

5.3.5 Wilderness Visitor Setting

Recreation Opportunities

Wilderness Areas are invaluable in today's society for those wanting to retreat from the human-influenced or impacted-upon landscapes and environments. Globally, wild lands are shrinking due to the demands of a growing world population. Therefore the wilderness opportunities New Zealand can offer are of international importance.

It is important to note that of the five visitor settings in section 5.3, gazetted wilderness areas are the only one that is recognised in legislation. Although most of Fiordland is viewed by many as a wilderness now, legal designation as a wilderness area under section 14 of the National Parks Act 1980 ensures that these areas are managed to maintain their wilderness values. With explicit regard to wilderness areas, Section 14(2)(d) of the Act states that “No animals, vehicles or motorised vessels (including hovercraft and jet boats) shall be allowed to be taken into or used in the area and no helicopter or other motorised aircraft shall land or take off or hover for the purposes of embarking or disembarking passengers or goods in a wilderness area.” Notwithstanding this, the Department of Conservation recognises the need to access such areas by mechanised means for management purposes, particularly for the control of introduced animals, including deer. Search and rescue operations are not restricted. Fiordland National Park presently contains two gazetted wilderness areas, the Glaisnock and Pembroke, and a further possible wilderness area (South West / Cameron Remote Area). The Department of Conservation recognises the contribution to the preservation of indigenous biodiversity that hunters can have through the control of deer populations in these areas and may allow restricted access to these wilderness areas at certain times of the year (see Table 7).

The intention of Wilderness Areas is not to lock the land up or prevent people from going there. Their primary purpose is to provide recreation opportunities for highly experienced hunters, trampers and climbers seeking solitude and challenge in a natural environment free from facilities. It is acknowledged that many people will appreciate these values without ever having visited a Wilderness Area. In order to achieve this, the law generally prevents motorised access and the construction or maintenance of tracks, huts or other structures. Aircraft or boat access is still possible by landing adjacent to the boundary. This may, however, erode the experience of those in the Wilderness Area. It is also proposed, through this management plan, that some aircraft access for recreational hunting be allowed where clear conservation benefit can be demonstrated (see section 5.5).

Fiordland National Park presently contains two areas gazetted as Wilderness Areas. The Glaisnock Wilderness Area is a significant block adjoining the Milford Track corridor. On the boundaries of this are a

number of recreation facilities, including the George Sound Hut, and the Worsley Hut on Northwest Arm of Lake Te Anau. Due to its size and topography it provides significant opportunities to experience natural quiet. However, with the increase in aircraft movements in the area, particularly associated with Milford Sound / Piopiotahi and to a lesser extent to George Sound, there is the risk that this value will diminish. Working with aircraft operators to ensure flight paths and landings do not adversely affect these values is essential.

The second gazetted Wilderness Area is the Pembroke which borders on Milford Sound / Piopiotahi. It is roughly triangular in shape and provides an extensive alpine wilderness experience. It is arguably considered the most accessible wilderness opportunity in New Zealand. It has a high level of use on its boundaries, particularly adjoining Milford Sound / Piopiotahi. It does not provide the degree of solitude generally regarded acceptable in Wilderness Areas as it is subject to noise, particularly from overflying aircraft; its western boundary is developed (Milford Sound / Piopiotahi); and due to its accessibility. However, it is essential that the present level of noise tolerance is not exacerbated further. As for the Glaisnock Wilderness Area, efforts will be made to work with aircraft operators to ensure flight paths and landings do not adversely affect wilderness values.

A new Wilderness Area is proposed for the southwest corner of Fiordland. This area does not include any of the large inland lakes (such as Poteriteri, Hakapoua or Hauroko) or the Maritime New Zealand facility at Wednesday Peak and, in doing so, avoids conflicts with existing use in these areas. In contrast to the other two Wilderness Areas (and any other Wilderness Area in New Zealand) the proposed area has extensive coastal topography that is generally low lying and includes substantial tracts of low altitude podocarp forest. The interior of the proposed Wilderness Area is an isolated but substantial area comprising extensive, radiating, glacially carved alpine ridge and valley topography. The valleys are beech forested and often have valley floor lakes. The area offers many possibilities for extensive wilderness travel and offers a truly challenging wilderness experience due to its isolation, size and rugged climate. Possible issues that threaten these values include boat and air access to surrounding areas. This is particularly so in the coastal locations of this proposed Wilderness Area. Supper Cove is recognised as a transit node on the border of this proposed Wilderness Area.

While the area included in the wilderness proposal has values of national and arguably international importance, submissions received to this plan have highlighted a number of concerns held by affected communities. If the proposal for a new Wilderness Area were to be investigated and progressed further it would be appropriate to go through a separate public consultation process, involving calls for public submissions and public hearings, prior to recommendation for gazettal. The issues raised in submissions to this plan would need to be

considered and addressed through any such public process. These include the following:

- That aircraft access is required in order to undertake existing activities (such as hunting); and
- That the Department of Conservation will be unable to control deer populations in southwest Fiordland; and
- That additional Wilderness Areas should not be put in place because they exclude sections of the community (such as families and those who have dependence on mechanised access); and
- That members of the public will not be able to access their special places; and
- That the eastern boundary for the proposal is too distant and should be extended to include Lakes Poteriteri and Hakapoua.

Objectives

1. To provide a range of wilderness recreation opportunities for the long term by maintaining areas which are pristine in their naturalness and where there is minimal evidence of human activity. Key attributes defining wilderness include:
 - a) Solitude, peace and natural quiet;
 - b) No recreation facilities, except occasional facilities on the borders of the areas;
 - c) Users should be self-reliant and highly experienced; and
 - d) Users should not expect to encounter more than one party per week.
2. To manage each of the Wilderness Areas recognising and protecting their special qualities. These are:
 - (a) Glaisnock**

A large area of substantially unmodified landscape in a continuous sequence of changing ecosystems from the west coast across the main divide to Lake Te Anau. Apart from on the boundaries, this area provides significant opportunities for experiencing natural quiet.
 - (b) Pembroke**

A rugged, isolated area of difficult access (apart from the border areas around Milford Sound / Piopiotahi), containing a typical cross-section of substantially unmodified landscape. It provides a reasonably accessible opportunity to experience an alpine wilderness.

(c) South West / Cameron Remote Area (proposed wilderness area)

A large area with coastal topography that is generally low lying and includes substantial tracts of low altitude podocarp forest and a substantial interior comprising extensive, radiating, glacially carved alpine ridge and valley topography and beech forested valleys that often have valley floor lakes. It offers a truly challenging wilderness experience through its isolation, size and rugged climate.

Implementation

1. Inform the New Zealand Conservation Authority on the appropriateness of gazettal of the South West / Cameron Remote Area to the status of a Wilderness Area by commencing a consultation process within five years of this plan receiving final approval from the New Zealand Conservation Authority. The following should apply:
 - a) Commence a separate public consultation process enabling the public to make submissions; and
 - b) Consult and consider issues raised in submissions received and heard on the draft Fiordland National Park Management Plan process.
 - c) Recognise the proposed boundaries identified in Maps 7 and 15 of this plan are indicative only and, if gazettal as a Wilderness Area is recommended, may be subject to change as a result of the above consultation process.
 - d) Unless the New Zealand Conservation Authority determines that gazettal is appropriate this area will be managed in accordance with the provisions of this plan to recognise its wilderness values.
2. Aircraft landings in Wilderness Areas will not be permitted except for emergency, search and rescue and conservation management purposes or for the recreational hunting of wild animals under certain special circumstances (see section 5.5 - Aircraft Access).
3. Concession applications involving the use of wilderness areas should be declined unless otherwise provided for in this Plan.
4. Where applications for activities detailed in Implementation 3 are received, the Department of Conservation will:

- a) Consult with the Southland Conservation Board and seeks its recommendation;
- b) Consult with papatipu rūnanga;
- c) Publicly notify the application, acknowledging the wide public interest in these matters; and
- d) Require a full environmental impact assessment undertaken by appropriate-qualified specialists.

(Refer also section 5.5, Implementation 4 which provides a framework for managing aircraft landings in wilderness visitor settings).

5. Guided hunting and fishing in the South West / Cameron Remote area will be considered on a case-by-case basis (unless gazetted in accordance with Implementation 1) but should be subject to a maximum of one party per week and a maximum party size of three people, inclusive of guides, unless it is clearly demonstrated that a larger party size will not have adverse effects, including social effects and cumulative effects.
6. Private parties will be encouraged to limit their groups to seven people.
7. No new buildings, machinery, bridges or other structures will be allowed within wilderness visitor settings. Existing huts may be retained on the boundary.
8. No roads, tracks or routes will be maintained or constructed in this setting.
9. Advocate that aircraft operators recognise and respect the wilderness visitor setting values which their activities may affect. In particular, flight paths and landings away from these wilderness visitor settings will be encouraged (refer to section 5.5).
10. Advocate through the Resource Management Act processes to protect wilderness visitor setting values. In particular, advocate to Southland Regional Council for controls to be put in place in planning documents and through resource consent processes that restrict use (particularly mechanised use) of the coastal marine area and structures in the coastal marine area which adjoin wilderness visitor settings.
11. Management will be in accord with The Wilderness Policy (New Zealand) 1985.