

5.3.7 Backcountry Visitor Setting

Recreation Opportunities

The backcountry settings include much of the eastern side of Fiordland National Park where access is relatively easy. These settings cover the existing backcountry areas that have hut and track systems e.g. coastal Waitutu, eastern Hauroko, Green Lake/Monowai, Hope Arm/Back Valley, Kepler Mountains, Lake Te Anau, Lake Manapōuri and east of the Milford and Hollyford roads. In the past these areas have generally been more popular with the traditional New Zealand backcountry trumper or hunter but they are becoming increasingly popular with the overseas backpacker-trumper.

Visitors to these areas will need to be reasonably self-reliant with moderate backcountry skills although they may be able to rely on sound basic huts, well-marked tracks and bridges where necessary. Accommodation other than basic huts is generally incompatible with this setting. Motorised access tends to be more readily available. The landscape within this setting is unmodified and natural and is accessible without major physical effort. Group sizes will be variable but should generally not exceed 12 people. Encounters with other parties are likely to occur. The management response to adverse effects from increasing use of particular areas will generally be to try and manage visitor numbers or patterns of use, but expansion of facilities or hardening of sites to cope with demand may also be considered.

These areas are expected to absorb the greater part of any increased use of Fiordland National Park. However, not all parts will be intensively used. Any development must include an assessment of effects on the natural environment and existing recreational opportunities.

Objective

1. To provide opportunities for a variety of recreation experiences in a natural setting that may be challenging but can be accessed relatively easily; while protecting other national park values. Key attributes defining backcountry include:
 - a) Catering for less experienced users who are prepared to experience a degree of risk and discomfort;
 - b) Visitors being reasonably self-reliant;
 - c) Facilities comprising basic huts and well-marked tracks;
 - d) Some reliance on mechanised access; and
 - e) Visitors expecting to have regular interactions with others (meeting up to ten parties per day).

Implementation

1. Manage existing tracks, routes, huts, bridges and signs within backcountry areas in accordance with section 5.8.
2. New commercial ventures, facility development and growth in visitor use should be designed and managed to be consistent with national park values, including the outcomes defined in the objectives of this section for backcountry visitor settings and capacity, party size and frequency provisions set out below.
3. Limit hut capacity to a maximum of 20 people.
4. Recreation and tourism concessionaires wishing to operate in this visitor setting using existing tracks should be managed as follows (excluding guided hunting and fishing parties):
 - a) Maximum party size of 13 people inclusive of guides; and
 - b) Restricted to a maximum of one party per day per concession.
 - c) Concession activity should be managed in order to meet objective 1 e) as detailed above.
5. Recreation and tourism concessionaires wishing to operate in this visiting setting when guiding occurs off existing tracks should be managed as follows (excluding guided hunting and fishing parties):
 - a) Maximum party size of seven, inclusive of guides;
 - b) Frequency should be restricted to a maximum of one party per day per concession per backcountry setting; and
 - c) No more than ten concessions for guiding activities off formed tracks (excluding guided hunting, fishing and kayaking) should be permitted for each of the backcountry visitor settings identified in sections 5.3.7.1 to 5.3.7.3.
6. The group size and frequencies listed in Implementation 4 apply to commercial kayak operators but do not apply to other commercial boat operators (refer to section 5.6 Boating and Facilities).
7. Guided hunting and fishing will be considered on a case-by-case basis but should be subject to a maximum of one party per day and a maximum party size of three people, inclusive of guides.

8. Additional restrictions on the frequency of trips (such as weekly, monthly and/or annual limits or smaller party sizes) may also be applied to commercial operators. These will differ depending on the type of activity and the existing level of commercial and recreational use. Any limits applied to individual concessions should be designed to manage the likely number of encounters with all other parties (both private and commercial), consistent with the key attributes defining backcountry.
9. Should an applicant for a concession seek changes to the limits listed in section 5.3.7, the applicant should be required to undertake appropriate research approved by the Department of Conservation that addresses physical and social carrying capacity effects.
10. Private parties will also be encouraged to meet the requirements of Implementations 4-7. Bylaws may be investigated as an option to manage general recreation access if the adverse effects of general recreation visitor use requires addressing.

5.3.7.1 Northern Backcountry Setting

This setting includes areas adjoining the Routeburn Track east of the Milford and Hollyford roads, the Marian Valley and Gertrude Saddle tracks and Lake Te Anau (excluding Worsley Arm and North and Middle Fiords which are managed under the Western Remote Setting of section 5.3.6.3). The area has a number of recreation opportunities ranging from those adjoining remote settings, such as the Marian Valley and Gertrude Saddle tracks, through to opportunities bordering Lake Te Anau and the Milford Road that are more towards the frontcountry end of the backcountry experience.

Marian Valley beyond the gantry and Gertrude Saddle, while in the backcountry zone, borders the Darran Remote Visitor Setting. Use of these tracks will be managed to be more consistent with a remote experience in order to avoid impacting on the surrounding Darran Remote Visitor Setting. Use of, and interest in, these tracks is currently high and in order to maintain the adjoining remote opportunities it is considered that management of concessionaire use is required.

This visitor setting also includes the waters of Lake Te Anau (excluding Worsley Arm and North and Middle Fiords) which offer significant boating and kayaking opportunities in backcountry (and remote) visitor settings (refer to section 5.6 for management of these activities).

Please note section 5.3.7 for general information regarding backcountry visitor settings within Fiordland National Park.

Objective

1. To manage the Northern Backcountry visitor experience setting to protect the following key attributes:
 - a) The backcountry experiences of the Northern Backcountry visitor setting;
 - b) A place that provides opportunities for a backcountry lake experience with easy access from Te Anau; and
 - c) A place that provides backcountry tramping opportunities which can be accessed from the Routeburn Track and also provide access to the Darran Remote Setting.

Implementation

1. Manage the Marian Valley beyond the Gantry and Gertrude Saddle to be more consistent with a remote experience so as not to affect the surrounding Darran Remote Setting. The following should apply to recreation / tourism concessions:

- a) Limited to a maximum party size of seven people, inclusive of guides;
- b) Not more than 2000 guided day walk visitors should be permitted to Gertrude Saddle per year for all concessionaires (excluding concessions for mountain climbing when they are moving through this visitor setting as opposed to regular use of the setting);
- c) Not more than 3000 guided day walk visitors should be permitted beyond the Gantry in Marian Valley for all concessionaires; and
- d) Frequency should be limited to a maximum of one party per day per concession.

5.3.7.2 Manapōuri Backcountry Setting

The Manapōuri Backcountry Setting includes a range of hut and track networks accessible from Lake Manapōuri. The setting also adjoins the Kepler Track and access to backcountry and remote opportunities can be obtained from the track. Lake Manapōuri provides significant boating and kayaking opportunities in a backcountry visitor setting and serves as a gateway for those accessing other areas of Fiordland National Park (refer to section 5.6 for management of boating and kayaking activities).

Walks on the south side of the Waiau River provide traditional backcountry recreation opportunities. While proposals for a bridge across the Waiau River have been raised this would alter the type and level of visitor usage of the Circle Track, and associated tracks and facilities. This would adversely affect the backcountry opportunities currently provided. It is considered that adequate visitor access to these tracks and facilities is currently provided through boat access arrangements. Proposals for a bridge across the Waiau River will not be supported.

While in the backcountry visitor setting The Monument has site characteristics, safety aspects and challenges for users that tend more towards a remote experience. At The Monument a restriction on party size is therefore considered appropriate to manage visitor use.

Please note section 5.3.7 for general information regarding backcountry visitor settings within Fiordland National Park.

Objective

1. To manage the Manapōuri Backcountry visitor experience setting to protect the following key attributes:
 - a) The backcountry experiences of the Manapōuri Backcountry visitor setting;
 - b) A place that provides an opportunity for a backcountry lake experience with easy access from Manapōuri; and
 - c) A place that provides a range of backcountry opportunities that can be accessed from Lake Manapōuri and the Kepler Track.

Implementation

1. Recreation and tourism concessions to The Monument should be limited to a party size of seven (inclusive of guides).

5.3.7.3 Southern Backcountry Setting

The Southern Backcountry Setting includes areas adjoining the Borland Road, Hump Ridge Track and lakes Monowai and Hauroko. These areas have historically provided a more traditional backcountry experience for local users. While the creation of the Hump Ridge Track has changed use patterns to a certain extent, the setting is adjoined by, and provides access to, extensive remote opportunities. The majority of this visitor setting offers a backcountry experience more towards the remote end of the spectrum.

Lakes Hauroko and Monowai provide significant boating opportunities in a backcountry visitor setting and serve as important gateways for those accessing other, more remote, areas of Fiordland National Park (refer to section 5.6 for management of boating activities).

Borland (a generic term given to the area north of Lake Monowai through to West Arm) contains a variety of backcountry opportunities which are traditionally used by New Zealanders during weekends and public holidays. Because of its relatively easy access, international visitors are becoming more common. The number of concession operations is also increasing. These trends may change the nature of the experience provided and displace traditional users.

Should changes occur in the type of activities offered at the education centre at Borland Lodge, it is possible this will also change user patterns in the area. Management actions will be required to ensure the backcountry experience for which this area is managed is maintained.

Mt Burns and Eldrig Peak are located in this setting which provides one of the more accessible backcountry opportunities in the South Island where you can experience alpine botanical communities. Owing to the increasing number of people at these sites, unacceptable physical impacts are evident on the fragile alpine plant communities. To address these effects, restrictions will be imposed on commercial operators and management actions will be developed to manage use of these sites. It is possible similar over-use patterns may occur at other sites within this area.

Please note section 5.3.7 for general information regarding backcountry visitor settings within Fiordland National Park.

Objective

1. To manage the Southern Backcountry visitor experience setting to protect the following key attributes:
 - a) The backcountry experiences of the Southern Backcountry visitor setting;

- b) A place that provides opportunities for backcountry lake experiences on lakes Monowai and Hauroko;
- c) A place that provides traditional backcountry opportunities that can be accessed from the Borland Road and Hump Ridge Track; and
- d) A place that offers an important buffer to the surrounding remote settings.

Implementation

1. Recreation and tourism concessions should not be granted for weekends and public holidays in the Borland area.
2. Recreation and tourism concessions granted to Mt Burns and Eldrig Peak should be subject to the following conditions:
 - a) A maximum party size of seven, inclusive of guides should be permitted; and
 - b) No more than three concessions for guided activities should be granted at each site; and
 - c) One trip can include a maximum of two separate and discrete parties.
 - d) Frequency should be limited to a maximum of one trip per week to each site per concession.
3. Should the management of adverse effects be required then the similar restrictions to those outlined above may apply to other sites in the Borland area in the future.
4. Consider a variety of management techniques to address the adverse effects of general recreational use on Mount Burns and Eldrig Peak. This may result in discouraging general recreational use of these sites, site management or the introduction of bylaws.
5. The Borland Road corridor will be managed according to the provisions of this section, section 5.7 and other relevant provisions in this plan.