

7. Visitor Services and Facilities

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The Department has a dual role in the management of lands it administers. On the one hand, these lands provide vital havens where habitats and ecosystems can be safeguarded, while on the other they provide the opportunity for present and future generations of people to enjoy their natural and historic heritage.

The responsibility to provide for recreation is stated in the Conservation Act 1987, the Reserves Act 1977, the Walkways Act 1990, and the National Parks Act 1980.

The Conservation Act (Section 6(e)) states the function of the Department with respect to visitor use on conservation areas:

" To the extent that the use of any natural or historic resource for recreation or tourism is not inconsistent with its conservation, to foster the use of natural and historic resources for recreation, and to allow their use for tourism."

The Department must also give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, requiring effective consultation and information sharing with tangata whenua regarding visitor services as appropriate.

Key factors which will influence the future development of visitor services and facilities in the Conservancy are:

- Some visitor facilities are badly run down and are unable to cope with present visitor numbers, let alone the numbers expected in the year 2000. Major investment in infrastructure is required. The Department suggests part of this should come from other organisations.
- Projected increases in overseas visitor numbers are likely to maintain the demand for outdoor activities.
- The ageing populations of Northland and Auckland are likely to result in increased demand for passive outdoor recreation opportunities and for short and long walks.
- Free independent travellers (FITs), who are characterised by the fact that they have flexible holiday plans, have more time to spend, and do not book their travel itineraries in advance, are expected to increase in number in Northland. They favour coastal and other easily accessible opportunities and seek good information from the Department and from the network of visitor information centres.
- Facilities sought by visitors include picnic areas and short walking tracks as well as places to camp, carparking and on site information.

- The European market is fast becoming well-established in Northland, with young visitors seeking adventurous holidays away from the traditional tourist tracks in more remote conservation areas.
- As the New Zealand population ages and international visitors become more interested in the environment, recreation activities which include elements of helping the community (volunteer work), enjoying nature and relaxation will become more important. Short walks, nature study, bird watching and exploring historic sites will increase in popularity.
- The demand for the Department's campgrounds and cottages, especially in coastal settings, will continue to increase.
- The increasing popularity of boating (sea kayaks, scenic cruises, cruise ships, jetskis, sail and motor boats), particularly in the Bay of Islands, will result in increasing demand for walking tracks and other visitor services on adjacent islands and mainland shores.
- The high levels of unemployment and low to medium incomes in Northland suggest that the majority of Northlanders have comparatively little discretionary money available for recreation. They are more likely to carry out low cost activities, often providing for their material needs by fishing or diving.
- Growth in visitor numbers will be particularly marked at Northland's key attractions that currently receive a high percentage of overseas visitors - Cape Reinga, Waipoua Forest, Waitangi, Kerikeri and the Bay of Islands.

The following criteria will be used to decide where the Department will focus its resources:

- Where the greatest recreational needs will be met and where the Department will be able to get conservation messages across to the greatest numbers of visitors.
- Where habitat, species, historic, cultural and spiritual values are most at threat from visitors.
- Where certain recreation experiences are in relatively short supply in the region and need careful management to maintain the type and quality of that experience.
- Where pressures and unacceptable impacts are likely to occur given current visitor trends.

7.2 MAJOR DIRECTIONS

The long term inter-related goals of the Department's National Visitor Strategy are:

Goal 1: Protection

To ensure that the intrinsic natural and historic values of areas managed by the Department are not compromised by the impacts of visitor activities and related facilities and services.

Goal 2: Fostering Visits

To manage a range of recreational opportunities that provide contact with New Zealand's natural and historic heritage; and provide a range of recreational and educational facilities and services that are consistent with the protection of the intrinsic natural and historic values of Department-managed areas.

Goal 3: Managing Tourism Concessions on Protected Lands

In managing a range of recreational opportunities, to allow the private sector to provide visitor facilities and services where they do not compromise the intrinsic natural and historic values of areas managed by the Department and do not compromise the experiences or opportunities of other visitors.

Goal 4: Informing and Educating Visitors

To share knowledge about our natural and historic heritage with visitors, to satisfy their requirement for information, deepen their understanding of this heritage and develop an awareness of the need for its conservation.

Goal 5: Visitor Safety

To provide visitors with facilities that are safe and are located, designed, constructed and maintained in accordance with all relevant legislation and sound building practices to meet appropriate safety standards.

To raise visitor awareness of the risks present in Department-managed areas and the level of skill and competence they will require to cope with these risks.

The Conservancy's approach to encouraging, providing and managing visitor services is based on several major directions, described below. These aim at rectifying gaps in the supply of opportunities and responding to anticipated changes in demand over the next ten years and beyond.

1. Develop co-operative relationships with other organisations to enhance the provision of visitor services and facilities.

In order for the Department to achieve its conservation goals it must establish, develop and improve its relationships with iwi, conservation boards, the wider community, recreation organisations, Northland Regional Council, local authorities, the tourist industry, and other government departments. Achievement of the provision of quality visitor services without compromising conservation goals will largely depend on receiving help and investment from these organisations and individuals.

Relationships work both ways - educating visitors is a role that can effectively be carried out by all organisations involved in the visitor service industry. The Department values feedback from visitors, the community, the tourist industry and from local authorities. Better co-ordination of services is needed at a regional level and funding assistance for the provision of facilities and services is also sought.

2. Enhance visitor opportunities through the granting of concessions.

By entering into concession agreements with iwi or the private sector, the Department is able to increase the range of activities that visitors can enjoy, obtain some financial return to the taxpayer for the commercial use of land belonging to them and administered by the Department, and get conservation messages across to visitors. In all cases (except for recreation reserves), protection of natural and historic resources is paramount. The Department expects concessionaires to play an increasingly important role in contributing to visitor services and facilities, especially where it is unable to provide the service or facility itself.

3. Adopt a visitor services approach by providing services and facilities visitors need.

The key to success for the Department in satisfying visitors and raising its profile lies in the provision of consistently high standards of service and facilities, particularly at popular attractions. The Department serves visitors in many different ways - it informs, provides safe facilities, warns of dangers, provides opportunities in the outdoors and information about them, and sells merchandise. In some cases new tracks may create a demand rather than fulfil a need, but are required to ensure that use of the area does not cause unacceptable damage to a site.

4. Focus on opportunities favoured by the majority of visitors while also fostering a wide range of appropriate opportunities.

The experiences visitors seek and gain in the outdoors vary from person to person. The Department must offer a variety of opportunities that are compatible with the purposes for which the land is managed. Some areas need to be managed for steady, intense use and others for remote self-sufficient experiences.

Emphasis over the next ten years will be placed on absorbing the projected increases of visitors within existing facilities. Better utilisation can be achieved by raising the standard of existing facilities and services and making them more robust. At a site in a good location, it is often inadequate signposting or insufficient information which hinder use. However, there may be situations where new facilities are required or restrictions put in place to protect natural or historic resources and to ensure continuation of appropriate visitor experiences.

5. Secure and control visitor access to lands managed by the Department.

The Department needs to ensure that access to land it administers is secure so as to allow visitor use. The main access issues are:

- a number of walkways and other tracks encroach on wahi tapu sites or on erosion prone areas;
- a high number of New Zealand Walkways have not been legalised by way of formal easement over private land;
- threats exist to traditional use of access, such as land ownership changes, development, coastal subdivision, and landowners' changing attitudes;
- the lack of visitor co-operation regarding dogs, firearms, trespass over private land where landowners' goodwill currently exists, and the uncontrolled use of vehicles, horses and grazing stock in remote, sensitive sites like Pouto and North Cape; and
- conflicts exist between users of tracks such as trampers and mountain bikers.

6. Safeguard the resource and monitor the impacts of visitors.

Visitor management in some areas is critical to safeguard both natural and historic resources and the enjoyment of visitors. Maintaining the delicate balance between protection and use is a challenge. Of uppermost importance is protecting the intrinsic value of the resource. The other three factors to balance are:

- protecting and enhancing the attraction;
- meeting the needs of the local or host community; and
- meeting the needs of the visitor from further afield.

All visitors impact on the natural resource base, but impacts are more serious where:

- there is a high level of use in concentrated areas over a short period of time;
- the terrain is fragile or sensitive; and/or
- the species or values present are particularly sensitive to human activity.

The natural environment is a vital ingredient in attracting the predicted three million overseas visitors to New Zealand by the year 2000. With the projected increased demand, deterioration of existing facilities and of visitor experience can be anticipated, particularly at current pressure points.

Places and activities likely to receive the highest increase in use from overseas visitors are:

1. Flagstaff Hill, Russell: Historic appreciation, scenic viewing.
2. Islands in the Bay: Boat cruises, picnicking, scenic short walks.
3. Bay of Islands Historic and Maritime Park Visitor Centre: Obtaining information.
4. Sites easily accessible from Paihia and Kerikeri (including Manginangina): Short coastal and bush walks, historic and cultural appreciation.
5. Cape Reinga and adjoining sites: Scenic viewing, cultural and historic appreciation.
6. Waipoua: the four key walking tracks and Information Centre: Obtaining information, short bush walks.

The Department is only one of several agencies and a range of tourism operators that share in the management of visitor impacts. A joint effort between the private and public sectors will be required to achieve sustainable management of tourism in Northland.

Providing opportunities for visitors is not simply a matter of satisfying demand; the levels and types of recreation that are compatible with the area must be determined.

The value of monitoring visitors and gathering data is not widely appreciated. Many visitor surveys in the past have been very broad with little obvious application to day to day management. Regular review of data collected and relevance of the procedures and sites is essential in the future.

An understanding of visitor use is necessary for setting priorities for upgrading, maintaining or retiring facilities. It is also valuable for determining public awareness priorities and for setting levels of use and acceptable change.

The Northland Visitor Strategy, when completed, will contain more detail on visitor management at specific places. It is a non-statutory document prepared by the Department in consultation with tourism interest groups and will be available for public comment.

7.3 COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Objective

To involve community groups more closely in the provision of visitor facilities and services.

Implementation

1. Actively encourage walking and tramping clubs, individuals, service organisations, local authorities and recreation groups to become involved in the development and maintenance of tracks and walkways and other conservation projects.
2. Aim to engage people in local communities in job opportunities for visitor service related work.
3. In managing resources for visitors, be open to discussion with and involvement by the community in the decision making process.
4. Be open to non-commercial (non-profit making) organisations providing facilities and services, provided the proposal meets the requirements outlined in Section 7.30 New Recreation Facilities.

7.4 RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS

Objective

To consult and work with the tourist industry and business to achieve sustainable tourism and the protection of natural and historic resources.

Implementation

1. Consult widely on how best to provide better service to visitors.
2. Welcome and encourage appropriate proposals for the provision of visitor services if they meet the requirements of Section 7.30 New Recreation Facilities.
3. Develop an information sharing process so that key conservation messages are transmitted by other visitor service providers.
4. Seek to improve the Department's performance in the development of sponsorship arrangements for visitor services and conservation projects.
5. Where tourism businesses do not require concessions, but where the business relies on services and facilities provided by the Department, seek a contribution towards the provision of that service.

7.5 RELATIONSHIP WITH TANGATA WHENUA

Until quite recently, tangata whenua were not involved in decision making about visitor facilities on land administered by the Department. This has led to a situation where some walking tracks, walkways, campgrounds, carparks and picnic and service areas encroach on sacred sites or conflict with tangata whenua goals.

Tangata whenua hold mana whenua over land administered by the Department and are the hosts to visitors in those areas. Tangata whenua have had a long and intimate relationship with this land so there are many places that have special meaning for them. They therefore seek to ensure that future visitor use and development takes full account of their traditional relationships and in particular respects their sacred sites and special places.

Objective

To consult and develop effective working relationships with tangata whenua to ensure visitor activities, facilities and services do not conflict with Maori cultural values.

Implementation

1. Develop a programme with tangata whenua to remedy any encroachments of visitor facilities or access on wahi tapu. Encourage tangata whenua to advise the Department where the most extreme impacts occur, so that these are made priorities.
2. Seek to ensure tapu sites are respected and protected from visitors. Protection may include such measures as visitor education and fencing or other controls on access.
3. Do not locate new visitor facilities on or near known burial places. Visits to such sites will only be at the discretion of and with the guidance of tangata whenua.
4. Tangata whenua will be consulted on the provision of visitor facilities and visitor access on lands administered by the Department and/or according to codes of practice developed between the Department and tangata whenua.
5. Seek Maori perspectives on interpretation, promotion of information, and recreation.

7.6 RECREATION CONCESSIONS

By entering into a concession agreement with iwi or the private sector, the Department can achieve the following:

- Broaden the scope of activities which visitors can undertake.
- Get conservation messages across to visitors. The role concessionaires can play in educating visitors is often undervalued, as they provide an important link with a wide range of visitors who often do not come into contact with Departmental staff.
- Provide some financial return to the taxpayer for the commercial use of public lands.

Part IIIB, Section 170 of the Conservation Act 1987 requires that any trade or business conducted on land administered by the Department, or a business that services visitors, must be authorised by way of a concession.

Concession requirements are additional to any Resource Management Act 1991 consents which may be required for the activity.

Concessions in Northland are currently dealt with on a reactive basis. Very few concessions have been granted and there are a high number of businesses operating without appropriate authorisation. This gives the Department poor credibility within the tourism sector, as it is clearly unfair that some operators have concessions while others are running businesses without them.

The Department expects concessionaires to play an increasingly important role in contributing to visitor services and facilities in Northland. Of particular importance is the management of human toilet waste and other refuse and the need for concession operators to contribute to the provision of facilities, or ensure that they and their clients are self-contained with regard to waste disposal.

Objective

To extend the range of opportunities available to visitors through granting appropriate high quality concessions, compatible with the legislation under which the land is managed.

Implementation

1. Assess applications in accordance with Part IIIB of the Conservation Act 1987.
2. Ensure that concessions are carefully assessed, managed and monitored. Assess applications in terms of Section 17U(1)(a) to (g) of the Conservation Act, which include:
 - the nature of the activity and the type of structure or facility (if any) proposed to be constructed;
 - the effects of the activity, structure or facility;
 - any measures that can be reasonably and practicably undertaken to avoid, remedy, or mitigate any adverse effects of the activity;
 - any relevant environmental impact assessment, including any review or audit; and
 - public submissions (for applications for licences, leases and some permits).

Applications will also be assessed for their:

- impacts on natural and historic resources;
 - impacts on cultural and spiritual values (as determined by tangata whenua);
 - impacts on existing users;
 - quality of service offered;
 - compatibility with recreation priorities set out in the CMS; and
 - management of human waste and rubbish disposal.
3. Provide for consultation with tangata whenua on all applications and prior to the concession being notified and/or according to codes of practice developed between the Department and tangata whenua. Conditions in the concession agreement may be required to reflect the wishes and concerns of the tangata whenua.
 4. Publicly offer concession opportunities identified by the Department and those likely to have wide sector interest.

5. Consult commercial aircraft operators to determine appropriate sites for landing, if any, on areas administered by the Department. Require a concession for any commercial landings.
6. Depending on the status of the land concerned, see merit in and have preference for the following types of facilities and services being provided by concessionaires:
 - (a) Guided walking and tramping on tracks managed by the Department.
 - (b) Special events and guided tours which enhance people's awareness and appreciation of historic and cultural resources.
 - (c) Special events and guided tours which reflect the status of Maori people as tangata whenua and kaitiaki o nga taonga tuku iho.
 - (d) Special events and guided tours which increase people's awareness and appreciation of Northland's natural resources and the conservation ethic.
 - (e) The operation of some of the Department's campsites.
 - (f) Management of some of the Department's existing accommodation facilities and other existing facilities such as outdoor education lodges.
 - (g) The provision of basic foods and supplies at the Department's campsites.
 - (h) Small scale eco-based tourism ventures that support local communities.
7. Consider applications for other concessions on their merits.
8. Encourage tangata whenua involvement in concessions where visitors' awareness and appreciation of historic, cultural and spiritual values are enhanced.
9. Give priority to requiring unauthorised businesses in the Conservancy to apply for concessions.
10. Give greater attention to the potential of concessionaires (and other operators) to advocate conservation messages for the Department by:
 - ensuring appropriate conditions are included in concession agreements;
 - establishing effective and co-operative working relationships with them;
 - assisting in training of guides and drivers where practicable;
 - checking scripts and publicity material where practicable; and
 - ensuring staff are aware of the concessions operating in the Conservancy.
11. Investigate all reports of unauthorised commercial activities on lands the Department manages.

12. Make ongoing monitoring by concessionaires of the impact of their operation a condition of any concession agreement.
13. Encourage all concessionaires to carry out interpretation of their areas of operation and regularly monitor the quality of interpretation and visitor service of any concession.
14. Require an assessment of environmental effects for every concession offering or application.

7.7 INFORMATION

Visitor enjoyment of an area is enhanced if visitors are aware of the area's special natural and historic features. The Department benefits by providing high quality, accurate information, as an educated visitor is potentially the Department's best ally.

Currently the Conservancy has visitor information available at the Conservancy office, at visitor centres at Russell, Cape Reinga and Waipoua and at some field centres. With the expected increase in visitor numbers, the Department needs to expand the availability of its information. The Department has successfully co-located visitor information services with the Visitor Information Network (VIN) office at Tarewa Park in Whangarei. Possibilities for similar arrangements exist in other locations such as Dargaville, Kaitaia and Paihia.

The national, maritime and forest parks in New Zealand are actively marketed by the New Zealand Tourism Board and the Department. The Northland Conservation Park, the Bay of Islands Maritime and Historic Park and the Te Paki Reserves are the highest profile recreation areas in Northland.

Objective

To provide accurate information to visitors so that their recreation experience will be enhanced.

Implementation

1. Work co-operatively with other recreation providers and organisations to provide and distribute visitor information.
2. Choose media for information on a site by site basis. Describe the range of services and opportunities available to visitors, and reflect iwi perspectives where relevant.
3. Give reasons why restrictions are placed on visitors for the protection of cultural, spiritual, natural or historic values, in conjunction with any marketing.
4. Cater for groups other than traditional visitors, for example non-English speakers, in the distribution and production of brochures.
5. Ensure that goods and services marketed and sold by the Department are of high quality, meet visitor needs, and promote conservation goals.
6. Seek co-operation with relevant agencies to provide joint visitor information about similar or complementary topics (e.g. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Ministry of Fisheries, Northland Regional Council, Tourism Northland, iwi authorities).

7. Raise the profile of the Bay of Islands Maritime and Historic Park, the Northland Conservation Park and the Te Paki Reserves in all information to visitors.

7.8 SIGNPOSTING

Signs influence visitors' behaviour by directing them to attractions, identifying features or facilities, informing and educating them, and warning them of dangers. The national sign system aims at providing high quality, and easily read and understood signs.

For many visitors, orientation signs are their only point of contact with the Department and the areas it manages. However, many current signs are out of date and many popular sites do not have signs welcoming visitors to the area, e.g. Whangamumu, Te Paki Stream. Most current orientation signs do not take iwi perspectives into account.

Objective

To provide informative and welcoming signposting of facilities.

Implementation

1. Over the next ten years, make all signs conform to the national sign standard.
2. Make as priorities for replacement of new signs those:
 - in high public profile areas;
 - damaged or showing incorrect information; and
 - where there is an important management issue e.g. access restrictions.
3. Liaise with Transit New Zealand and local authorities to improve directional signposting to visitor attractions.
4. Design and locate signs to ensure they do not clutter sites or compromise the intrinsic values of the site.
5. Incorporate interpretative material in orientation signs, wherever appropriate, to enhance the visitors' experience.
6. Consult tangata whenua in the planning of interpretative and orientation signs to ensure their perspectives are included.

7.9 INTERPRETATION

Interpretation for conservation is the art of explaining the origin, meaning or values of a place or event, involving an audience by stimulating their interest, satisfying their curiosity, and perhaps challenging them to participate in some conservation activity. By encouraging first hand experience and personal involvement the opportunity is provided for an emotional element in a visitor's experience. This can be the essential step in developing a more caring attitude in the visitor, which can lead to further benefits for management of natural and historic resources.

The iwi view is that any signage must portray recognition of tangata whenua values and that the correct Maori names of places must be used. Ngati Whatua in particular state that all sites and areas have value to Ngati Whatua through their ancestral links. Some are of more significant value than others. Maori place names should be regarded as taonga: they place a cultural grid over the land, allow people to gain an insight into Maori history, and are a tangible link to iwi. The significance of sites and areas are determined by kaumatua, who are often the best resource library in Maoridom. Te Roroa emphasise the need for a bicultural approach to all aspects of conservation including signs and interpretation.

Priorities for interpretation are based on both thematic and place-based approaches.

Themes

A thematic approach to interpretation has been adopted by the Conservancy, to present a complete story that unfolds before the visitor rather than a series of isolated snippets of information. Depending on the size, complexity and importance of the features of a site, a primary theme and one or two secondary themes may be presented. The following themes are designed to illustrate the balance between the cultural and natural environment and the contribution they make to the character of the Conservancy.

Special Flora

Kauri forest ecosystems	This theme will be explored via life cycle, topography, species diversity, immensity of size, soil type, gumdigging, evolution and ecology. European cultural aspects will largely be left to the Matakoho Museum, but may have Departmental input.
Mangroves	Nursery, estuary ecology, tide, plant adaptation, climatic zone, previous range, role in nutrient and silt control.
Endemic and endangered plants	Landform influence, endemism, temperature influence, threats, conservation efforts, Gondwanaland.

Threats

Animal pests	Possoms, goats, deer, cattle, pigs, mustelids, stoats, rats, cats and dogs.
Plant pests	Pampas, wandering jew, mist flower, lantana, hakea, climbing asparagus, and ginger.
Human activity	Pollution, plastics, erosion, swamp drainage, fire, habitat loss.

Special Fauna

Invertebrates	<i>Placostylus</i> , <i>Paryphanta</i> , tusked and giant weta.
Birds	Kokako, kukupa, NZ dotterel, kiwi, brown teal, kaka.
Reptiles	Tuatara. Duvaucel's gecko.

Landforms

Features/Process	Tombolo, sand dunes, volcanics, drowned river valleys, harbours, limestone.
Islands	Rare/endemic flora and fauna, landforms, threats, restoration, cultural story, recreation, climate.

Marine & Coastal

Human	Marine protected areas, use ethics, cultural impacts, marine farming, sand extraction, lighthouses, whaling/dolphin watch.
Natural	Process, estuaries/harbours threats, marine care, inter-relationship of land/sea, dune systems, shore birds, oceanic currents, special nature of north-east coast, wetlands of international importance (RAMSAR).

Cultural Story

Maori	Cultural materials, survival, modification, introduction of species (plant and animal), archaeology.
European	Trading, whaling, settlement, modification, introduction of species (plant and animal). Key event e.g. first church service, buildings, lighthouses.
Interaction	The Treaty of Waitangi, missionaries, conflict.

Department of Conservation

Functions, importance of conservation, logo, relation to all issues. Future implications of present and past actions of managers.

Places

All places and potential places where interpretation facilities could be located have been evaluated according to criteria based on:

- current visitor numbers;
- potential increase in visitor numbers;
- number of return visitors;
- potential to alter people's attitudes or behaviour; and
- the site's contribution to New Zealand's identity.

On the basis of ranking criteria, priority sites for future interpretation have been determined.

Other opportunities for interpretation exist through co-operation with other organisations involved in visitor servicing. Conservation messages and awareness may be raised at non-Departmental sites, Visitor Information Network centres, through heritage trails, concession operators and transport operators, tourist enterprises, and at launching ramps and wharves. Mobile or temporary displays, theme booklets and summer programmes are other techniques dealt with in the public awareness section. [Refer Section 8.0 Public Awareness.]

Objectives

To create opportunities for the public to experience and develop an insight to Northland's unique natural and cultural character.

To create awareness and understanding of the Department's role in the conservation of New Zealand's natural and cultural heritage.

Implementation

1. Establish a network of interpretation signs which identify themes, recreation opportunities and the responsibilities of visitors according to priorities in Table Twelve.
2. Invite tangata whenua involvement in interpretation projects.

3. Co-ordinate interpretation projects with other organisations who are involved in visitor servicing.

Table Twelve: Priorities for Interpretation

These priorities are intended only as a guide to the preferred development options. Priorities may vary according to the extent of tangata whenua and community support and interest.

The scale of the development is coded as:

- L Large (e.g. visitor centre, or upgraded tracks or other facilities.)
- M Medium (e.g. multi sign/pamphlet production)
- S Small (e.g. several signs).

High Priority

Site	Action	Scale
Cape Reinga	Pursue Visitor Centre concept. Research, plan and implement track.	L
Russell Visitor Centre	Research and plan for redevelopment of displays.	L
Waipoua (key trees)	Research, plan and implement.	L
Ruapekapeka	Research and plan.	L
Waipoua Forest	Pursue Visitor Centre concept. Research, plan and implement. Concurrently investigate the development of the track system.	L
Kerikeri Visitor Centre and Rewa's Village	Review, research and develop concept.	L
Auckland Visitor Information	Research, plan and implement.	M
Mangawhai, Ruakaka, Waipu Wildlife Refuges	Research, plan and implement.	M
Visitor Information Whangarei	Research, plan and implement.	M
Wharf/Ramp/Hut & Camping Ground Signs	Research, plan and implement.	M
Nocturnal Park Kiwi House	Research, plan and implement.	S
Trounson Kauri Park	Research, plan and implement.	S
Underwater Trail, Motuarohia	Review its current form and potential for extension.	S

Medium Priority

Site	Action	Scale
Russell Visitor Centre	Visitor Centre concept implemented.	L
Ruapekapeka	Concept implemented.	L
Kerikeri Visitor Centre & Rewa's Village	Implement concept.	L
Internationally Important Harbours	Research, plan and implement.	L
Underwater Trail Motuarohia	Review potential for extension, plan and implement.	M
Ahipara/Lake Ohia	Linked sites. Research, plan and implement.	M
Arai Te Uru	Research, plan & implement.	M
Manginangina	Research, plan & implement.	M
Otehei Bay	Research, plan and implement.	M
Mangonui Courthouse	Research, plan and implement.	M
Matakohe Museum	Research, plan and implement.	S
Dune Lake Pouto	Research, plan and implement.	S
Te Paki Stream	Research, plan and implement.	S
Opua Mangrove Boardwalk	Research, plan and implement.	S

Low Priority

Lower priority interpretation projects include signs and pamphlets for areas such as the hydro station, arboretum and airport wetland at Kerikeri; mangroves at Hatea River and Limeburners Creek; facilities in Puketi forest including the nature trail, the lookout and Waihoanga walk; Maxwell's cottage, Waipoua River and the lookout at Waipoua Forest. Other low priority projects are: Waiata, Ngawha geothermal lakes, Onepu Pa, Mimiwhangata, Paihia Visitor Information, St Paul's Rock, Rangikapiti Pa, Waro Limestone, the Regional Museum Kiwi House and Matakohe (Limestone) Island.

7.10 VISITOR SAFETY

There is an element of risk in all outdoor activities and the Department takes reasonable precautions to minimise risks to visitors. This may mean providing facilities or information for the protection of visitors from natural hazards. The aim is to make visitors aware of their responsibility for their own safety. This is done in conjunction with the Mountain Safety Council, the Water Safety Council and other relevant groups. In emergencies, the New Zealand Police are responsible for co-ordinating search and rescue, but Departmental staff often assist when the incident is on land managed by the Department.

Objective

To ensure that visitors are aware of hazards and that appropriate precautions are taken to minimise risks.

Implementation

1. Promote visitor safety through education and the provision of information about any potential hazards or dangers.
2. Continue to liaise with New Zealand Police and search and rescue groups.
3. Maintain facilities provided by the Department to a safe standard, consistent with relevant safety guidelines.
4. Expect concessionaires and the providers of outdoor education to be responsible for public safety in respect to their operations and activities.

7.11 VISITOR CODES

Part of the Department's approach to visitor management is to encourage visitors to adopt certain codes of practice by which their impact on the environment is minimised.

Objective

To encourage visitors to adopt appropriate codes of practice.

Implementation

1. Promote, by all necessary means, implementation of the carry-out rubbish policy in all areas, except where food is sold and in high use campgrounds.
2. Promote the New Zealand environmental care code and the water care code in all relevant visitor publications.
3. In co-operation with the Northland Regional Council, promote policies that encourage responsible visitor attitudes to their use of the natural environment.
[Refer also Section 9.0 Statutory Planning.]

4. Positively reinforce visitor care through the provision of interpretation material, such as explaining why visitors should not walk on the base of a kauri. [Refer also to Section 7.9 Interpretation.]

7.12 LIMITS ON ACCESS

Most lands administered by the Department in the Conservancy are open to the public. However, it may be necessary at some times and in some places to limit or restrict access, for a variety of reasons.

In some areas, such as the Poor Knights Islands Nature Reserve, access is strictly controlled to protect extremely rare or fragile species and ecosystems. In other areas, temporary closures or use restrictions may be required for management purposes (habitat rehabilitation or seasonal bird nesting), for public safety (fire emergency or poisoning operations), or for other purposes determined by landowners (seasonal closures for farming practices) where access is over private land.

The Department will seek to improve its performance in consultation with tangata whenua over the siting of access. In the past, lack of effective consultation has resulted in walkways and tracks encroaching on wahi tapu and other culturally sensitive sites. This includes tracks developed informally by tramping clubs or walking groups.

Aircraft, particularly helicopters, are an increasingly popular means of access to remote areas for activities like fishing off isolated rock stacks and offshore islands. However, aircraft can disturb wildlife and other visitors and their use needs to be regulated. The Department can control aircraft when they land on areas it administers, and impose conditions on concessionaires regarding flight paths and frequency of use.

Objective

To limit access where necessary to protect natural and historic resources or for the enjoyment of other visitors.

Implementation

1. Seek to provide visitor access as far as possible, but enforce restrictions where necessary, in accordance with the legal status of the area (e.g. nature reserve), to protect Maori traditional values, natural and historic resources or threatened species, for safety reasons or for other reasons (e.g. lambing or forest fire risk) as determined by landowners where access is over private land.
2. Rectify encroachments on sites of particular significance to tangata whenua in co-operation with tangata whenua. Access restrictions may be necessary to protect sensitive sites.

3. Where restrictions are present, endeavour to inform the public of the restrictions and the reasons for them.
4. Where individuals or groups from outside the Department wish to develop tracks or mark access on lands the Department administers, require that there is consultation with tangata whenua and formal approval of the Department.
5. Permit aircraft access to specified areas on land administered by the Department subject to appropriate conditions where it does not compromise natural and historic values or the use and enjoyment of the area by others. If landing for commercial purposes, a concession in terms of Section 7.6 Concessions will be required.

7.13 ROADS AND VEHICLE ACCESS

The availability and quality of vehicle access has major implications for the management of visitor services. Improvements to existing roads can alter patterns of use. For example, the sealing of State Highway 12 has had major implications for the management of visitor services and facilities in the Waipoua Forest. Facilities adjacent to the road, like toilets, carparking and information, will be sought while facilities off the main sealed highway may become less inviting for visitors. New air links and tourist operations such as water taxis and backpacker fun buses will also alter visitor use patterns.

Northland Conservancy does not have a large network of roads on land it administers. Omahuta Forest contains the largest stretch of road for visitor access. Other roads are within campgrounds or are used for management purposes only (wild animal control, search and rescue, fire breaks etc.).

Vehicle access to attractions often leads to vandalism of facilities, the need for ongoing maintenance of roads, and increased visitor pressures. Restrictions on vehicle use are very difficult to control. Sites like Mokaikai Reserve near North Cape and the road from Waipoua to Kawerua coast are examples where it is difficult to control vehicle access to remote, sensitive natural areas. Vandalism of gates and disregard for rules is frequent in these areas.

Objective

To co-ordinate the planning and provision of vehicle access over and on lands administered by the Department so as to minimise the impact of roading on natural and historic resources.

Implementation

1. Maintain close links with local authorities and Transit New Zealand for effective planning of vehicular access arrangements on lands administered by the Department.
2. Seek to improve the Department's relationships with tourist operators and public transport operators.
3. Continue to maintain existing roads used primarily for visitors so long as their use justifies it. The visitor monitoring programme will enable the Department to assess visitor use. [Refer also Section 7.27 Visitor Use Monitoring.]
4. Publicise areas designated for vehicle use, and any controls on their use, in relevant publications produced by the Department and on site. [Refer also Section 8.0 Public Awareness.]
5. Prioritise areas with road access difficulties and seek the co-operation of relevant parties towards improving access.
6. Restrict vehicle access to the beach over land managed by the Department, except at boat ramps or at legal road access points.
7. Confine motor vehicles on land administered by the Department to formed roads and designated parking areas, unless otherwise authorised by conditions in permits, concessions or licences for commercial operations, or permitted in specified zones [Refer Section 7.22 Potentially High Impact Activities.]

7.14 CARPARKS AND SERVICE AREAS

Service areas are usually associated with focal points such as bays, lookouts, walking tracks, road ends or rivers. At these points visitors seek facilities such as carparking, shade in the summer, sun in the winter, seating and tables, signposts, rubbish disposal, and toilets.

The main issues facing the Department at service areas in Northland are:

- the pressure to provide services at sites that are either major natural tourist attractions visited by commercial tour operators; or major sites in residential areas where the local authority would normally fund and maintain facilities;
- the poor standard of toilet facilities at key tourist attractions;
- the conflict of existing or potential facilities with cultural and spiritual values and/or Treaty of Waitangi land claims, such as at Cape Reinga; and
- vandalism, security of visitors' belongings, and inadequate carparks at high use areas in the Conservancy, e.g. Cape Reinga, Flagstaff Hill and Tane Mahuta.

Objective

To improve the experience for visitors at service areas, particularly those attracting the majority of visitors, while protecting natural and historic resources.

Implementation

1. Set standards of maintenance and facility quality for each service area, and give priority for upgrading (or addressing concerns) to sites where:
 - natural or historic features are suffering damage;
 - visitor safety is an issue; or
 - facilities (e.g. toilets and carparking) need to be enlarged or improved to cope with current or expected visitor numbers.
2. Integrate the management and planning of service areas through close liaison with iwi, tourist operators, local authorities, and landowners.
3. Seek contributions from tourist operators, service clubs, and local authorities for the provision of core facilities at service areas.
4. Only develop new sites for facilities where there is a proven or predicted demand and where there is a particular attraction. Sites will be assessed in accordance with the factors outlined in Section 7.30 New Recreation Facilities.
5. Consult with iwi to ensure that facilities and visitor use on and around service areas do not encroach on wahi tapu or otherwise cause cultural offence.
6. At high use sites in the immediate future, give emphasis to the provision of consistently high standards of facilities and services catering for a wide range of visitors.
7. Provide facilities for rubbish disposal at high use sites, and include sorting facilities for recycling.
8. Where vandalism and theft are a known problem, inform the police and take steps such as signposting, carpark design and surveillance, to try and minimise the problem.

There are a number of ways to establish access for walking over land that is not in public ownership. Options include easements, New Zealand Walkways, rights of way and informal, co-operative arrangements with adjoining landowners. The Department has a responsibility to provide adequate access for visitors to land it administers. In other areas, the Department seeks to promote public access to sites of recreational importance.

The Conservancy manages 19 New Zealand Walkways, over routes that were approved by the former New Zealand Walkways Commission. Most travel over a combination of land administered by the Department and private land. Only two walkways in Northland are gazetted under the New Zealand Walkways Act 1990: the Mangawhai Cliffs Walkway and Kaitaia Walkway. Several other walkways follow unformed legal roads.

Legal protection, particularly surveying a route, is a costly process. Careful assessment of priorities and future management of walkways is required. In many cases if land is subject to claims before the Waitangi Tribunal, legal protection of walkways may not be pursued. The New Zealand Conservation Authority acts as a central co-ordinating body to promote, supervise and control the administration of walkways in accordance with the New Zealand Walkways policy. The role of the Conservation Board is to advise the New Zealand Conservation Authority and the Director-General on proposals for new walkways in any area within the jurisdiction of the Board.

In addition to New Zealand Walkways, there are many locations where easements for walking purposes have been formed to allow access to lands administered by the Department, or where unformed legal roads are followed. Examples are at Whangamumu, Mahinepua and Kororipo Pa.

The Resource Management Act 1991 (Section 6) stipulates that the maintenance and enhancement of public access to and along the coastal marine area, lakes and rivers must be recognised and provided for as a matter of national importance. This is primarily the responsibility of the Northland Regional Council and local authorities, and mechanisms include the establishment of esplanade reserves.

Sites adjacent to the coast and along water-bodies are often significant to tangata whenua and there may be a conflict with visitor use.

Objective

To encourage and enhance walking access and pursue long-term protection of public access.

Implementation

1. Where necessary for recreational purposes, investigate legal foot access to the boundary of land administered by the Department.

2. Where access is inadequate, seek an arrangement with adjoining landowners and consider the provision of basic facilities such as stiles or marker posts where needed, to address landowner's concerns or where public demand requires them.
3. Carry out management of Walkways in accordance with the Department's National Walkway Policy, any national sponsorship campaign and the Department's track classification standard. Encourage use of the New Zealand Walkway Act to establish legal walking routes over private land.
4. Prioritise legal protection of existing walkways according to those:
 - receiving the highest use;
 - known to be threatened by development; or
 - where the landowner is in support.
5. Where legal protection cannot be achieved, discuss alternative options for securing public walking access with landowners and make attempts to address any concerns landowners or tangata whenua may have.
6. Monitor walkways receiving low use, that have high maintenance costs and no legal protection. Then, consider closure if, after consultation with interest groups, land owners, community groups, tangata whenua, the public and the Conservation Board, no other organisation is willing to manage them.
7. Assess proposals for new walkways according to the factors outlined in Section 7.30 New Recreation Facilities
8. Do not gazette Walkways following legal roadways or over public land administered by a local authority, but make every endeavour to secure public access and the protection of the recreation, scenic and historic values of those roads. (In cases where Walkways follow a legal road the Local Government Act prevails over the New Zealand Walkways Act.)
9. Advocate to local authorities that their district plans reflect Section 6 of the Resource Management Act, which provides for maintenance and enhancement of public access along water-bodies, provided consultation with tangata whenua occurs before any development.
10. On private lands, consult with landowners to seek to maintain public access to important recreation areas. Advocate retention of unformed legal roads which provide access to important recreation opportunities.
11. Over the next ten years, give emphasis to improving standards of access, legally protecting access, protecting the resource, and signposting and promoting existing accessways, rather than developing new sites.

7.16 WALKING AND TRAMPING

In Northland, the Department manages most areas for walking and tramping in natural surroundings, and currently maintains 550 km of tracks.

Deficiencies in the track network are:

- the high number of one-way walking tracks and shortage of loop tracks;
- an excess of long tramping tracks and routes in remote rough terrain that cater for adventurous trampers;
- a shortage of self-guided walks with good access, which are suitable for families, the elderly, school groups and overseas visitors;
- the lack of a quality overnight tramping track with hut or lodge accommodation;
- poor data on visitor use, especially for tracks in remote locations;
- the number of tracks that may encroach on wahi tapu sites; and
- inadequate signposting and marking of tracks.

The absence of any reliable monitoring on the track network makes prioritising for track upgrades or rationalisation difficult. Once an efficient monitoring system is in place, priorities for track management will be continually reviewed. Based on current knowledge, the majority of visitors prefer short walking tracks and relatively small numbers seek remote tramping tracks. As a result, in some cases it may be necessary to close tracks, reclassify them or reduce maintenance to a minimum.

Tracks are categorised in the following ways.

- Path: Well formed. May be barrier free and suitable for wheelchairs.
- Walk: Well formed and marked. Suitable for persons of all ages and varying standards of fitness.
- Tramp: Designed for use in most weather conditions. Suitable for people of reasonable fitness.
- Route: Access via river bed or areas only lightly marked and cut. A high degree of back country experience is required.

Objective

To create, maintain and manage a spectrum of walking and tramping opportunities that cater for a range of visitor needs.

Implementation

1. Maintain and upgrade existing short walks in known, popular and easily accessible locations.

2. Investigate where there is an excess of remote tramping tracks in Omahuta and Puketi Forests, Russell Forest, and Herekino Forest and rationalise the maintenance of these facilities.
3. Establish an efficient track monitoring system to assist in determining future standards and classifications of tracks.
4. Provide more details on tracks in the Northland Visitor Strategy, with the aim of improving management and maintenance of the existing network, including:
 - identifying those tracks the Department will put extra resources into;
 - providing a process for addressing which tracks encroach on wahi tapu and mitigating these impacts in consultation with tangata whenua;
 - providing for involvement of volunteer groups; and
 - describing the condition of tracks so that reception staff and visitor information outlets have up to date information.
5. Mark all tracks and classify to national standards.
6. Treat new tracks and "informal" tracks (not-signposted or formed) that receive heavy use as new developments and evaluate according to Section 7.30 New Recreation Facilities.
7. Where tracks are closed, reclassified or given minimal maintenance, inform the public in brochures and through the news media. [Refer also to Section 7.7 Information.]

7.17 WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES

The Department has the following responsibilities with regard to water-based recreation opportunities:

- providing access to water over land administered by the Department;
- providing services and facilities for water-based visitors on adjoining land administered by the Department;
- protecting marine mammals and the management of marine reserves; and
- advocacy for protection of water resources which provide recreation opportunities.

In some areas, land administered by the Department provides the only shore base for many water-based activities. Responsibility for management of the water-based activity lies with the Northland Regional Council and Maritime Safety Authority of the Ministry of Transport, and with local authorities over freshwater lakes and rivers.

Numerous sheltered harbours and bays make the east coast of Northland, especially the Bay of Islands, ideal for all forms of boating. The major impact of this activity is pollution

of water by sewage disposal. Boating also occurs on the west coast harbours, around offshore islands and on dune lakes, especially at Kaiwi and Ngatu lakes.

Sea kayaking is growing in popularity, especially around the Bay of Islands. Overnight kayaking adds pressure for the provision of remote camping sites and the need for toilet and rubbish disposal facilities.

Activities such as relaxing on the beach, swimming, diving, surfing or kayaking are mainly low-key, with access being the chief requirement. In more popular areas, facilities such as toilets and carparking may be required. Motorised recreation (water-skiing, jetskis etc) may disrupt the recreation of others unless carefully controlled.

It is estimated that 40% of Northland's residents and visitors go fishing. The Department's role is to assist the Ministry of Fisheries in education on fishing regulations, and to establish and manage marine protected areas.

Although marine reserves are primarily established to protect the marine environment, they are also important for visitor enjoyment and education. Northland has two protected marine areas: the Mimiwhangata Marine Park (with partial protection) and the Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve, which draws visitors world-wide. Commercial operators based in Tutukaka are important providers of visitor access to the reserve.

Marine mammal watching is growing in popularity throughout Northland, both on a commercial basis and by recreational boaties. The Department needs to ensure that the animals are not harmed by this activity.

The main issues are:

- the provision of information, carparking, foot access, and facilities for rubbish and sewage disposal;
- the protection of sensitive sites;
- the prevention of the introduction of plant and animal pests to offshore islands, and pollution of dune lakes; and
- the advocacy of conservation messages and co-operation with users.

Objective

To provide for water-based activities so long as their impacts are compatible with the protection of natural and historic values.

Implementation

1. Support efforts by other agencies (Northland Regional Council and district councils) to zone potentially conflicting uses (water skiers, jet skis, motorbikes and vehicles), away from areas of significant natural and historic value and areas where more passive activities are undertaken.

2. Encourage district councils to provide pump-out facilities and support initiatives to provide holding tanks aboard boats. [Refer also to Section 9.0 Statutory Planning.]
3. Circulate guidelines for approaching and viewing marine mammals as widely as possible to recreational boaties, and closely monitor all businesses currently operating under a marine mammal permit. [Refer also to Section 5.10 Marine Mammal Protection.]
4. Continue to enforce rules and regulations relating to water-based visitor use of lands administered by the Department.
5. Continue to carry out joint education programmes with relevant businesses and controlling authorities on appropriate behaviour for water-based visitors, through the provision of publicity material, patrols by staff, brochures and signposting at boat ramps and wharves.
6. Give priority to identifying sites where toilets are required. Seek to provide toilets at Departmental campgrounds and high use roadends, but not in areas where it is more appropriate for local authorities and tourism operators to do so.
7. Low impact water-based recreation such as sailing and canoeing will be fostered by:
 - maintaining access through land administered by the Department where there is proven demand, provided the access does not adversely impact on natural or historic values; and
 - providing signposting and information on site.
8. Provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy and learn about marine life, and promote the recreational values of marine protected areas. [Refer also Section 5.8 Marine Protected Areas.]
9. Improve compliance with the Marine Reserves Regulations 1993 at the Poor Knights Islands Marine Reserve through increased liaison with commercial tourism operators who regularly visit the reserve. [Refer also Section 5.9.]
10. Where new activities involve the establishment of facilities, assess according to Section 7.30 New Recreation Facilities.

7.18 CAMPSITES AND ACCOMMODATION

The Northland Conservancy has a network of campsites which complement the accommodation infrastructure in the region. The Conservancy manages eight coastal campsites and three in forest settings. Most are classified as standard campsites with basic facilities of toilets, cold water showers, water and rubbish disposal. The sites at Trounson and Waipoua are partly serviced with hot showers, kitchens, and electricity.

There are also six informal campsites, which provide for self-sufficient camping. A trial area for camping is being tested at Mimiwhangata. Most campsites provide facilities for day visitors.

Demand is strong for these campsites - especially on the coast. Maitai Bay has an estimated 18,000 visitor nights and 7,000 day visitors per year. Campsites at Puketi, Waipoua and Trounson are less popular but camping is an important activity at these locations.

Formal campsites concentrate camping within effectively managed sites and help to protect the environment from the effects of indiscriminate camping. However, campsites on the coast frequently contain wahi tapu and sensitive natural areas. The Department needs to ensure that campers and day visitors respect these areas and do not encroach on them. Campsites also provide a good opportunity to convey conservation messages to a wide cross section of the community.

The demand for informal, back-to-nature style holidays at low cost is increasing. There is scope for more remote style campsites, particularly between Bream Bay and Whananaki, at Mimiwhangata, in Whangaroa Harbour and on islands in the Bay of Islands. International visitors are also seeking a range of accommodation facilities, such as choices between a cabin, lodge or a campsite at the same location.

The major issues in the management of campgrounds are basic maintenance (roading, signs, buildings), compliance (fires, dogs, payment of fees, camping in undesignated sites), sewage and waste disposal, and water quality.

With regard to other accommodation, Northland does not have a back-country hut/track network like other regions. Instead, there is a range of basic cabins, cottages and lodges in a variety of settings. These facilities were inherited from former agencies and no new facilities have been built by the Department. The focus of effort has been in upgrading Lane Cove cottage and the facilities at Waipoua Headquarters. These two facilities now provide affordable, quality, no-frills accommodation and are proving to be very popular. Most other huts and cottages are under-utilised.

Objective

To provide appropriate, well maintained services at campgrounds and other accommodation sites in a low-key style, in keeping with their settings.

Implementation

1. Continue maintenance of all existing accommodation and manage conservation campsites according to nationally-set guidelines.
2. Seek professional landscape advice to improve campsite layout and facility design.

3. Allow mobile shops at campsites to trade only in essential food and camping items. Fast food and souvenir vendors are considered inappropriate in these locations.
4. Consult commercial campground owners in the proximity of the Department's campsites when the Department is planning any major facility, service change or new development.
5. Carry out an assessment of all accommodation managed by the Department, with the intention of operating some accommodation facilities as concessions and others through a community-based Camp Host Scheme.
6. Where there is a Treaty claim over the land, only consider the option of leasing in consultation with claimants, and only if it does not prejudice the resolution of the claim.
7. Encourage the greatest range of visitors possible to benefit from the Department's accommodation facilities. The maximum period of continuous occupancy at camping sites will be four weeks, and at any cabin, hut or lodge it will be one week (7 nights) unless in the offseason (1 June to 31 October).
8. Set a carrying capacity (maximum number of campers per night) for each campground based on the capacity of the facilities present.

7.19 TOILETS AND RUBBISH

As part of a national direction, the Department is seeking to improve its management of human waste. Toilet facilities throughout the country are being progressively upgraded to ensure they are socially, culturally and environmentally acceptable, with priority given to sites that receive the highest use.

The existing toilet regime, where visitors bury toilet waste at the main campsites on Urupukapuka Island, is not in keeping with national efforts to control human waste disposal at sites where visitors congregate. For local iwi, it is also a culturally insensitive method of waste treatment.

Other concerns of the Department include:

- the visual impact of toilets during the off season;
- maintenance and servicing requirements; and
- the probability of boaties using the toilets to offload their waste water.

Objective

To ensure environmentally and socially acceptable waste management systems are in place at key visitor sites.

Implementation

1. Give top priority to replacing or upgrading any existing toilet facilities that are impacting on environmental or cultural values.
2. Investigate the provision of toilets on Urupukapuka Island at the two main camping bays.
3. Provide signposts with warnings for any sites with potential water quality problems. Drinking water supplies will be tested regularly.
4. Provide rubbish sorting and recycling facilities at all campgrounds and at selected cottages and huts where practical. The national "pack it out" policy will be promoted.
5. Promote the environmental care code and adopt the Conservancy open fires policy at all campsites, where fires are confined to fire places supplied by the Department.

7.20 INFORMAL CAMPING

Demand for low impact informal camping occurs throughout the Conservancy. These sites currently receive low levels of use and knowledge about them is usually via word of mouth. To lessen the chance of visitors randomly camping in and damaging fragile sites, the Department will identify sites where informal camping may occur and will focus on educating visitors about low impact camping.

There is a demand from sea kayakers and small boat users for remote camping on islands in the Bay of Islands, and from visitors with warranted self-contained vehicles who want to park and camp in natural surroundings beyond formal campgrounds.

Objective

To provide overnight camping opportunities at designated "informal" sites.

Implementation

1. Investigate the suitability of the following sites for informal camping: Waikahoa Bay, Mimiwhangata; Whangamumu; Deep Water Cove; Pandora Bay, Te Paki; Forest Pools, Puketi; Raetea; Kawerua; Punaruku Valley, Russell Forest; Taheketiti Stream, Omahuta; Kerikeri Inlet and Whangaroa Harbour.

2. Install on-site visitor information panels at designated 'informal campsites' describing the rules and guidelines for self-sufficient camping.
3. Allow self-contained vehicles such as camper vans at any conservation campsite (serviced, standard or informal) and manage consistent with national policy.
4. Monitor levels of use and on-site impacts of informal camping, and promote and enforce restrictions if necessary.

7.21 FACILITIES FOR DISABLED VISITORS

Most outdoor facilities and major attractions in Northland do not adequately cater for the needs of disabled visitors. The Department has recently started to address this issue by redevelopment of tracks and facilities at Manginangina.

Objective

To provide facilities for disabled visitors.

Implementation

1. Develop a programme for removing barriers at major visitor attractions in consultation with the Disabled Persons Assembly (DPA) and the Disability Resource Centre (DRC).
2. Identify the standard and level of accessibility in all new developments. This will be done during the planning and project design stages in consultation with DRC and DPA.
3. Promote facilities that have been approved by the DRC and DPA as appropriate for disabled visitors.
4. Until such facilities are approved, do not promote these sites as being wheelchair accessible.

7.22 POTENTIALLY HIGH-IMPACT ACTIVITIES (DOGS, OFF-ROAD VEHICLES, HORSES, FIRES AND ORGANISED GROUPS)

The Department recognises the interest that people have in activities such as horse riding, four-wheel driving, and exercising dogs in remote natural areas. However, these activities often conflict with the protection of natural and historic resources, and may annoy other

visitors or damage tracks. By designating areas that can withstand the impacts, or through identifying land managed by other agencies with little or no natural and historic value, some high-impact activities can be provided for. Likewise, some high-impact activities can be provided via zoning or the introduction of restrictions.

There is considerable interest in taking domestic animals, particularly dogs, on to lands administered by the Department: for exercise, companionship and for hunting. Dogs are a major threat to wildlife, especially kiwi.

The demand to ride horses and bring all-terrain vehicles onto land administered by the Department is not large, but these activities can have a severe impact. Recreational horse riding is difficult to control on beaches where horses threaten nesting shorebirds. Horses also damage tracks and assist plant pest invasion in areas like Waoku Coach Road and Puketi Forest. Recreational riding has been occurring for many years, making it a difficult activity to control.

All-terrain vehicles can damage sensitive sites, especially on the coast where there are nesting shorebirds, archaeological sites and wahi tapu. Many of the popular areas for off-roading are remote (e.g. Pouto, Ahipara) and the Department is unable to patrol these areas regularly.

Fires associated with outdoor recreation pose a major threat to land administered by the Department. The existing regime is inconsistent. For example open fires are permitted at barbecue sites in Puketi Forest and firewood is provided by the Department, except during periods of total fire ban. In comparison, at sites such as Te Paki Reserves no barbecues or open fires are permitted at any time.

Organised groups use lands administered by the Department for a range of activities: club outings, school trips, and sports events. Without some form of control, large groups can have adverse impacts. Liaison between the Department and the groups concerned is all that is required.

Objective

To accommodate, in a controlled and limited manner, activities which may have adverse effects on natural and historic resources, or which may hinder the enjoyment of other visitors, by minimising their potential for damage or disturbance.

Implementation

1. Contribute to local authority planning for suggested locations to cater for high-impact activities.
2. Identify areas that are controlled dog areas and open dog areas, with or without conditions, according to procedures defined in Part VC of the Conservation Act 1987.

3. Do not permit dogs, or any other pets, in any serviced or standard conservation campsites. Dogs for hunting purposes may be permitted at informal campsites as a condition on the hunting permit unless the area is a controlled dog area.
4. Allow guide dogs that accompany visually impaired or profoundly deaf visitors to have access to all areas open to the public, so long as the dog is registered and is kept leashed.
5. Apart from the above exceptions, do not allow visitors to bring any domestic animals on to land administered by the Department.
6. Discuss with horse and all-terrain vehicle users the establishment of zones so that use is diverted away from sensitive areas. Liaise with other landowners who may be able to provide for these activities.
7. Investigate opportunities for horse trekking on old formed roads through selected lands administered by the Department in consultation with interested groups.
8. Do not permit open fires on lands administered by the Department except in fireplaces provided, or with gas or fluid fuelled burners. Review the safety of existing fire places and if necessary remove them. Investigate the provision of gas cooking plates at selected sites.
9. Examine any request by a large group for the formal use of land administered by the Department in terms of its impact on natural and historic values and other visitors. Such use may require a permit, or a concession if the use is a commercial one. [Refer to Section 7.6 Recreation Concessions.]

7.23 MOUNTAIN BIKING

The Department recognises that mountain biking is a popular recreational activity. However, not all areas are available to visitors with mountain bikes. Pressure for mountain biking on tracks is certain to increase and this will inevitably cause conflict with other users unless carefully managed.

Objective

To allow mountain bike use in areas identified as acceptable.

Implementation

1. Allow mountain bikes on certain tracks, assessed according to the Department's national guidelines.

2. Consult with bike users and other agencies when considering which tracks are:
 - unsuitable;
 - designated primarily for mountain bikes; or
 - suitable for both mountain bikes and walkers.
3. Involve mountain bike groups and clubs in track maintenance and the introduction of techniques for reducing impact on natural and historic values if it occurs.

7.24 RECREATIONAL HUNTING

Recreational pig and goat hunting are significant activities in remote forests and shrublands throughout the region, and can help to achieve wild animal control objectives. Forests are also subject to threat from deer introduced for hunting or escaped from captivity. [Refer also to Section 5.4 Animal Pest Control.]

The Department has given authority to the Northland Fish and Game Council to permit gamebird hunting on appropriately classified lands administered by the Department. Hunting occurs in areas such as Te Paki farm, Waitangi wetlands and some government purpose reserves designated as wildlife management zones.

Objective

To support in appropriate places, controlled recreational hunting so long as it is consistent with the protection of natural and historic resources.

Implementation

1. Gather information on hunting to help assess the numbers and needs of recreational hunters in Northland.
2. Promote the requirement for hunting permits and instigate incentives for obtaining permits and giving returns (number and location of kills).
3. Consider restricting recreational hunting with dogs in dog control areas. These areas will be defined according to the procedures prescribed in Part Vc of the Conservation Act, and may include areas where, for example, wildlife values are high and include the presence of threatened species and where protected wildlife are vulnerable to uncontrolled dogs.
4. Discourage hunting in areas of high visitor use.

5. Encourage pig hunting clubs to foster good handler skills and responsible use of hunting dogs, and to eradicate pig populations in high risk wildlife habitats such as those in Te Pahi, consistent with Implementations 3 and 4 above.
6. Continue to manage gamebird hunting in liaison with the Northland Fish and Game Council.

[Refer also to Section 5.4.2 Recreational and Commercial Hunting.]

7.25 OUTDOOR EDUCATION

There are no educational lodges provided by the Department in Northland. However, there are two lodges on lands that are leased - the Tangihua Outdoor Education Lodge and the Otehei Bay Outdoor Education Camp (sited on land leased by Fullers Northland).

Over the past ten years several schools have made enquiries to develop outdoor education lodges on land administered by the Department at Mimiwhangata, Whangaruru and Waitangi. The Department prefers educational lodges to be sited off land it administers. However, if use of the building is non-exclusive, sensitively designed and does not interfere adversely with existing patterns of use, any proposals will be considered.

Objective

To consider any proposals for outdoor education facilities.

Implementation

1. Treat any proposals for new outdoor education facilities as concession applications in terms of the Department's national concession policy, and assess under Section 7.6 Recreation Concessions.
2. Establish legal access to the Tangihua Outdoor Education Lodge in consultation with adjacent landowners.

7.26 LOW USE ACTIVITIES

There are few opportunities for caving and rock climbing in the region apart from the Waipu, Abbey and Waiomio caves which are owned by other agencies. The most popular site for rock climbing is at Mangaraho Rock which is a wahi tapu site to Ngati Whatua. The Department does not have an inventory of available (or appropriate) sites for climbing and inquiries are infrequent. Many rock faces and cave areas are tapu and may require

special conditions. Rock climbing and abseiling can cause severe impacts on vegetation on sensitive sites and surrounding terrain.

Objective

To manage low use activities consistent with the protection of natural and historic resources.

Implementation

1. Assess appropriate sites for rock climbing, abseiling and caving in consultation with iwi and in close liaison with user groups.
2. Seek to prepare an inventory of sites available for these activities and promote any special conditions necessary.
3. Monitor all current low use activities and actively manage if levels of demand necessitate this.

7.27 VISITOR USE MONITORING

A comprehensive information base covering visitor numbers and their levels of satisfaction and motivation on lands administered by the Department is required. For example, managers of a track need to determine whether visitors are satisfied with the information provided about the facility and transport to and from it, and with their experience while on the track. There is a particular need to understand and cater for the recreational needs of under-represented visitors (minority groups).

Objective

To monitor levels of visitor use and visitor preferences and satisfaction.

Implementation

1. Continue the Conservancy visitor monitoring programme and implement the national on-site survey guidelines whenever surveys are required.
2. Regularly survey visitor perceptions, preferences and satisfaction levels at high use sites or where high impact activities are occurring. At medium and low use sites the focus will be on the collection of visitor use data.
3. Seek assistance from other agencies and tourist operators in the collection of visitor data.

4. Regularly review data collection and the monitoring of sites to assess its relevance to management.

7.28 IMPACT MONITORING

The Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) is a management system designed to keep the character of an area and rate of change due to human factors within acceptable limits. Zones of use will be identified and the desired conditions for each zone described in the Northland Visitor Strategy. Visitor impacts will be monitored and management undertaken to ensure that the acceptable conditions are maintained. Setting limits on visitor numbers is preferable to continually 'hardening' or upgrading facilities. At certain levels of impact, limits must be established on the facilities provided and the level of use.

Objective

To monitor and manage impacts on the resource.

Implementation

1. Define desired conditions for use zones in the Northland Visitor Strategy and implement appropriate methods for maintaining the conditions.
2. Discourage, restrict or prohibit activities on land administered by the Department that damage natural or historic resources, disturb other users, or are culturally offensive.
3. Seek tangata whenua assessment of visitor access near or over wahi tapu sites on land administered by the Department and apply restrictions where appropriate.

7.29 FACILITIES REVIEW

Facilities for recreation on land administered by the Department have been inherited from two former departments. In the past, development centred on sites with little regional co-ordination. The Department has inherited a network of visitor facilities that often do not reflect staffing resource levels or visitor demands in some areas. [Refer also to Appendix Three: Priorities for Visitor and Recreation Site Management.]

There are approximately a dozen domain boards currently serviced by the Department in Northland. Many domains have high recreation value and are popular visitor attractions. Tamaterau (Whangarei Harbour), Waipu and Ruakaka Campground Domains are examples of sites that attract thousands of visitors.

Objective

To rationalise the management, supply and maintenance of recreation facilities.

Implementation

1. Seek to transfer the administration of all resources under the control of domain boards to local authorities. Day to day management of the reserves will continue to rest with the local community.
2. Consider the following factors when determining the Department's future role in the management of existing visitor facilities:
 - levels of use;
 - cost of maintenance;
 - importance for conservation management purposes;
 - whether the facility is in harmony with tangata whenua values;
 - historic value;
 - impact on adjacent facilities;
 - whether use could be made more convenient;
 - removal of barriers or constraints;
 - views of visitors;
 - relocation to a more appropriate location;
 - alternative maintenance;
 - similar nearby opportunities; and
 - safety.
3. When visitor demands cannot be met due to limitations of the natural resource, liaise with other agencies about where the activity may be more suitable, or supply information about alternatives.
4. Where the Department is unable to provide a visitor service, explain why not and seek to change or reduce the expectations of visitors.

7.30 NEW RECREATION FACILITIES

This section discusses the provision of recreation facilities that do not operate as a trade or business. Where the proposal involves establishing a trade or business, a concession is required and Section 7.6 Recreation Concessions applies.

Objective

To carefully assess any proposals for new recreation facilities on land administered by the Department.

Implementation

1. Only establish new facilities where there is a strong demand, long term investment is justified, and natural, historic and Maori cultural values as expressed by tangata whenua, will not be compromised.
2. Ensure that any new facilities focus on low-impact opportunities for the majority of visitors and wherever possible are sited close to other attractions or sites where there are significant public awareness opportunities for the Department.
3. Where the Department or other organisations propose to establish or improve facilities on land administered by the Department, assess their appropriateness by taking the following factors into account:
 - level of existing demand;
 - anticipated demand;
 - quality of experience;
 - tangata whenua values and Treaty of Waitangi claims;
 - cost;
 - appropriateness of site relative to other sites;
 - compatibility with natural and cultural resource protection;
 - compatibility with existing use patterns;
 - benefits gained by the Department (public awareness and interpretation);
 - purpose for which the land is held;
 - accessibility; and
 - assurance of ongoing maintenance.

7.31 FACILITIES DEVELOPMENT

The presence of facilities can divert visitors away from fragile areas that may be sensitive to damage. In this way facilities can help to regulate visitor numbers and reduce overall visual and physical impacts. Developments must be designed to respect the scale, nature and character of the place where they are located. Sufficient facilities such as toilets, well-constructed tracks, viewing areas and visitor information services are needed to protect natural and historic resources from anticipated increasing pressures of demand.

Objective

To provide sufficient facilities to protect natural and historic resources from adverse visitor impacts.

Implementation

1. Carefully plan the design and siting of facilities and where necessary, consult with specialists. Develop concept plans before new initiatives or major upgrades are undertaken.
2. Ensure that designs conform to all relevant legislation (Building Act 1991, Resource Management Act 1991, Guidelines for the Design, Construction and Upgrade of Outdoor Visitor Facilities).
3. Give priority for alleviating existing impacts to:
 - sites where prevention of damage to natural, historic or cultural values is necessary such as at Rangikapiti Pa, Four Sisters carpark, damage to kauri roots, Mount Manaia; and
 - sites where waste management is a significant issue.
4. Provide adequate rubbish facilities at high use sites or investigate other methods of dealing with rubbish.
5. Adopt a long-term commitment to using renewable resources and recycled materials, such as the use of solar panels and windmills.

7.32 OVERALL PRIORITIES FOR VISITOR SERVICES

1. Ensure the protection of natural and historic resources and consult widely and effectively on providing better service to visitors before making decisions.
2. Require unauthorised businesses in the Conservancy to obtain concessions.
3. Give greater attention to the role concessionaires play in educating visitors to land administered by the Department.
4. Improve or establish toilet facilities at highest use sites as appropriate and where impacts are occurring.
5. Improve visitor education, information and awareness of visitor codes at the highest use sites and/or where impacts are occurring.
6. Enlarge or improve the quality of facilities to cope with projected increases in visitors in order to prevent damage to natural or historic features.
7. Provide interpretation and information on the values present at high use sites.
8. Review the appropriateness and methods of retaining and maintaining low-use facilities.
9. Improve and promote short walks adjacent to popular attractions.

10. Assess alternative forms of management for campgrounds and booked accommodation.
11. Establish a programme for correcting any existing encroachments on culturally sensitive sites in partnership with tangata whenua.
12. Seek legal protection of existing walkways according to those:
 - receiving the highest use,
 - known to be threatened by development, or
 - where landowner is in support.

More detailed site-specific priorities for visitor and recreation management are contained in Appendix Three.