

5.2 VISITOR AUDIT

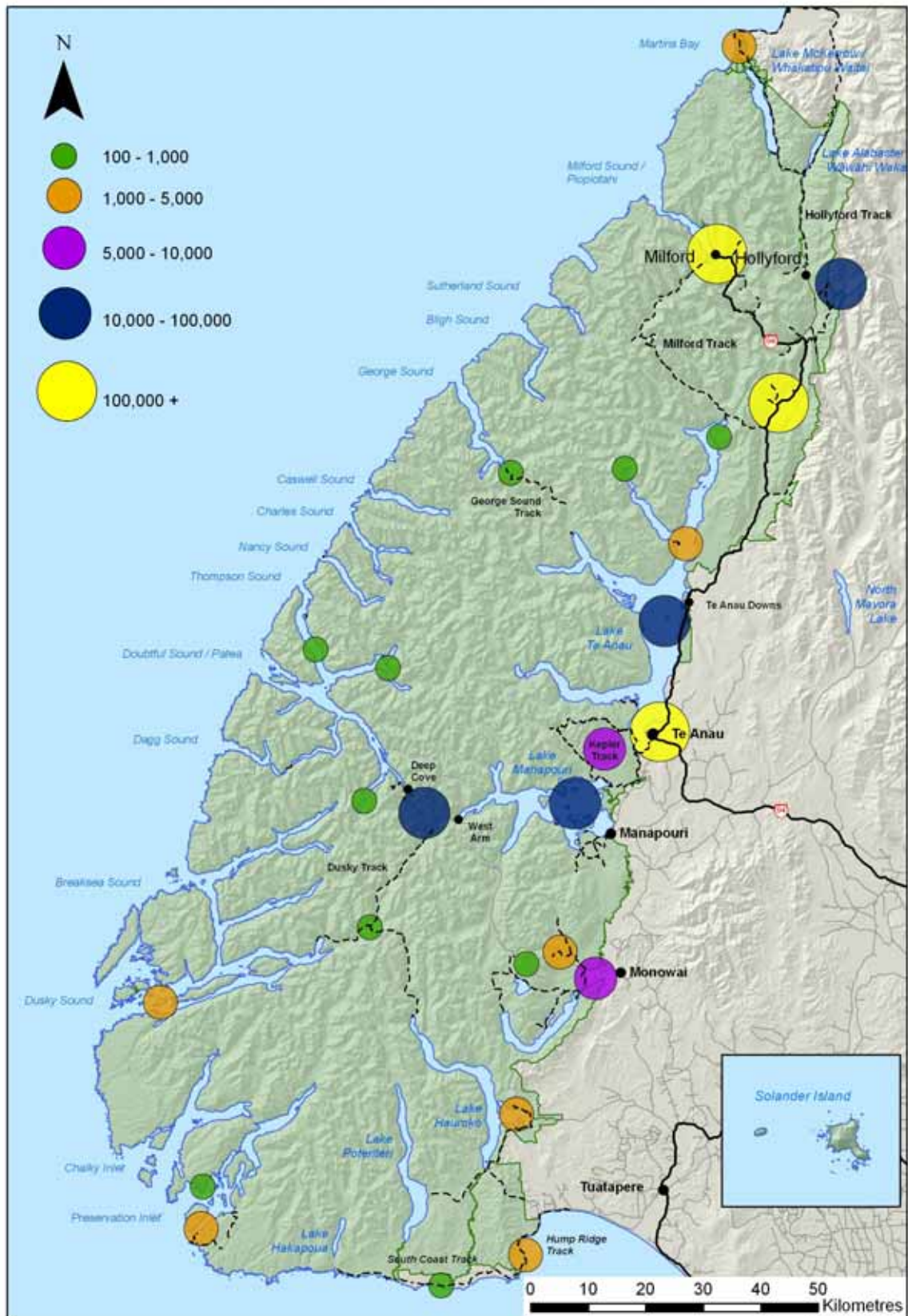
5.2.1 Fiordland National Park Visitor and Tourism Trends

Fiordland National Park has a deserved, and increasingly significant, reputation as one of New Zealand's premier locations for outdoor and nature-based recreation activities. Fiordland National Park contains several significant tourist attractions for a range of both international and domestic tourists, the most popular being Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and the Milford Road. Fiordland National Park is an integral component of the Queenstown-dominated Southern Lakes tourism 'product'. Within the regional context Fiordland National Park has many unique attributes including high-standard day and multi-day walking tracks, the mountain wilderness, and the southwest fiords with their natural and historic interest. On the other hand, activities such as downhill snow skiing, off-road driving and mountain biking are catered for at other locations within the region, but generally outside of Fiordland National Park.

In 2005 there were around 650 000 visitors were attracted to Fiordland National Park (2005 data), with the main concentration of visits occurring within the north-eastern sector from Manapōuri to Milford Sound / Piopiotahi, a result of well-developed road and boat access (refer Map 5). The predominant visitor and tourism infrastructure is located within this sector, with trips along the Milford Road and cruises on Milford Sound / Piopiotahi being by far the most popular attractions in and adjoining Fiordland National Park. The main visitor season occurs from mid October until the end of April. It has extended earlier, and later, over recent years, often dependent upon the prevailing climatic conditions and the wider tourism industry trends. Visitation peaks between January and March. Use patterns over recent years have shown a moderate increase in visitation to the park's major attractions outside of the traditional visitor season. The prominence of these shoulder periods may have implications for future visitor management where significant congestion and infrastructure capacity and change of opportunity issues arise during the main visitor season.

Fiordland National Park does not have the same pattern of use as other protected natural areas with more accessible population catchments. The distance from large urban centres supports the perception of wilderness and remoteness that provides a distinct draw card and 'pull' factor to those who do visit Fiordland National Park and has increasingly been identified by visitors as one of Fiordland's main attractions.

MAP 5. ANNUAL VISITOR NUMBERS



The lakes and rivers of Fiordland National Park provide numerous opportunities for power boating, water skiing, sailing, kayaking and trout fishing.

The presence of introduced animals in Fiordland National Park provides recreational hunting opportunities for red deer, wapiti-type deer and on a smaller scale for pigs and chamois. Wapiti-type deer in particular, although less widespread and less numerous than red deer, are highly prized by hunters for their trophy value. Hunting blocks within the wapiti area (see Map 7) are balloted during the popular autumn hunting period. Trout fishing is a very popular recreation activity within Fiordland National Park. In 2005 it is estimated that there were around 24,000 trout fishing trips in Fiordland National Park. The most popular areas include the lakes and their main tributaries.

There are numerous less heavily used tracks, routes and huts in Fiordland National Park that provide remote tramping opportunities for those with backcountry experience and skills. Data collected over the past ten years show that the more accessible of these tracks (e.g. the Dusky) are receiving more frequent use and that use by international visitors is increasing as a proportion of total use. One of the challenges for Fiordland National Park management is to ensure that traditional remote and wilderness boating, trout fishing, hunting and tramping opportunities are protected in the face of these trends.

Fiordland is valued for its size, remoteness and ruggedness. One of the ways to protect these values in the long term is through the creation of designated Wilderness Areas. These ensure large tracts of Fiordland National Park retain their wilderness qualities free from facility development and mechanised access. There are two gazetted Wilderness Areas in Fiordland – the Glaisnock and the Pembroke. Many other areas of Fiordland National Park retain these characteristics; however, the only area being considered for gazettal is the southwest corner of Fiordland National Park.

Outdoor and nature-based recreation is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the leisure and tourism industry in the developed world today. Greater environmental awareness internationally and an increase in the numbers of independent travellers has resulted in an increase in adventure and eco-tourism activities and has accelerated commercial opportunities in these fields.

To illustrate the growing range of activities in Fiordland National Park, there have been more people undertaking all of the following over the last ten years: white water kayaking, multi-sport events, mountain running, backcountry skiing, remote trout fishing, paragliding, power boating, overnight walking trips and commercial guided trips into the backcountry. This growth in activity has contributed to an increased recognition of Fiordland National Park as a significant regional and national recreation resource. There has also been an increase in activities such as sea kayaking and scuba diving in the marine areas

adjoining the Fiordland National Park. Consequently there has been an increase in Fiordland National Park-based activities that service these.

There is no indication that the increase in the use of natural areas for active recreational activity, nor the development of new outdoor activities and pursuits will diminish in the immediate future.

A significant influence on use patterns in Fiordland National Park is the continued growth of Te Anau and Queenstown. The largest user group in Fiordland National Park is day visitors from Queenstown visiting Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and to a lesser extent Doubtful Sound / Patea. This in itself provides challenges for the Department of Conservation. As Te Anau expands, the pressure on the park's resources increases. There are increasing demands to provide further and differing recreation and tourism opportunities for these visitors. At times these may be in conflict. The response of the Department of Conservation will be determined by the values attributed to different areas and the outcomes sought for them.

Fiordland National Park will be managed to provide a range of recreation opportunities. This plan will provide for growth in some areas while reducing visitor numbers in other areas. This will ensure that the key opportunities Fiordland National Park offers remain for the enjoyment of present and future generations.

While much of the regional tourist activity occurs around the Southern Lakes, initiatives are being made to market a wider region using promotional concepts such as the Southern Scenic Route. Increasing tourist traffic on this route may place increased pressure on existing recreation resources.

Tourist industry forecasts predict further major growth in the numbers of international visitors coming to New Zealand. The Tourism Research Council of New Zealand expects that tourism will continue to grow during the period of current predictions (i.e. up until 2011). It is expected that visitor nights for international visitors to Fiordland National Park will increase by 29.2% over this period. Such growth on the national scale will see similar growth in demand for visits to individual national parks and other protected natural areas in line with emerging global travel trends. How the anticipated growth and trends can be best catered for in Fiordland National Park is discussed in the following sections of this plan. There is an urgent requirement to improve information bases and monitoring of visitor use and trends in Fiordland National Park to assist in management forecasts and proactive responses to identified use trends. Gathering information presented in such information bases allows for access within the Fiordland National Park to be appropriately managed. Certain opportunities may require limits (e.g. boating access) to enable the most appropriate management of the whole range of recreational opportunities and for the protection of natural park values.

5.2.2 Access

Water Access

Water access is an integral part of how visitors enjoy this national park. The lakes and some rivers provide easy access to the backcountry, and remote and wilderness recreation opportunities. There are regular water taxi services on the larger lakes providing access to the Great Walk tracks, favourite hunting and fishing spots, and access for tramping opportunities. Other activities such as scenic and nature watching opportunities are provided by boats. There are also several commercial kayaking and jet boat operators within Fiordland National Park. Recreational boating is also a popular activity.

Demand for water based access is increasing and with this opportunity also comes some challenges. Improved access can result in changing use patterns, displacement of current users, and sometimes changing recreation opportunity type. Increased use could result in pressures on wilderness, remote and backcountry values. Demand for lakeside facilities is increasing, for example in areas adjoining wilderness and remote opportunities. This impacts on natural character and is contrary to preserving the park in a natural state. There is risk of weed infestations brought in on boats from other places.

About 40 international cruise ships visit the Fiordland coast each year but most do not disembark passengers. Of those that do, Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and the historic sites in the southern fiords are the only places visited. Such trips are growing in popularity. Ocean going yachts also frequent the fiords. Regular scheduled day and overnight launch cruises operate on Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and Doubtful Sound / Patea every day. Longer charter and scheduled multi-day departure cruises are available in Doubtful Sound / Patea and Dusky Sound, and in Chalky and Preservation Inlets. These visitors do use Fiordland National Park. Private boating, using sail or motor-powered craft, is popular on the larger lakes and undertaken on some fiords.

Transport by boat is a distinct feature of visitor opportunities in Fiordland. While having no direct jurisdiction over the waters of the fiords, the challenge for Fiordland National Park management is to ensure management between the water/land interface is consistent. Hall Arm in Doubtful Sound / Patea, for example, is promoted as the "Sound of Silence".

The fiords adjoining Fiordland National Park are utilised by a number of commercial fishing vessels. Facilities such as mooring lines, barges and freshwater supplies are necessary accessories associated with this industry and are located within Fiordland National Park. Fishing bases are located at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and to a lesser extent at Doubtful Sound/ Patea, both of which are located within Fiordland National Park.

Section 5.6 (Boating and Facilities) expands on the commercial and recreational boating opportunities in Fiordland National Park.

Land Access

State Highway 94 (Lumsden to Milford Sound / Piopiotahi) is the only major land route into Fiordland National Park. Overall use of State Highway 94 is increasing, subject to seasonal fluctuations, with February being the busiest month of the year. In 1990 the peak daily vehicle counts were about 300 vehicles each way. By 2004 this figure had increased to more than 530 per day. A side road gives access to the lower Hollyford Valley.

The Borland Saddle road was constructed during the 1960s to provide access to the transmission lines from the Manapōuri power station and is part of Fiordland National Park. It was not built to highway standards. The road is open for public use over the summer months, subject to Transpower requirements.

The Wilmot Pass road providing access between West Arm (Lake Manapōuri) and Deep Cove was also built as part of the hydro-electric power scheme. The Department of Conservation administers the road and a number of agencies contribute to its maintenance. This is the main access to Doubtful Sound / Patea and it is not connected to a public road.

Transport services operate on both the Borland Saddle and Wilmot Pass roads.

The southern part of Fiordland National Park is accessible via State Highway 96 and the Lake Hauroko road. The existing roads provide the major opportunities for people to see and enjoy the grandeur of Fiordland.

The Milford Road (including the Hollyford Road) is the most important access route in Fiordland National Park. The road is part of the State Highway network; however, its management significantly affects how visitors access Fiordland National Park. Day visitor opportunities are provided along this road and it is the key access route for those visiting Milford Sound / Piopiotahi. Care is required to ensure that important recreation opportunities are not lost as a result of road upgrading or management decisions that change the use patterns in those areas.

Various proposals have been put forward for roads, monorails or cableways through various parts of Fiordland National Park including through the Greenstone or Caples Valleys and up Mount Luxmore. Other ideas include an extension of the Hollyford Road through the Pyke Valley north to the Cascade and Haast, and there have been various ideas for transport options along the Milford Road.

Air Access

There are airstrips within Fiordland National Park at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi, Martins Bay, Knobs Flat, Quintin Huts (Milford Track), and in the Kaipo and Hollyford Valleys. Float planes can land on many inland lakes and can provide access to much of the coast, while helicopters have the capability to land virtually anywhere there is sufficient clear and level ground. Air transport is used by fishermen, hunters, divers, trampers and for various other recreation or tourist activities. Air transport is essential to the commercial fishing industry in Fiordland, for aerial wild animal control and for search and rescue purposes.

Milford Sound / Piopiotahi airstrip is by far the busiest place in Fiordland National Park for aircraft services with about 8,500 aircraft landings per year (average 1996 to 2005, rounded to nearest 500). Most of the landings are associated with scenic flights from Queenstown, which also involve a relatively high number of over-flights in the north of Fiordland National Park, including the Milford, Greenstone, Caples, Routeburn and Key Summit tracks.

The rest of Fiordland National Park receives a generally low level of aircraft landings with some of the more popular sites being Luxmore Hut and the Hollyford and Kaipo Valley airstrips. There are also a number of landings on the Milford and Routeburn tracks associated with the servicing of huts and other facilities, and for medical evacuations and the transfer of trampers over flooded sections of the tracks.

5.2.3 Facilities

Travellers' Accommodation

A variety of accommodation is abundant in or adjacent to Fiordland National Park. The main dormitory centre adjacent to Fiordland National Park is Te Anau, where the majority of traveller accommodation is located. Manapouri township also offers a range of facilities, but to a much lesser extent. Visitors to the southern sector of Fiordland National Park can be accommodated at Tuatapere.

Tourist accommodation is also available on private land at Martins Bay, Jamestown near Lake McKerrow / Whakatipu Waitai, at Kisbee in Preservation Inlet and in the Waitutu at the mouth of the Wairaurahiri River.

Within Fiordland National Park, commercial travellers accommodation is available at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi (hotel and lodge for budget travellers); Te Anau Downs (Motor inn and budget accommodation); Knobs Flat (travellers facilities, lodge and camping for travellers); Homer Hut (New Zealand Alpine Club); and at Gunns Camp in the Hollyford valley. Backpackers' accommodation is also available in the

hostel at Deep Cove when it is not required by education groups. Regular overnight accommodation is provided on vessels on Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and Doubtful Sound / Patea. Tourism operators also offer overnight opportunities on boats throughout the other fiords and on some of the lakes in Fiordland National Park.

Recreation Facilities and Services (refer Maps 6a and 6b)

Within the Fiordland National Park there are 648 km of walking tracks, ranging from short nature walks to long distance tracks and routes of up to several days' duration. More than 60 huts and shelters are provided for visitor use; some supplied with gas for cooking. Operators of guided walks over the Milford, Hollyford and Routeburn tracks have built their own lodges on these tracks.

The picnicking and camping sites in the Eglinton Valley have toilets, water supply and fireplaces. Other sites are provided at Lakes Hauroko and Monowai, Lake Manapōuri and Hall Arm in Doubtful Sound / Patea. The use of campervans for overnight stays is steadily increasing - facilities for these vans, such as water supplies and sani-dumps, need to be available at service centres. Powered campervan sites are only available at the Milford Sound lodge. The existing camping and picnic sites appear to be adequate in number but some upgrading or "hardening" of sites may be desirable in response to increasing use. Low-impact camping is allowed anywhere within Fiordland National Park, except in those areas adjacent to roads and high-use tracks and restricted areas such as the Murchison Mountains.

Boat ramps, jetties and moorings have been long established at popular access points to the major lakes, as well as at Deep Cove and Milford Sound / Piopiotahi.

The existing facilities are considered sufficient for general public use. Water-ski lanes have also been established on Lakes Te Anau and Manapōuri, near popular beaches.

Major commercial visitor facilities within Fiordland National Park include the visitor terminal, car-parks and wharves at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and the Te Ana-au Caves visitor facility. There is interest in developing other major facilities such as those associated with new transport options for accessing Milford Sound / Piopiotahi.

Commercial facilities on the Te Anau lake-front include a jetty associated with the floatplane business, launch services on Lake Te Anau, boat hire and a helipad. On shore there is an operations building and car park, fuel pumps and buried tanks associated with the launch and float plane services. Public facilities include a boat harbour, moorings for boats and several launching ramps. In addition, there are two community-based facilities (the Scout hall and the yacht club) and recreation activities along the lake-front include picnicking, swimming

and small boat activities. The lakefront is a significant amenity for Te Anau, providing an attractive setting for the 'Gateway to Fiordland'.

The water edge generally forms an administrative boundary for activities on the lakefront. National park status applies to the waters and bed of Lake Te Anau.

The lakeshore is partly legal road and partly recreation reserve, both administered by Southland District Council. The Department of Conservation visitor centre located on the lakeshore is, however, in Fiordland National Park.

Interpretation facilities and services consist principally of displays, exhibits and information at Fiordland National Park visitor centres located at Te Anau, West Arm, in the travellers' facilities at Knobs Flat and the Milford Sound / Piopiotahi Terminal building. The Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre in Te Anau receives more than 133,500 visitors annually. Small museums are located at the Te Anau Visitor Centre and Gunns Camp (Hollyford).

Brochures, hut displays, leaflets, guidebooks and publications on topics such as natural history, geology, ecology and history provide visitors with an extensive range of references they can use to familiarise themselves with Fiordland. Summer visitor programmes run by the Department of Conservation are also available. Conservation education programmes run by the Department of Conservation take place at the Deep Cove Hostel and at Borland Lodge.

There are several visitor locations with on-site interpretation panels and displays. Oral and written interpretation is provided by a number of concessionaires.

A number of potentially important interpretative opportunities are currently under investigation. These include: Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre and Fiordland Museum redevelopment; replacement of the ageing audio-visual show at Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre; interpreting Māori heritage in partnership with mana whenua; and further opportunities along the Milford Road, including a 'Park Entrance' site to capture visitors travelling from Queenstown who are not given the opportunity to stop at Fiordland National Park Visitor Centre.

MAP 6A. RECREATION FACILITIES PART 1 – NORTH FIORDLAND



MAP 6B. RECREATION FACILITIES PART 2 – SOUTH FIORDLAND



5.2.4 Visitor Impacts

The increasing growth in visitor numbers to parts of Fiordland National Park is resulting in adverse effects in places. Adverse effects include social effects such as crowding, noise and incompatible uses (e.g. those seeking an experience of self-reliance versus those who prefer to be guided); and physical effects such as track damage and effects on sensitive natural ecosystems. Addressing such problems, particularly the social effects, is a significant issue for this plan.

Some adverse effects evident in Fiordland include:

- Physical capacity limits being exceeded, for example on the Kepler Track, which can result in overcrowding and inability to obtain a bed in the hut.
- Significant physical damage to sensitive alpine environments like Mt Burns and Eldrig Peak and in the Key Summit area.
- Pressure for some tracks to be upgraded to address increased use such as Lake Marian; or increased activity resulting in places being managed for different experiences to those which traditional users expect.
- Problems of congestion and noise at Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and along the Milford Road during peak periods (see sections 5.3.9.1 and 5.3.9.2); diminishing visitor enjoyment of Fiordland National Park.
- Effects of aircraft on Fiordland National Park users, particularly in wilderness and remote zones.

It is important that management considers the impacts upon present and future visitors and many of the provisions in this plan have therefore been developed to address these types of visitor impacts.