

# VISITOR STRATEGY



Department of Conservation  
*Te Papa Atawhai*

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# 1. Introduction

This strategy is part of Atawhai Ruamano, or Conservation 2000, a departmental process that establishes the department's vision and direction for the year 2000 and beyond.

The Department of Conservation has identified its vision for the year 2000 as:

By the year 2000, New Zealand's natural ecosystems, species, landscapes and historic and cultural places have been protected; people enjoy them and are involved in their conservation.

To realise this vision, the department wants to achieve three broad conservation results by the year 2000 -

- significant gains in the protection of New Zealand's indigenous biological diversity and landscapes
- effective management of historic places in co-operation with the community and iwi, and significant gains in their conservation and appreciation
- a good service to visitors, without compromising conservation.

To set a course for these results the department has sought to develop a biodiversity action plan, an historic strategy and a visitor strategy as internal documents to guide staff in their work. The department has sought and obtained external comment on drafts of these strategies. These comments have been of considerable assistance and the effort made by contributors has been greatly appreciated. As the strategies are internal documents for the use of departmental staff, it is the department and the department alone which must accept responsibility for them.

## 1.1 VISITOR STRATEGY GOALS

The Visitor Strategy has several inter-related goals -

### **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. This links closely to other key department strategic initiatives such as the biodiversity action plan and the historic heritage strategy.)

### **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. (This goal operates alongside conservation connections, the department's public awareness strategy.)

### **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.

## **1.2 PREPARATION OF THE STRATEGY**

The Visitor Strategy has emerged after a lengthy debate. In 1994 a team of departmental staff prepared a discussion document which was released for public comment in September of that year. Some 6000 copies were circulated and 284 submissions received. An independent summary of the key issues was commissioned and a revised document prepared by Visitor Services Division staff. This was sent to people and organisations who had made a submission on the discussion document. A further 90 submissions were received on the revised strategy; the final version of the strategy incorporated their comments. The New Zealand Conservation Authority was closely involved and consulted throughout the development of the strategy.

## **1.3 STATUS OF THE STRATEGY**

The Visitor Strategy will guide and inform all the department's planning and management relating to visitor services and where relevant, it may also assist the implementation of conservation management strategies as well as management plans for national parks and other specific conservation areas. It will underpin the preparation of annual business plans.

**For the purpose of this strategy, visitors are people visiting areas managed by the department. They include people using visitor centres and clients of concessionaires, New Zealand and international visitors.**

## 2. Visitors and Conservation: Tradition, Philosophy and Legislation

### 2.1 TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES ON ACCESS TO NATURE

The opportunity to freely visit forests and coastlines, mountains and rivers, historic sites and attractive landscapes, is a deeply cherished part of the New Zealand way of life.

The special relationship of the tangata whenua to the land, to Papatuanuku, influenced the ways in which Maori people visited and used these places. Through their whakapapa they could trace their links with mountains, rivers and, ultimately, all living things. They recognised the mauri in all natural things in the realms of Tane and Tangaroa and protected them through tribal sanctions, such as tapu and rahui. The sacredness of special places meant that visits were conducted with care and respect.

European settlement during the 19th Century brought contrasting philosophies regarding the conservation of wild nature. At one extreme, wild lands were considered “barren and sterile in the absence of man’s hand”, awaiting the fulfilment and productivity that came with the axe and the plough. At the other extreme, the Romantic tradition believed that much wild land should be preserved for its intrinsic values, and that the individual could be ‘recreated’ by encountering nature as far as possible on her own terms.

New Zealand’s earliest attempts to legislate for the protection of natural resources reflected this philosophical ambivalence. Conservation measures like the Forests Act 1874 ran into a storm of utilitarian opposition from provincial institutions and individuals who wanted to place personal gain and immediate return before any long-term community (or ecosystem) benefits. The potential for detrimental impact from tourism to the geothermal attractions of the Volcanic Plateau was recognised at this time by leading legislators, including premier William Fox. Yet the subsequent Thermal Springs District Act of 1881, enabling the government to set aside reserves as a thermal ‘park or domain’, was still couched in terms of the **value** of this popular form of recreation to **visitors** (rather than the **preservation** of hot springs and geysers for their **intrinsic values**).

Two philosophical streams are evident in New Zealand’s early legislation dealing with the protection of the back-country and places of special interest. The **preservationist** stream, which led to the reservation (for the preservation of indigenous flora and fauna) of Resolution Island (1891) and Little Barrier Island (1894), was largely supported by the scientific community. Visitors were not encouraged. The ‘**access to commons**’ stream reflected the desire of settlers to be free of Old World strictures on the rights of citizens to have ready access to the wildest and most beautiful places in their land. It was a New World phenomenon, shared with colonists in North America and Australia. This right of all to share in the public land “commons” has become part of our culture, a community value enshrined in

our statutes from the earliest days of European settlement, through devices such as the “Queen’s Chain” and the progressive reservation of special places warranting protection. Just as the Treaty of Waitangi sought to guarantee Maori people continued access to and use of their lands and fisheries, so too, the Crown gradually acquired public lands - in part to satisfy the needs of all New Zealanders to maintain direct contact with their natural (and subsequently, historic) heritage.

## 2.2 TOURISM ON LANDS OF HIGH CONSERVATION VALUE

Lands with high value for conservation and recreation have been visited by both New Zealand and overseas visitors for more than a century. Maori were among the earliest to capitalise upon the visitor attractions of the Pink and White Terraces and the other geothermal areas of the Rotorua region. The first Hermitage Hotel was built at Mt Cook in 1884; the Milford Track was opened in 1890; by the 1890s the Whanganui River was known to visitors as the “Rhine of New Zealand” and glacier guiding was available on the Franz Josef and Fox glaciers. By the 1880s, many Canterbury rivers were stocked with trout. Trout were subsequently introduced to the catchments of Lake Taupo, the Rotorua Lakes and the Southern Lakes and quickly became a major tourism attraction. By the turn of the century, the acclimatisation movement had progressively introduced many exotic animals for game sport (many of which became serious conservation pests).

Debates over the right balance of public use and protection, or the perceptions of some tourism enterprises disadvantaging ordinary New Zealanders by restricting freedom of access to “their” birthright, are nothing new; they date back more than a century to those times. New Zealand’s legislation and policies dealing with parks and reserves, tourist resorts and domains, forests and lands, walkways and eventually, conservation, have all developed since then - continually evolving the relationship between the Crown as caretaker of the nation’s most important natural and historic heritage, and the public seeking to derive enjoyment (and, in some cases, livelihood) from contact with these special places.

What has changed over the past decade is the mix of visitors to our parks and other protected areas and the experiences which they seek. Overseas visitors now predominate in many of the higher profile locations (tourism ‘icons’). Their rapid growth in numbers, generally lower level of back-country skills, and desire for higher quality facilities in the front country, has highlighted the tension (between ‘protection’ and ‘visitor use’) that has always been there in our legislation.

It is clear that our legislators have always considered that visitor recreation (and ‘tourism’) and conservation should be able to co-exist in some protected areas. To protect conservation values, park management policies have generally stressed the need for large tourism facilities (skifields, resort villages, highways) to be located outside (or on the periphery) of the parks. As the pressure of overseas visitor numbers increases, however, what is not agreed is the degree to which more tourism can, or should, be accommodated on lands managed primarily for conservation.

## 2.3 PARKS, RESERVES AND OUTDOOR RECREATION

A burgeoning demand for outdoor recreation began after World War II and led to the formation of many new tramping, hunting and skiing clubs through the country. At the same time, the need for better administration of public lands for outdoor recreation was recognised. The National Parks Act 1952, and its successor the National Parks Act 1980, while stressing that parks were to be preserved in perpetuity, also recognised that:

*“...the public shall have freedom of entry and access to the parks, so that they may receive in full measure, the inspiration, enjoyment and other benefits that may be derived from mountains, forests, sounds, sea coasts, lakes, rivers and other natural features.”*

By the mid-1960s, this public interest in both protection and recreation had been recognised through the formation of 10 national parks. The first of 19 forest parks, Tararua, was set up under the Forests Act 1949, a statute which had been amended to place greater emphasis upon multiple-use and the provision of opportunities for outdoor recreation. An explosion in the numbers of deer which had built up alarmingly during the 1940s and 1950s) led to the development, during the 1960s and early 1970s, of an extensive network of huts and tracks throughout the protection forests and forest parks managed by the Forest Service. Many of today's back-country huts, tracks and bridges stem from this period.

The Walkways Act 1975 recognised the need for better access to front country by encouraging the development of walkways across private land. Even in the national park system long-standing commercial privileges, like the Tourist Hotel Corporation's monopoly over public access to the Milford Track, were challenged by recreation groups, and the rights of free (but carefully managed) public access reaffirmed - except for special areas, such as nature reserves and wildlife sanctuaries, where the ecological or cultural sensitivity of the site required careful regulation of visitors through permits for access.

The administration of New Zealand's extensive system of reserves and domains was streamlined under the Reserves Act 1977. This statute emphasised the protection of representative landscapes which gave New Zealand its distinctive character, but continued to recognise the rights of visitors to enjoy most categories of protected areas, by requiring, amongst others:

*“management for the benefit and enjoyment of the public, areas of New Zealand possessing:*

- i. Recreational use or potential, whether active or passive; or*
- ii. Wildlife, or*
- iii. Indigenous flora or fauna; or*
- iv. Environmental and landscape amenity or interest, or*
- v. Natural, scenic, historic, cultural, archaeological, biological, geological, scientific, educational, community, or other special features or value.”*

By the late 1970s, a significant body of research had established the range of motivations (recreational, educational and spiritual) for visitors to the New Zealand outdoors -

- a desire to “recreate” oneself, to get away from the stresses of “civilisation” (the freedom that comes with a simpler lifestyle, even if only for a few hours or days)
- the attractions of new places, especially their scenery, and appreciation of their native plants and wildlife, geology, or historic features
- the physical challenge and exercise involved
- the sociability of the experience, especially the close relationships developed with companions on the adventure
- the “aesthetic-spiritual” experience of close contact with a natural order which had not been fashioned by humans.

Many visitors admitted to the excitement of learning new skills, developing self-reliance and savouring the romance of adventure and discovery. Others sought solitude and the therapeutic effects of contact with the harmonious patterns of natural landscapes. To some, a visit to a wild place gave them a feeling of pride as a New Zealander, as a member of a community which had decided to forego exploiting the resources in that place; as such, the individual and the community grew in moral stature.

#### 2.4 ROS PLANNING: FROM WILDERNESS TO FRONT COUNTRY

By the early 1980s, it was becoming increasingly clear that the bulk of the visitor facilities (excluding the visitor centres) lay in the back-country. Urban populations desired more easily accessible short walks and coastal facilities. At the same time, the “back-country boom” in outdoor recreation had engendered concern at the diminishing extent of true wilderness in New Zealand. The need to retain some “wilderness areas” - wild landscapes offering the opportunity for recreation entirely unsupported by facilities like huts and tracks - had been recognised in both the Forests Act and National Parks Act but little had been done to delineate a comprehensive system of “facilities-free” wild areas. A Wilderness Policy for public lands was subsequently adopted by government in 1983 to ensure that the limited extent of wilderness remaining was protected.

Planning techniques like the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) were developed and applied, to identify the range of settings appropriate for different recreation activities from wilderness to front-country which caters for a wider section of potential visitors. Public interest in more diverse opportunities for outdoor recreation resulted in several initiatives to better protect and manage natural resources: wild and scenic rivers (1981 amendment to the Water and Soil Conservation Act), cave and karst systems and marine areas.

## 2.5 THE CONSERVATION ACT AND VISITORS

The environmental re-organisations of the mid-1980s led to the passage of the Conservation Act 1987 and the establishment of the Department of Conservation. The Conservation Act, in defining 'conservation', advanced three reasons for "the preservation and protection of natural and historic resources"

- maintaining their intrinsic values
- providing for their appreciation and recreational enjoyment by the public
- safeguarding the options of future generations.

The Act reiterated the validity of recreational use of most lands managed by the Department of Conservation, providing conservation values were safeguarded. Part II, section 6(e) states:

*"To the extent that any 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."*

At the same time, the department was charged with continuing to manage the National Parks, Reserves and Walkways Acts which remained unchanged in the extent to which visitors were allowed to freely enter and enjoy the benefits of contact with nature and historic heritage.

The Conservation Act also gave the Department of Conservation a mandate to advocate for conservation. This advocacy role added a new dimension to the department's communication relationships with visitors. Information and interpretation services for visitors had been established in most of the national parks (and some of the forest parks) since the late 1970s. Visitor centres offered visitors insights into the park and its conservation through staff knowledge, publications, displays and sometimes audio-visual presentations. Another visitor service offered in most parks was the "summer visitor programme" - several weeks of guided interpretive activities (usually walks) over the holiday period. With the advent of the department, these interpretive services began to change subtly, not only continuing to satisfy visitors curiosity and thirst for place knowledge, but also providing insights into the conservation of our natural and historic heritage and encouragement to the visitors to become actively involved in conservation.

The management of visitors to lands and marine areas managed by the department has become a very live issue in the 1990s. The rundown or removal of some visitor facilities and services has been criticised by a wide range of New Zealanders. At the same time, New Zealand's wild places, wildlife and "clean, green countryside" have attracted an unprecedented number of international visitors. Their impact is especially felt on the great walks like the Routeburn Track and Abel Tasman coastal walk, and in key scenic areas like Milford Sound, Mt Cook, Cape Reinga and South Westland's glaciers. A significant number of these overseas visitors are seeking "ecotourism" (or "geotourism") experiences. They, too, want to sit quietly in a rainforest and listen to the songbirds, witness an erupting volcano, see a buried forest, or observe native wildlife at places as various as Taiaroa Head, Waitangiroto Lagoon, Tiritiri Matangi Island or Kaikoura. Along with New Zealand visitors, they also expect good maps, route guides and brochures. They expect the department (as manager of the special places

that they have come to visit) to provide them with a range of services: information centres; education on wildlife and conservation; the provision of safe and comfortable (if basic) huts, tracks and bridges, as well as picnic areas, toilets and short walks; advice on personal safety and appropriate care for the environment during their visit; and some degree of insight into the conservation work that is being done to protect their global heritage.

The department's prime role is to look after these lands and waters on behalf of all New Zealanders. The department does not own them, nor does it have a monopoly on the knowledge about them. Nevertheless, the department as custodian and manager recognises that these places are of value to all visitors. They are welcomed as valued guests but expected to behave in a manner which respects and cares for the places they visit. The assistance and/or complementary role of associates (volunteers, recreational user groups, other information providers, etc) is also of vital importance. So, too, is the role of the tourism industry acting as concessionaires, providing visitor services under the direction of the department.

In its strategic vision for the year 2000 (Atawhai Ruamano) the department has set a broad goal of providing a good service to visitors without compromising conservation. With changes in patterns of visitor use and expectations, many of the facilities and services provided by the department no longer meet visitor preferences. The challenge addressed in this part of the Atawhai Ruamano strategic vision is how and where these services can be improved, and for which visitor groups, all within a context that allows people to enjoy our natural ecosystems, species, landscapes and historic and cultural places, while becoming more involved in their conservation.

# 3. Issues

## 3.1 PROTECTION OF INTRINSIC NATURAL AND HISTORIC VALUES

### 1. Introduction

The department manages a substantial amount of the country's land area. This includes

- two world heritage areas
- more than 30 national and forest parks
- wilderness areas
- reserves, including marine, scenic, nature and historic reserves
- marginal strips around lakes and along rivers and the coast
- other protected areas.

The protection of the intrinsic natural and historic values of these areas is the department's first concern. These protected areas are internationally recognised and safeguard species and ecosystems found nowhere else in the world.

From an international perspective New Zealand's plants and animals are distinctive; not only are a large proportion of them unique to New Zealand, but a number of them have very ancient lineages going back several hundred million years. The survival of these ancient relics of a bygone era is closely linked to the geological processes which formed New Zealand.

Around 80 million years ago, New Zealand broke away from Gondwana and began one of the longest periods of isolation that any land mass has ever experienced. The ancestors of the "living fossils" that still occur today were present in Gondwana, and were part of New Zealand's "cargo" as it parted from the larger land mass. Later in geological time more advanced life forms such as flowering plants and mammals evolved in other parts of the world and superseded more primitive species found here.

The arrival of humans brought about catastrophic changes to the fauna and flora. The introduction of mammalian predators such as stoats, rats and cats has had a severe impact on fauna, particularly ground-dwelling species. The spread of browsing animals such as goats, possums and deer has dramatically altered New Zealand's forests. Land modification led to major habitat loss (over 80% of lowland forests and 90% of freshwater wetlands have been lost since human settlement) and, along with the introduction of predators, this has been responsible for the extinction of around 45 bird species. Today over 500 plants and animals are threatened with extinction to some degree. This accounts for around 10% of the world's threatened species, a figure disproportionately high for a country as small as New Zealand.

## 2. Statutory Requirements

There are a number of Acts and Regulations which promote the protection of the intrinsic natural and historic values of department-managed areas. The key statutes are the -

- Conservation Act
- National Parks Act
- Reserves Act
- Wildlife Act
- Marine Reserves Act.

The Conservation Act promotes the protection of New Zealand's intrinsic natural and historic values and sets up the Department of Conservation for that purpose. The Act describes the first function of the department as being "to manage for conservation purposes, all land, and all other natural and historic resources, for the time being held under this Act, and all other land and natural and historic resources whose owner agrees with the Minister that they should be managed by the department" (see the footnote at the end of this section for a definition of terms).

Under the National Parks Act, national parks must be managed to preserve in perpetuity their intrinsic values so that -

- they shall be preserved as far as possible in their natural state
- the native plants and animals of the parks shall as far as possible be preserved and the introduced plants and animals shall as far as possible be exterminated
- sites and objects of archaeological and historical interest shall as far as possible be preserved
- their value as soil, water and forest conservation areas shall be maintained.
- The Reserves Act describes how land is acquired for reserves, how reserves are classified and should be managed. This includes -
- Providing, for the preservation and management for the benefit and enjoyment of the public areas of New Zealand possessing
  - (a) recreational use or potential, whether active or passive
  - (b) wildlife
  - (c) indigenous flora or fauna
  - (d) environmental and landscape amenity or interest; or
  - (e) natural, scenic, historic, cultural, archaeological, biological, geological, scientific, educational, community, or other special features or value.
- Ensuring, as far as possible, the survival of all indigenous species of flora and fauna, both rare and commonplace, in their natural communities and habitats, and the preservation of representative samples of all classes of natural ecosystems and landscape which originally gave New Zealand its own recognisable character.

The Marine Reserves Act provides for the setting up and management of areas of the sea and foreshore as marine reserves for the purpose of preserving them in their natural state as the habitat of marine life for scientific study.

The Wildlife Act covers -

- protection and control of undomesticated animals and birds (excluding marine mammals) through a categorisation of wildlife into those absolutely protected (no killing); partially protected (no killing unless causing damage to land or property); wildlife that may be killed if Minister allows; wildlife not protected unless specifically protected by Minister; unprotected wildlife; game; and wildlife that may be farmed
- authorising the taking/killing of protected wildlife for certain purposes
- establishment of wildlife sanctuaries, wildlife refuges and wildlife management reserves
- establishment of wildlife districts where either the department or fish and game councils have control of wildlife.

From this legislation, it is clear that the department's first concern is the protection of the intrinsic natural and historic values of the areas it manages.

### **3. Visitor Impacts on Natural and Historic Values**

Visitors are attracted to department-managed areas by the relatively unspoilt, unpolluted and uncrowded environment, impressive natural scenery and accessible outdoor recreation opportunities. Visitors, however, can have a variety of detrimental impacts on the intrinsic natural and historic values of these areas. Impacts include -

- vegetation clearance, trampling or destruction
- tracks becoming muddy or widened
- soil erosion and/or soil compaction
- wildlife disturbance or habitat destruction
- changes in wildlife behaviour
- water pollution and pollution of waterways
- toilet waste and rubbish
- noise and visual pollution
- firewood collection, campfires and the associated increased fire risk
- increased risk of introducing unwanted species such as weeds
- increased litter, vandalism and souveniring at historic sites
- disturbance to wahi tapu and archaeological sites.

In 1995, the New Zealand Conservation Boards identified over 60 sites where visitor activities were having a detrimental impact on departmental areas. In particular, it was found that -

- track deterioration and erosion is common
- vegetation close to some campsites is being cleared for firewood
- water supply contamination by human waste is a problem at some huts, campsites and roadside areas

- wildlife, particularly at nesting sites, being disturbed by off-road vehicles, jet skis, horses, dogs and guided tours
- the detrimental impacts of visitors are greatest in fragile landscapes such as sand dunes and subalpine areas.

The risk of detrimental visitor impacts occurring is increasing with increases in visitor numbers (mainly international visitors), commercial activity and an expanding range of visitor activities. Nevertheless, compared with the widespread devastation caused by introduced animal pests, the current environmental impact of visitors is still relatively localised and modest in scale.

#### **4. Visitor Impact Research**

Research on visitor impacts has focused on what impacts have occurred in the past. It has examined the relationship between the numbers, activities and behaviour of visitors and the environmental impacts they produce. Attempts have been made to identify the sensitivity of different landscapes to visitor impacts and the thresholds at which these impacts begin to occur. However, there are still considerable gaps in our knowledge. A 1995 Lincoln University<sup>1</sup> review of visitor impact research in New Zealand concluded that -

- research into visitor impacts is limited in terms of the areas studied, the type of impact studied and the length of study
- very little continuous monitoring is being done
- the relationships between baseline conditions, type and level of use, the type and degree of impact, and management objectives/responses have not been investigated
- most research has focused on terrestrial impacts, with very little done on the impacts on wildlife or environmental quality
- individual studies have focused on only one or two variables and do not provide a comprehensive study of visitor impacts at a particular site
- the studies reviewed do not provide sufficient information to demonstrate the relationship between sites with similar characteristics
- only a limited number of research methods have been used in New Zealand.

The relationship between the numbers, activities and behaviour of visitors and the environmental impacts they produce needs to be better understood and more research is clearly needed in this area.

#### **5. Goals and Guiding Principles for Protecting Intrinsic Natural and Historic Values**

The department's over-riding protection goal is -

- 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.

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<sup>1</sup> Biophysical Impacts of Tourism by Jonet C Ward and Ruth A Beanland

In other words, the protection of intrinsic natural and historic values is the department's primary concern. In managing visitors and related facilities and services, the objective is to avoid, reduce or minimise the impacts on intrinsic natural and historic values.

To achieve this goal the department's management actions will be guided by the following principles -

- some sites and ecosystems (e.g. those strictly protected as nature reserves and some scientific reserves) are so important because of their natural and/or historic values that visitor access should be controlled or even denied
- in all other department-managed areas, the protection of intrinsic natural and/or historic values will take precedence over visitor activities, and the provision of visitor facilities and services; iwi will be consulted to ensure that the Maori cultural values of department-managed areas are protected
- most areas will be kept in their natural state without facilities development, to protect intrinsic natural and historic values and give visitors the opportunity to experience nature on nature's terms
- the qualities of solitude, peace and natural quiet will be safeguarded as far as possible in all areas managed by the department
- protection of intrinsic natural and historic values may involve setting limits on visitor numbers, facilities, services and commercial activity; where the impacts of increasing visitor numbers to a site are unknown, the department will adopt a precautionary approach until such time as it is clearly demonstrated that increasing numbers pose no significant problem
- visitor activities, facilities and services that are in keeping with and promote understanding of intrinsic natural and historic values will be preferred
- visitors will be encouraged to minimise their impacts on intrinsic natural and historic values
- visitor facilities and services will be designed, located and managed to avoid, reduce or minimise impacts on intrinsic natural and historic values.

## **6. Managing the Protection of Intrinsic Natural and Historic Values**

### *Identification of Conservation Values*

The Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) for each conservancy attempts to broadly assess the intrinsic natural and historic values of areas managed by the department in that region. In particular, the CMS identifies the significance, fragility and tolerance of -

- plants and animals
- the air, water and soil
- landscape and landforms
- geological features
- systems of interacting living organisms and their environment (ecosystems)
- historic places

Located within a particular region, for example, the Paraparaumu Scenic Reserve in Wellington conservancy contains kohekohe forests and brown mudfish. According to the CMS, the kohekohe forest is rare in the region and the brown mudfish is rated nationally as a vulnerable species. The fish are present only in a small wetland where the hydrology and water quality need to be maintained. So, the reserve will be managed primarily to protect and preserve the forest and the mudfish. The provision of any visitor facilities and services must be compatible with this management objective.

### *Assessing Potential Visitor Impacts*

Once the intrinsic natural and historic values of key sites are fully understood, the next step is to assess the impacts that visitor activities, facilities, services and increasing numbers may have on these values. For example, in the case of the Paraparaumu Scenic Reserve, what impacts are visitors likely to have on the kohekohe forest and the mudfish based on current research. The answer to this question will determine what is a suitable management regime. As noted above, there are considerable gaps in our knowledge about visitor impacts and the relationship between visitors and intrinsic natural/historic values. For this reason a precautionary approach will be taken when determining a suitable management regime.

### *Deciding a Suitable Management Regime for Visitors<sup>2</sup>*

Based on the assessment of intrinsic natural and historic values and the potential visitor impacts, a suitable management regime for visitors can then be determined. The first issue to be addressed is whether the effects of the proposed visitor activities, facilities or services are likely to be inconsistent with the conservation of a particular site. If the effects are deemed to be inconsistent with conservation, the activity will not be allowed, but there may be a case for locating such facilities and services outside areas managed by the department. In the case of the Paraparaumu Scenic Reserve, is the effect of visitors on the forest and mudfish population significant enough to be inconsistent with conservation?

If it is considered appropriate for visitors to use and enjoy a particular site, then the next step is to -

- decide what is an appropriate number of visitors and set limits where necessary to avoid or reduce impacts on intrinsic natural and historic values
- decide what are appropriate visitor facilities and services and the appropriate management practices and standards for these so that the impacts on intrinsic natural and historic values are avoided or reduced
- promote good conservation practices for managing visitor facilities such as energy efficiency, recycling and waste reduction

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<sup>2</sup> Definition of Terms used in the Conservation Act:

- Natural resources are defined as -
  - (a) plants and animals of all kinds; and
  - (b) the air, water, and soil in or on which any plant or animal lives or may live; and
  - (c) landscape and landform; and
  - (d) geological features; and
  - (e) systems of interacting living organisms, and their environment
- Historic resources are defined as -

“An historic place within the meaning of the Historic Places Act 1980”

- encourage appropriate visitor behaviour, for example, through promotion of the environmental and water care codes.

Using the Paraparaumu Scenic Reserve again as an example, it can provide walking opportunities for visitors with scenic views and the conservation values of coastal forest can be interpreted for visitors. For this reason it will be managed for a moderate number of visitors with a standard loop track and high quality interpretation material.

The same impact evaluation steps apply where a site already has visitors.

#### *Monitoring Visitor Impacts*

Once a management regime for visitors has been decided and put in place, the impacts of visitor activities, facilities and services on the intrinsic natural and historic values will need to be monitored. The monitoring system will concentrate on developing an early warning system, which will indicate that steps need to be taken to prevent further impacts occurring.

#### *Taking Remedial Action to Prevent Unacceptable Visitor Impacts*

When the monitoring programme identifies visitor activities, facilities and services as having an unacceptable impact on natural and historic values, the department will take steps to rehabilitate the site and take one or more of the following actions

- **Reduce the use of the site/area by visitors**

This can be achieved in a number of ways, for example by restricting the number of visitors, imposing a limit on the length of stay, discouraging potential visitors or improving access, facilities and promotion in alternative areas.

- **Modify visitor activities/behaviour<sup>3</sup>**

Large groups, visitors with pets and groups that do not practice low-impact behaviour will cause more problems than other visitors. The types of use and visitor behaviour can be modified so that problems are less likely to occur.

- **Modify the timing of visitor activities**

The fragility of the environment varies with the time of year. In addition, certain times of the year and week are more popular with visitors than others, so impacts can be more severe. In some instances, visitor use can be shifted to times when it is least likely to cause impact to either the environment or other visitors.

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<sup>3</sup> Conservation is defined as –  
‘the preservation and protection of natural and historic resources for the purpose of maintaining their intrinsic values, providing for their appreciation and recreational enjoyment by the public, and safeguarding the options for future generations’

- Preservation, in relation to a resource, is defined as –  
“the maintenance, so far as is practicable, of its intrinsic values”
- Protection, in relation to a resource, is defined as –  
“its maintenance, so far as is practicable, in its current state; but includes:
  - (a) its restoration to some former state; and
  - (b) its augmentation, enhancement or expansion”

- **Move the visitor activity/facility/service somewhere else better able to cope**

Visitor use can be shifted to more durable sites, it can be locally dispersed so that visitor impacts are reduced, or it can be concentrated on a few sites so the area impacted is minimised.

- **Increase the resistance of the site**

Managers can also artificially increase the resistance of the resource by either strengthening (hardening) it or shielding it from impact. Shielding involves separating the resource from the visitors causing the problem; boardwalks and barriers are examples. Strengthening involves changing the resource to make it more durable, for example compacting the surface of a track.

A mix of techniques will be used on a case by case basis. Making changes to what is causing the impact (visitor numbers, activities, behaviour, facilities and services) will usually take precedence over increasing the resistance or capacity of the site/area.

## 3.2 FOSTERING VISITS BY THE PUBLIC

### 1. Introduction

The department welcomes visitors to the areas it manages. In return, visitors are expected to behave in a manner which respects and cares for the places they visit. In some places the number of visitors and the type of activity has to be carefully managed to ensure the protection of the intrinsic natural and historic values.

The department recognises that there are significant benefits in visitors coming to the areas it manages.

**For the visitor,** these areas provide inspiration, enjoyment and recreation. They provide the chance to get away from the stresses of everyday life, the opportunity to explore new places and experience solitude, challenge, adventure and a different perspective on space and time. Visitors are attracted to these areas by the clean green environment, impressive natural scenery, the sounds of nature and natural quiet and accessible outdoor recreation opportunities. Many New Zealand visitors believe that their opportunity to freely visit these areas is synonymous with the indigenous character of New Zealanders.

**For conservation,** visitors can develop a better appreciation of the intrinsic natural and historic values of these places, whether these be wilderness or intensively developed sites such as Milford Sound. This appreciation should increase their support for the protection of these places and encourage some to participate in conservation work.

**For the department,** it enables closer links to be developed with communities, recreational and conservation groups and other organisations, and brings economic benefits to the country and regions.

The department also recognises that visitors can pose a threat. Some visitor activities, facilities and services can detract from the enjoyment of other visitors. Visitors can be affected by noise, overcrowding, changes in the type of facilities expected, a loss of solitude, all diminishing the quality of the visit. For these reasons, visitor activities, facilities and services need to be carefully managed by the department.

Visitors to areas managed by the department are travelling primarily for recreational purposes. In this strategy, visitors are defined as people visiting department-managed areas. They include people using visitor centres, clients of concessionaires, both New Zealanders and international visitors.

In fostering visits by the public to department-managed areas, there are a number of key issues –

- how to identify the types of visitor activities that are appropriate in different areas, the type and standard of facilities and services that should be provided and their associated level of use
- how to review and identify what facilities should be retained, repaired, replaced or removed (many of the visitor facilities provided by the department are reaching the end of their working life)
- how to secure better practical and legal access for visitors to department-managed areas

- how to protect the value of natural quiet from intrusive noise
- how to find out more about visitors, where they go, in what numbers and how satisfied they are with the recreational opportunities, facilities and services the department manages on their behalf.

## 2. Statutory Requirements

There are a number of Acts and Regulations which determine the use of department- managed areas by visitors. The key statutes are the -

- Conservation Act
- National Parks Act
- Reserves Act
- Marine Reserves Act
- New Zealand Walkways Act

Each of these Acts provides for the use of these areas by visitors and yet each has different emphasis on the extent to which the department should foster visits.

The **Conservation Act** describes one function of the department as being – *“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.”*

“Conservation” is defined in the Conservation Act as: “the preservation and protection of natural and historic resources for the purpose of maintaining their intrinsic values, providing for their appreciation and recreational enjoyment by the public, and safeguarding the options of future generations.” Under this Act, then, the department clearly actively encourages recreational use of conservation areas, as well as protecting and preserving the natural and historic resources of those areas.

Under the **National Parks Act**, national parks are set aside “for their intrinsic worth and for the benefit, use and enjoyment of the public.” The principles in section 4 of the Act have two thrusts; preservation in perpetuity of the park’s intrinsic values, and use and enjoyment by the public. The Act states that national parks are administered to ensure, as far as possible, that they are preserved in their natural state. At the same time, the Act states the public has freedom of entry and access to the parks for “inspiration, enjoyment, recreation and other benefits...”

The **Reserves Act** states that reserves are administered to preserve and manage for the benefit and enjoyment of the public, areas possessing some of a number of values or features set out in section 3. Most reserves are to be managed, amongst other things, to ensure, as far as possible, the preservation of access for the public to and along the sea coast, lake shores and river banks.

At one end of the visitor use scale, recreation reserves are managed primarily to provide areas for recreation and sport and for the physical welfare and enjoyment of the public. At the other end, nature reserves are managed to protect and preserve native plants, animals or natural features. Whereas visitors have freedom of entry and access to recreation, scenic and historic reserves, entry to most nature reserves and some scientific reserves is generally only allowed after first obtaining a permit to enter.

The **Marine Reserves Act** describes the purpose of marine reserves as preserving areas of the sea and foreshore in their natural state as the habitat of marine life. Subject to the primary purpose, the public has freedom of access to marine reserves “so that they may enjoy in full measure the opportunity to study, observe and record marine life in its natural habitat.”

The **New Zealand Walkways Act** enables the establishment of walking tracks over private and public land. The Act clearly states the purpose of this is so that “*the people of New Zealand shall have safe, unimpeded foot access to the countryside for the benefit of physical recreation as well as for the enjoyment of the outdoor environment and the natural and pastoral beauty and historical and cultural qualities of the areas they pass through*”.

From this legislation, it is clear that visitors to areas managed by the department are not only welcome, but are generally encouraged to visit and enjoy themselves. With the exception of recreation reserves, however, such visitation is always subject to protection aims.

### 3. Issues

#### *Managing Recreational Opportunities, Visitor Facilities and Services*

The department manages a range of recreational opportunities. The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)<sup>4</sup> identifies seven recreation ‘zones’. These are: urban, urban fringe, rural, backcountry, remote, wilderness areas and coastal areas. Visitors to these zones participate in a variety of activities and have different requirements for facilities and services. For example, in a walk-in backcountry area the visitor can participate in a variety of recreational activities including: nature study, camping, canoeing, caving, tramping, hunting, fishing, rock climbing and photography. To participate in these activities they may require tracks, bridges, basic huts, an accurate map and information about features of interest. By comparison, a day visitor to an urban fringe area may require just a toilet and somewhere to have a picnic. The issue for the department is how to manage a range of recreational opportunities whilst protecting the intrinsic natural and historic values of the areas it manages. Specifically, this means identifying what visitor activities are appropriate and the facilities and services required to enable visitors to participate in these activities.

Currently the department provides an extensive range of facilities and services for visitors. These include 250 campsites, 960 backcountry huts, 11,000 kilometres of walking track, numerous roads, some airstrips and jetties and over 100 picnic areas. The department is also an important provider of interpretation and information. It manages more than 40 visitor centres from Russell in the north to Stewart Island in the south. It is also responsible for the publication of information brochures, maps, audio visual displays at visitor centres, visitor programmes and the provision of signs, interpretation displays and safety services.

Many of the facilities listed above are reaching the end of their working life or need maintenance work. Some are no longer used by visitors. The department needs to review the visitor facilities it provides, set priorities

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<sup>4</sup> The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is a system that enables land managers to inventory, plan for, –and protect opportunities for recreation. The system was developed in the United States and was adapted for use in New Zealand by the department, in consultation with key recreation groups, during 1993.

and decide what management action is required such as replacement, upgrading, maintenance or removal. A few of the department's older visitor facilities have acquired heritage values because of their association with historically significant activities, including environmental protection, farming and tourism. These values will be identified and taken into account when determining future management options.

### *Managing Access*

Freedom of access with no charge to enter and travel) for visitors to department- managed areas has been a long held tradition in New Zealand. As noted earlier, this reflects the desire of early settlers to have more land in public ownership ('commons') with correspondingly greater freedom of access than in Europe. The legislation reflects this, though it is accepted that access may need to be controlled in some circumstances to protect natural or historic values and ensure the safety of visitors. Concerns have been raised that in managing access, no group should be given exclusive rights by the department for the use of a track or a particular area. Securing access to department-managed areas across neighbouring land is also of concern. The key issue for the department is how to secure better practical and legal access for all visitors to the areas it manages.

### *Natural Quiet*

An important value of department-managed areas is natural quiet. This can be defined as the natural ambient conditions or the sound of nature. Natural quiet can range from silence to a thunderstorm and includes the sounds made by animals and plants. Natural quiet is an important component of visitors' appreciation of department- managed areas along with other qualities such as solitude, space, scenery and clear skies. The level of concern at the threat to natural quiet from the intrusive noise of aeroplanes, helicopters, off-road vehicles and other motorised equipment has become acute in some popular areas. For example, the department receives many complaints from visitors (and staff) about aircraft noise at Mt Cook, Franz Josef and Milford Sound. The issue for the department is how to protect the value of natural quiet from intrusive noise.

### *Wilderness Areas*

The experience of wilderness is an important part of the wide range of recreational opportunities that exist, and should be protected, in New Zealand. The wilderness setting lies at one end of the ROS and the concept fosters the experience of remoteness and discovery, challenge, solitude, freedom and romance. It fosters self- reliance and empathy with wild nature. Wilderness is therefore principally a recreational and cultural concept which is compatible with nature conservation.

Protection of wilderness areas<sup>5</sup> is provided for under the Conservation, National Parks and Reserves Acts. There are currently wilderness areas designated under the first two of these acts, and managed by the department according to the provisions of government's 1985 Wilderness Policy.

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<sup>5</sup> Wilderness areas are wild lands which appear to have been affected only by the forces of nature, with any imprint of human interference substantially unnoticeable. Designated wilderness areas are managed to perpetuate their natural condition.

Tracts of land chosen to be protected as wilderness areas should meet the following criteria:

according to the provisions of government's 1985 Wilderness Policy.

The issue of public concern regarding wilderness areas is two-fold -

- protection of those de facto wilderness areas already identified by government and recreational users
- the perception of an inexorable reduction in the quality of potential (and existing) wilderness areas, through the pressures of increasing use, especially aerial access outlined in other parts of this document.

### *Managing Visitor Conflicts*

Some visitor activities, facilities and services can detract from the enjoyment of other visitors. Visitors can be affected by -

- overcrowding and loss of solitude
- changes in the type of facilities they expect, and
- a reduction in the quality of the recreational experience.

Visitors' perceptions of overcrowding and loss of solitude are affected by their expectations, the number of people they meet, the type of people and their behaviour, and where the encounters occur. Conflict is most likely to occur between dissimilar groups, particularly if one group's behaviour is considered to be inappropriate by the other. This kind of conflict is more serious in remote places, and when encounters are unexpected. Some visitor groups resent the intrusion of increasing numbers of visitors and an expanding range of commercial activities. To avoid conflict with their traditional recreational opportunities, the affected visitors usually end up being displaced, generally deeper into the backcountry.

With increases in the number of visitors, many traditional backcountry users are concerned that the basic facilities and services they want may be either significantly upgraded or no longer provided. There are also concerns about the quality of some recreational opportunities being reduced, for example by the use of mountain bikes on tracks used traditionally by trampers. The issue for the department is how to monitor and minimise conflicts between different visitor activities, facilities and services.

### *Visitor Research<sup>1</sup>*

To assist -the department in providing recreational (and educational) opportunities, appropriate visitor facilities and an efficient, helpful and friendly service to visitors, the department needs to know more about visitors. In particular, it needs to find out more about what they want to do or know, where they go, and in what numbers. Furthermore, improved management depends upon knowing how satisfied visitors are with the recreational opportunities, access arrangements, facilities and services the department manages on their behalf.

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- (i) they will be large enough to take at least 2 days' foot travel to traverse;
  - (ii) they should have clearly defined topographic boundaries and be adequately buffered so as to be unaffected, except in minor ways, by human influences;
  - (iii) they will not have facilities such as huts, tracks, bridges, signs, nor will mechanised access for recreation be allowed.

#### **4. Goal and Guiding Principles for Fostering Visits by the Public**

The department's goal for fostering visits by the public is -

- 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.

To achieve this goal, the department's management action will be guided by the following principles -

- the department welcomes visitors as the custodian of areas which provide inspiration, enjoyment and recreational opportunities
- in managing all visitor activities, facilities and services the department seeks to protect the intrinsic natural and historic values of the areas visited
- the department will manage a range of recreational opportunities in different settings, from wilderness areas to developed sites; this recognises that there are a range of visitors seeking different recreational experiences
- access to areas managed by the department will be free of charge; it may, however, be controlled to protect natural and historic values, or the safety of the visitor
- the qualities of solitude, peace and natural quiet will be safeguarded as far as possible in order to enhance visitors' enjoyment of areas managed by the department
- visitor activities, facilities and services should be actively managed to avoid compromising the experiences of other visitors
- protecting visitor recreational experiences may involve setting limits on visitor numbers, facilities and services including those provided by concessionaires; where the impacts of increasing visitor numbers to a site are unknown the department will adopt a precautionary approach until such time as it is clearly demonstrated that increasing numbers pose no significant problem
- visitor activities, facilities and services (both recreational and educational) that are in keeping with and promote understanding of intrinsic natural and historic values will be preferred
- in fostering visits by the public the department will consult and work closely with other groups such as local and regional councils, recreation and conservation groups, iwi Maori, and the tourism sector.

#### **5. Managing Visits by the Public**

##### *ROS and Visitor Groups*

The Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) or recreation/visitor strategy for each conservancy provides an assessment of the recreational opportunities managed by the department in that region. A recreational opportunity comprises a combination of an activity, a setting and an experience. The Recreational Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) describes and maps recreational opportunities and has been adopted nationally by the department. Using

ROS, opportunities for outdoor recreation experiences are classified along a continuum of areas from urban to wilderness.

Based on the ROS assessment of recreational opportunities, seven distinct visitor groups can be identified -

- Short Stop Travellers (SST)
- Day Visitors (DV)
- Overnighters (ON)
- Backcountry Comfort Seekers (BCC)
- Backcountry Adventurers (BCA)
- Remoteness Seekers (RS)
- Thrill Seekers (TS)

Although some visitors can belong to different groups at different times, at any one time visitors will be in one of these seven groups. The seven visitor groups are derived from the eight ROS classes; their relationship is shown in Table 1. There is not a perfect correlation between the visitor groups and the ROS classes, as all visitor groups (except backcountry comfort seekers) tend to use more than one ROS class. Some examples of typical sites are also given in the table.

TABLE 1: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN VISITOR GROUPS AND ROS CLASSES

ROS classCLASS: VISITOR GROUPS:	URBAN	URBAN FRINGE	RURAL	BACK-COUNTRY DRIVE-IN	BACK COUNTRY 4X4 DRIVE-IN	BACK-COUNTRY WALK-IN	REMOTE	WILDERNESS
SST		✓ Bluff Hill Lookout	✓ Kawana Mill	✓ Dolomite Point				
DV		✓ Colonial Knob, North Head	✓ Cape Foulwind	✓ Molesworth	✓ Maratoto Valley	✓ Mt Holdsworth tracks		
ON			✓ Mimi-whangata Motutapu	✓ Lyell, Pelorus Bridge				
BCC						✓ Routeburn, Greenstone		
BCA						✓ Southern Crossing	✓ Central Kaimanawa	
RS							✓ Mid-Arawhata	✓ Olivine
TS		✓ Jet ski hire	✓ Bungee jumping on Kawarau	✓ Ski fields	✓ Safari tours	✓ Blackwater rafting	✓ Parapenting, heliskiing	✓ Rafting on Karamea

*Note: From the table, it can be seen that Day Visitors (DV) and Thrill Seekers (TS) use the widest range of ROS classes; Overnighers (ON) use a narrower range of ROS classes. While the Backcountry Comfort Seekers (BCC), Backcountry Adventurers (BCA) and Remoteness Seekers (RS) seek the remoter end of the ROS spectrum, they still pass through the more accessible classes of backcountry en route.*

The seven visitor groups are defined and described on the following pages in terms of the following factors -

- the setting used
- the accessibility of the area and the nature of the visit
- activities undertaken
- experience sought and the degree of risk present
- the facilities and services sought
- make up of visitors and visitor numbers
- projected use.

## A. SHORT STOP TRAVELLERS (SST)

<p>SETTING</p>	<p>This group uses the “natural edge” (for up to one hour’s duration) along main access routes as part of a stop along a journey to a destination. Sites are located beside -</p> <p>highways, including the main tourism highways</p> <p>local access roads which are used predominantly by domestic visitors.</p>
<p>ACCESSIBILITY AND NATURE OF VISIT</p>	<p>High vehicle accessibility with visits of a short duration of up to one hour’s length or associated with lunch/cup of tea break/toilet stop/stretch of the legs or a visit to a natural attraction.</p>
<p>ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN</p>	<p>Seeking activities of a passive to mildly active nature such as picnicking, photography, sightseeing, nature appreciation and short walks.</p>
<p>EXPERIENCE SOUGHT/ DEGREE OF RISK</p>	<p>Seeking an “instant immersion” in nature experience, associated with a high degree of scenic value or historical interest. Low risk experience associated with safe facilities.</p>
<p>FACILITIES/SERVICES SOUGHT</p>	<p>Seeking a high standard of facilities and services, including car parks, toilets, easy tracks of short duration that cater for all ages and most abilities, picnic facilities and orientation/interpretation signs about the location.</p>
<p>MAKE-UP OF VISITORS AND VISITOR NUMBERS</p>	<p>Represented by both domestic and international visitors including free and independent visitors. Sites used by short stop travellers receive high use compared with sites used by the other visitor groups.</p>
<p>PROJECTED USE</p>	<p>Because of the expected large increase in international visitors there will be a corresponding increasing demand for this type of facility/service in this setting, particularly along main tourism highways.</p>

## B. DAY VISITORS (DV)

SETTING	This group uses a wide range of settings from urban fringe to backcountry walk-in. Day visits range from one hour up to a full day (see SST). This group often uses sites that are access points for the backcountry such as roadends, easy day walks or scenic attractions. They also visit the coast or islands.
ACCESSIBILITY AND NATURE OF VISIT	High vehicle accessibility associated with a range of road standards, from gravel through to tar seal, and can involve significant travelling time to get there. Tracks used by this group are of a standard that enable use by relatively inexperienced visitors with a low level of skill.
ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN	Visits are often associated with a family or group outing or a specific recreational activity. Two distinct types of activities may occur at these sites: a) those activities such as picnicking and swimming; b) activities such as walking along easy day tracks. Water is often a focus for the visit, be it at the coast, lakes or rivers.
EXPERIENCE SOUGHT/ DEGREE OF RISK	Seeking experiences in a natural (or rural) setting with a sense of space and freedom. This group seeks an outdoor experience with a low level of risk, and safe facilities.
FACILITIES/SERVICES SOUGHT	Seeking a high standard of facilities and services, including carparks, wharves, boat ramps, toilets, tracks, picnic facilities, on-site orientation/ interpretation signs and also pre visit information about activities that are possible and features of the site.
MAKE-UP OF VISITORS AND VISITOR NUMBERS	<p>Sites used by day visitors receive medium to high use compared with sites used by the other visitor groups. This group uses two major types of sites -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sites that are used predominantly by non-locals, both domestic and international visitors</li> <li>• sites used largely by visitors from local communities, many of whom make repeat visits.</li> </ul>
PROJECTED USE	International visitor numbers are expected to increase greatly whereas domestic visitor numbers will increase more slowly.

### C. OVERNIGHTERS (ON)

SETTING	Campsites and overnight accommodation at rural or backcountry drive-in Sites accessible by vehicle. The site may be accessible only by boat.
ACCESSIBILITY AND NATURE OF VISIT	The type of accommodation and the setting are often associated with a natural attraction that will determine the experience. The duration of the visit may be from one night to one or more weeks. These locations are often used as summer holiday spots year after year.
ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN	Camping is the predominant activity. At both campsites and overnight accommodation this group often undertakes a range of activities using the site as a base, including easy day walks, guided nature programmes, water-skiing, fishing, swimming etc.
EXPERIENCE SOUGHT/ DEGREE OF RISK	This group seeks an overnight experience in a predominantly natural setting. They expect both the camping/overnight experience, and the associated activities they undertake, to be generally low risk ones. Includes the traditional New Zealand family holiday experience.
FACILITIES/SERVICES SOUGHT	<p>Seeking basic facilities and services, at least pit toilets and a water supply. Like day visitors, overnights generally prefer a high standard of facilities (e.g. tracks, on-site orientation/interpretation signs) for activities where the site is used as a base. A few seek facilities such as cabins and sites, with electricity found at a small number of serviced campgrounds.</p> <p>Seek pre-visit information on booking arrangements, planning where to go, and on activities that can be undertaken in the area or on unique natural or historic features.</p>
MAKE-UP OF VISITORS AND VISITOR NUMBERS	Visitors staying for one week or more tend to be mainly New Zealand family groups. Many overnight campers are school groups. Most international visitors stay for only one night and can include those in campervans and other free independent travellers. During the peak summer period, use at most sites is high compared with low use for much of the year.
PROJECTED USE	Because this group is made up mostly of New Zealanders, total use is expected to increase only slowly with the exception of areas close to Auckland. But as these are increasingly “found” by international visitors, use will increase.

#### D. BACKCOUNTRY COMFORT SEEKERS (BCC)

SETTING AND ACCESSIBILITY	Natural setting (backcountry walk-in) with generally the only modification being the facilities provided. Largely foot access apart from where air and boat access is permitted. Often requires and has good links with transport infrastructure.
NATURE OF VISIT AND ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN	The major activity undertaken is tramping on the major tracks, with most trips taking 2 to 5 days.
EXPERIENCE SOUGHT/DEGREE OF RISK	Seeking an outdoor experience in a backcountry environment that has low risk due to the provision of safe, comfortable facilities. To ensure a safe and comfortable experience this group sometimes uses guided or concessionaire operations. For many this may be their first introduction to the New Zealand backcountry.
FACILITIES/SERVICES SOUGHT	Seeking a low risk comfortable experience in the backcountry. This is facilitated by the provision of well constructed tracks, bridges and quality huts (some with hut wardens) and backcountry campsites with associated facilities. Seek pre-visit information to help plan their trips and daily track condition information from hut wardens.
MAKE-UP OF VISITORS AND VISITOR NUMBERS	Overall there is an equal proportion of New Zealanders and international visitors on the major tracks. New Zealanders in this group are relatively inexperienced with a wide age range. The majority of international visitors are aged between 20 and 40.
PROJECTED USE	This group is projected to experience a large increase in international visitors, with the domestic visitors remaining static or even dropping (if no limits on numbers are set), based on ‘tramper flight’ to lower use areas to avoid increasing numbers.

## E. BACKCOUNTRY ADVENTURERS (BCA)

SETTING AND ACCESSIBILITY	Natural setting (backcountry walk-in or remote) with basic facilities. Access is largely on foot except where air or boat access is permitted. Foot access is on tramping tracks or routes.
NATURE OF VISIT AND ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN	Visits generally range from 2 to 7 days (sometimes longer), but also include some day visits. Backcountry adventurers undertaking day visits can range further into the backcountry but do not require the standard of facilities sought by the day visitor group. Activities include tramping, hunting, fishing, mountaineering, cross-country skiing, rafting, kayaking and mountain biking; activities with a high degree of self-reliance.
EXPERIENCE SOUGHT/ DEGREE OF RISK	The traditional New Zealand backcountry experience. This group has a higher level of backcountry skills and experience than backcountry comfort seekers. They seek an experience that has challenge and a sense of freedom and they accept a degree of risk and discomfort.
FACILITIES/SERVICES SOUGHT	Require only basic facilities maintained to appropriate standards (for example, huts, tracks, tent sites, essential bridges, routemarkers, limited signs). Seek pre-visit information to help plan their trips, including maps, information on snow/ weather conditions, hut tickets and route guides. They are particularly interested in information about transport options and access restrictions.
MAKE-UP OF VISITORS AND VISITOR NUMBERS	Backcountry adventurers are generally young, male New Zealanders. It is difficult to estimate the numbers in this diverse and widely dispersed backcountry adventurer group.
PROJECTED USE	Because this group is made up mostly of New Zealanders, numbers are expected to increase only slowly. Potential growth in some areas may occur from international visitors and New Zealanders seeking alternatives to higher use tracks.

## F. REMOTENESS SEEKERS (RS)

<p>SETTING AND ACCESSIBILITY</p>	<p>Natural setting (remote or wilderness). Contains few or no facilities. Access is largely on foot except where air or boat access is permitted. Foot access to the edge of remote/wilderness areas is usually by tramping track or route.</p>
<p>NATURE OF VISIT AND ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN</p>	<p>Visits range from 3 to 7 days (or longer). The main activities are tramping, hunting, mountaineering, cross-country skiing, rafting, all require the highest degree of self reliance.</p>
<p>EXPERIENCE SOUGHT/ DEGREE OF RISK</p>	<p>Seeking a wilderness experience with limited interaction with other parties. Seek the challenge and complete sense of freedom that comes from prolonged contact with wild nature. Because of their high skill level and experience, this group accepts the higher level of risk associated with travelling through remote wilderness areas.</p>
<p>FACILITIES/SERVICES SOUGHT</p>	<p>Seek no facilities once in remote country. Seek pre-visit information to help plan their trips, including maps, snow/weather conditions and route guides.</p>
<p>MAKE-UP OF VISITORS AND VISITOR NUMBERS</p>	<p>This group is made up of fit, experienced, predominantly male New Zealanders. Compared with other visitor groups, remoteness seekers numbers are very low.</p>
<p>PROJECTED USE</p>	<p>Numbers are expected to increase slowly. Although remote experience has international appeal, it is difficult to assess the growth of overseas visitors seeking remoteness.</p>

## G. THRILL SEEKERS (TS)

<p>SETTING AND ACCESSIBILITY</p>	<p>Sites with a mostly natural backdrop, often with a dramatic element to them. The setting is often spectacular. The sites are found right across the recreation opportunity spectrum. They are highly accessible using a range of transport (including aircraft).</p>
<p>NATURE OF VISIT AND ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN</p>	<p>The visit is up to a day's duration and involves exciting activities such as downhill skiing, parapenting, rafting, bungy Jumping and snowboarding. There is also an element of thrill seeking in some overnight backcountry activities such as, cross-country skiing and long distance rafting, and such visitors should be considered as Backcountry Adventurers or Remoteness Seekers.</p>
<p>EXPERIENCE SOUGHT/ DEGREE OF RISK</p>	<p>Seeking controlled risk activities as part of an exciting experience.</p>
<p>FACILITIES/SERVICES SOUGHT</p>	<p>Seek specialised facilities-such as ski fields, bungy jumping platforms and pre-visit information to encourage undertaking or help planning for an activity.</p>
<p>MAKE-UP OF VISITORS AND VISITOR NUMBERS</p>	<p>High numbers of international Visitors are represented in this group (except for downhill skiers who tend to be New Zealanders), comprising largely the young and well off. Currently high visitor numbers relative to other groups.</p>
<p>PROJECTED USE</p>	<p>This group is projected to experience a rapid growth based on the large international component and the way these experiences are marketed to this group.</p>

## 6. Providing Visitor Facilities and Services

This section describes the specific strategic direction for each of the visitor groups. These are discussed in terms of -

- the location and range of facilities and services provided
- standards of these facilities and services
- the role of other providers.

### *Short Stop Travellers*

Short Stop Travellers are a priority visitor group for facilities and services. Providing appropriate facilities can lead to more satisfying visits for this group. Furthermore, from a conservation management perspective, picnic areas, short walks and interpretation sites are important 'honeypots' - peripheral developments that will satisfy many visitors, thereby avoiding unacceptable visitor impacts on core department-managed areas.

The current distribution of facilities suitable for this group on department-managed areas is highly variable in both location and standard. These existing facilities will be reviewed.

Facilities for this group will generally be designed to a high standard in terms of aesthetics, durability and clarity of communication. Facilities will not be established where the function is better provided outside department-managed areas. Accessible recreational/educational opportunities for this group are needed close to population centres, scenic/Heritage Highways and tourism centres.

The question of who provides facilities and services along Heritage Highways that pass through (or close to) department-managed lands of high appeal to visitors is very central to the requirements of this group. Consequently, the department will work closely with Transit NZ (and relevant local authorities, as well as other interested parties such as Regional Tourism Organisations and the Automobile Association) to rationalise existing rest areas and other amenity areas, and achieve a better planned approach to the provision of facilities for this visitor group along Heritage Highways.

### *Day Visitors*

This is also a priority group for increasing effort and expenditure, because they have the potential for high environmental impacts, are increasing in number and have a high demand for accessible outdoor experiences. Developing key sites to improve access and widen recreational opportunities, developing a sense of place and better orientation of these visitors are priorities.

- At priority sites, facilities will be developed, or upgraded, to -
  - » improve access e.g. provide new short walks where these do not exist increase the range of recreational opportunities for day visitors
  - » bring tramping tracks up to walking track standard
  - » bridge all major streams to appropriate safety standards
  - » provide shelter at roadends
- Vehicle access will be maintained to priority sites or upgraded where this is appropriate. Other organisations will be encouraged to contribute

to funding or provision of these roads. The department does not expect to develop any new roads

- Partnerships with other providers of day visitor facilities/services will be sought where practicable. In reality, however, the department accepts that it will remain the major provider for day visitors to areas it manages.

A large number of day visitors belong to family groups. The main facilities required by this group are tracks, bridges, picnic and toilet facilities and roadend shelters of sufficiently high standard to minimise discomfort or risks to their safety.

### *Overnighters*

The department's main responsibility will be to provide basic short-term camping opportunities for visitors seeking an overnight experience in the frontcountry. This group is important to the department in assisting with conservation work, as they have long term associations with specific sites or are often on site.

- The department will continue to manage the existing network of serviced campgrounds (and implement its review of these campgrounds) and booked accommodation, charging market rates.
- Standard and informal campgrounds will be managed to provide a basic level of service including a level site, vehicle access, environmentally-friendly toilets and a water supply. Services will be charged for where practicable.
- Where environmental impacts resulting from indiscriminate camping are unacceptable the department will either -
  - » develop basic facilities and communicate with overnights to modify their
  - » behaviour or
  - » close (either permanently or temporarily) the site for camping where the cost of managing the impacts is unacceptable.
- The department will move to have community or educational trusts to take over the management of its educational lodges.
- The department will ensure that its lodges, houses and booked huts are available to overnight users and that they are more effectively marketed.

### *Backcountry Comfort Seekers*

These visitors have little or only moderate experience of the backcountry and the priority is therefore on providing them with safe facilities, a good track surface and a degree of comfort in camping and hut facilities. The question of how many facilities, and to what standard, should be provided for this visitor group is one of the most contentious issues raised in public submissions on earlier drafts of this visitor strategy. The Great Walks and 'top tracks', which appeal to the comfort seeker group, are expensive to maintain. For instance, the Routeburn Track was restored after the devastating January 1994 floods at a cost of approximately \$1.4m.

Of equal importance is the question of standards for what could be termed the other 'top tracks'. There are a number of these overnight tramping opportunities, many of them quite well known - the Rees-Dart, Wangapeka Track and the Travers-Sabine Track, for example.

The thrust of departmental effort will be on planning if, where and by whom facilities and services for the group should be provided, defining a sustainable standard, and ensuring high compliance with hut and camp site fees.

- Hut and track systems will only be upgraded to cater for the requirements of backcountry comfort seekers where there is a demonstrated need for a higher level of facilities and services.
- Because of the significantly higher level of facilities and staff services required to maintain a Great Walk, it is unlikely that the department will designate any more.
- Crowding in huts and campsites on Great Walks will be reduced by - introducing booking systems
  - » setting seasonal hut and campsite fees with higher fees during peak summer months
  - » where booking systems are not operating, encouraging smaller groups.
- The department will ensure a high level of compliance with the fee system for Great Walks.
- Existing facilities on Great Walks and some major track and hut systems will be maintained, or upgraded to the departmental standards that recognise the requirements of backcountry comfort seekers for a low risk experience
- The private sector has a role in providing accommodation and services for backcountry comfort seekers, for example, guided walks with associated accommodation on the Routeburn Track.

### *Backcountry Adventurers*

The major issue for this visitor group is maintaining the network of huts, tracks and bridges in the backcountry. It is widely perceived (from submissions on the draft strategy) that the department is going to “abandon the backcountry”. The point to emphasise is that a network of basic facilities will still be provided in the backcountry for this group.

While it can be argued that the 850 category 3 and 4 huts and about 11,000 km of tramping tracks are indeed basic, anyone who knows New Zealand’s backcountry intimately will be aware that many of these facilities were built for a different purpose (accommodation and travel of the former Forest Service’s deer hunters). Today, many of these huts and tracks are only used by small numbers of backcountry adventurers. Whilst this is only partly the case for the national parks, it certainly is the situation in most forest parks and larger stewardship areas. These huts and tracks constitute a significant maintenance load on the department, but benefit only small numbers of visitors. Comprehensive hut and track reviews in areas like Nelson/Marlborough and the Ruahine Forest Park have indicated that a number of huts and tracks could be phased out with very little loss of amenity. In real terms, track rationalisation will mean the upgrading of some tramping tracks to ‘walking track’ standard and the down-grading of others to ‘route’ standards. There will still be a network of huts and tracks, but one which will be able to be maintained to acceptable standards.

The strategic direction will, therefore, concentrate on reducing departmental effort and expenditure on providing and maintaining the existing level of facilities. Partnerships and consultation with user groups will be important in achieving this rationalisation.

- Facilities that aid visitor safety and provide a basic degree of comfort will continue to be provided (e.g. tramping track, or route standard track; category 3 or 4 huts; bridges at key river crossings; pit toilets, and signs primarily for safety).
- Where specific huts and tracks are considered to be a low priority by the department they will be offered to user groups to maintain. Where these facilities cannot be maintained by user groups, they will be designated as “non-maintained” and shown as such on information material. Where the facility is not required for other departmental purposes, it may be removed.
- Conservancy hut and track reviews must fit within this national strategy and the department will ensure interested groups are consulted in any decisions made on the future of these facilities.
- Communications with the backcountry adventurer will be improved to develop stronger partnerships in management.

#### *Remoteness Seekers*

These visitors are low users of recreational facilities, but have a high requirement for pre-visit planning information, much of which is from maps, (see page 49).

The priority for this group will not be provision of facilities and services but instead will focus on protection of the opportunity for their enjoyment of remoteness and wilderness recreation.

- The department will better identify areas which it will manage as remote backcountry. This will include the identification of remote zones which exclude helicopter landings.
- The department will seek to designate formally further wilderness areas and manage existing wilderness areas in terms of the Wilderness Policy, (see page 36)

#### *Thrill Seekers*

Thrill seekers are not a priority group for departmental expenditure because the majority of facilities and services, such as skifields, will be provided by the private sector. The department sees its key relationship as being with the provider of the facility or service rather than with the visitors.

### **7. Reviewing Visitor Facilities and Services**

The department needs to review all of the visitor facilities and services it provides to evaluate how effective these are in fostering recreational opportunities for visitors. All visitor facilities and services will be prioritised according to -

- their importance for visitors
- the strategic direction for each visitor group
- whether appropriate engineering standards are met
- their management significance for the department.

A set of criteria will be developed and applied to determine –

- which of the sites, and conservancy priorities identified in Conservation Management Strategies and Plans, are priorities nationally
- how sites should be grouped for management purposes (such as setting standards for facilities)
- the priority sites for funding and management actions to be identified in conservancy business plans
- the priority sites for spending nationally allocated funds.

The criteria will cover amongst other things –

- the importance of the site for recreational and educational experiences
- the potential for visitors' appreciation and understanding of conservation
- current and projected visitor numbers.

Visitor facilities at low ranked sites will probably be removed or allowed to revert to the bush. In reviewing visitor facilities and services the department will consult widely with recreation and conservation groups, the tourism industry, local communities, other public sector agencies including local and regional councils and Maori groups.

## **8. Managing Access**

For each conservancy, an assessment will be made of the adequacy of public access to department-managed areas, particularly over private land. This will identify opportunities for improving access and, where necessary, the department will advocate on behalf of all visitors for improved access (practical and legal). It should be noted, however, that the department may control access in some areas to either ensure the safety of visitors or to protect the environment.

## **9. Protecting Natural Quiet**

In protecting natural quiet, visitors and tourism industry operators need to be aware of their responsibilities to other visitors. In particular, aircraft flying over areas managed by the department require careful management to ensure that aircraft noise does not detract unduly from visitors' experience of those areas. The Civil Aviation Bill makes provision for restrictions to be imposed on airspace for reasons of national security and the public interest. There is now an opportunity for the department and other parties to seek restrictions on airspace for conservation purposes (including the enjoyment of visitors).

The department will identify areas where restrictions are required to –

- protect wildlife
- maintain natural quiet to ensure visitor enjoyment –
- minimise conflicts between different groups of visitors (e.g. those using air transport and those on the ground).

Discussions will be held with the Civil Aviation Authority and regional representatives of the aviation industry on how these restrictions can be applied.

## **10. Establishing and Managing Wilderness Areas**

The department will seek to designate formally the following wilderness areas –

- Olivine (Mt Aspiring National Park)
- Paparoa (Paparoa Range)
- Tin Range—Pegasus (Southern Stewart island)
- Southern Fiordland
- Adams (mid-Southern Alps)

Wilderness areas will be managed in accordance with the 1985 Wilderness Policy as follows –

- to retain natural wilderness qualities, developments such as huts, tracks, route markers and bridges are inappropriate, and in the few cases where such facilities exist they should be removed or no longer be maintained
- adjoining lands should be managed as buffers to assist in the protection of a wilderness area; buffers may contain huts, tracks and bridges, but these should be few and vehicle access will be discouraged near the wilderness boundary
- wilderness is a fragile resource, susceptible to overuse; while wilderness areas are open to everyone, overuse will be minimised by selecting areas for their remoteness rather than regulating access by permit
- to ensure the use of wilderness areas at levels compatible with the maintenance of wilderness values, commercial recreation activities may only be undertaken under licence or permit
- because wilderness areas are places for quiet enjoyment, free from obvious human impact and require physical endeavour to achieve in full measure the wilderness experience, the use of powered vehicles, boats or aircraft will not be permitted; horses may be allowed where strong historical links exist and where legislation permits
- users of wilderness areas should be self sufficient and depend on the natural environment for shelter and fuel only if the use of such resources does not detract from the values of the wilderness
- logging, roading, hydro-electric development, and all but hand-methods of mining are also incompatible
- because of the overriding importance of protection of intrinsic natural values and the safety of visitors to wilderness areas, restrictions on air access may be lifted temporarily for management purposes such as search and rescue operations, fire fighting, and control of introduced plants and animals.

## **11. Managing Visitor Conflicts**

The department will attempt to resolve conflicts between visitor activities by separating them in space or time wherever possible by techniques such as zoning. For example, mountain bikes which may conflict with walkers in some circumstances could be confined to certain tracks. Alternatively, tracks could be used by walkers for one period and by mountain bikers at other times. Visitors will be encouraged to minimise negative impacts on other visitors' recreational experiences.

Similarly, where facilities and services become overcrowded, reducing the quality of the visitors experience, limits will be set on the number of visitors who can use those facilities and services. Various management techniques will be used, such as the booking system on the Routeburn Track.

### 3.3 MANAGING TOURISM CONCESSIONS ON PROTECTED LANDS

#### 1. Introduction

As noted earlier, visitors to department-managed areas are travelling primarily for recreational purposes. If, in the process, they use and pay for facilities and services provided by the private sector (a concessionaire) during their visit, then tourism can be said to be taking place. The provision of visitor facilities and services by concessionaires is controlled by the department. At present there are approximately 500 concessionaires operating in department-managed areas. These range from air, water and land transport operators, to guided treks, hunting and fishing trips, to nature tours, skifields and accommodation

The department does not see itself as having the sole responsibility for providing appropriate visitor facilities and services, but instead has the role of leader, guide and facilitator. This will involve a shift in the approach taken by the department in the past as a range of partnerships with other groups continue to be developed. This does not mean, however, that responsibility for the provision of appropriate visitor facilities and services is being devolved. If other groups wish to develop facilities or services in areas managed by the department, this must be done within a conservation framework.

Recreational visits organised by concessionaires are generally characterised by -

- the concessionaire facilitating access larger groups
- seasonal peaks
- structured timetables
- the concessionaire making key decisions.

By comparison recreational visits by the public not using concessionaires are generally characterised by: independent access, small groups, varying degrees of self reliance and flexible timetables.

In recent years there has been significant growth in the number of commercial tourism operators providing visitor facilities in department-managed areas. In particular, services that allow visitors to participate in adventure recreation and educational nature tours are increasing in number.

The department also manages a number of major icons that are vitally important for the tourism industry. These include -

- Milford Sound
- Mount Cook National Park Abel Tasman coastline
- Punakaiki
- Franz Josef and Fox Glaciers
- Most skifields including Mount Ruapehu and Mount Hutt
- Rotorua geothermal areas
- Waitomo Caves (joint management with local iwi).

These icons, and other places managed by the department, give New Zealand its unique character and provide the scenic backdrop to many towns and highways.

## **2. Statutory Requirements**

In March 1996, Parliament passed the Conservation Amendment Bill (No 2) which changed the way the department manages concessions.

There are now four new acts affecting concessions

- Conservation Amendment Act
- Reserves Amendment Act
- National Parks Amendment Act
- Wildlife Amendment Act.

The new legislation creates a single set of provisions that apply to concessions under the Conservation Act, the National Parks Act, the Reserves Act and the Wildlife Act. The concession application provisions appear only in the Conservation Amendment Act.

The new provisions came into effect on 1 July 1996. These provisions affect all concessions on lands managed by the department including recreation and tourism concessions, aircraft landings, commercial filming activities and resource use concessions such as grazing, telecommunications, harvesting and baches.

The Conservation Amendment Act 1996 places new responsibilities on applicants to identify the possible effects of their proposed activities and to suggest ways that any adverse effects can be avoided or reduced. "Effect" has the same meaning as in the Resource Management Act 1991.

Applicants for concessions must -

- describe the proposed activity
- identify the places where the activity will be carried out, and if possible the status of the land
- describe the potential effects of the proposed activity and any actions that will be taken to avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects
- indicate the type of concession wanted
- provide details of the proposed duration of the concession and the reasons for that duration
- provide relevant information about the applicant including information about the applicant's ability to carry out the activity.

Applicants seeking a lease, a profit à prendre, a licence granting an interest in land or an easement must also provide additional information as there are a number of new conditions which must be satisfied before such concessions will be granted. These relate to the reasons for the application and its appropriateness. For example, an application to build a structure will not be granted if building it in another place would have less harmful effects.

An applicant can also be asked to provide additional information such as an environmental impact assessment to help the decision maker reach a decision.

The new provisions list the matters which must be considered when deciding whether or not to approve a concession application. These are -

- the nature of the activity, and any -associated structure or facility
- the effects of the activity, structure or facility
- any measures that can be reasonably and practicably taken to avoid, remedy or mitigate any adverse effects of the activity
- any relevant environmental impact assessment
- any relevant oral or written submissions received as a result of the public process
- any relevant information which may be withheld under the Official Information Act or the Privacy Act.

An application will be declined if -

- the activity is contrary to the provisions of the Act or the purposes for which the land is held
- there is insufficient or inadequate information to assess the effects of the intended activity, including any effects of the proposed methods to avoid, remedy or mitigate adverse effects
- there are no adequate methods for remedying, avoiding or mitigating the adverse effects of the activity.

Leases will not be granted unless the applicant can demonstrate that exclusive possession is necessary to protect public safety, to protect the physical security of an appropriate activity or for the competent operation of the activity.

If there is an approved Conservation Management Strategy (CMS) or Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the relevant area, the concession cannot- be granted unless it is consistent with that strategy or plan.

If there is no CMS or CMP, or if the relevant CMS or CMP does not make provision for the activity, the concession can be granted if it meets the criteria specified in the Conservation Amendment Act.

### **3. Issues in Managing Tourism Concessions**

In approaching the provision of visitor facilities and services by the tourism industry a number of issues have been raised as follows -

- how to identify the type and extent of commercial tourism operations that are appropriate in different department-managed areas and what standards they should -follow in providing facilities and services to visitors
- how to take a co-ordinated approach to granting concessions to tourism operators to provide facilities and services for visitors. In particular, avoiding reacting to proposals in an ad hoc way and preventing an overprovision of concessions
- how to protect the value of natural quiet from intrusive noise
- how to monitor conflicts between commercial tourism operations and other visitors
- how to deal with the increase in commercial tourism operations using department-managed areas without a concession

- the lack of a co-ordinated approach to tourism planning in New Zealand, both at a national and local authority level, leading to ad hoc tourism development
- how to manage tourism icons such as Milford Sound, Mount Cook, Fox and Franz Josef Glaciers, the coastline of the Abel Tasman National Park and Mount Ruapehu.

#### **4. Goal and Guiding Principles for Managing Tourism Concessions**

The department's goal in managing opportunities for tourism concessions is -

- in managing the range of visitor 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.

To achieve this goal, the department's management actions will be guided by the following principles -

- the department recognises the significant potential for providing satisfying visitor experiences through facilities and services provided by the tourism industry under concessions
- protecting visitor experiences may involve setting limits on visitor numbers, facilities, services and commercial activity; where the impacts of increasing visitor numbers to a site are unknown, the department will adopt a precautionary approach until such time as it is clearly demonstrated that increasing numbers pose no significant problem
- visitor activities, facilities and services provided by concessionaires that are in keeping with and promote understanding of intrinsic natural and historic values will be preferred
- in managing tourism concessions the department will consult and work closely with other groups such as local and regional councils, recreation and conservation groups and iwi Maori
- the department will ensure that visitor activities, facilities and services provided by concessionaires will not compromise the conservation of the intrinsic natural and historic values of the areas visited
- access to areas managed by the department will be free of charge; it may be controlled to protect natural and historic values or the quality of the experience of the visitors (Concessionaires will not be allowed to control access unless they have a lease)
- the qualities of solitude, peace and natural quiet, will be safeguarded as far as possible in order to enhance visitors' enjoyment of areas managed by the department
- visitor activities, facilities and services provided by concessionaires should be actively managed to avoid compromising the experiences of other visitors.

## **5. Managing the Issues**

### *Managing Tourism Concessions*

The department will enter into a dialogue with the tourism industry to develop a better understanding of their aspirations for commercial tourism operations on department-managed areas. The role of the tourism industry needs to be more clearly defined to prevent an over-provision of concessions. In particular, the department will advocate for a more co-ordinated approach to tourism planning in New Zealand. The department will also work closely with the tourism industry to address the issue of unlicensed operators, and monitoring concessionaires.

The department will follow the steps set out in the Conservation Amendment Act 1996 when assessing applications from commercial tourism operators to provide facilities and services for visitors in department-managed areas. Applicants will have to demonstrate that any adverse effects on natural and historic values or the recreational experiences of other visitors can be avoided, remedied or mitigated. Some Conservation Management Strategies (CMS) or Conservation Management Plans (CMP) provide specific guidance on the type of commercial tourism operations that are appropriate in different areas. A concession will not be granted unless it is consistent with that strategy or plan.

### *Improving Dialogue*

The department will attempt to improve the dialogue between the tourism industry and recreation/conservation groups, so that they develop a better understanding of each others viewpoint and recognise the value of well managed commercial tourism operations in department-managed areas.

### *Managing Major Commercial Visitor Attractions*

In managing major attractions such as Mount Cook and Milford Sound, the department will promote co-ordinated and sensitive development. While large numbers may continue to visit these areas, they will be managed to keep impacts on the natural and historic values to a minimum. It is envisaged that a range of environmentally acceptable visitor attractions may be developed on department-managed areas by the tourism industry. It is unlikely, however, that major tourism transport and accommodation complexes will be developed because of potential adverse effects and these can be located away from department-managed areas.

### 3.4 INFORMING AND EDUCATING VISITORS

#### **1. The Issue: Informing, Interpreting and Advocating**

Visits to protected areas are the most tangible way in which people come into contact with New Zealand's natural and historic heritage and, indeed, with the work of the Department of Conservation. In its function as custodian for this heritage, the department has a two-fold role as both a protector (see section A) and, an educator. Both roles are tightly interwoven, reinforcing each other. The educator role is part of the conservation advocacy mandate in section 6(b) ~ (d) of the Conservation Act 1987, where the department is required to -

- advocate the conservation of natural and historic resources
- promote the benefits (of conservation) to present and future generations
- prepare, provide, disseminate, promote, and publicise educational and promotional material relating to conservation.

The fundamental issue is not whether the department should be informing visitors and sharing with them its knowledge of our heritage. Rather, the issue is -

- what should the department be advocating?
- where are the key places where the department should try to inform and educate visitors?
- which are the most important visitor groups that the department should try to communicate and interact with?
- what techniques are most effective?

#### **2. Visitor Requirements for Information and Interpretation**

Most visitors have a fundamental need for information about the places they want to visit. The nature of the information required tends to vary with the type of visitor and the activity or experience sought.

Pre-visit information is of critical importance to visitors intending to undertake back-country recreation; maps and brochures showing for example topography, tracks, huts, bridges, and legal access, are of crucial planning importance for these users. Weather forecasts at the commencement of the visit are also important to backcountry visitor groups. On the other hand, day visitors and short stop travellers are more inclined to use information centres and the advice of desk staff to help make choices on activities undertaken, or "things to do", on the day.

A comprehensive survey of visitors to 20 of the department's main visitor centres found that the main reason for visiting the centres was to satisfy their need for information on recreational activities,

Also, just as many people visited the centres for an educational service (to view the interpretive displays and audiovisuals), as those who sought a recreational service (e.g. hut tickets, hunting/fishing licences, or recording trip intentions'). While most visitors do not come to learn about conservation per se, it is clear that many seek to improve their knowledge about the natural and historic values of the area. Generally, they welcome being

provided with insights into the conservation values of the ecosystems and historic heritage being protected by the department.

The provision of two particular categories of on-site information are of concern to short stop travellers and day visitors -

- accurate directional signs and orientation noticeboards at roadend carparks; these ensure the visitor's satisfaction and safety by indicating direction, travel times, safety precautions, and features of interest en route
- on-site panels at features of interest, explaining the significance of the place, whether it be the nature of the rock type or landform, the wildlife habitat, or the human history which gives meaning to the site.

The general issue of what level of information the department should be providing does require more research, however. For instance, people visiting Mount Cook National Park are entitled to know what are the special things about the area in order for it to have been recognised with park status. Obviously, they do not come to Mount Cook to get a lecture about the problems of marine mammal bycatch in the hoki fishery. The challenge for the department is how to strike the right balance between the delivery of information and advocacy messages to the visitor. This is very much a visitor satisfaction issue, for no visitor is going to be receptive to conservation advocacy if their reasonable basic needs for information and knowledge are not met first.

### **3. The Current Situation in Informing and Educating Visitors**

In a strategic sense, the department's efforts to inform and educate visitors are guided by the national Public Awareness Strategy and, at the conservancy level, by the Conservation Management Strategy. The former strategy assists with determining the type of conservation message, the latter strategy expresses the value of places within the conservancy. Neither strategy, however, is intended to provide the detail to match the message with the different visitor groups, at key sites, and through the best communication medium.

There are 5 ways in which information and interpretive services are provided to visitors -

- signs and notices
- visitor centres and information centres
- visitor publications
- visitor programmes
- concessionaires and other organisations (e.g. Mountain Safety Council, tramping clubs).

#### *Signs and Notices*

A new sign system has been progressively implemented throughout all regions over the past 2 years. This has significantly improved public perception of the location of department-managed areas and the opportunities available during visits.

## Visitor Centres

The department manages 24 visitor centres (see Table 2) each generally with specialist visitor information staff, interpretive- displays and audio-visuals, a wide range of brochures and maps, and other visitor services. Most of these visitor centres are located in, or adjacent to, national parks, forest parks, or a wildlife or historic site of national significance.

TABLE 2: CATEGORIES OF VISITOR CENTRES (WITH DEPARTMENT INVOLVEMENT)

DEPARTMENT VISITOR CENTRES*	INFORMATION CENTRES+ (WITH DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENCE)	VISITOR CENTRES AND INFORMATION CENTRES (with no department staff but passive department information and/or interpretation)
NORTH ISLAND		
Waipoua Russell Kauaeranga Te Ikawhenua Aniwaniwa Whakapapa (VIN) North Egmont Ohakune Mt Bruce Catchpool	Whangarei (VIN) Auckland (with ARC) Coromandel Rotorua Napier Wellington (with VUW)	Waitangi Waitomo (VIN) Gisborne (VIN) Turangi (VIN) Dawson Falls Wanganui (VIN) New Plymouth (VIN) Palmerston North
SOUTH ISLAND		
St Arnaud Totaranui Arthur's Pass (VIN) Twizel (VIN) Mt Cook (VIN) Punakaiki (VIN) Reefton (VIN) Franz Josef (VIN) Fox Glacier (VIN) Haast (VIN) Wanaka (VIN) Glenorchy Te Anau Stewart Is (VIN)	Picton (VIN) Nelson (VIN) Motueka Takaka Hanmer Springs (VIN) Queenstown Dunedin	Kaikoura (VIN) Christchurch (VIN) Taiaroa Head Makarora Invercargill (VIN)
24	13	13

*VIN: Visitor Information Network (accredited by NZ Tourism Board)*

*\* A department-managed Visitor Centre, generally associated with a national park or other nationally significant protected area. Generally contain department information and/or education staff, interpretive displays, audio-visuals, maps and brochures and conservation merchandise.*

*+ Usually urban Visitor Information Centre at key gateway locations. Generally has emphasis on wider information about opportunities; usually contain little site interpretation.*

*ARC = Auckland Regional Council*

*VUW = Victoria University of Wellington*

The department also has two smaller national park visitor centres, Dawson Falls and Makarora, which are unstaffed for most of the day.

A number of other visitor centres at sites of national importance are not managed by the department, but assistance has been given with interpretive displays and audio visuals. Examples are Waitangi National Reserve and Taiaroa Head. Two museums manage displays provided by the department, Waitomo Museum of Caves (karst ecosystems) and Invercargill Museum (subantarctic islands).

At the 11 major departmental visitor centres which belong to the Visitor Information Network (VIN), there is some public expectation that booking services for private sector accommodation and transport will be provided. This expectation poses a problem for the department, since satisfying this demand would divert staff from providing important conservation information and education services.

Each of the major departmental visitor centres now caters for 60,000-200,000 visitors per annum. Currently, many of the centres are unable to provide the range and levels of visitor service desired, and are having difficulty providing the staffing levels and skills to satisfy the demands of increasing numbers of visitors. Many interpretive displays and audio-visuals are dated. Some are no longer accurate because they pre date the formation of the department and do not reflect its conservation mandate. Rationalisation of the location and level of services provided in the visitor centres, improved future levels of resourcing to the most important and greater effort in forging partnerships with other information providers are expected outcomes of this visitor strategy.

### *Information Centres*

In addition to its visitor centres, the department operates, or makes a significant contribution to, a number of visitor information centres (Table 2). All of these information centres are in urban areas and many are in accessible gateway' locations, where visitors can receive pre-visit information on the range of recreational opportunities available to them - both regional and national. In 13 of these centres, departmental staff are available to provide information to visitors. Most of the provincial information centres with passive department information and interpretation services are part of the Visitor Information Network (VIN).

Basic visitor information services are provided at another 35 departmental field centres. Generally, the service only consists of the availability of maps and brochures of the local area, hut tickets, and the granting of hunting permits.

### *Visitor Publications*

A wide range of recreation and heritage interpretation brochures are currently provided for visitors. The style of these brochures is gradually being improved through the application of the department's publications design standards. However, the focus and scope of these brochures varies widely between conservancies and there is a need to evaluate them in terms of the priorities (key sites and visitor groups) established in this strategy.

The department has in the past collaborated with the Department of Survey and Land Information (DOSLI) by providing visitor information for incorporation into Infomaps (especially the 33 maps in the Parkmap, Trackmap and Holidaymaker map series covering the most popular recreational areas managed by the department). These maps are important for visitor safety and satisfaction.

### *Visitor Programmes*

The provision of summer interpretive programmes for visitors has been a visitor education outreach of at least 25 years standing. The necessity of requiring higher cost recovery, with diminishing staff resources, has had the effect of closing down most of the traditional summer visitor programmes. In some locations, non- departmental staff have taken over the programmes as commercial propositions.

The face-to-face contact and hands-on involvement provided by visitor programmes has been a popular avenue for the department's conservation advocacy. However, it is considered that the conservation advocacy benefits have not been sufficient to outweigh the significant staffing costs and, therefore, their future is uncertain. Any further loss of staff contact with visitors is of concern.

#### **4. Goal and Guiding Principles for Informing and Educating Visitors**

The department's goal is -

- 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.

In other words, the department believes there is a "knowledge/awareness spectrum" along which it communicates with visitors -

*"From knowledge comes understanding, from understanding comes appreciation, from appreciation comes commitment to protecting."*

Accordingly, the department's management actions will be guided by the following principles -

- the department will share with visitors its knowledge of New Zealand's natural and historic heritage and explain its work towards the conservation of this heritage
- visitors will be provided with a range of information and interpretation services which will increase their knowledge, enjoyment, understanding and concern for areas managed by the department
- The department recognises the importance of visitors becoming more aware of the natural and historic values of the places they visit and adopting patterns of behaviour which respect these values, as well as respecting the recreational experiences of other visitors
- In giving effect to the partnership principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, the department will encourage is to interpret their kaupapa, where they consider this appropriate, on department-managed lands
- Visitor information and information services provided by departmental staff (and concessionaire-managed staff, when appropriate), will be accurate and of a high quality
- The department recognises the importance of providing information which can raise visitors' awareness of the risks present in department-managed areas and the skills and competence they will require to cope with these risks
- Use of the most effective communication media for information delivery and interpretation to visitors will be encouraged.

## 5. Managing the Issue : Informing and Educating Visitors

An informed visitor is one who is more likely to have satisfying experiences during the visit, is less likely to be at risk of injury, and is more likely to return for future visits. The responsibility for visitors becoming informed is not solely the responsibility of the department, but ideally involves a partnership with the visitors. Accordingly, the department will put its communication efforts where they are most likely to yield results, especially the protection of the environment and of visitors, and raising visitors conservation awareness. In essence, it is a strategic issue for the department to determine the priorities for -

- key sites for communicating with visitors (and identifying which visitor groups will be a priority at these sites)
- what communication medium to use to best effect
- when and where to use concessionaires (and other information providers).

### *Key Sites*

The key sites for communicating with visitors will be those that -

- already attract (or are expected to attract) larger numbers of visitors
- offer significant opportunities for high quality recreation or education experiences
- have a high potential for raising the visitors awareness of the importance of conservation.

Generally, these sites will lie in the front country and be more accessible to short stop travellers, day visitors and overnighter visitor groups. Many sites will be natural or historic features of national interest (which already have a high profile among New Zealand's protected areas.

### *Communicating with different Visitor Groups*

All seven visitor groups require information and types of communications in order to ensure their greater satisfaction and personal safety, or influence their environmental behaviour. In terms of departmental priorities for action, the groups differ widely depending upon their likely abilities, attitudes and impacts. The main information and education requirements are itemised below for each visitor group.

**Short Stop Travellers and Day Visitors:** Short stop travellers and day visitors are priority groups for both information and interpretation. Because of their low levels of experience and ability, and the shorter times they are prepared to devote to the visit, they need effective orientation information (carpark notices, signs, brochures on short walks and road-side features of interest). Day visitors, in particular, have the potential to cause significant environmental damage, so messages on how to minimise the impacts of their visit are important.

Both visitor groups tend to have a high level of interest in the site. Consequently, they are considered priority groups for on-site interpretation which will deepen their knowledge and understanding of the place.

**Overnighters:** Because most overnighters tend to be return visitors to more intensively-managed, less fragile sites, there is less of a need for communication emphasis on environmentally acceptable behaviour. Instead, priorities will be to encourage hands-on activities which minimise conflicts with other overnighters at the site, and seek to encourage these long-stay visitors to become more involved in the department's conservation work (especially around the overnighter site). They are an ideal group to benefit from summer visitor programmes.

**Backcountry Comfort Seekers:** Backcountry comfort seekers tend to include a high proportion of overseas visitors, many of whom have a low level of experience in the New Zealand backcountry. Risk awareness and safety messages are a high priority for this group, coupled with the provision of a maps, brochures, facilities information and weather forecasts. This group requires a high level of in-journey information through signs, hut wardens, guidebook and maps, because they have the potential for making significant environmental impacts, getting themselves into difficulties, or annoying other backcountry users through their inconsiderate behaviour. They are not a priority group for interpretation services because they generally have a low level of awareness of the conservation work of the department and the chances of engaging them in future conservation work are not considered to be high. Since they will be the group paying the highest hut fees, they will expect a high quality of information service delivery.

**Backcountry Adventurers and Remoteness Seekers:** These two groups are the most experienced and self-reliant, capable of managing their own visits in an environmentally acceptable manner. Accordingly, because they have a high level of awareness of the importance and fragility of the backcountry, they are low priority for conservation messages through interpretation services. They do have a high requirement, however, for pre-visit trip-planning information (maps, weather forecasts) and this will remain an information priority for the department.

Because these two groups range through the most remote backcountry, which departmental conservation officers visit less frequently, they are an important source of information concerning the condition of huts, tracks, vegetation and wildlife. As a group, they tend to feel alienated through the increasing emphasis upon providing facilities in the front country. They are the priority groups for establishing regular communication on facilities planning (especially maintenance of map accuracy, tracks, bridges), estate condition, and identification of natural hazards.

**Thrill Seekers:** The thrill seeker group is not a departmental priority for information and interpretation. As a group, however, they do have a high requirement for communications which can: lead to them minimising their environmental impacts; raise their awareness of safety issues; and encourage consideration of other users of conservation lands. In the main, it will be the responsibility of holders of recreation concessions to ensure that their clients are informed and aware of their responsibilities. The department will only provide basic information, usually orientation signs and brochures, for thrill seeker visitors.

### *Techniques for Informing and Educating Visitors*

In balancing the requirements of the visitor with the communication goal of the department, it is expected that services will continue to fall into two broad categories

- information such as signs, publications, advice from visitor centre desk staff and hut wardens, which enables visitors to have a more enjoyable, safer visit
- interpretation such as on-site panels, publications, visitor centre displays, audio visuals, and contact with hut wardens or department staff running visitor programmes to enable them to satisfy their curiosity and deepen their understanding of the values of the place they are visiting and the need to conserve it.

#### **Department Information Staff**

- Visitor Centre and Information Centre management will be improved to place greater emphasis upon the quality of the information service function, especially at key locations.
- The department's visitor/information centre desk staff will be given greater support in delivering quality information to visitors, especially in terms of specialist job training, network co-ordination and career development.
- Hut and campsite wardens will be expected to play a greater role as information providers and interpreters to the overnighiter and backcountry comfort seeker visitor groups.

#### **Visitor Publications**

- Existing place-oriented visitor recreation brochures will be reviewed to develop a hierarchy of brochures which better reflect the visitor strategy priorities, in terms of key sites and visitor groups. The emphasis will be on brochures catering for day visitors and, to a lesser extent, short stop travellers, overnighiters and backcountry comfort seekers.
- The department expects to play a more active role in co-ordinating the publication and sale through department visitor and information centres of accurate and informative Parkmaps and Trackmaps of key sites on conservation lands. These maps are considered to be of crucial importance for both front country (day visitors and overnighiters) and backcountry visitors (backcountry comfort seekers and backcountry adventurers).
- The department will encourage other visitor information providers to develop more comprehensive guidebooks to natural and historic heritage sites. Such publishers will be encouraged to consult with the department to ensure the accuracy of the information.
- Future national park handbooks may be produced by conservancies where viable, but a national series of handbooks from one publisher will no longer be maintained.

#### **Signs and On-site Information/Interpretation**

- More emphasis will be placed on communication facilities at key roadends and roadside sites (used primarily by day visitors and short-stop travellers). As the implementation of the department sign system progresses, more consideration will be given to the quality of information (especially orientation to safe recreation opportunities) which needs to be conveyed to visitors at these front country locations.
- On-site interpretation will be provided at high-visitation sites with high natural or historic heritage value. This educational technique has been popular with visitors, and at most sites will generally be preferred to the establishment of any new visitor centres.

## *Visitor Centres and Information Centres*

Visitor Centres and Information Centres (containing a range of the above services) will continue to be of prime importance in informing and educating visitors.

### **Information Centres**

- Information centres, located at key visitor gateways and major urban centres, will continue to be used to disseminate pre-visit information. Visitors to these centres will be provided with good orientation, recreation opportunity and safety information.
- The current allocation of resources for providing pre-visit information will be reassessed, based upon -
  - » number and types of visitors requiring information
  - » ease and convenience of public access
  - » cost effectiveness of information service per visitor.
- The department will work closely with the New Zealand Tourism Board, the Visitor Information Network (VIN) and selected other information centres, in fulfilling the pre-visit requirements of all visitor groups except thrill seekers.
- The department will rationalise its own information desk functions in urban conservancy offices and field centres in order to provide a better information service for all visitors who need pre-visit information. In many instances this will mean considering transferring the department information function (either staff, displays, publications, or all of these) into the local VIN centre (if this is an optimal location), or co-locating with other visitor information providers. This type of merger has already occurred in Nelson, Turangi, Kaikoura, Auckland, Wellington and Whangarei.
- Seven urban locations are considered to be the highest priority for the department to consolidate or upgrade its visitor information services. From north to south these are: Whangarei, Auckland, Wellington, Picton, Christchurch, Queenstown, Dunedin.
- At a further 10 locations of lesser importance to the department, efforts will be made to maintain or improve the provision of visitor information. From north to south, these are: Hamilton, Rotorua, Gisborne, Taupo or Turangi, Napier, Wanganui, Nelson, Kaikoura, Invercargill.
- Only basic visitor information will be provided at the 14 conservancy offices and 35 field centres which are not listed in Table I as visitor centres or information centres. There will be no retailing of conservation merchandise at these offices, except for hut tickets and maps and brochures of the local area.

### **Visitor Centres**

- The department's visitor centres will be evaluated to determine their future role and resourcing, in terms of the following questions -
  - » are they in the best locations for servicing the requirements of visitors?
  - » are they the best places for telling the most important heritage conservation stories?
  - » are they able to be improved by establishing more effective partnerships with other visitor information providers?

- » what range and standard of services should be provided; is the current level of investment justified in terms of the current numbers and types of visitors?
- » is visitor safety an important issue at the visitor centre and how should it be addressed in information and education terms?
- Twelve locations are considered to be the highest priority for the department to consolidate (or upgrade) its visitor centre services. From north to south, these are: Cape Reinga, Waipoua, Whakapapa, Mt Bruce, St Arnaud, Arthur's Pass, Punakaiki Franz Josef, Haast, Mt Cook, Te Anau, Stewart Island.
- New visitor centres are highly desirable at Cape Reinga and Waipoua. The department would not want to establish such facilities on its own; they would require the support of other major partners - iwi, tourism industry and district councils.
- At a further 7 locations of lesser importance to the department, efforts will be made to improve the provision of visitor information and education services. From north to south, they are: Russell, Kauaeranga, North Egmont, Aniwaniwa, Catchpool, Fox Glacier, Wanaka.

## 3.5 MANAGING VISITOR SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

### 1. Introduction

The Cave Creek tragedy has highlighted the safety of visitor in department-managed areas and the risks to visitors in these areas. In ensuring that visitors have a safe experience, both the department and the visitor have certain responsibilities.

The department is responsible for -

- providing visitor facilities that are located, designed, constructed and maintained to meet appropriate safety standards using sound building practices
- making visitors aware of the risks present in department-managed areas and of the level of skill and competence they require to cope with these risks.
- The visitors are responsible for -
- their own decisions on what risks they are prepared to take
- ensuring that they have the level of skill and competence to cope with the risks present.

### 2. Statutory Requirements

There are a number of Acts and Regulations which affect the provision of facilities and services for visitors and matters of visitor safety. The key statutes are:

- Resource Management Act;
- Building Act;
- Occupiers Liability Act;
- Health and Safety in Employment Act.

The Resource Management Act controls the use of land and landscapes, air and water. This Act provides guidance on whether visitor facilities and services can be provided. It sets out the provisions to follow when applying for land and water use and discharge consents and outlines the restrictions on use and discharge. The primary aim of the Act is the promotion of sustainable management of natural and physical resources (section 5). A land use consent must be obtained from the territorial local authority before any new visitor facility can be provided.

The Building Act establishes the Building Regulations and the Building Code. The Building Regulations describe the process for territorial local authorities to issue building consents and the regulations provide legal backing for the Building Code. The Building Code ensures that buildings and structures meet their intended purpose, are safe, sanitary and have proper fire exits. It also contains minimum performance criteria for buildings and structures and suggestions on how these criteria can be met.

The Occupiers Liability Act establishes the department's responsibility to ensure visitors to the areas it manages are safe from harm. The Act imposes on the department as occupier, a duty to take reasonable care to ensure the safety of visitors. What is reasonable depends on the circumstances. The Act does preserve the old common law rule of '*volenti non fit inuria*' which means the department has no obligations to visitors in respect of

risks willingly accepted by the visitor. This absolves the department from liability where visitors choose to undertake potentially dangerous activities knowing that these activities may be dangerous.

The Health and Safety in Employment Act establishes the department's responsibility to ensure the safety of staff and contractors and the public in the workplace. This Act has a primary focus on the health and safety of department employees and contractors. The safety of visitors to department-managed lands, however, does not fall within the ambit of this Act.

### **3. Safety and Risk Management**

It is impossible to predict all natural hazards in department-managed areas and to categorically state an outdoor recreation experience is completely free of risk. Elements of risk will always be present in nature. Risk means any unintentional event or situation that leads to a loss. This loss may lead to physical, mental, social or financial harm. There are increasing numbers of visitors to areas managed by the department participating in activities that feature risk and potential danger. The challenge facing the department is to balance the requirements of these visitors with an experience that is safe and fulfilling. This may be done through the provision of appropriate opportunities, facilities and information services. The key is for visitors to match their skill and competence levels with the level of risk involved in a particular activity. Three levels of skill and competence can be identified - inexperienced, moderately experienced and experienced.

#### *Inexperienced (overnighters, short stop travellers, some day visitors)*

At the inexperienced stage beginners are engaged in an activity at a basic skill level or engaged in an activity with a low level of risk. They often participate in a group directed by a leader, often within a structured programme and in many cases as a "one off" experience. In this situation the beginner interacts with leaders and peers and is usually reliant on a leader or the department for safety measures.

#### *Moderately Experienced (some day visitors, backcountry comfort seekers)*

The moderately experienced stage is more likely to consist of groups of peers in advanced courses or self organised activities. At this stage participants exercise some individual control of their activity interacting with leaders and/or similarly experienced peers. They are less reliant on the department for safety measures.

#### *Experienced (backcountry adventurers, remoteness seekers)*

At the experienced stage, experienced individuals participate at higher skill levels in a more hazardous environment. This stage includes the experienced participant who pursues adventures alone, or with small groups of similarly experienced individuals. They may develop a high level of teamwork, because the physical setting may be more hazardous. The responsibility to avoid accidents lies primarily with the individual. This group is the least reliant on the department for safety measures.

There is a continuum of risk between these groups. With the inexperienced group the ability of the individuals to handle risk is low. The ability to handle risk increases for the moderately experienced group and for the experienced

group they may face substantial risks in a hazardous environment. In backcountry areas visitors will need a high level of experience and skill to ensure their safety. At popular accessible areas, for example roadends, the level of skill and experience required will be less and, therefore, their reliance on facilities and services supplied by the department will be greater, increasing the department's responsibility.

#### **4. Goals and Guiding Principles for Visitor Safety**

The department has two goals in managing 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.

To achieve these goals the department's management action will be guided by the following principles -

- there is a continuum of risk present in department-managed areas with generally much higher risks present in the backcountry (at some more accessible sites, however, such as Franz Josef glacier, higher risks are present); in backcountry areas visitors will need a much higher level of experience and skill to ensure their safety; at popular roadends the level of experience required will generally be low and visitors with no experience at all should be able to enjoy roadend facilities in safety.
- safety standards for visitor facilities will comply with all relevant legislation. Visitors will require increasing levels of skill and competence as they move away from accessible frontcountry locations to the backcountry and away from facilities and services developed to reduce or manage this risk.
- elements of risk will always be present in nature and visitors are responsible for their own decisions on the risk they are prepared to take; they have to match their personal level of skill with the risks present
- the department will, where possible, provide visitors with accurate information on the risks present in areas it manages and the level of skill required to cope with these risks; it recognises the important role that the Mountain Safety Council and tramping clubs play in providing training and advice on safety matters for visitors
- the department recognises the important role that tourism concessionaires play in providing safe recreational experiences for visitors.

#### **5. Managing Visitor Safety and Risk**

##### *Quality Conservation Management System*

In response to the Cave Creek tragedy the department has developed and begun implementation of a project management system - Quality Conservation Management (QCM). It is based on the International Safety Rating System which is used in New Zealand by organisations such as the New Zealand Fire Service and is widely accepted around the world. This system provides a process to systematically evaluate the safety of an organisation's operations and identifies what action is required to prevent loss. It contains many of the elements from ISO 9000 and is particularly useful for managing visitor

facilities provided by the department because of its focus on safety and management systems. In conjunction with the QCM system, engineering standards have been prepared for a wide range of visitor facilities to ensure the actual construction and maintenance is carried out correctly. These have been developed in consultation with the Institute of Professional Engineers of New Zealand.

#### *Visitor Facilities QCM*

The QCM system adopted by the department covers all visitor facilities. Comprehensive manuals have been produced describing the system and the engineering standards, and further manuals on aspects of the system are being developed. The procedures and technical engineering standards now apply to the design, construction, inspection, maintenance and repair of all visitor facilities.

The QCM procedures are intended to ensure that -

- visitor facilities are located, designed, constructed, inspected, maintained and repaired to meet appropriate engineering standards
- qualified engineering input is obtained where appropriate for the design, approval and maintenance of visitor facilities
- the construction and maintenance of visitor facilities is carried out by appropriately qualified staff
- visitor facilities are adequately inspected during and after construction by a suitably qualified person and on an ongoing programmed basis
- the department complies with its statutory requirements, in particular the Resource Management Act, the Building Act, the Occupiers Liability Act and the Health and Safety in Employment Act
- staff responsible for managing visitor facilities are aware of their responsibilities for ensuring that these facilities meet appropriate standards of design, construction, inspection, maintenance and repair
- staff are trained and appropriately qualified for their appointed tasks
- a programme to review existing visitor facilities is implemented; this identifies whether appropriate engineering standards are being met and if not, what action needs to be taken, (routine maintenance, repair, upgrading or decommissioning).

An extensive QCM training programme has been developed for staff accountable for ensuring that visitor facilities meet appropriate standards of design, construction, inspection, maintenance and repair. The department's QCM system will be regularly audited by external agencies. In addition, the Minister of Conservation has set up a panel of risk and quality management experts. They will check the department's QCM systems to see whether they are fully compatible with accepted quality management standards and risk/loss control principles.

#### *Safety Watch Free Phone*

The department has introduced a national safety watch' scheme which will enlist the help of the public in monitoring the safety of visitor facilities between scheduled inspections. The scheme involves a 24 hour day, 7 day week 0800 freephone. Phone calls are taken by a trained operator who will ask the caller a series of specific questions. These cover the exact nature and description of the hazard and its location so that the calls can be assessed and prioritised.

Appropriate action will then be taken where necessary. Not every call will be of top priority and acted on immediately, but those concerning visitor safety will be. Emergency calls such as reports of fire, accidents or missing persons will be redirected to the appropriate organisation.

#### *Health and Safety In Employment*

To meet its responsibility under the Health and Safety In Employment Act the department has appointed a national health and safety co-ordinator with overall responsibility for ensuring that conservancies are implementing this Act. Under the department's national staff training programme, all human resource managers, operations managers, field centre managers and other key staff have been trained in the provisions of the Act.

#### *Raising Visitor Awareness of Risk*

In making visitors aware of the risks present in department-managed areas and making them aware of the level of skill and competence they require to cope with these risks the department will develop systems to -

- ensure that visitor centre staff, hut wardens and other staff who communicate with visitors are trained and qualified to provide appropriate safety information
- ensure high standards of accuracy in the safety information provided to visitors so they can manage risks to their safety during their visit. This particularly applies to information in -
  - » directional signs and orientation notices departmental recreation brochures
  - » Infomaps and route guides.
- improve visitor access to services which can ensure greater awareness of safety and risk during their visit; these services include
  - » widespread availability of intentions forms mountain weather forecasts
  - » hut radio networks (where appropriate).
- implement a programme of periodic monitoring of visitor safety information services to ensure that appropriate standards are being met.

Once the actions described above are completed, the department can provide a statement of assurance to the public on the safety of visitor facilities. This may be in the form of a "Visitor Charter".

# Appendix

## RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, VISITOR FACILITIES AND SERVICES IN AREAS MANAGED BY THE DEPARTMENT

### **Recreational Opportunities**

The Department manages the following recreational opportunities:

#### *The Coast*

The department manages 14 marine reserves, the Sugar Loaf Marine Protected Area, the Marine Mammal Sanctuary off Banks Peninsula and many offshore nature reserves such as Kapiti Island, Raoul Island and the Auckland and Snares Islands. These places offer opportunities for visitors to see some of New Zealand's most threatened indigenous species and habitats.

#### *Urban and Urban Fringe*

There are very few protected natural areas in New Zealand's urban areas. The department is involved, however, with managing many small pockets of land on the outskirts of urban areas. Not surprisingly, these areas are well used by local visitors but some, like North Head in Auckland, are also popular with international visitors.

#### *Rural*

A large proportion of rural New Zealand is used for farming, horticulture and forestry. The department manages the majority of the remaining natural areas found in rural environments. Rural areas are popular for walking, horse-riding, farm-stays, photography, sightseeing and off-road vehicle use (4 wheel drive vehicles and mountain bikes). Walkways, legal roads, esplanade reserves and marginal strips are the main ways by which visitors access these areas.

#### *Drive-in Backcountry*

These areas are easily accessible by car or bus but are further away from the city than rural areas. Examples include Lake Waikaremoana within Te Urewera National Park and the Waipoua kauri forests in Northland. Most ski fields in New Zealand are situated in these areas. Seventeen of the country's 25 ski fields are in areas managed by the department.

Some more remote areas in this category can only be accessed by 4 wheel drive vehicle or jet boat. Examples include The Old Man Range in Otago and the lower Motu River in the Bay of Plenty.

#### *Walk-in Backcountry*

Travel in these areas is largely by foot on well formed tracks. The Routeburn, Milford and Kepler Tracks in Fiordland and the Hooker Valley track in Mount Cook National Park are good examples. Visitors stay in huts, camping sites or one of a few lodges.

### *Remote*

These are New Zealand's traditional tramping, hunting and climbing areas. A network of huts and tracks enables visitors to explore these areas and participate in a variety of active pursuits. The bulk of remote areas are found along the alpine spine of the South Island and the hill country chain from East Cape to Wellington. The department manages most of these areas.

### *Wilderness*

These areas are where visitors can encounter natural areas entirely on nature's terms. There are no tracks, huts or other facilities and visitors need to be self-sufficient. It can take a day or more to walk to these places from the nearest track or hut. The department manages all of the country's designated wilderness areas. These account for only about one percent of New Zealand's land area.

### *Historic Sites*

Together with Te Iwi Maori, the department is responsible for many historic sites and structures -

- Maori pa, wahi tapu, gardens and rock art
- sites relating to early exploration, such as Captain Cook's landing site at Astronomers Point, Dusky Sound, Fiordland National Park
- remnants of early European settlement such as mining relics, whaling and sealing relics, bridges, government buildings and military structures such as Godley Head on the outskirts of Christchurch and Ripapa Island in Lyttleton Harbour.

### **Facilities and Services**

The department provides a wide range of facilities and services for visitors including the following.

#### *40 visitor centres and information centres*

From Russell to Stewart Island and from large centres open seven days a week, to small centres with part-time staff. The majority are run independently by the department and some are run jointly with either a local authority, tourism promotion council or community group. These visitor centres are located at major tourism centres such as Auckland and Queenstown and in all the national parks. Eleven of the department's visitor centres are part of the nation-wide Visitor Information Network (VIN).

Visitor centres provide information about what to see and do in an area. They also enhance visitors' experience by interpreting natural and cultural features. This is achieved by displays, publication and visitor centre staff.

#### *6 education lodges*

Providing accommodation and facilities for school and other community groups.

#### *960 backcountry huts*

Offering overnight accommodation and day shelter for trampers, hunters, climbers and other visitors.

### *259 camping areas*

Eleven of these areas are fully serviced campgrounds.

### *1,390 kilometres of walkways*

The Department maintains around 160 walkways.

### *9,600 kilometres of other tracks*

A network of tracks have been established around the country, first by Maori and later by Europeans. By the 1950s, the increasing number of deer lead to extensive track and hut development in remote and backcountry areas for hunters. Nowadays, some of these tracks receive very little use. No other country in the world has such an extensive network of tracks and huts.

The department is promoting the most popular tramping tracks as the "Great Walks". These are: Lake Waikaremoana, Tongariro Northern Circuit, Abel Tasman, Heaphy, Routeburn, Milford, Kepler and Rakiura (Stewart Island).

### *1,200 kilometres of roads*

Giving access to areas managed by the department.

### *Toilets and sewage treatment systems*

The department provides these services in all areas it manages except remote and wilderness areas. Most are associated with road end or roadside picnic areas.

### *About 100 formal and thousands of informal picnic areas.*

Catchpool, near Wellington is an example of one of the larger formal picnic areas.

### *Thousands of roadside, waterside and road end facilities*

Usually at places of natural and historic interest. They include viewing platforms and interpretation panels, laybys and parking areas, boat ramps and water access points such as Huka Falls, The Chasm (Milford Highway), Cape Reinga and Ketetahi car park.

### *Other services*

Safety services include providing weather forecasts, search and rescue backup and avalanche warnings. The department also acts as a local authority in locations such as Mount Cook Village and Whakapapa Village.

### **Staff Resources**

The Department employs 1,350 full-time and part-time permanent staff and an extra 250 or so temporary staff at various times.

All of these people are directly involved in or support "hands on" conservation work, whether this is in the field, in the development of policy or in advisory and senior management roles.

Few other New Zealand organisations have such a variety of skilled staff. They range from hunters to marine biologists, recreation planners to archaeologists.