

Part Five: Visitor Management

5.1 PLANNING RATIONALE

Fiordland National Park is unique to New Zealand with the vast scale of the park, both in the actual size of Fiordland and the isolation that visitors may feel when in the national park. This, combined with the sheer vertical scale in the rugged fiord environments and significant rivers, lakes, tarns and waterfalls, set Fiordland aside from any other national park in New Zealand. Its uniqueness is enhanced by the natural quiet that is found in many areas of Fiordland and the extreme climatic conditions that can be experienced at any time of the year. Fiordland National Park appeals to a wide range of visitors, both nationally and internationally who come to Fiordland to appreciate the diversity of nature, landscapes and vistas afforded by the national park and fiord environment, dominated by post glacial landforms.

Visitors may look to connect with nature, and the Department of Conservation looks to promote this by managing Fiordland National Park with a range of opportunities being available to suit a range of skills, abilities and demands of visitors. These range from visitors who wish to experience Fiordland but have facilities available, such as at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi, where visitors can drive, be driven, fly or arrive by boat, through to gazetted Wilderness Areas where there are no facilities and where visitors must be entirely self-reliant. Visitors can tramp through these Wilderness Areas, navigating for many tens of kilometres without any routes or signs or encountering other parties.

In recent years Fiordland National Park has experienced a steady increase in visitor numbers. Growth in visitor numbers is expected to continue, with international attention on Fiordland enhanced by Fiordland National Park being part of the Te Wāhipounamu - *South West New Zealand* World Heritage Area. Needs and aspirations of visitors are addressed within the context of the prime aims of management: preservation of the park's natural and historic features.

Increasing use and tourism initiatives bring pressure for additional visitor opportunities often with associated facilities. Changing and conflicting use requires consideration of what is the appropriate mix of opportunities to be provided in the future. Although Fiordland National Park contains a vast visitor resource, it is not essential nor indeed desirable to provide for every possible user taste or preference. Outside Fiordland National Park many opportunities are available, or potential exists for them, particularly on other conservation lands in the southern part of New Zealand.

An amenity area is an area within a national park where the development and operation of recreational and public amenities and related services for public use and enjoyment of the national park may be authorised in

accordance with the National Parks Act 1980. National park values only apply in an amenity area in so far as they are compatible with the development and operation of such amenities and services. Fiordland National Park has no amenity areas. Any proposal for an amenity area in Fiordland National Park would require notification through a public process and will require a change to this management plan. A proposal for an amenity area should demonstrate that it is for the development and operation of recreational or public amenities appropriate for public use and enjoyment of Fiordland National Park, and that these could not be located outside of Fiordland National Park.

Fiordland has its own special attributes, including large tracts of wilderness and remote country. Maintaining these wilderness/remote values should be accorded priority in the visitor management of Fiordland National Park.

Commercial and non-commercial recreation activities occur in many forms within Fiordland National Park. Many activities are assisted by concessionaires (commercial operators). For example the majority of people who make their way to Milford Sound / Piopiotahi do so through tourism operators; many trampers utilise aircraft to access the more remote parts of Fiordland. Environmentally, concessionaires can play an important role in advocating national park values to Fiordland National Park visitors.

It is also important to recognise that Fiordland National Park is managed to reflect its international importance as a World Heritage Area. A component of this classification is the role of Fiordland as a “wilderness” of national and international significance. The effects of visitor management must be considered in this context, not just in terms of its importance in the regional and national New Zealand environment.

Management requires user information to allocate resources effectively. Potential environmental impacts must be anticipated, and visitor safety from hazards ensured to a reasonable degree.

This plan uses a three-fold approach to managing visitor activities in Fiordland National Park. Firstly, a zoning strategy divides Fiordland National Park into various visitor settings and indicates where activities or development may take place (section. 5.3). The purpose of the zoning is to minimise conflict between various visitor opportunities; to manage increasing demand for changes to visitor opportunities; and to ensure certainty for visitors so they know what visitor experience will be provided and where in Fiordland National Park.

Secondly, more detailed provisions are set out for the management of specific activities or developments across Fiordland National Park (sections 5.4 – 5.16). Finally in some particular places in Fiordland National Park where there is intense use or where more pressing issues have been identified, there are specific provisions relating to that place.

This approach is intended to give strategic direction to visitor management while retaining flexibility to consider future initiatives.

Fiordland National Park adjoins areas managed by the Otago and West Coast conservancies. Consistent cross-boundary management will be achieved where possible.

Objectives

1. To ensure the preservation of Fiordland National Park's natural characteristics, including the iconic status of Fiordland National Park, values and historic features while meeting the needs and aspirations of visitors.
2. To allow for a range of both commercial and non-commercial recreational activities within Fiordland National Park managed in accordance with the range of visitor settings.
3. To work with commercial operators within Fiordland National Park to promote visitor appreciation of the national park and world heritage values.
4. To consider any proposal for changes to visitor settings in accordance with the natural, historical and cultural, recreational, landscape and amenity values of Fiordland National Park.

Implementation

1. To gather information on the use of Fiordland National Park to monitor visitor use and any trends in this use.
2. To assess information gathered on visitor use and trends to determine future management priorities for the preservation of natural characteristics and values of Fiordland National Park.
3. To work with both commercial and non-commercial recreational user groups to ensure co-operation between such groups and to avoid potential conflict for differing user groups in the same location within Fiordland National Park.
4. Amenity areas within Fiordland National Park should only be considered where the amenities cannot be located outside of Fiordland National Park.
5. Any proposal to establish an amenity area within Fiordland National Park should need to demonstrate that the adverse effects of the amenity area on the rest of Fiordland National Park would be minimised, in accordance with Objective 4 above. Any such proposals will require an amendment to the Fiordland National Park Management Plan.

6. Unless otherwise provided for in the Fiordland National Park Management Plan, any proposals to change the visitor settings in Fiordland National Park will require an amendment to the Fiordland National Park Management Plan.