

**Explanation****28. Public Awareness**

The Conservation Act 1987 gives the Department the function of advocating for the conservation of natural and historic resources generally, of promoting the benefits to present and future generations of the conservation of natural and historic resources, and of preparing and distributing educational and promotional material relating to conservation.

Nearly all Department staff are advocates in the course of their work. When they are dealing with groups of people or individual members of the general public, they draw on either their own public awareness skills or those of the public awareness staff, who provide resources, advice and opportunities to inform and educate people about conservation issues.

Some public awareness work is driven externally by factors such as requests for information or issues raised by the public, and the sheer number of visitors to areas managed by the Department (which consequently requires a high level of information about opportunities, facilities, access, safety and compliance). Other public awareness work is in response to activities of the Department which require public input or explanation.

The function of public awareness is to:

- Raise awareness and increase enjoyment of the natural and historic resources of the Conservancy, both on and off areas managed by the Department, explain the impact of human activities on the diverse and complex natural ecosystems; and help people appreciate the differing perspectives of Maori and European cultures towards natural resources, and the recreational opportunities on areas managed by the Department.

The Department places great emphasis on enhancing people's visits to natural places so that they better appreciate the natural environment and the history of protection which has allowed the natural processes to continue.

- Explain the role of the Department and its approaches to conservation and management of natural and historic resources, especially those actions taken to decrease or prevent threats to the Conservancy's natural and cultural values.

This also involves communicating safety and compliance requirements on areas managed by the Department, facilitating statutory public processes and ensuring conservation management is undertaken in an open and consultative way.

- Encourage, assist and educate groups and individuals to sustain and enhance the natural and historic environment.

People can be motivated to contribute to protection through exposure to the Department's staff, operations and policies, by learning techniques for protection, working with public awareness, and by understanding pros and cons.

There are three ways of advancing public awareness immediately available to staff: the first involves the natural or historic sites people visit. Some sites on areas managed by the Department provide ideal opportunities to stimulate interest in natural and historic values and in conservation practices among visitors.

The second way is the contact made with various organisations and individuals in the course of the Department's work. Through good public relations, education and increased community participation in conservation, we can endeavour to raise the conservation awareness of these associates.

The third way is contact with the "general public" through the education system, responding to public inquiries or through the media.

#### *Public Awareness in the Next Decade*

Shaping our directions for public awareness nationwide in the next decade is the Department's desire to encourage wider community involvement in the conservation of natural and historic resources, and to provide sufficient information for community groups and individuals to make responsible choices themselves. A strategy will be prepared to set objectives and priorities for public awareness activities.

Within the Department there will need to be greater recognition of the role of public awareness activities at all levels of its work.

#### **Wellington Conservancy**

The characteristics of this Conservancy which have the most bearing on public awareness activities are:

- The second largest urban population in New Zealand. There are numerous opportunities for the Department to encourage "backyard" conservation practices among residents. Urban pressures on the environment threaten some significant conservation values, particularly water quality and wetland ecosystems. The presence in the Conservancy of parliament and the headquarters of major companies and government departments means that decisions will have implications to conservation beyond the Conservancy;
- Three nationally significant sites for threatened species recovery programmes: Mana Island, Kapiti Island and the National Wildlife Centre. They offer visitors direct insight into departmental operations, making them extremely important public awareness opportunities;
- A mainly domestic tourism and recreation base, with a high proportion of visitors coming from within the Conservancy; most of them using the forest parks;
- A good knowledge of much of the Conservancy's biological and geological values by virtue of an historic concentration of research institutions in the region;
- Unprotected natural areas are usually small remnants of bush, coastal escarpment or wetland owned by farmers. Their protection will involve communication with numerous landowners which could benefit from community-wide public awareness activities.

Contact between the general public and departmental staff is by:

- Telephone contact with Conservancy office staff;

- Public programmes of walks and talks;
- field staff and counter staff at two small urban-based offices (Masterton and Waikanae) and reserve access points at Catchpool, Holdsworth, Otaki Forks, Mana Island and Kapiti Island;
- Specialist staff at the National Wildlife Centre.

## 28.1 PLACE-RELATED PUBLIC AWARENESS

### Explanation

By drawing people's attention to existing natural and historic resources in their surroundings, the Department is well placed to seek support for further protection of and respect for natural/historic features throughout the Conservancy. Promotion of conservation values of the resources can be achieved at a distance, through publications or other media; however, public awareness objectives are best met at the places themselves. The Department actively seeks public awareness opportunities on areas it manages and advocates that other land managers and conservationists take a similar approach.

### Management Issues

#### *Interpretation Themes*

The following are dominant natural and historic resources in this Conservancy that are nationally significant or that stand out as being special features. Where interpretation themes are appropriate they will focus on these subjects.

#### Geology and Landforms:

- Nationally significant and conspicuous geological features in the Conservancy include (active) fault scarps, active uplift, raised beaches, "red rocks", pinnacles, fossiliferous beds, and peneplain remnants.

#### Wetlands (including dune wetlands, lakes and estuaries):

- Nationally significant ecosystems which are dynamic, vulnerable and are being degraded by changes in drainage regimes, pollution and siltation.

#### Maori History and Cultural Values:

- Sites on the Palliser coastline (still evident) are some of the earliest in the country. The western coast (including the islands) is rich in Maori history of settlement, resource use and conquest. Greater recognition of waahi tapu around the region will be beneficial.

#### Coastal and Marine:

- The rocky shore, marine environments and the distinctive Cook Strait escarpment are significant biologically and, along with the vulnerable dunelands, are under pressure from urban and rural development. Interestingly, many coastal plants are also found in alpine zones. Shipwrecks are a significant part of Wellington's history. Seal haulouts are expanding and breeding colonies apparently increasing.

#### Coastal Forest:

- Nationally significant remnants of coastal kohekohe forest are scattered along the western coast.

#### Threatened Species:

- Plant and wildlife species are protected both on the mainland (in reserves and at the National Wildlife Centre) and on Mana and Kapiti Islands. Some of them are specific to Cook Strait. Both the National Wildlife Centre [*refer p 42*] and Kapiti Island [*refer p 110*] have historical association with pioneering threatened species recovery work. This aspect of the places may be a component of interpretation themes at these places.

#### Major Losses:

- Major environmental changes such as forest loss or wetland drainage are characteristic of the Conservancy. Memories of previous landscapes are manifest as remnant stands or special species' protection reserves.

#### Axial Ranges:

- The large forest parks provide protection for ecosystems and water catchments and help us appreciate the benefits of large reserves. At the time it was first planned, Tararua Forest Park was central to a new forest park system.

#### *Visitors*

Visitors to natural and historic areas seek adventure, to learn, to have fun, to relax, to have family time together. The Department has a visitor service role to ensure that people are safe, do not infringe laws, know where they are going and what they will find there. In addition, some of the places they visit provide excellent opportunities for the Department to increase visitors' knowledge and active interest in natural history, history and conservation.

The best ways of taking advantage of these opportunities (e.g., static interpretive displays, signage, guided interpretive walks and talks, facilitated school activities, staff contact, or publications) are dictated by the physical features of a site, the way people use it, the type of visitor and their reasons for visiting, and the potential spinoff for conservation.

Given the resources of the Department, it would be prudent to work within existing (and predicted) visitor patterns rather than to try to change them. However, there may be times when the public awareness emphasis should be changed to lessen impacts at existing sites.

The Department should maintain sufficient information for the public about areas it manages, including their values, to increase visitor enjoyment, manage visitors and prevent law infringements.

#### **Objectives**

- 1 Encouragement of knowledge of, and involvement with, conservation management at natural and historic places managed by the Department.
- 2 Increased appreciation and knowledge of the natural and historic resources and recreation opportunities of areas managed by the Department.
- 3 Active attraction of people who would not normally go to areas managed by the Department.
- 4 Provision of up-to-date information about opportunities, facilities, access, safety and compliance on areas managed by the Department, matching information resources with visitor demands.

**Implementation**

- 1 Identify sites which have “high significance” for public awareness on areas managed by the Department. These will have significant natural and/or historic resources and offer one or more of the following opportunities:
  - Enable visitors to learn about protection and preservation activities; places where visitors can see examples of cause and effect of unnatural impacts.
  - Enable visitors to get involved with conservation work.
  - Enable the Department to distribute educational and promotional material about conservation to many people.
  - Enable the Department to interpret the Conservancy’s most significant conservation values.
  - Suitable for promoting priority conservation issues.
  - Useful to educational groups for natural history and cultural studies.
  - They are tourist attractions.

Priority will usually be given to sites identified in the first grouping of Table 20, p 262. Sites identified in the second grouping of Table 20 are likely to be a priority within the period of the CMS. Specific priority may be given to a specific site on merit.

- 2 Encompass all significant natural and historic resources characteristic of the Conservancy (marine, coastal, geological, wetland, lowland, hill country, sub-alpine, threatened species, historic artifacts and cultural values) and the priority interpretation subjects (geology and landforms, wetlands, Maori history, coastal and marine, coastal forest, threatened species, major losses, axial ranges) in its choice of “high significance” public awareness sites, paying particular attention to opportunities to promote the concept of indigenous biodiversity.
- 3 Assess which Public Awareness activities are best suited to the “high significance” sites to develop their full Public Awareness potential and develop a public awareness strategy. Options include interpretive guided walks and talks, self-guided interpretation, interpretive signs, displays, literature, media features, working bees, provision for educational trips, retailing, visitor centres.
 

The features of sites which will be considered in the assessment include physical features, visitor characteristics, climate, proximity to population bases and potential for revenue generation.
- 4 Continue visitor programmes to meet Objectives 1–3 above.
- 5 Encourage and facilitate school group visits to appropriate “high significance” sites in preference to classroom-based activities relating to natural and historic values.
- 6 Develop public awareness activities – signs, published material or visitor programmes – at sites with high visitor use, especially where there is overnight accommodation.
- 7 Incorporate the priority interpretation subjects in public awareness activities where possible, both off-site and on-site, and support other agencies and individuals promoting those subjects.
- 8 Familiarise counter staff with access, facilities and recreational opportunities on areas managed by the Department.
- 9 Assess adequacy of information (especially brochures, maps and signage) relating to access, facilities, safety and compliance; improve and update this information as required. The highest priority is for

information signage for access across private land. Provision of on-site information takes priority over provision of interpretation resources if resources are limited.

- 10 Assess adequacy of information outlets used by the Department and seek economic ways to overcome any inadequacies (this is contingent on meeting Implementation 8, as a review of the information required will indicate the way such information should be distributed).

Table 20:

Sites with high significance for public awareness on areas managed by the Department.

Protection and preservation activities, evidence of cause and effect of unnatural impacts, and significant natural/historic features provide significant public awareness opportunities		
Castlepoint Scenic Reserve*	Mana Island Scientific Reserve	South Coast (incl. Speargrass Weevil Reserve, Red Rocks, Sinclair Head)*
Kapiti Island Nature Reserve	National Wildlife Centre*	Waikanae Estuary Scientific Reserve
Lake Horowhenua (incl. Hokio)	Papaitonga Scenic Reserve	Whitireia Park Recreation Reserve*
Lake Wairarapa (incl. Boggy, Allsops, Matthews, Lake Shore reserves)	Pauatahanui/Duck Creek/Horokiri	
Site-specific historic/natural features provide significant public awareness opportunities		
Carter Scenic Reserve	Makara Coast (general area)	Tararua Forest Park (overall)
Government Buildings (from 1996)	Pencarrow Lakes	Tuhitarata Bush Scenic Reserve
Hemi Matenga Scenic Reserve	Pukerua Bay	Turakirae Head Scientific Reserve*
Kapiti Marine Reserve	Putangirua Pinnacles Scenic Reserve*	Turnbull House
Koputaroa Scientific Reserve	Rimutaka Incline/Cross Creek*	Waiohine Scientific Reserve
Kupe's Sail (and Cape Palliser area)	Rimutaka Forest Park (overall)	
Intrinsic features provide general (rather than site-specific) public awareness opportunities		
Catchpool Valley*	Holdsworth/Powell*	Orongorongo Valley*
Colonial Knob	Kaitoke/Smiths Creek	Otaki Forks*
Aorangi Forest Park	Maungakotukutuku Scenic Reserve	Waiohine Gorge*
* High visitor numbers		

The sites listed were identified in 1993. They meet the criteria listed in Implementation 1 and 2 above. They are grouped according to the criteria used to measure their public awareness opportunities.

## 28.2 CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT PUBLIC AWARENESS

### Explanation

The Department seeks public support for its work, help with it and effective interaction with the public in its decision-making processes. The Department also recognises a growing role for staff in helping groups which the Department works with (its associates) to practice sound conservation management in their own projects.

### Management Issues

#### Public Relations

To achieve protection of natural and historic resources and public support for particular conservation activities, the Department often runs specific campaigns, negotiates options for management through a public process or seeks partnerships or allegiances with boards, trusts, landowners, iwi and private enterprise. Public awareness staff can advise other staff on issues requiring a major public relations component, on public involvement and on gaining support through public awareness campaigns. They require a sound knowledge of the individuals and organisations the Department works with. The standard of public debate of issues is improved by regular information sharing with these associates.

Issues requiring significant public awareness input in this Conservancy most frequently relate to Protected Natural Area programmes, compliance, water quality advocacy, pest control, cultural site protection, wetland ecosystem protection, marine and coastal ecosystem protection, and integrated management for sustainable land-uses. To optimise the Department's resources, discretionary public awareness activities (such as visitor programmes, community participation and media) should be directed towards priority programmes and issues.

#### *Working with Associates*

Most of the Department's contact with groups and individuals relating to protection and preservation work is through dealing with specific issues, management planning processes or protection campaigns. There is a traditional working relationship between the Department and groups that make a significant direct contribution to conservation (e.g., conservation interest groups, rural communities, iwi, local authorities, tramping clubs and tourism operators). Accordingly, the Department will increasingly focus on raising the awareness of those associates with a low level of conservation awareness, of owners of land of high conservation value and of people or groups whose activities most threaten conservation values. Wherever possible, current issues or recent successes will be used as case studies, or local examples of active conservation will be promoted.

#### *Community Involvement*

Understanding conservation of natural and historic resources is best learnt by example. In many cases this can be achieved through greater exposure to the Department's work. Volunteer opportunities give people first-hand insight into the complexities of conservation management and some of the skills and knowledge required. Where they offer the Department skills, the benefits of their participation becomes mutual. Sponsorship relationships offer the Department public awareness opportunities with the businesses concerned.

### **Objectives**

- 1 Achieve a greater input into the work of the Department by allied conservation interest groups and individuals.
- 2 Increase communication with traditionally non-participatory community groups and individuals in the course of the Department's work and encourage them to develop conservation initiatives and projects.
- 3 Increase the range of community groups the Department has regular contact with.
- 4 Achieve greater commitment to conservation practices from groups and individuals in the community.

### **Implementation**

- 1 Develop a public awareness strategy to provide detail on how to achieve these objectives and implementation measures.
- 2 Provide public relations expertise, adequate resource support and information flow for major issues and management strategies.
- 3 Tailor other public awareness functions to support the high impact/high urgency components of priority issues and conservation programmes.
- 4 Facilitate volunteer participation which provides conservation skills training (for either party). Respond positively to interest in volunteer participation in specialist management work, while ensuring volunteers bring the most appropriate skills to the job.

- 5 Support statutory advocates in their efforts to encourage regional and district authorities to make policies and provision for conservation and sustainable management of natural and historic resources.
- 6 Respond where possible to requests from interest groups for speakers on conservation subjects, aiming to foster interest in local rather than general examples.
- 7 Seek opportunities to raise awareness of those people whose activities most threaten natural and historic resources and recreation opportunities; associates with low conservation awareness; and owners of land with significant natural and historic resources, while maintaining communications with regular associates through newsletters or meetings.
- 8 Seek ways in which traditionally non-participatory groups can participate in conservation, primarily through public management planning processes, sponsorship arrangements and public meetings.

### 28.3 GENERAL PUBLIC AWARENESS

#### 28.3.1 Media and Education

#### **Explanation**

Most educational programmes are issue-related. Along with other environmental agencies, the Department hopes to attract and harness people's interest in "green" issues generally. It also serves the public, informing people how conservation of their protected resources is being achieved.

#### **Management Issues**

##### *Public Awareness*

General public awareness programmes may be developed at the national level, e.g., Conservation Week, or locally instigated. The latter will mainly be programmes about threats to natural and historic resources in the Conservancy. Opportunities for raising public awareness also arise in the course of the Department's other activities, for example, wildlife protection measures often provide education opportunities with a high level of public interest. The metropolitan emphasis in Wellington challenges Department staff to find ways to bring the messages to people (rather than people to places it manages.) "Back-yard" conservation opportunities focus on water pollution, landscaping, encouraging native birds (and discouraging introduced predators), and waste minimisation and management.

In a new joint-venture with the Wellington VIN (Visitor Information Network) Centre from 1 July 1995, the Department will have a strong presence in downtown Wellington. This will provide a great opportunity for the Department to distribute recreation and general conservation information. The centre will have a national as well as a regional role.

##### *Education Institutions*

The Department supports education about the conservation of natural and historic resources and responds to requests for information and interpretation resources throughout the year. Some destinations in areas managed by the Department are well suited to nature study and specialist interest education. Resources can be developed accordingly. The Department recognises the benefits of working with teachers rather than dealing directly with students.

#### **Objectives**

- 1 Familiarise the general public with the nature of conservation work.

- |                       |   |   |
|-----------------------|---|---|
|                       | 2 | Stimulate interest amongst residents to become conservators of their local environment.   |
|                       | 3 | Assist teachers and group leaders to become proficient conservation educators.  |
| <b>Implementation</b> | 1 | Develop a public awareness strategy to provide details on how to achieve these objectives and implementation measures.  |
|                       | 2 | Seek media opportunities to explain the nature of the Department's work and to promote conservation generally.  |
|                       | 3 | Support national thematic public awareness programmes as required, and provide a local flavour to their content.  |
|                       | 4 | Liaise with teachers and group leaders to anticipate requests from teaching institutions and students for conservation information.   |
|                       | 5 | Be supportive of other trusts or educational organisations preparing educational material concerning the conservation values in the Conservancy.  |
|                       | 6 | Encourage teachers to focus their groups on the current, and local, conservation issues for which Department staff can provide resources or opportunities for involvement. Give priority to promoting on-site conservation education opportunities. |
|                       | 7 | Provide teacher and group leader training opportunities through involvement with teacher support services or through on-site training experiences (such as the National Wildlife Centre).   |
|                       | 8 | Ensure the new joint-venture VIN Centre retains an emphasis on the provision of quality conservation information alongside information on recreation facilities and opportunities, and that staff are trained appropriately.                        |

### 28.3.2 Internal Issues

#### **Management Issues**

##### *Research*

Effective advocacy communications rely on a sound understanding of the public groups involved. In recent years surveys have concentrated on recreational users. Less is known about the attitudes, needs or level of conservation awareness of other public groups in this Conservancy. This Conservancy relies on other agencies to provide survey data about social attitudes, environmental awareness or local public perceptions of the Department. There has been little formal evaluation of the effectiveness of the Department's public awareness activities.

#### **Objectives**

- 1 To optimise the effectiveness of public awareness activities and investment of departmental public awareness resources.

#### **Implementation**

- 1 Instigate evaluation programmes for major interpretation and public relations activities.
- 2 Gather sufficient information on issues and public attitudes on which to base communication strategies.

### 28.3.3 Corporate Standards

#### **Explanation**

Production management of publications, signs, displays, advertisements, public notices, etc., requires production skills for which specialist staff are employed. The Department also employs specialists with public relations and writing skills. When these skills are not used, overall quality control is

lost and standards become variable, damaging the public image of the Department.

It is important for the Department to be recognised as an expert in the conservation of natural and historic resources. To develop a better public image for the Department's interpretation role, staff must make greater efforts to be skilled interpreters, for any volunteer interpreters to be knowledgeable and well trained, and for concessionaires dealing with the public to have good interpretation skills.

The Department should seek to set a good example to the public about how to assist the conservation of natural and historic resources in the workplace by the efficient use of resources.

**Objectives**

- 1 Maintain a highly professional public image at all times.
- 2 Use resources efficiently and reduce the quantity of non-renewable resources used wherever possible.

**Implementation**

- 1 Ensure excellence in production of publicity material (no matter how small the job or how short the deadline) by developing resources and the necessary commitment to ensure high production standards.
- 2 Encourage specialist staff to participate in public awareness activities in order to present a professional public image and maintain public access to the Department's specialists.
- 3 Train staff, volunteers, and where appropriate, concessionaires involved in public awareness activities about local conservation issues and in interpretation skills.
- 4 Ensure other staff recognise public awareness opportunities and needs in the course of their work.
- 5 In the Conservancy office and at field centre offices, efforts will continue in reducing the amount of paper used and in recycling paper products.
- 6 Other materials will be recycled wherever possible.
- 7 Energy resources will be used as efficiently as possible.