

## **CMS development – chapter 1.5.1 People’s benefit and enjoyment**

**This document is an attempted analysis of public use changes in Canterbury, and of where we may need to head in future management. It is based on snippets of data and research results collected from various sources in recent years<sup>1</sup>.**

**A summary of this analysis will be included as introductory text within chapter 1.5.1 People’s benefit and enjoyment, within the reviewed CMS.**

**Comments on this document are being sought from DOC staff, stakeholder clubs and concessionaires, and the public.**

**Given the lack of thorough research on this topic it is desirable to have reasonable consensus on our understanding of the public-use trends if we are to develop meaningful CMS direction.**

Within the document are bracketed questions, shown as [Q...]; these questions will hopefully be answered and some answers may lead to new or changed policies.

### **1. Introduction**

Public use and enjoyment of rural land and public conservation areas (front-country and backcountry<sup>2</sup>) in Canterbury is changing in response to a wide variety of factors; the challenge for the department is to better understand this change and appropriately respond to it.

Data is increasingly available on national and international trends in outdoor recreation and tourism, but interpreting it is not straightforward, and the data may not detect regional variations differing from national averages.

Some broad activity, management and other trends are:

- Christchurch is the main gateway for South Island domestic tourism, with visitor-flow emphasis along the radiating State Highways: 1 (north and south), 73 (to the West Coast), and 8 (towards Central Otago); SH 7 (Lewis Pass) and 80 (Aoraki/Mt Cook) have less emphasis; other routes less again.
- For international tourists, the State Highway 1 and 8 route south of Christchurch towards Central Otago and beyond, and State Highway 80, are the primary flow routes; followed by State Highway 1 (north, and south of Rangitata) and 73; State Highway 7 less again; others even less.
- The department’s expenditure in outdoor recreation is four times higher, relative to population, in the South Island versus the North Island. The inclusion of district and regional council expenditure in outdoor recreation may even out this relationship to some extent.
- Department expenditure between front-country and backcountry is approximately 50:50; public perspectives vary on where any change of investment should happen.
- The New Zealand population is slowing its growth, aging, concentrating northwards (generally) but also showing localised growth, and becoming more ethnically diverse.
- New Zealander visits to public conservation land are still significant but stable.
- Some national trends in activities since 1997 show walking significantly increasing; running, off-road driving, kayaking and snowboarding increasing; mountain biking static; and tramping, downhill and cross-country skiing, and horse-trail riding declining.

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<sup>1</sup> No references have been included in this report, but all statements can be referenced either to research or statistical data, or to information and observations from department, concessionaire, club, and other organisations’ staff and members.

<sup>2</sup> For department management purposes, public conservation land can be divided broadly into front-country and backcountry. In the Recreational Opportunities Spectrum (ROS) used by the department, front-country includes the ROS zones of Urban, Urban Fringe and Front-country; while backcountry includes the ROS zones of Backcountry, Remote and Wilderness.

- For visitor use of our national parks, Aoraki/Mt Cook is stable or variable in a mid-range of use; Arthur's Pass (along with Tongariro, Paparoa and Abel Tasman) is growing slightly in visitor use; but neither as high as for Fiordland and Westland/Tai Poutini, nor as low as the remaining parks.

## 2. The 'traditional' activities

Membership of most traditional Canterbury outdoor clubs (tramping, climbing, hunting, [Q: *And skiing?*]) is generally declining and aging, with less member-volunteer capability for maintaining club facilities (e.g. huts, ski fields).

Climbing clubs now represent a small proportion of backcountry users, although may continue to have membership boosted by overseas 'seasonal' members seeking to use club facilities and gain hut fee reductions. They may now represent an increasing number of front-country users, i.e. the rock-climbing and bouldering users.

Deer-hunting clubs experienced significant membership decline, likely influenced by deer number declines from high levels of commercial helicopter-based hunting. With the more recent drop in commercial hunting, club membership is now rising, although it is thought unlikely to reach previous high levels.

Skiing and snowboarding in Canterbury continues as one of the most intensive and localised use activities within public conservation lands, with Canterbury having 12 of the 25 ski fields nationally (6 commercial & 6 club fields). Activity levels may be determined more by yearly snow availability than by other factors such as costs and alternative activities.

Ski touring may be an increasing Canterbury/Otago activity [Q: *But at what level, and of what significance compared with other activities?*], perhaps encouraged by the increasing availability of new conservation lands with formal/easier public access. [Q: *Is it primarily confined to the tops of the new southern conservation parks?*]

Fishing (freshwater and coastal) is another activity that continues to have high [Q: *Possibly increasing?*] use levels, again perhaps encouraged in backcountry areas by the easier availability of new conservation lands.

Conversely, gamebird hunting may be in decline or not showing any significant growth, with an emphasis on opening-day activity. Public conservation lands, along with other lands, very likely provide ample opportunities for this activity.

Outdoor, backcountry activities undertaken by schools and tertiary institutions is still very active [Q: *But what are the use trends? Have safety, economic and other issues led to more guided/contracted supervision at hired/shared lodge facilities on and off public conservation land? Is there now a stronger focus on integration with academic curriculum studies and outdoor studies in the 'back yard' rather than in the backcountry? Is there surplus capacity with school lodge facilities?*]

[Q: *Is there some benefit in giving some form of support to clubs and club activities? If so, how and what support? E.g. 4WD access for club-organised activities and events.*]

## 3. Facilities and 'new' conservation area use factors

The department's Recreational Opportunities Review (2004), and the acquisition through tenure review/NHF purchases of new public conservation lands (see CMS section 2.5 Conservation and Forest Parks, on [www.doc.govt.nz/canterburycms](http://www.doc.govt.nz/canterburycms)), has resulted in improved and additional facilities and 'new' areas to visit. These facilities and areas have attracted at least initial interest and visitors.

For some of the 'new' areas, runholders had previously been restrictive of public access (e.g. Ahuriri, St James) and the 'opening up' under the conservation area status will mean more visitors to these areas, at least initially.

In all/most [Q: ?] cases though, there is little evidence that these visitors will be additional backcountry users, or evidence on where these visitors were going beforehand and whether, in

time, their use will again spread out within Canterbury and elsewhere and/or decline within the 'new' areas. In some cases though, where the upgraded facility and setting is considered spectacular (e.g. Hooker Valley track and Mueller Hut), visitor use is high and increasing.

While data on backcountry hut usage in Canterbury is variable, it does suggest that while huts in main valleys are receiving stable, slightly increasing or increased peak-period usage, other hut usage is more variable with decreasing, static or only slightly increasing usage [*Q: This was considered true in 2007 for APNP; is it true across the whole conservancy?*]. Most hut usage is well below nominal hut capacity<sup>3</sup>.

Within Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park the alpine huts are receiving declining use over time, although there is considerable variability between use of the various huts [*Aoraki/Mt Cook National Park hut data for 1982 to 2009 will soon be available to better inform this*], while the more-accessible semi-alpine Mueller Hut has high occupancy.

Within the 'new' conservation areas, hut density and accessibility from road-ends is often higher and easier respectively than meets department hut-location standards, meaning over time there will be a need to either rationalise or phase out of some of these huts, or that funding for these huts will continue at the expense of other facilities, or there will be a need to find other means of retention (e.g. community group care).

Where there are localised population increases, of either seasonal or permanent residents (e.g. Twizel [*Q: And Hanmer, Rangiora and Lyttelton basin?*]), there is an increasing interest in [*Q: And need for?*] recreational opportunities in these areas.

The Te Araroa Trust is developing 'Te Araroa - The Long Pathway', a linked system of walking tracks the length of New Zealand. Te Araroa passes mostly east of the Main Divide for the length of Canterbury, primarily using a combination of existing tracks and routes. Whether this pathway attracts significant levels of use over and above pre-pathway use of the tracks and routes remains to be seen, and is uncertain in terms of national backcountry use trends.

Urban-edge use, primarily by Christchurch and nearby urban residents and visitors, is increasingly being provided for through the significant provision of Christchurch City Council reserves on the Port Hills and, since amalgamation with Banks Peninsula, elsewhere on the peninsula, and the provision of facilities in these areas. [*Q: Timaru also with its coastal and other reserves and opportunities?*]. Environment Canterbury also has a series of regional reserves alongside the Waimakariri and Ashley Rivers and at Tekapo.

The proposed Cape Reinga to Bluff national cycleway may involve a continuous route or a series of local and regional opportunities. If aimed at a road-cycle touring standard then it is unlikely to involve much, if any, public conservation land, due to the engineering and other costs and practicalities. There may, however, be associated tracks at mountain-bike standard which could include some front- and backcountry conservation areas. Possibly, these would be no more than what is already being provided for or anticipated, in much the same way that Te Araroa will largely use existing tracks and routes.

Overall, there is a lack of evidence on the relationship between an increase in backcountry facilities and a resultant overall increase in public use and/or in achieving an overall increase in population fitness/health; the opportunities may currently be near saturation for current and likely future use levels.

#### **4. 'External' effects**

Within our high alpine areas, climate change is affecting the extent and depth of snow fields and glaciers, with consequent adverse effects for foot and fixed-wing aircraft access, hut access, mountain-climbing opportunities and snow-related activities.

Ski fields are becoming more dependent on snow-making capabilities and, combined with increased operating costs and changes in public-use patterns, the outcome may be that some

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<sup>3</sup> A nominal hut capacity can be calculated by multiplying the hut's sleeping capacity by the number of nights per annum for which it is reasonable to expect the hut to be used (i.e. Saturday night for weekends, other nights for longer weekends and public/education holidays, further nights over summer, fewer nights over winter).

fields do not survive. Spreading the operating season into summer activities and boosting use through facility development (e.g. accommodation) are two options being explored by operators. [*Policies on this likely to be included in the CMS Concessions chapter re ski fields*]

Climbers' traditional activities in the Canterbury alps are reducing, in favour of West Coast, Aspiring and Fiordland mountains (ease of access and better snow and rock), and rock and boulder climbing, where suitable rock and ease of access are the determining features.

'Oil shock' effects on vehicle access to the backcountry seems to be mixed, but rather than causing any significant reduction, alternative scenarios may be emerging such as greater car-pooling and prioritising the discretionary travel dollar for recreational pursuits.

Nationally, especially in coastal areas where coastal subdivision has occurred, there has been a loss of camping grounds. Government has sought to reverse this trend by seeking further camping-ground opportunities on public conservation lands.

## **5. Overseas visitor and demographic trends**

Sitting within the national trends (see 1 above), Canterbury overseas visitor use may be more backcountry than rural/front-country orientated, with predominant use of national park areas and well-known tracks (e.g. Hooker track, Mueller Hut, Avalanche Peak, Hawdon-Edwards, St James), but with some venturing into the newer conservation parks. Front-country use does occur along State Highway 73, both in the Craigieburn basin (see CMS 2.8 Kura Tāwhiti, Cave Stream and Lake Pearson) and through Arthur's Pass National Park. Some of this use can be fickle and easily influenced by international guide books and word-of-mouth.

While national tourist increases of about 4.5% pa were recently (2008) being predicted, some localised rural and conservation areas (e.g. the Aoraki/Mount Cook village area, Hanmer [*Q: ?*]) have experienced increases well above that figure. Future economic and 'oil shock' factors may considerably change all this, although the tourist industry is, perhaps optimistically, predicting a return to tourist growth.

There is some evidence for displacement of 'traditional' backcountry use due to increases in numbers of overseas visitors (e.g. at Mueller Hut), peak-period usage of popular locations (e.g. Mt Somers Walkway), and by events (e.g. Coast to Coast). There is little evidence though that alternative opportunities and times were not still available to handle the displacement; a possible exception being alternative mid-alpine hut settings as for Mueller.

Demographic changes (e.g. an older population) have not necessarily seen a decrease in outdoor activity as was being predicted some years ago. Conversely, the older age group currently using our backcountry may be the fittest and most active demographic that New Zealand will ever see, and they may 'carry' their activity interests forward in time; other age groups now and in the future may use the backcountry less.

People in this older group [*Q: And the education system?*], rather than the declining clubs, are likely to be the ones who may introduce future youth to the outdoors.

Lifestyle changes are another driver of change. 'Time-scarcity', along with either increased disposable income or a higher priority for recreational activity, and more recreational options, is seeing a move from weekend or longer 'expedition' tramping, climbing or hunting trips, to shorter more-targeted trips using vehicle or aircraft access and lighter equipment, more 'equipment-based' recreation and/or 'organised' recreation.

## **6. 'Newish' trends**

Within 'equipment-based' and 'organised' recreation can be included mountain biking, kayaking and rock-climbing/bouldering, and their inclusion with running into organised events.

Nationally, mountain biking was a growth activity, but it has been static since 1997, with a possible 'natural' limit set by population demographics, including fitness [*Q: Is there evidence that Canterbury fits this national norm, or is it different, perhaps reflecting Christchurch's cycling history?*]. The activity, including for events, is mostly satisfied by urban-edge facilities but there is also use of tracks near holiday venues (e.g. Hanmer, Twizel) and in front-country and

backcountry conservation areas. There is some concern about adverse effects, most especially with downhill off-track biking that may require location restrictions, and with bikers having adequate backcountry skills when venturing beyond the peri-urban environment.

Race kayaking, usually as part of multi-sport activity, has little involvement with public conservation land in Canterbury, but sea kayaking is another, albeit smaller, growth activity in Canterbury and, while Canterbury is well provided with sea and lakes, is not often provided for with specific shore facilities such as low-key, water access only, camping areas, for which there is some scope around Banks Peninsula, including on conservation lands.

A growing recreational interest, generated by a perhaps short-lived boom in 4WD vehicle numbers (in view of rising transport costs), has been in off-road and/or 'farm track' use by these vehicles. As tenure review lands become public conservation land there are requests for public vehicle use of the former farm vehicle tracks, some of which may have been used previously by arrangement with the runholder, either by the public, guided tours or community events.

Rock-climbing and bouldering has spread to most suitable rock areas (as well as to indoor walls), with intensive-use sites emerging (Kura Tāwhiti/Castle Hill, Port Hills, Mt Somers [*Q: Others?*]) and related issues such as bolting approvals, natural and historic value impacts, and nearby camping activity.

'Organised' recreation is taking several forms: club/community-run or minor-commercial events (e.g. walk/run or mountain-bike rogaines, Dusky Trail mountain bike, Mt Somers run, 4WD outings, bouldering competitions); commercial events (e.g. Coast to Coast, Avalanche Peak Challenge, St James run); and commercial guided activities (e.g. tramping, climbing, rafting, hunting, off-road vehicle tours). Some of these events also operate well on non-public conservation lands with landowner support, including on pastoral lease lands that may become conservation land through tenure review.

'Events' may be reaching market saturation, with keen regional and national competition amongst them and contestant choices being based on entry and travel costs, physical settings and their personal capabilities. Event organisers are seeking more spectacular natural and/or remote settings to keep their market edge.

*[Q: Do we keep providing more 'spectacular' settings to serve potential growth and/or market competition, perhaps until the demand tops-out, or do we limit the settings and/or numbers of events, and manage their effects (as in Arthur's Pass National Park Management Plan)?]*

A growing recreational activity is participation in conservation work, both as volunteers and as part of concessionaire-run activities, and either doing biodiversity/biosecurity work (e.g. bird species work and weed control) or assisting with recreation facilities (e.g. hut and track maintenance). The attractions seem to be the variety of activities to choose from, and the ease with which you can find out about them, the fact that no club membership is required, that it is affirming work, often family-friendly and in local community areas.

The growing 4WD clubs are also part of this trend, for example by assisting access for wilding tree control and the maintenance of vehicle-accessible huts (e.g. Macaulay Hut).

There has been some interest in Canterbury in concessionaire-owned and operated backcountry accommodation and/or equipment storage huts, but only two exist at present (Ball Glacier and on the Two Thumb Range), with another (Crow valley) authorised but since removed. Looking to national examples of where these huts predominantly exist (e.g. on Great Walks with booking systems and high use) there are no obvious parallel requirements in Canterbury.

Overall, public use now involves a combination of traditional activities, 'new' activities, events and volunteer work; people are responding to a greater choice of opportunities.

## **7. Potential objectives [very draft!]**

1. To foster people's benefit and enjoyment by providing *[recreational opportunities and facilities in response to Canterbury's use patterns]* or *[a range of recreational opportunities]*, and within national priorities.

2. To foster people's benefit and enjoyment by supporting community and educational activities that, in turn, foster such use.

## 8. Potential policies [very draft!]

The department:

1. Should continue/support research and monitoring to enable a better understanding of changing trends, experiences, impacts [*etc.*] in outdoor recreation in Canterbury.
2. Should hold to following priorities:
  - a. Continue an/the [?] emphasis [*as in CMS 2000, 5.3.2/5.3.3*] on front-country accessible facilities, especially near permanent and seasonal residential areas and/or, where easily accessible, from State Highways [*note implications as these tend to be the most management-intensive*].
  - b. Continue maintenance of existing backcountry facilities, but noting that this effort may be reduced or directed towards highest priority facilities [*What criteria? Possibly VAMS/ROR?*] should funding reduce.
  - c. Rationalise backcountry huts [*acquired since the 2004 ROR exercise, through tenure review/NHF processes, and/or in periodic whole-conservancy reviews*] to achieve consistency with department hut-location standards.
  - d. Not replace existing backcountry facilities [*at asset-life end or beyond-repair damage*] unless in priority use locations [*What criteria? Possibly VAMS/ROR?*].
  - e. Not construct [*or support the construction of?*] new backcountry facilities unless the following are considered:
    - i. the need for them is consistent with national and Canterbury outdoor recreation trends [*caution, could lead to demand-driven planning*];
    - ii. there is well-researched information showing that the facility will have a high level of use, current and future, and/or likely adequate demand, and/or the availability of alternative substitute opportunities; and
    - iii. the potential effects of the facility on drawing use from other facilities and what that would mean for the future use and maintenance of those other facilities.
  - f. [*Potential policy: Transfer of lower use/low priority facilities to community group ownership and/or management?*]
3. Should foster recreational activities (public and concessionaire) that involve undertaking biodiversity, biosecurity, historic and/or recreational facilities actions, including, in part, as an alternative management approach to providing additional public use areas and facilities.
4. Should be [*providing/assisting?*] the development/operation of a South Island 'gateway' visitor centre for North Island domestic and overseas visitors wanting to experience South Island and Stewart Island/Rakiura public conservation lands.
5. Should, when considering opportunities for 4wd and mountain bike vehicle use, and horse riding, look to where tracks etc. already exist rather than/in preference to new tracks.
6. [*Policy re allowing and/or not allowing concessionaire equipment storage and/or accommodation huts?*<sup>4</sup>]
7. Should seek better application of [*the NZAC?*] bolting code.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that policies regarding concessionaire ski fields and associated accommodation will be covered within the CMS chapter 1.7.1 Concessions; the policies following a precautionary approach in light of potential climate change and economic realities, and suggesting confining any development to existing fields, and no new fields.

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