Kahurangi National Park Management Plan draft amendment - extending the season for mountain bikes on the Heaphy Track

Introduction

This information sheet covers the draft amendment to the Kahurangi National Park Management Plan 2010 (the Kahurangi Plan).

The Kahurangi Plan can be viewed on the Department’s website at: http://www.doc.govt.nz/knpmp. This information sheet and background reports can be viewed at: www.doc.govt.nz/kahurangiamendment

The Department proposes to amend the Kahurangi Plan to:

- Extend the mountain bike season on the Heaphy Track to 1 April to 30 November, excluding Easter.
- Update the plan to reflect the outcomes of the 2011-2013 mountain biking trial and factual information relevant to mountain biking.

If the amendment is adopted, the Kahurangi National Park Bylaws 2009 will be amended to give effect to the changes.

Details of the draft amendment are found below.

Making a submission

Persons and organisations are invited to make submissions on the Kahurangi Plan amendment.

Submissions must be made in writing by 4.00pm Tuesday 12 July 2016.

Submissions may be made by post or email to:

Kahurangi Plan amendment or Email Heaphy@doc.govt.nz
Department of Conservation
Private Bag 4715
CHRISTCHURCH 8140
A submission form can be found at [www.doc.govt.nz/kahurangiamendment](http://www.doc.govt.nz/kahurangiamendment) and while we prefer you to use this, other formats that include all information on the form will also be accepted.

If you wish to be heard in support of your submission you need to state this on your submission form. Please also include your contact information so we can contact you to arrange a suitable time for you to attend the hearings.

Submissions may be made only on the draft amendments. No other parts of the Kahurangi Plan are being changed.

**Proposed amendment**

The draft amendment proposes extending the current mountain bike season for the Heaphy Track of between 01 May and 30 September, to 01 April to 30 November, excluding Easter (i.e. Good Friday to Easter Monday) when it falls within April. That is, to extend the season from five to eight months.

The Heaphy Track is a moderately used Great Walk but has capacity to accommodate more visitors. Extending the mountain biking season would provide a further opportunity to mountain bike in autumn and spring.

Walker numbers are highest over December and January, then relatively constant over February to April. The proposed amendment retains a walkers-only season during December to March, and Easter, which usually falls within April.

An amendment process is being undertaken as a full review of the Kahurangi Plan may be some years away.

**Background to proposed amendment**

**The 2010 partial review and 2011-2013 trial**

In 2010 a partial review of the Kahurangi Plan was approved. It included provisions for mountain biking on the Heaphy Track under a three-year trial from 2011 to 2013.

Following the trial, monitoring and other data was analysed\(^1\) and the trial outcomes reported\(^2\) (refer [www.doc.govt.nz/kahurangiamendment](http://www.doc.govt.nz/kahurangiamendment)).

**Outcomes of the trial**

The report generally found the mountain bike trial seasons to be successful and made the following recommendations in relation to the Heaphy Track:

1. *Allow mountain biking to continue on the Heaphy Track.*
2. *Extend the mountain biking season to 1 March to 30 November excluding the four days of the Easter holiday weekend.*
3. *If the season is extended then social monitoring should continue to assess whether there is any conflict between mountain bikers and walkers as a result of the change.*

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4. There has been sufficient physical monitoring and to conclude that no further physical impact monitoring is necessary.

5. The monitoring of Powelliphanta land snail should continue and the Department will highlight the importance of Powelliphanta to visitors and reinforce that riding on the track at night is not permitted.

6. All other previous conditions for mountain bike trial should be maintained.

Following the trial the Department and the Nelson/Marlborough Conservation Board approved continued mountain bike use, subject to maintaining the conditions of use in the Kahurangi National Park Bylaws 2009. Further monitoring of Powelliphanta land snails was carried out, as was continued highlighting of the importance of Powelliphanta to visitors and why riding on the track at night is not permitted.

Track operation 2013-2016

Since 2013, track and bridge upgrading to Great Walk standard has occurred for almost the entire track length, and three huts (Perry Saddle, Mackay and Heaphy) have been renewed, providing increased communal space and bed capacity.

Further monitoring of Powelliphanta land snails has been undertaken and a more in-depth report concluded “The impacts of mountain bikers and other track users on Powelliphanta snails are considered to be minimal and of no concern for the conservation management of the Powelliphanta species.”

Management issues

Management issues associated with shared walking and mountain biking tracks are generally centred on physical, ecological and social impacts. These impacts were monitored on the Heaphy Track (the Track) during the 2011-2013 mountain biking trial seasons.

Physical
Track and bridge upgrading increased the resilience of infrastructure to use. Monitoring has showed the Track, huts and other infrastructure are able to accommodate current and predicted levels of use by walkers and bikers. There were no reports of people riding off the Track or reports of damage to historical features or signs on the Track.

Ecological
Monitoring during the trial largely confirmed any effects on flora and fauna were minimal and that potential adverse effects had been largely addressed via conditions of use and visitor information. Additional monitoring was carried out on the impacts of mountain biking on Powelliphanta snails on the Track over the 2015 mountain biking season. This monitoring concluded there were no unmanageable issues with mountain bike impacts on the wider environment or on the snails.

Social
Social impacts include whether visitors’ experiences meet their expectations and concerns around safety and appropriate user behaviour. Management measures put in

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place during the trial to address social impacts included: restricting the mountain biking season from 1 May to 30 September; limiting group sizes for mountain bikers; providing clear information to improve visitor awareness, satisfaction and safety; and signage to identify appropriate visitor behaviour. The ‘Mountain Bikers Code’ is clearly displayed at Track ends, in huts, on websites and in visitor information.

Feedback from Heaphy Track users during the three year trial suggested social impacts were minimal. There were 144 comments received; the majority were positive and six were negative. It was difficult, however, to fully gauge the effect of mountain bikers on walkers due to the fact that there were a limited number of walkers on the Track between 1 May and 30 September.

Comments received during the trial suggest that overall compliance of mountain bikers adhering to the Mountain Bikers Code has been high. The limited number of instances of conflict reflects that both mountain bikers and walkers are sharing the track with consideration for each other.

Overall, it appears that the measures put in place through the Kahurangi Plan to manage the physical, ecological and social impacts of mountain biking have been successful. If an extended season for mountain biking is approved, ongoing monitoring of social impacts will be carried out.
Below are extracts from the Kahurangi National Park Management Plan (Incorporating 2009/2010 Partial Review) 2010, showing the draft amendment.

The only text being amended at this time is:
- text specifically relevant to the season dates for mountain biking on the Heaphy Track;
- the updating of factual information relevant to the mountain biking season; and
- the updating of 2010 pre-mountain biking trial text to the post-trial situation where needed to provide current context for the proposed amendment.

The draft amendments are shown with underlining for new text and with strike through for text proposed to be removed. Text that is not part of the amendment is shown in black for context purposes only.

The full Kahurangi National Park Management Plan can be viewed on the Department’s website at: [http://www.doc.govt.nz/knpmp](http://www.doc.govt.nz/knpmp)
1.6 HEAPHY TRACK CORRIDOR PLACE

1.6.4 Values of the Heaphy Track Corridor

Recreational values (page 46)
(Amend last paragraph)

Mountain biking use occurred prior to Kahurangi National Park being formed in 1996. This plan provides access for mountain bikers on a seasonal basis over the winter months from 1 May to 30 September, excluding the Easter holiday weekend, when walker numbers are lower (see Section 4.1.1 Mountain biking).

4.1 VISITOR SERVICES AND MANAGEMENT

The Heaphy Track Corridor (page 73)
(Amend last paragraph)

This plan provides for mountain biking on the Heaphy Track on a seasonal basis from 1 May to 30 September, excluding the Easter holiday weekend, which has traditionally been a period of low use (see Section 4.1.1 Mountain biking).

Mountain bikes (page 78)
(Amend first paragraph)

In accordance with General Policy for National Parks 2005 mountain biking is considered appropriate on a trial basis the following routes in the Park: Heaphy Track, Flora to Barron Flat and Kill Devil. Seasonal biking is proposed allowed on the Heaphy Track from 1 May to 30 September each year, excluding the Easter holiday weekend, and year round on the Flora to Barron Flat and Kill Devil routes (see Section 4.1.1 Mountain biking).

IMPLEMENTATIONS (ALSO SEE SECTION 4.1.3) (pages 79-81)

9. Continue to manage the Heaphy Track as a Great Walk with the provision for controlled seasonal use (from 1 May to 30 September each year, excluding the Easter holiday weekend from Good Friday to Easter Monday), as a trial, for mountain biking.

33. Amend Retain the existing bylaws allowing a mountain biking trial on the specifically approved routes of the Heaphy Track, Flora to Barron Flat Track, and Kill Devil Track subject to the measures set out in Section 4.1.1 Mountain biking, including the Implementations.

4.1.1 Mountain biking

4.1.1.1 Policy (page 82)

To provide opportunities for a range of mountain biking experiences on specific routes on a trial basis in Kahurangi National Park while
minimising adverse effects on national park values and protecting the experiences of others.

4.1.1.2 Background (page 85)
(Amend last paragraph and add an additional paragraph)

The three identified routes also provide a range of mountain bike experiences in the Park. The Heaphy Track is a multi day ride which requires a good level of fitness, an intermediate to advanced level of skills to ride in a backcountry environment across a variety of landscapes and a moderate degree of self reliance. The Flora Saddle to Gridiron Junction section of the Flora to Barron Flat Track provides an entry level ride on a fairly flat, smooth, wide 4WD track suitable for families and beginners. The remainder of the Flora Saddle to Barron Flat Track and the Kill Devil Track are one day rides for advanced and expert riders. They are technically challenging, on rough, remote terrain which require the rider to walk or carry their bikes at various points.

The mountain biking trial concluded successfully in 2013 and mountain biking was allowed to continue under the same conditions of use.

MAP B: Specified mountain bike routes
(No change)

4.1.1.3 Issues associated with mountain biking
(No change)

4.1.1.4 General management measures and considerations (pages 86-88)

General Policy for National Parks 2005 policy 8.6(i) requires the identification of measures to manage mountain bikes in national parks to minimise adverse effects. The following measures have been identified for all three routes where mountain biking is allowed. Additional management measures which apply to individual tracks have been identified in Sections 4.1.1.5 – 4.1.1.10.

(a) Mountain biking for a trial period

Mountain biking on the selected routes was initially trialed between 2010 and 2013, but no further trial periods are in place.

Mountain biking will be allowed on the selected routes for a trial, which will be assessed when the plan is reviewed in full, or by 31 December 2013, whichever occurs first. This should allow for three full seasons of mountain biking on the Heaphy Track, by which time levels of use should have stabilised and there will be comprehensive monitoring data to assess effects.

Management and monitoring will aim to ensure that potential user conflicts, safety issues, impacts and adverse effects on the Park values and visitor experience can be minimised. Table A details...
more comprehensive information on potential issues and proposed mitigation methods. If monitoring shows that the social, physical or ecological impacts of mountain biking on any of the selected routes are significant and/or unacceptable then the activity may be discontinued at any stage of the trial.

Otherwise mountain biking may continue until the trial has been assessed or this plan has been through a full review process; whichever occurs first. At that time, the Department and the Nelson/ Marlborough Conservation Board will assess the monitoring data and determine whether mountain biking on all or some of the identified routes may be allowed to continue.

(b) Restricted seasons

On higher use tracks, providing a restricted season is an effective tool for managing user conflicts and potential safety issues by identifying specific times of the year when the activity can occur. The Heaphy Track has a restricted season for mountain biking from 1 May to 30 September excluding the Easter holiday weekend. This has been used as a management measure on the Queen Charlotte Track and is working successfully.

(c) Limited group numbers
(No change)

(d) Adherence to a nationally recognised user code of conduct
(No change)

(e) Mountain bike track grading system
(No change)

(f) Concessions and organised events

Concessions for commercially guided mountain bike operations can be considered on the routes identified for mountain bike use. Any concessions that are granted should initially have an expiry date of 31 December 2013. The assessment of whether concessions for mountain biking should be allowed to continue will be carried out when the whole trial is assessed (see Section 4.1.1.4(a) above).

(No other amendments)

(g) Provision of information
(No change)

(h) Monitoring

Monitoring of mountain biking activity and effects occurs as part of national visitor and biodiversity monitoring, with more specific programmes if required.
Monitoring of all management measures will be carried out prior to and during the trial to gather base line physical information, as well as measure visitor satisfaction and experiences throughout the trial period and compliance with bylaws (see Section 4.1.1.1 Monitoring and trial evaluation).

TABLE A: MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND MEASURES FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING (pages 88-89)

Delete all references to a trial or trial period.

“ISSUE”, “User conflict and experience”, delete the following:
A trial period (until the plan is reviewed in full, or by 31 December experience 2013, whichever occurs first) for all three identified routes to assess the effects of mountain biking on each track.

“ISSUE”, “Seasonal access (Heaphy Track)”, amend as follows:
“Access to the Heaphy Track restricted to 1 May April until 30 September November”.

4.1.1.5 Heaphy Track (page 90)

The Heaphy Track (see Map C) is currently a multi day tramping and mountain biking track and is managed as a Great Walk. Use of the Heaphy Track by walkers is highly seasonal. On average approximately over 4500 5000 people walk this track each year with use concentrated over the summer months.

Records of hut and campsite use via the Department’s booking system indicate that 81% about 80% of those who walk the track each year do so between the months of November to April, peaking in January, with 24% of April use occurring over Easter, when it is in April. During the winter months visitor numbers decline sharply.

The majority of the Heaphy Track is a robust, well formed, hard surfaced track maintained to the Great Walk standard. Upgrades of the non-standard sections are scheduled over the next few years being undertaken. At present it is capable of withstanding use by mountain bikes. The Department uses quad bikes small vehicles on parts of the track for efficiency of management.

As the track was built prior to 1900 it is subject to the Historic Places Act 1993 Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014. The West Coast Tai Poutini section of the track is actively managed to protect its historical and cultural heritage. Parts of the track on the West Coast Tai Poutini Conservancy side are less robust and more vulnerable to damage such as rutting and erosion. Upgrades to these sections are planned in the near future. It is important that visitor behaviour is managed so that degradation of historic values does not occur.

For most mountain bikers the track would be is a multi day ride although some day use “in and out” at Karamea and the Aorere Valley ends is anticipated occurs. This includes downhill use from Perry Saddle Hut for day return or overnight trips.
The track is promoted as being suited to riders with advanced skills (Grade 4) and can increase to expert (Grade 5) when factoring in distance, remoteness, and the technical skills riders require in wet and/or cold weather, although track upgrades may bring it more in line with Grade 4.

According to the Mountain Bike New Zealand grading system the track is considered to be Intermediate, Grade 3, with some steep slopes and avoidable obstacles. However this would probably increase to a Grade 4 in wet and/or cold weather when factoring in distance and remoteness. Total ride time is estimated at 10-20 hours depending on experience, fitness and track conditions at the time.

4.1.1.6 Management of mountain biking on the Heaphy Track (page 90)

Mountain biking on the Heaphy Track will be is from 1 May April to 30 September November, excluding Easter. During this time user records indicate there are considerably fewer people walking the track therefore the potential for user conflicts and demand on facilities is reduced.

Given that the track is not a circuit and track users need to arrange transport to and from both ends, the Heaphy Track route will be has dual directional flow, allowing for members of groups to start at either end. This will aids in the transport logistics, allows leaders in a group to go back to find slower members, and it also means that bikers will be are able to cycle part of the track as a day trip or overnight and then return the way they came.

MAP C: Heaphy Track: specified mountain bike route
(No changes to map)

To manage this situation and to assist in visitor safety for all users of the track, bikers will be are expected to adhere to the “Mountain Bikers Code” at all times (see Appendix A). This has proved to be effective for the Poulter mountain bike trial that the Department is carrying out in the Arthur Pass National Park.

Another measure that will assists in visitor safety and to maintains visitor experiences for all recreation users is limiting group numbers to no more than six. A limitation on mountain bike group size will assists in limiting pressure on facilities and reduces the potential to adversely affect the experiences of walkers.

The Powelliphanta land snail, roa (great spotted kiwi) and whio (blue duck) are species which occur within the Heaphy Track Corridor. The former is under serious threat and the protection of their habitat is critical. Whilst the kiwi populations are stable in this area it is still vital that habitat and individuals are protected as much as possible. Being nocturnal, kiwi and Powelliphanta land snail activity occurs from dusk to dawn. Therefore riders should cannot ride the track during the hours of darkness, as set out in the Kahurangi National Park bylaws stipulating that there will be no riding during the hours of darkness.
Bikers will also be required to remain on the track at all times and to respect huts and other track facilities. Guidelines apply for the appropriate use, storage and maintenance of bikes while in and around the huts will be developed and the Kahurangi National Park bylaws will be amended to prohibit bikes from being taken into a hut and onto or under hut steps, verandas or porches. This is to ensure adequate space for other users and to maintain hut and veranda cleanliness. The Department may consider the installation of temporary shelters, at selected huts on the Heaphy Track during the course of the trial, for overnight storage and maintenance of bikes. Mountain bikers should be self reliant and carry a groundsheet or fly if they wish to carry out repairs, maintenance or store their bike under cover.

All promotional material, signage and other media will detail these measures and monitoring will be carried out to ensure compliance. Adherence to these conditions will be key indicators when assessing the overall success of the trial.

The track may be closed to mountain bike use after storms, heavy rain or snow or high tide events which may affect the integrity of the track particularly on the West Coast Tai Poutini Conservancy side. Mountain bike use will be monitored and recorded.

4.1.1.1 Monitoring and trial evaluation (page 98)

Monitoring the social, physical and ecological effects of mountain biking is key to determining whether this activity is acceptable in the Park and whether it should continue beyond the trial period, important for the extended mountain biking season on the Heaphy Track. While it is necessary to monitor all the specified routes it is particularly important for the Heaphy Track given its significance as a Great Walk.

Pre-trial physical monitoring of the tracks will be carried out according to the Department's Standard Operating Procedure for all tracks. Regular and recorded monitoring of tracks will occur during the trial and will be detailed in a monitoring programme.

Hut book analysis and feedback through the Department's website will be used to record visitor experiences and inform social monitoring. There is also the potential for online surveys to will be carried out in the future through the development of the Department's national online booking system for huts and Park facilities. Other mechanisms which will be used to measure the effects of mountain biking on the Park values include:

(i) Compliance with the bylaws,
(ii) Compliance with the “Mountain Bikers Code” (Appendix A),
(iii) Recording of all enforcement incidents and outcomes,
(iv) Keeping a register for departmental staff to record field observations regarding mountain bike activity, and
(v) Recording feedback from all user groups, and
(vi) Monitoring walker and mountain biker interactions.
4.1.12 IMPLEMENTATIONS (pages 101-103)

1. Provide for mountain biking, as a trial, on three routes: the Heaphy Track, the Flora to Barron Flat Track, and the Kill Devil Track (as identified on Maps B, C, D and E).

2. Assess the mountain biking trial, on all three routes, when the plan is reviewed in full, or by 31 December 2013, whichever occurs first.

3. Amend the existing bylaws to allow the use of mountain bikes on the Heaphy Track (as identified on Map C) from 1 May to 30 September, excluding the Easter holiday weekend from Good Friday to Easter Monday, with a maximum of 6 riders per group.

4. to 9. (No change)

10. Amend Retain the existing bylaws to:
(a) prohibit the use of mountain bikes on the Heaphy Track and the Flora to Barron Flat Track during the hours of darkness; and
(b) provide for the temporary closure of the approved mountain biking routes at any time if unfavourable weather, track conditions or other management issues arise; and
(c) prohibit the taking of mountain bikes into a hut and onto or under hut steps, verandas or porches; and
(d) require mountain bikes that are used on the approved mountain biking routes to remain on the formed track.

11. (No change)

12. Applications for concessions for commercial mountain bike operations may be considered on the routes identified for mountain bike use, in accordance with the following:
(a) each trip should be limited to a maximum of five clients and one guide;
(b) all concessions should initially have an expiry date of 31 December 2013;
(c) concessions may have further restrictions placed on them, or be terminated, if monitoring shows that the impacts of mountain biking on any of the approved routes are significant and/or unacceptable.

13. (No change)

14. Carry out baseline monitoring of the identified routes prior to the commencement of the mountain bike trial.
15. Establish and implement a mountain biking monitoring programme to record and report on the following:
(a) Numbers of walking and mountain biking visitors on the Heaphy Track all approved mountain bike routes and their experiences
(b) Absence or presence of mountain bike activity off or beyond the allowed route (i.e. off track)
(c) Impacts on the track surface due to mountain bike activity
(d) Any enforcement incidents and their outcomes
(e) Any damage to or removal of signs
(f) Nature and level of conflict, if any, between walkers and mountain bikers, including feedback from visitors
(g) Impacts on native fauna and flora injury or mortality, and disturbance to habitat due to mountain bike activity
(h) Compliance with the "Mountain Bikers Code" and the bylaws
(i) Damage to historical and cultural heritage features due to mountain bike activity
(j) Use of helicopters on the Kill Devil Track

16. If monitoring shows that the impacts of mountain biking on any of the approved routes are significant and/or unacceptable, then:
(a) further restrictions may be placed on the activity in order to manage these adverse effects; or
(b) the activity may be discontinued at any stage or the trail. Relevant bylaws will be amended accordingly.

17. Mountain biking may continue until such time as an assessment of the trial has been carried out:
(a) when this plan is reviewed in full, or by 31 December 2013, whichever occurs first; and
(b) a decision has been made as to whether to allow mountain biking to continue; and
(c) subject to any necessary controls.