

Delayed 4WD access to Harrisons Bight

Background

In June 2004, the Nature Heritage Fund (NHF) purchased part of the Clent Hills pastoral lease in association with a number of local land owners. The 10,000 hectares purchased extend around the southern shores of Lake Heron to the Taylor Range. This is now administered by the Department of Conservation as part of the Hakatere Conservation Park, which consists of nearly 60,000 hectares of rugged mountain country, tussocklands, beech forest, rivers and lakes.

A number of public consultations have taken place since the NHF purchase in 2004. The decision to reopen 4WD-vehicle access to Harrisons Bight is a result of the September 2008 decision by Mike Slater, Conservator West Coast Tai Poutini Conservancy.

Intention and implementation

Managed and controlled 4WD-vehicle access will be allowed along the existing, approximately 3-km unformed track, from the Lake Heron inlet to Harrisons Bight - during the summer months only (November to April inclusive). To implement this, two clearly defined steps are required.

Firstly a number of administration and monitoring controls need to be put in place to ensure that 4WD access to Harrisons Bight is effectively managed and controlled. Access will be managed via a locked gate or similar system. Ongoing monitoring of the site will determine future limits on the number of vehicles using this access, if the environmental, wildlife, and social impacts become unacceptable. Signage at the inlet and information provided to users will advise that the gate may be locked permanently if users do not comply with the site's protocols.

Secondly, the construction phase has several aspects. Some soft sections of the existing track need to be metalled. The fence and gate above the inlet need to be relocated closer to the existing car park. A car park needs to be formed at the end of the access track, at Highbank (just before Harrisons Bight) and a ford and boardwalk need to be constructed to enable access for 4WD vehicles and foot traffic across the inlet.

The construction of a ford across the inlet requires resource consent. The Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), Section 13, states resource consent must be obtained from the relevant regional council - in this case Environment Canterbury - if there is going to be disturbance to the bed of any lake or river, where the proposal does not comply with a rule in the regional plan.



Current situation

The department submitted its resource consent application in May and has recently been advised by Environment Canterbury that it has decided to process the application as a non-notified consent. The department continues to plan for Harrisons Bight to be reopened; however, work on the ground will not begin until the resource consent and its associated conditions are confirmed. We are expecting this will take 3-4 weeks.

Initially it was planned to have the work completed and the track opened by November 2009. Further time will now be required to confirm and complete the ford's construction and implement the finer details of Mike Slater's 2008 decision, to ensure the future management of 4WD access to Harrisons Bight is effectively managed and controlled.

The department wishes to progress this work as soon as is practicable. However, it does not expect the work to be completed until 2010.

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Note:

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