DEER HUNTERS

FROM Page 1

By BROOKE GARDINER

IT'S not rigged.

That's what Fiordland Wapiti Foundation vice-president Ron Peacock has made clear after accusations from deer hunters that the annual ballot system to shoot Wapiti in the bugle season in the Fiordland National Park was unfair.

"There's no way that it can be rigged," he said.

"It is definitely as legitimate as it can be."

The ballot is drawn under police supervision using an electronic system and entrants are numbered as payment is received, he said.

When asked how it could be possible that some people were getting "randomly drawn" for the same blocks year after year, Mr Peacock laughed and said: "Yes that happens actually and that's random."

He went on to confirm one foundation committee member had drawn the same block for the past three years.

This year more than 1000 applied through the ballot but a maximum of only 300 hunters get to shoot on the 25 blocks of land.

Veteran Alexandra hunter Chris Cameron said he and a friend, who he describes as another foundation agitator, both drew their first choices in the ballot this year.

He said he didn't think it had anything to do with coincidence.

"Out of the 300-odd parties going



Caption: Ron Peacock, left, and Chris Whyte from the Wapiti Foundation checking out antlers taken from the Wapiti area in Fiordland. Photo: BARRY HARCOURT.

in there - how do the two agitators get a block?"

Mr Cameron said he had been pushing to "clean up" the ballot system for a number of years.

"A lot of guys want to see a manual system used," he said.

Fellow hunter Gareth MacRae supported the notion of using a

manual system and said he would be happy to see names drawn out of a hat, regardless of how long the process took.

Mr McTae said it was "too unique" that certain hunters were being drawn consistently in the same block, year after year.

"I'd argue there is a formula that

isn't above board. People are sick of it. Emotions are running high," he said.

Mr Cameron said he would sooner miss out on a block and have the ballot drawn fairly.

If the issue couldn't be sorted he would consider starting a second user group, he said.

## ► BALLOT FACTS:

■ The ballot period refers to the bugle, which is divided into two fortnightly periods.

■ This year they were: March 16 - March 29 and March 3 - April 12.

■ Hunters pay to enter into a random ballot in the hope of being allocated a block of land in the Wapiti Area to hunt during the popular bugle period.

■ There are 25 blocks in the Wapiti area and a maximum of six hunters are permitted to hunt on a block at any time during the period.

■ The only time the Wapiti area is closed for all hunting is from March 1 until the start of the first ballot period each year.

■ The Wapiti Ballot Committee comprises representatives from DOC, NZ Deerstalkers Association, Safari Club International, Southland Recreational Hunters Club, Fiordland Wapiti Foundation and the Fiordland Wapiti Trust (which comes under the Foundation umbrella).

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Roy Rose

# UP IN ARMS

By BROOKE GARDINER

WILD deer hunters in the south are angry and they want some answers.

They're concerned they could be squeezed out of shooting in the Fiordland National Park and they also believe an annual ballot system to hunt the prized Wapiti herd is rigged.

The ballot has been held since the 1920s and it allows hunters to shoot the Wapiti over two fortnight-long periods during the popular March-April bugle season, which is commonly known as the "roar".

Winning a ballot is sought after nationally and internationally because the Fiordland Wapiti is the only wild herd of its type in the Southern Hemisphere.

This year more than 1000 applied through the ballot but a maximum of only 300 hunters ever get to shoot.

Alexandra's Chris Cameron has been hunting in the area for more than 30 years and has major concerns with the ballot.

"It's meant to be random but there's some pretty hard evidence that it's being unfairly drawn," he said.

"One chap's had the same block five years in a row."

On top of the balloting worries, Mr Cameron is also leading a petition against an idea to close the national park to hunters in the months leading up to the ballot period.

The Te Anau-based Fiordland Wapiti Foundation, which is responsible for managing the impact of deer in the Wapiti area of the park, has conducted a survey with hunters on whether to close the area off earlier.

An application to close it earlier



**Happy Hunters:** Te Anau hunters Roger Footo, left, and Clinton Shefford with their 11pt trophy heads from last season's bugle. Mr Footo's Wapiti-red deer hybrid was shot in the Wild Natives area of the Wapiti area, Sneffords, in the Kepler Mountains. Photo: BARRY HARCOURT

would have to go to the Department of Conservation.

Mr Cameron said he wasn't sure about the foundation's intentions. "It's our public and legal right to have access," he said.

"They haven't got the bloody right to tell you and me when we can and can't go hunting."

"I don't see how closing a national park to recreational hunters benefits anybody - it just doesn't stack up."

Mr Cameron said he had "most of Te Anau on board", adding that "local hunters can't have their park shut".

"I don't believe DOC will even entertain the idea of closing a National Park," he said.

The Department of Conser-

vation hadn't replied to questions put to them by the Mirror at the time of print but Fiordland Wapiti Foundation vice-president Ron Peacock said there would have to be strong support for change.

"We've got no agendas to keep anyone out."

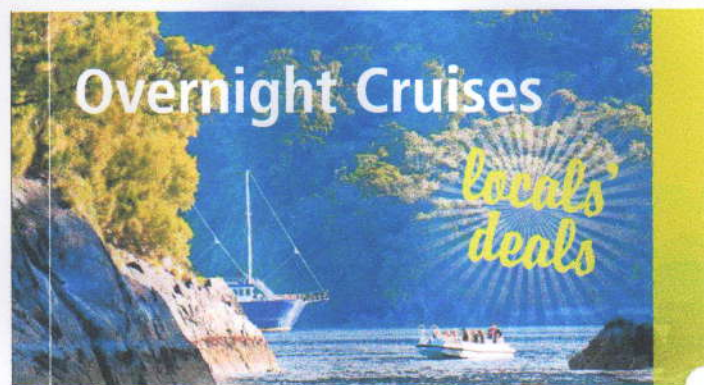
He said the foundation was

"neutral" on the issue so conducted a survey, which he said had "created some confusion" among hunters.

Mr Peacock said the recent survey closed at the end of last month and the results had not been collated. He expected to know the results within the next week.

## ► YOUR SAY?

Do you have concerns about the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation's ballot system, or the potential early hunting closure of Fiordland National Park? Let us know at: [communities@stl.co.nz](mailto:communities@stl.co.nz)



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