

# Assessing the benefits for conservation of volunteer involvement in conservation activities

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*'They work on slopes of high mountains, deep in the bush valleys of national parks, on lakes and rivers, in offices and out on the wind-blown coastlines. They are big-hearted, modest and find considerable satisfaction in their work. They are conservation volunteers.*

*Together, they contribute in a positive way in helping the Department of Conservation (DOC) protect New Zealand's natural and historical heritage for all to enjoy now and in the future.*

*Conservation volunteers give many thousands of hours each year to undertake a variety of activities, from track maintenance and bird and plant surveys to office duties, such as records management. All of this work is very important to the future of this beautiful country of ours.'*

Department of Conservation (2001a)

# Assessing the benefits for conservation of volunteer involvement in conservation activities

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## ABSTRACT

To assess the benefits of volunteer involvement in conservation activities, a literature review, three focus groups with volunteers, a similar meeting with Department of Conservation staff, and a postal survey were conducted. The report investigates the existing benefits of the Conservation Volunteer Programme for both conservation advocacy and the volunteers, discusses whether this programme is meeting conservation advocacy goals, and then makes recommendations about improving the programme to meet these goals. Most volunteers were unaware of such advocacy goals, and the term 'advocacy' itself was poorly understood. A definition of advocacy is discussed. Several benefits to volunteer involvement in conservation are identified, and some of these are contributing towards meeting advocacy goals. Recommendations include a necessity for greater clarification of key terms and roles, improved communication, and increased volunteer support, evaluation, and training.

Keywords: conservation, activities, volunteers, advocacy, literature search, questionnaire, Conservation Volunteer Programme, Department of Conservation, New Zealand

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this project is to prepare a report that:

- Identifies existing benefits of the Conservation Volunteer Programme for conservation advocacy
- Recommends ways of enhancing advocacy benefits through the Conservation Volunteer Programme

The objective of this report is to address the following key research questions:

- What are the benefits for both conservation and volunteers associated with the Conservation Volunteer Programme?
- Is the Conservation Volunteer Programme meeting its goals relating to conservation advocacy (to increase understanding of and commitment to conservation)?
- How could the Conservation Volunteer Programme be improved to meet these goals?

This research is primarily an assessment of the conservation advocacy goals of the Department of Conservation's (DOC's) Conservation Volunteer Programme (the volunteer programme).

The research will assist in providing greater strategic direction to the volunteer programme. It includes recommendations for enhancing opportunities for volunteers to engage in conservation activities and to increase their understanding of and commitment to conservation. The main users of this report are likely to be DOC staff involved in the volunteer programme and staff involved in other community initiatives.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND AND WHY THIS RESEARCH IS IMPORTANT

*Restoring the Dawn Chorus 2001–2004* states that a key goal for the Department of Conservation is to *engage the community in conservation*. It continues:

'A conservation ethic will be promoted by working collaboratively and encouraging increased participation. Our aim is that all New Zealanders will increasingly treasure our natural and historical heritage and also understand the scale of the task to conserve it.'

Department of Conservation (2001c)

The public of New Zealand have been involved in conservation activities for a long time (for example forest conservation groups were formed in 1870). In early 1988 Project Conservation was established by the Department of Conservation as a conscious attempt to involve the public in conservation activities under a coherent organisational and philosophical framework (James 1990). The Department of Conservation appointed co-ordinators to pilot this new initiative in three districts. The aim was to encourage public involvement in practical conservation work by providing opportunities for individuals to participate in voluntary and trainee schemes. Project Conservation's goals were to:

- Encourage voluntary work
- Support and strengthen links between conservation organisations and the Department
- Provide new opportunities for people to experience and become more aware of the natural environment
- Provide training to foster the recruitment of under-represented groups into the Department

James (1990)

Project Conservation was renamed Conservation Volunteers Programme and this programme now operates throughout most areas in New Zealand. The aim of the volunteer programme is outlined in the Draft Conservation Volunteers QCM Manual 1998:

‘To provide a quality volunteer programme that achieves both advocacy and operational objectives in a way which is rewarding to staff, community and volunteers’

Department of Conservation (1998b)

The five main goals for the Conservation Volunteer Programme outlined in this Manual are to:

- Provide volunteer opportunities so the community can assist in the conservation of New Zealand’s natural and historic resources
- Provide opportunities for people to safely experience the natural and historic environment and its management, and to become more sensitive to conservation values
- Support and strengthen links between tangata whenua, conservation and recreation groups, the community and the Department of Conservation
- Enable conservation tasks that otherwise would not have been done to be completed through the assistance of volunteers
- Enable the Department to benefit from the shared expertise of skilled volunteers

Department of Conservation (1998b)

Since 1998 the Manual has been updated and the 2001 version has a broader focus on a range of community involvements in conservation activities.

‘Community Involvement in Volunteer Activities’ states the following aim:

‘To ensure that active community involvement and volunteer activities achieve both advocacy and operational objectives in a way which is rewarding to staff, community, and volunteers’

and programme goals:

- Communities will be involved more effectively in conserving their heritage
- Communities understand and support the conservation of their natural and cultural heritage
- Individuals, groups and organisations are involved in managing conservation

Department of Conservation (2001b)

DOC’s volunteer programme, therefore, has goals relating to getting work done and advocacy goals (such as raising awareness and promoting conservation). The benefits of the volunteer programme associated with getting work done are tangible and more recognisable than the benefits for raising awareness and promoting conservation. The term *advocacy* is not widely understood, and the benefits from the volunteer programme for conservation (such as increased awareness and understanding and commitment to conservation) are less tangible.

The Department defines advocacy as

‘The act of ‘advocating’ or ‘being a voice for’ conservation. This includes statutory advocacy (i.e. input into planning processes, hearing, tribunals, etc.) and general advocacy (raising public awareness about conservation)’

Department of Conservation (2002)

This definition includes *raising awareness of conservation*, but does not include anything about achieving desired conservation *behaviours and actions* (which is included as the second goal *communities understand and support the conservation of their natural and cultural heritage*). In this report the terms ‘raising awareness’ and ‘promoting conservation’ are used interchangeably to refer to conservation advocacy goals, and this encompasses: enabling public involvement in conservation, raised awareness of conservation, increased understanding of, and commitment to conservation (including pro-conservation behaviours and actions).

There are significant benefits of volunteering in terms of raising awareness and promoting conservation, such as building community support for and awareness of conservation and the work of DOC, and educating people so they can support the conservation of New Zealand’s natural and cultural heritage. Volunteer programmes provide opportunities to educate people and influence them towards the adoption of long-term pro-conservation behaviour. They can positively influence relationships between the Department and the community (Ringer 1996). Community involvement in conservation activities can engender community ownership of conservation projects and increase their chances of long-term sustainability.

The Department has identified a need to assess the benefits to conservation as a result of people’s participation in the volunteer programme in order to make the most of the opportunity to promote natural and cultural (including historical) heritage issues, pro-conservation attitudes and behaviours, and provide opportunities for people to become more sensitive to conservation values. The Conservation with Communities Strategy (currently being prepared by the Department of Conservation) is a key policy document and provides a framework for this research and related work. This strategy outlines the Department’s intention to engage communities in conservation.

### 1.3 OVERVIEW OF APPROACH

To answer the research questions (listed above in Section 1.1) the following approach was adopted (and explained fully in Section 3).

#### ***Literature review***

A review of literature about voluntary involvement in conservation activities (refer to references).

#### ***Focus groups***

Three focus groups were held in the Bay of Plenty with a total of 13 conservation volunteers and one focus group was held with Department of Conservation staff involved with the volunteer programme in the Bay of Plenty.



### ***Postal survey***

A postal survey was prepared, discussed with Department of Conservation staff and volunteers involved in the focus groups, and sent to a total of 362 volunteers in Bay of Plenty, Southland, and Otago.

## **1.4 REPORT OUTLINE**

The structure of the report follows these headings:

- Scope of this research and literature review
- Field research
- Discussion/analysis
- Conclusions and recommendations
- References

## 2. Scope of the research and literature review

### 2.1 A DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING

A key issue identified in the literature on volunteering is how the terms 'volunteer' and 'volunteering' are defined. There is a general lack of agreement in the literature on the definition of these terms, and on whether volunteering refers to only unpaid work done for an organisation and whether particular types of activities are excluded (Wilson 2001).

Much of the research on volunteering adopts the following focused definition of volunteering:

'Activities or work done of a person's free will for the benefit of others (beyond the immediate family) for no payment other than, in some cases, a small honorarium and/or expenses' Gaskin & Davis Smith (1997)

The three key elements of this definition to note are:

- It is done of free will/people want to do it
- It is of benefit to others/the beneficiaries of the voluntary work may or may not be known to the volunteer
- That there is a lack of payment, but out of pocket expenses may be covered

This is consistent with how the Department of Conservation (DOC) has defined a volunteer in its Standard Operating Procedure document:

'For these purposes/ A volunteer is a person who undertakes unpaid work, of their own free will, in support of conservation efforts or services managed by the Department of Conservation.' Department of Conservation (2001b)

### 2.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THE CONSERVATION VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

The DOC volunteers include<sup>1</sup>:

- *Long-term community volunteers* who participate on an ongoing and consistent basis, e.g. approximately eight hours or more each week
- *Special event or short-term project volunteers* and groups who undertake work related to a specific area of interest, e.g. like one day tree planting, or species monitoring
- *Hut wardens*; who are individuals representing the Department in backcountry huts
- '*Friends groups*' that work to support a specific park or project, e.g. protection of kiwi, maintaining a specific track or facility

Department of Conservation (2001b), Bayliss (2000), James (1990)

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<sup>1</sup> This list is not definitive. The volunteer programme includes anyone who does any type of voluntary work for the Department of Conservation except the volunteer fire fighters and Compliance and Law Enforcement volunteers. These specialist volunteers have their own codes of practices and Standard Operating Procedures.

The Department runs other programmes that are not included as part of the Conservation Volunteer Programme, such as the Conservation Corps, Task Force Green, Community Service orders, and secondary school work experience (Department of Conservation 2001b).

James (1990) divided conservation volunteers into two categories:

*Committed volunteers* who had the following characteristics:

- A strong interest in and concern about conservation issues
- Membership of conservation and/or outdoor recreational organisations
- Previous involvement in conservation and/or other voluntary work

*Newcomer volunteers* who had the following characteristics:

- Little or no previous exposure to conservation issues
- Non-membership of outdoor recreational or conservation organisations
- No previous experience of conservation or other voluntary work

DOC has a standard procedure for the management of volunteer programmes (Department of Conservation 2001b). This Standard Operating Procedure formalises processes that are already in place within the Department and provides guidance to ensure national consistency. The aim is to ensure that volunteer programmes are closely linked with the work plans for each conservancy/area office.

Where practicable, the aim outlined in the Standard Operating Procedure is that community involvement in conservation activities includes a range of suitable opportunities. Volunteers are encouraged to indicate their volunteering preferences in terms of activities. Projects should be worthwhile and challenging and there should be opportunities to use existing skills or develop new ones. The intention is that care is taken during recruitment and training to ensure that volunteers are aware of how their input contributes to the total conservation effort (Department of Conservation 2001b).

In general there appears to be more people expressing an interest in becoming a conservation volunteer than there are currently opportunities available. This may change in the future with the Conservation with Communities Strategy which will enable the Department to be more inclusive of community participation and involvement in conservation activities.

Most conservancies/area offices have staff who are Volunteer Co-ordinators, with the following responsibilities to:

- Actively identify community involvement opportunities within the Strategic Business Planning Process
- Discuss and plan proposed projects with other involved staff and volunteers as appropriate
- Identify and resolve potential problems
- Ensure larger consistency within the Department of Conservation Community Involvement Goals
- Co-ordinate with and support the Practitioners Network

Department of Conservation (2001b)

The DOC Volunteer Co-ordinators and other staff currently look for ways in which the community could be involved in conservation activities. This involves consideration of how the community could be involved in assisting to

deliver the Departmental objectives. Proposals for volunteer involvement are then developed with the programme managers concerned, and submitted to the conservator/area manager for approval.

All volunteer activities have a job description, which identifies the skills and time required. A health and safety assessment is completed prior to the volunteer activity occurring. Planning, budgeting, and scheduling of projects is required to ensure that sufficient resources are allocated, including the supervisor's time. The supervisors are either staff or experienced volunteers.

## 2.3 LITERATURE AND PREVIOUS STUDIES

The emphasis in this section will be on the literature which focuses on voluntary involvement in conservation activities, and in particular, volunteering for the Department of Conservation. Previous studies which may provide insights about the benefits of volunteering for conservation projects, and how to evaluate these, have been included. Taylor (1997) comments that volunteers have been widely researched overseas (e.g. in the United Kingdom and United States of America) but not in New Zealand. Taylor's study provides references of some related literature on volunteers from overseas.

This report builds on a related research project conducted by Bayliss (2000) on the barriers to volunteer participation in conservation activities. Bayliss focused on achieving conservation work through volunteer involvement rather than on the benefits of volunteering for conservation in terms of promoting a conservation ethic and values. However, it does mention some of the benefits of volunteering for the Department of Conservation (for both the volunteers and the Department) in terms of conservation. Only very limited research has been carried out on the existing benefits for natural and historical heritage from the volunteer programme and how the Department's conservation advocacy role and training could be enhanced through volunteering.

Previous studies focused specifically on conservation volunteering, which were known about at the time of writing this report, are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. PREVIOUSLY CONDUCTED SURVEYS ABOUT CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERING.

TITLE	AUTHOR	DATE	SCOPE	WHO WAS SURVEYED	METHODOLOGIES
Achieving additional conservation work through volunteer involvement	Merryn Bayliss	2000	Barriers to achieving additional conservation work through volunteer involvement and possible ways of overcoming these barriers	441 volunteers 127 DOC staff	Postal surveys of DOC volunteers and staff
Learning from the bush restorers	Rhys Taylor	1997	What helps/hinders community based (citizen led) management and restoration of native bush ecosystems (volunteers efforts)	Approximately 30 conservation volunteers	Phone survey of spokespeople. Scoping included 5 field visits and 2 focus groups (at ECO conference and Agenda 21 Forum)
Volunteer involvement in practical conservation work	Chris Cosslett	1997	Costs and benefits which influence people's motivation to volunteer for conservation work	8 DOC staff who work with volunteers. 20 volunteer group reps (from rural/urban NZ, N and S Is)	Telephone interviews and postal survey
Building relationships with participants in DOC programmes	Martin Ringer and Margaret O'Brien	1997	How to maximise outcomes for volunteers and effective management of experiential groups in the outdoors	People involved in 5 field projects	Field observation. Based on previous literature review. National workshop for CVCs
Overcoming limitations to volunteer programmes in Bay of Plenty Conservancy	Christopher Jenkins	1992	A study on the factors that limit the future development of the Conservation Volunteer Programme in Bay of Plenty	90 Volunteers 7 Volunteer Co-ordinators All from the Bay of Plenty	Literature review and two postal questionnaires
Conservation Volunteers Southland and Otago 1991–1992	Fergus Sutherland	1992	Developed a photographic documentation of volunteer events and what they achieved. Results published in the newsletter	All Southland volunteers at the time and there was an 80–90% response rate	Postal survey Photographic records Was carried out for 2–3 years
Project Conservation: A sociological evaluation of a community participation and education programme	Bev James	1990	Reports on an evaluation carried out in 1988 of Project Conservation. Programme outcomes, processes, resources and orientation were evaluated	Approx. 44 people involved in Project Conservation 28 DOC staff	In-depth structured interviews. Unstructured interviews. Group discussions. Observation (such as at meetings). Self administered questionnaires. Telephone interviews
Youth Conservation Volunteers	M.A. Ellis	1982	Information needed to develop any future volunteer programme—with a focus on youth involvement	17 Lands and Survey rangers 2 people at Historic Parks 7 Forest Conservators 1 Officer of the Wildlife Service	Postal survey
Volunteers in Parks	R.R. Bellringer	1981	The role of voluntary organisations within New Zealand's parks and reserves system	83 national park honorary rangers	Postal survey

## 2.4 KEY FINDINGS OF PREVIOUS STUDIES

This section focuses on the useful findings of previous studies on volunteering. It is broadly organised to relate to the key research questions and objectives (listed in Section 1). The aim is to provide a discussion of volunteering in terms of: benefits to volunteers; benefits to the Department of Conservation; barriers or disincentives to volunteers that may get in the way of achieving the volunteer programme goals; and overcoming these barriers in order to achieve the volunteer programme goals, and in particular those relating to benefits to conservation.

### 2.4.1 Benefits for volunteers

The reasons people volunteer for the Department or related organisations (such as regional councils) are fairly well cited in the literature (Cosslett 1997; Bayliss 2000; Corydon Consultants 2001). Cosslett and Bayliss found that some of the benefits to volunteers and reasons people volunteer for the Department of Conservation include, but are not restricted to, the following:

- For enjoyment, recreation (the opportunity to spend time in attractive outdoor settings) or personal interest in the environment
- Because of a personal concern for the environment/conservation
- A desire to improve the environment for the future so that future generations can enjoy it
- Improving an amenity that the volunteers do not currently use, but may wish to in the future, or that they would like others to have the opportunity to use
- A chance to learn new skills and increase personal knowledge and awareness
- To assist the Department of Conservation to achieve its objectives
- To contribute to the community they live, work, and play in (to give something back)
- For work experience for career or study/to keep mentally stimulated and physically fit/for a sense of achievement
- To make people aware of conservation issues and to teach others about conservation
- To socialise, meet people with the same interests, to develop a sense of group identity, for companionship
- To improve the link between the Department of Conservation and the community

### 2.4.2 Benefits for the Department of Conservation

As well as individual benefits to volunteers, there are also benefits to DOC from the volunteer programme and involving volunteers in conservation activities. The obvious benefit—usually first-cited by volunteers and staff—is that volunteers are able to get work done that the Department may not be able to complete with current resources. Conservation tasks that otherwise would not have been done can be completed through the assistance of volunteers and the Department can benefit from the shared expertise of skilled volunteers.

When asked the benefits of volunteer involvement in conservation activities, Bayliss (2000) found the majority of staff (84%) thought getting work done was a key benefit of the programme and just over half of the staff (51%) indicated advocacy benefits (including strengthening links with the community and

increasing public awareness). A number of authors have touched on the importance of the benefits of volunteering for conservation education.

‘The major value of the volunteer programme lies in its advocacy benefits; participants learn about conservation and the work of the Department of Conservation. The Department benefits from the improved public relations, publicity, and feedback from individuals’. Sutherland (1992)

The benefits of public involvement in conservation activities are not limited to getting work done, therefore, the advocacy benefits can be significant (Bayliss 2000). These may include:

- Increased public awareness and support of the agency and its work (Ellis 1982)
  - Increased commitment to and ownership of the work (Moore 1999)
  - More constructive relationships with other organisations and the community
- Department of Conservation (1998a)

An evaluation of Project Conservation in 1988, found that the project had important benefits in relation to increasing understanding and commitment to conservation, such as building public support for DOC and encouraging a broad commitment to conservation within the community. At that time some Department staff questioned whether Project Conservation was a successful advocacy strategy. The evaluation indicated that the volunteer programme has the potential to improve public relations and liaison with the community. It was found that to be effective in advocacy, Project Conservation must emphasise conservation education in its activities (James 1990).

### **2.4.3 Barriers and disincentives**

A number of studies have found that there are barriers to volunteers, and to the Department of Conservation, achieving the goals of the volunteer programme.

James (1990) found that there were some communication problems in relation to the volunteer programme, and that bureaucracy within the DOC could impede progress with conservation work. Volunteers often wanted to contribute to management decision-making. Research carried out by Bellringer (1981) emphasised the importance of having good policies and communications, to have a successful volunteer programme.

The volunteer programme in Bay of Plenty was found by Jenkins (1992) to have five limitations:

- Lack of resources for volunteer projects
- The need for more supervisors for volunteer projects
- The need for greater co-ordination and technical support for the programme
- The perceived lack of support for the programme amongst senior staff
- A lack of women in the volunteer programme

Cosslett (1997) identified the following disincentives to conservation volunteers:

- Insufficient sense of achievement
- Having non-interesting, menial or pointless work
- Inadequate interpretation for volunteers of the relevance of the project to conservation
- Unfriendly or unwelcoming treatment by staff

- Poor quality of organisation and management
- Insufficient recognition of volunteer's contributions
- Failure of training or educational opportunities to match participants' expectations
- Personal discomfort about other people working on volunteer programmes
- A lack of fun

Bayliss (2000) found that 70% of DOC staff reported that a drawback of volunteer involvement was the time needed to supervise and organise volunteers.

#### 2.4.4 Overcoming barriers and meeting goals

While a number of studies have identified the limitations of the Conservation Volunteer Programme, the 1992 Jenkins report has identified, developed, and analysed a number of possible solutions for overcoming limitations to the growth of the programme in the Bay of Plenty. The recommendations made by Jenkins (1992) included:

- Ensure existing financial allocation for the volunteer programme is maintained or increased
- Prepare sponsorship proposals for the volunteer programme
- Train selected volunteers to supervise other volunteers
- Continue to distribute regular newsletters to volunteers (on new projects and outcomes of earlier projects)
- Maintain support for the programme from within the Department of Conservation
- Encourage women to become involved by actively seeking their involvement, developing appropriate projects, and being sensitive to women's needs
- Revise the existing project assessment form to provide information on the success of volunteer projects from the volunteers' perspectives
- Continue to provide social opportunities for volunteers to help meet affiliation needs

A report by Corydon Consultants (2001) prepared for the Wellington Regional Council focuses on a set of guidelines and tools to help park rangers involve volunteers in park operations and to help Volunteer Co-ordinators facilitate and support the development of a 'Partnership in Parks' programme. Although that report does not focus on conservation volunteers *per se*, some of its conclusions are similar to those made by Bayliss (2000) regarding what makes a successful volunteer programme, what is important to volunteers and, therefore, some guidelines for staff who lead or supervise volunteers.

- *Opportunities for volunteers should* be enjoyable and interesting for participants, well-organised, include manageable tasks with clearly defined outcomes, involve a reasonable amount of variety and work that is considered desirable, especially work involving wildlife or endangered species, and be work that is considered useful and worthwhile.
- *DOC staff who lead or supervise volunteers should* ensure there is adequate funding, resources and planning, be friendly to the volunteers, express appreciation for the volunteers' contributions, and demonstrate an organised and safe approach to the volunteer experience.

To have successful volunteer programmes there should be a genuine need for the volunteers' involvement in conservation, quality recruitment processes,



good relationships between staff and volunteers, commitment by both parties, good leadership, high quality experiences, appreciation and recognition for effort, and opportunities for feedback (Corydon Consultants 2001).

#### 2.4.5 Achieving benefits for conservation

There is not a lot of research or information available regarding the achievement of conservation advocacy benefits through the DOC volunteer programme. Ringer (1996) carried out a literature review and analysis to identify the factors that promote the development of pro-conservation values and behaviours of volunteers.

‘People support what they believe to be valuable, particularly if they consider it to be threatened or in short supply. People are usually most positive and active in their support if the values that they perceive accrue to themselves.’ McNeely (1995)

Forgie et al. (2001) discusses community-based conservation initiatives as ‘bottom-up’ activities and reports that people who participate in decision-making are more inclined to implement a solution. If participants are provided with information and support they are more likely to determine/contribute to appropriate solutions. Taylor (1997) had similar conclusions and his study (of what helped or hindered volunteers involved in bush restoration) distinguished between volunteer experiences as:

- *Citizen led*—those initiated by volunteers such as interest groups, societies, trusts, and neighbours
- *Citizen involvement*—those initiated from outside organisations, such as the Department of Conservation, councils, and so on

Taylor concluded that those volunteering experiences that were citizen led were more likely to have committed volunteers, promote new voluntary action, and improve the skills of volunteers so that they can contribute to conservation advocacy. More and more people who have not previously labelled themselves as ‘environmentalists’ have become involved. Citizen-involvement approaches (i.e. agency led) transfer less power to participants than citizen-led approaches.

‘Authorities have the potential to empower voluntary action, or disempower and need to understand the reciprocal nature of partnership.’ Taylor (1997)

Bayliss’s recent (2000) study of DOC staff and volunteers found the most common reason which volunteer respondents gave for wanting to volunteer was that they wanted to contribute to conservation (31%). When asked why people want to volunteer for the Department, staff gave a similar response, and a third (33%) thought that volunteers wanted to contribute to conservation. These volunteer motivations point towards opportunities for the volunteer programme to be used as a conservation advocacy tool (because the participants are interested in and committed to conservation).

Most of the literature reviewed by Ringer (1996) stated a need for further research into ways to bring about lasting positive change in participants’ conservation-related behaviour. Moore (1999) provides some useful research and insights in his work on the opportunities for volunteer participation to achieve advocacy goals in the American parks system. Success has come through a coherent philosophy and management structure and volunteer participation in parks is a priority.

‘Engaging volunteers will bring multiple benefits to our mission including greater public ownership of our work, fresh expertise and talent, additional human resources to get the job done, and community advocates for our mission ...

The fundamental ingredient for success is adopting volunteerism as a core management activity – and providing the leadership, philosophy, training, incentives, identity and marketing for its full power to catch hold.’ Moore (1999)

## 2.5 GAPS IN INFORMATION FROM LITERATURE

The literature suggests that Maori may have a different way of viewing and describing voluntary activity. Robinson & Williams (2001) make a distinction between giving (the European concept of volunteering) and sharing (the Maori concept of social obligation). These researchers ask the question:

‘Perhaps one of the requirements of voluntary activity is to help the community govern itself, and does government trust the community to be able to do that?’

The role of Maori in the volunteer programme has not been extensively studied. The literature suggests that there are differences in how Maori, Pacific Peoples, and Pakeha conceptualise and experience volunteering (Wilson 2001; Robinson & Williams 2001). While this issue was not a focus of this research, a number of the Volunteer Co-ordinators and one Kaupapa Atawhai Manager (in the case study area) were asked for advice on how to best include the views of Maori in this research, and future research on Maori involvement in volunteering may usefully complement this research.

The report on facilitating community-based conservation initiatives (Forgie et al. 2001) concluded that any project involving the community in conservation enhancement needs to address at the outset how it is going to increase public awareness and move beyond passive acknowledgement of problems to implementing positive action for conservation. The literature does not include many discussions of how the volunteer programme can lead to pro-conservation behaviour (with the possible exception of Ringer 1996 and Ringer & O’Brien 1997). Their work will be further discussed in Section 4 of this report.

## 2.6 CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM LITERATURE

People generally volunteer for the Department because of an interest in conservation and because they want to make a positive contribution. The benefits for conservation from volunteer involvement (such as increased understanding and commitment to conservation) have been only lightly touched on in previous studies, and no detailed reports on how to measure these benefits have been produced. The studies reviewed in this report provide useful information about conservation volunteering. There is, however, no comprehensive study on: the benefits for conservation advocacy and for the volunteers associated with the Conservation Volunteer Programme; an evaluation of whether the programme is meeting its goals relating to conservation advocacy; and how the volunteer programme could be improved to meet these goals.

# 3. Field research

## 3.1 OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

Field research was based on one primary case-study area in the Bay of Plenty (which involved four focus groups and a postal survey), and two secondary case-study areas in Southland and Otago (where the postal survey was sent to volunteers and there were no focus groups). In addition to the focus groups and the postal survey, the researcher also attended an event organised for International Year of the Volunteer. A meeting was held in mid April 2002 with some key DOC staff working on the volunteer programme and associated community involvement initiatives to ensure that this research would be as useful as possible.

## 3.2 FOCUS GROUPS

There were three small focus-group discussions with groups of present volunteers: one was held in Rotorua and two in Tauranga. They explored, in depth, what benefits the volunteers got out of their involvement, and what benefits for conservation the Department may have received. A total of 13 volunteers were involved in the focus groups and the discussions were held for a maximum of two hours.

Participants were selected with the assistance of the Volunteer Co-ordinators to ensure, where possible, that the focus groups included volunteers involved in a range of volunteering work. All potential participants were called by telephone by the researcher to assess their willingness and availability to participate in the focus groups and then sent an invitation by mail. The aim was to have 3–10 people in each group. A fairly even split of men and women agreed to participate, and the majority of people involved were over 50 years old and Pakeha.

In addition to the three focus groups with volunteers, a focus group discussion was held with the DOC staff involved in the volunteer programme in the Bay of Plenty (including most of the Volunteer Co-ordinators) and a trust involved in conservation volunteering (the Kahoroa Kokako Trust).

The purpose of the focus group discussions was to provide for in-depth discussions of the advocacy benefits of the volunteer programme, and how the programme could be improved to ensure it benefited conservation and met the conservation advocacy goals. A discussion guide (or key questions/points for discussion) was prepared as an indication of the questions to be asked at the focus group discussions (refer to Appendix 1). The volunteers and Department staff were also asked for input and suggestions on a draft postal questionnaire which was prepared prior to the focus groups by the researcher. This enabled more closed questions to be included in the postal survey.

Focus groups are well suited to exploratory research (James 2001b) and the focus groups proved to be an excellent way of exploring some key issues prior to refining and confirming the questions in the postal survey. The discussions

ranged widely and at times were quite lively. Participants were very positive about the experience of being asked to be involved and in some cases seemed reluctant to conclude the discussions. The researcher obtained a greater depth of understanding of the key issues from the focus group discussions. Many of the participants knew each other prior to participating in the focus group discussions, therefore they were comfortable talking together about their experiences as volunteers.

Any differences between the views of volunteers and Department staff, or between people with different demographic characteristics, were noted. Information from the focus groups was analysed into five key areas, and notes from each focus group session were prepared.

- Why do you volunteer for the Department of Conservation and how did you get started?
- Benefits of volunteering for you?
- Benefits of volunteering for conservation and the Department of Conservation?
- Goals of the Conservation Volunteer Programme?
- How could the programme be improved?

These key areas will be explored further in the results summary (Section 3.4).

### 3.3 POSTAL SURVEY

A questionnaire (postal survey) was developed as a pilot survey and sent to 14 volunteers involved in the Bay of Plenty in December 2001. There was a 100% response rate to this pilot survey. The full postal survey was then (January 2002) sent to the additional 348 volunteers on the mailing lists in the Bay of Plenty, Southland, and Otago to ascertain such things as:

- The number of times they have done volunteer work (including for different sectors/organisations) and the nature of the voluntary work
- How long they have been a volunteer for DOC
- Why they volunteer for DOC
- What they perceive as the benefits of volunteering (for themselves)
- What they perceive as the benefits of volunteering for DOC
- Information on their current environmental attitudes/behaviours
- Whether they think their current attitudes/behaviours have developed as a result of undertaking volunteer work for DOC or have been strengthened as a result of undertaking volunteer work for DOC
- Additional information on interests and demographical information

Refer to Appendix 2 for the complete postal survey questionnaire.

The postal survey responses do not necessarily provide a representative sample of volunteer experiences. Advice was sought from the Volunteer Co-ordinators on selecting the volunteers for this postal survey to ensure a range of experiences were represented (e.g. volunteer fire fighters, track maintenance, pest management operations) but in the end the survey was sent to all volunteers on the databases in Bay of Plenty, Southland and Otago. The survey was also sent to some societies and trusts, as it was thought that they may prefer

to answer the postal survey as a group. There were a few group responses to the survey.

Postal surveys are a relatively cost-effective method of obtaining information on complex issues, attitudes and values, from a range of people. Sometimes the response rates for postal surveys can be low and this may lead to biases in the results because the results may not be representative. In this case the response rate was as expected for this type of research (48% overall for the surveys, including the pilot, a total of 174 completed surveys). There were a number of surveys returned to the sender uncompleted because the volunteer no longer lived at the address provided.

The survey and focus groups provide useful information about: people's experiences of volunteering; whether they consider their involvement in the Conservation Volunteer Programme has had any impact on conservation messages they have received and given; and their conservation-related attitudes and behaviours.

### 3.4 RESULTS FROM FIELD RESEARCH

The results from the field research provide valuable information from staff and volunteers on the benefits of the volunteer programme, whether it is meeting its advocacy goals, and how the programme could be improved to meet its advocacy goals.

This section of the report presents a summary of the research results using the following format:

- General characteristics of the volunteers and the nature of their volunteering
- Why people volunteer
- The benefits of volunteering
- The experience of being a volunteer
- The goals of the volunteer programme
- The volunteer programme and advocacy goals
- Improving the volunteer programme to meet advocacy goals

#### 3.4.1 General characteristics of the volunteers and nature of their volunteering

Most of the volunteers involved in this research had been volunteering for 5–10 years (24%) and the next highest group from 6 months to a year (16%). One percent of respondents (16 people) have been volunteering for the DOC for more than 10 years.

The majority of volunteers involved in this research (68%) did ongoing volunteering. The next most significant type of volunteering was special events volunteering, carried out by 18% of respondents. Eleven volunteers who have registered for the volunteer programme, but are not yet volunteering, provided responses to the postal survey.

The nature of the volunteer work carried out by the volunteers involved in this research varied, but the majority of people were involved in: facility development/maintenance and restoration work (e.g. fences, planting).

There was a relatively even gender split—52% of respondents were male and 48% female.

The ages of the volunteer respondents were as expected: 59% were over 50 years and 38% of this group over 60 years old; 8% were younger than 20; 11% were 20–29 years; 10% were 30–39 years; and 12% were 40–49 years.

In terms of ethnicity, 88% of the volunteers were New Zealand Pakeha or responded as 'New Zealanders', 5% were Maori, 1% were Pacific Peoples, and 6% were categorised as 'other'.

New Zealand residents made up 98% of respondents, and 2% were international volunteers.

The highest level of education attained by the respondents was: 5% primary school, 36% secondary school, 13% vocation or trade qualification, 32% tertiary qualification, and 14% post graduate qualification.

The employment status of the greatest number of respondents was retired (34%), closely followed by those in full-time paid employment (29%), 12% were students, 9% were in part time paid work, 5% were unemployed, 4% were homemakers/parents, and 9% ticked 'other'.

Thirty-nine percent of volunteers involved in the research belonged to other environmental/ conservation organisations (in addition to their involvement with DOC), and of that 39%, 79% of them had belonged before becoming a volunteer for DOC.

Of respondents who had volunteered for DOC, 12% were involved in other volunteering (such as for IHC, etc.).

This demographic profile is fairly consistent with other available recent research findings on conservation volunteers in terms of how long people had been volunteers, the nature of their voluntary work, and the gender split (for example see Bayliss 2000). This research indicates a slightly older demographic profile (i.e. a slightly higher percentage of volunteers are over 50 years old than in Bayliss's study) and therefore there were more retired people involved. This may mean that there are some volunteers who have not been captured by this research, i.e. episodic volunteers who may be younger. Bayliss (2000) did not ask ethnicity or nationality, or whether respondents belonged to an environmental organisation and were involved in other volunteering.

Of note is that the gender split was fairly even (52% men and 48% women) which indicates that since Jenkins' (1992) research there are more women involved in the volunteer programme. This may reflect success in terms of Jenkins recommendations to *encourage women to become involved by actively seeking their involvement, developing appropriate projects, and being sensitive to women's needs.*

### 3.4.2 Why people volunteer

The main reasons cited by respondents for volunteering (Fig. 1) were (in order):

- For enjoyment and because of a personal interest in the environment
- Because of a concern for the environment
- To assist the Department of Conservation to achieve its objectives
- For future generations—so that future generations may see and enjoy the environment

These results are consistent with previous studies of people’s motivations and reasons for being involved in conservation volunteering.

*Enjoyment/a personal interest in the environment* was significantly higher than the second reason (58% of respondents in total stated that they volunteer for enjoyment and interest and more than half of these respondents stated this was the most important reason they volunteer).

The second highest reason stated for volunteering was *because of a concern for the environment* (41% of respondents and 67% stated this was the most important reason).

Volunteers who responded that they *volunteer to assist DOC to achieve conservation outcomes* closely followed with 40%. There was a fairly even split in terms of whether the respondents thought this was the most important, second most important, or third most important reason for volunteering.

The fourth ranked reason for volunteering was *so that future generations can see and enjoy the environment/ conservation estate* (31%). Again an even split in terms of whether the respondents thought this was the most important, second most important, or third most important reason for volunteering.

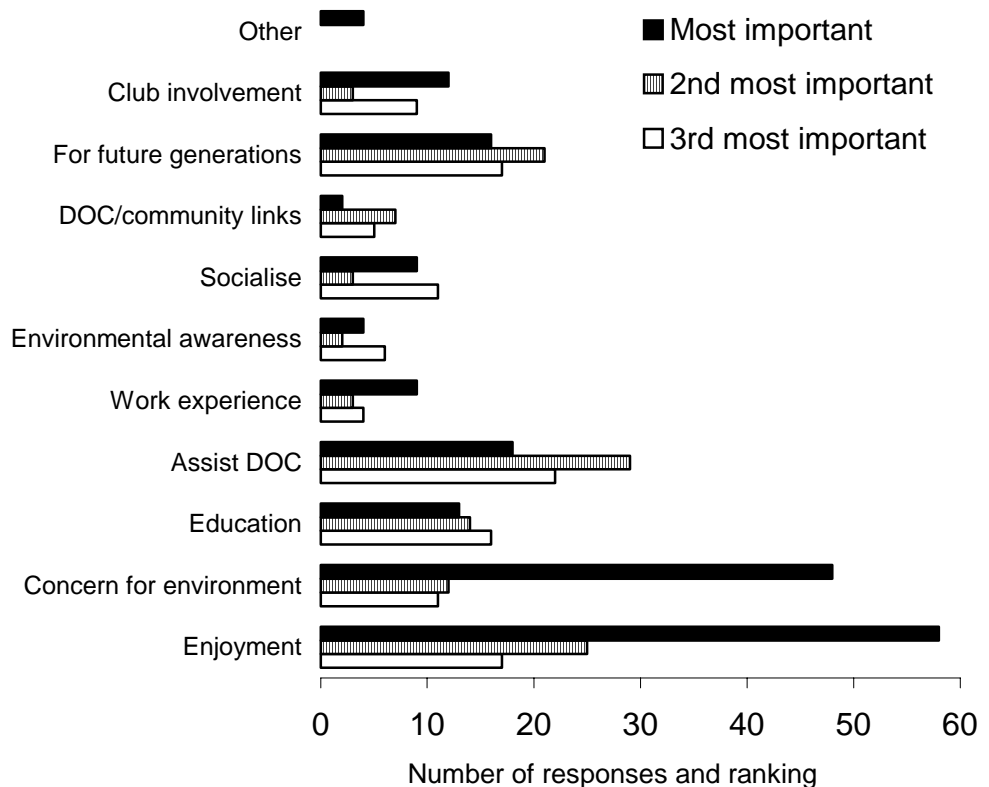


Figure 1. Why people volunteer for DOC.

Other reasons stated for volunteering include:

- To learn and increase personal knowledge and skills
- Socialise and meet people with similar interests
- Because of involvement of a walking club or similar
- To improve the link between DOC and the community
- For work experience and skill development
- To make others aware of environmental issues

### 3.4.3 The benefits of the volunteer programme

Respondents perceived that the most important benefits of the volunteer programme for DOC were (in order of *most* importance):

- To assist with getting DOC work done
- To increase community awareness of conservation
- To gain community support for DOC
- So that communities may take action towards conservation goals

This is illustrated in Fig. 2. The second and fourth bullet points are related to benefits for conservation. More respondents saw the value of the volunteer programme in terms of increasing awareness of conservation, than perceiving benefits in terms of communities taking action towards conservation outcomes. The overall responses to this question were that volunteers who responded saw the benefits from the volunteer programme (in order):

- Because it increased community awareness of conservation—67%
- To gain support for DOC—63%
- To assist the Department get work done—59%
- So that communities could take action towards conservation goals—41%

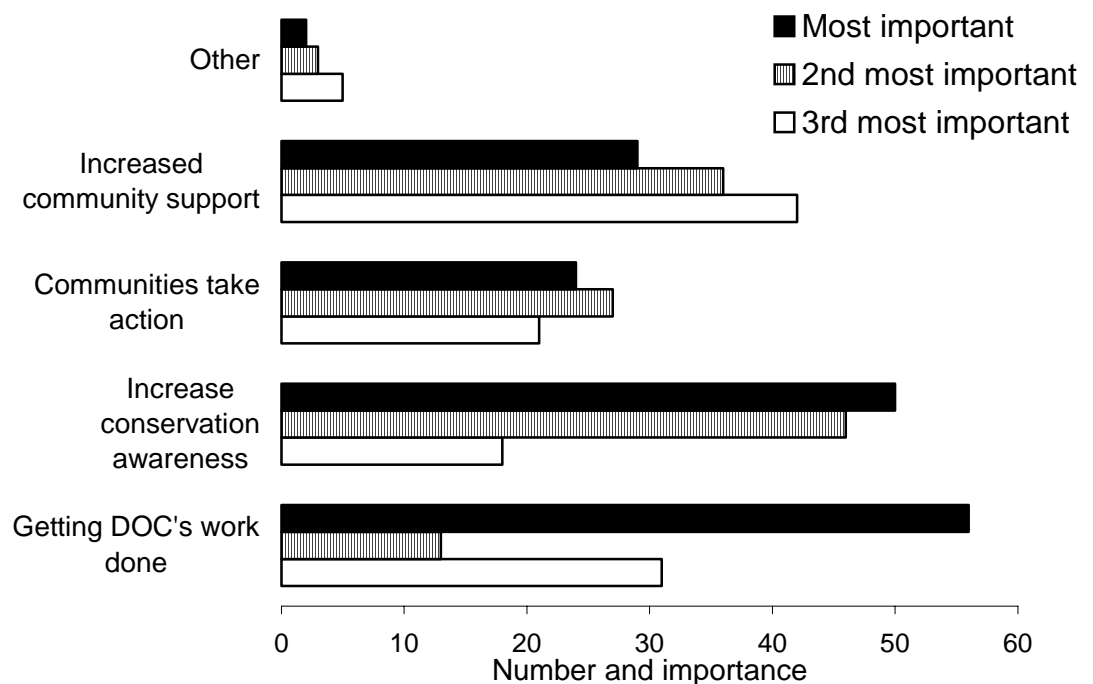


Figure 2. Main perceived benefits of volunteer programmes.



### 3.4.4 The experience of being a volunteer

The majority of respondents either strongly agreed or were inclined to agree that volunteering for DOC is: *enjoyable*; *useful to conservation*; and *satisfying*. (Approximately 82% either strongly agreed or were inclined to agree with the statement that volunteering is enjoyable, 83% think it is useful to conservation, and 80% think it is satisfying.) Considerably fewer volunteers agreed or strongly agreed that volunteering is *educational* and *well organised*: (33% strongly agreed it is educational and 32% strongly agreed it is well organised). This is illustrated in Fig. 3.

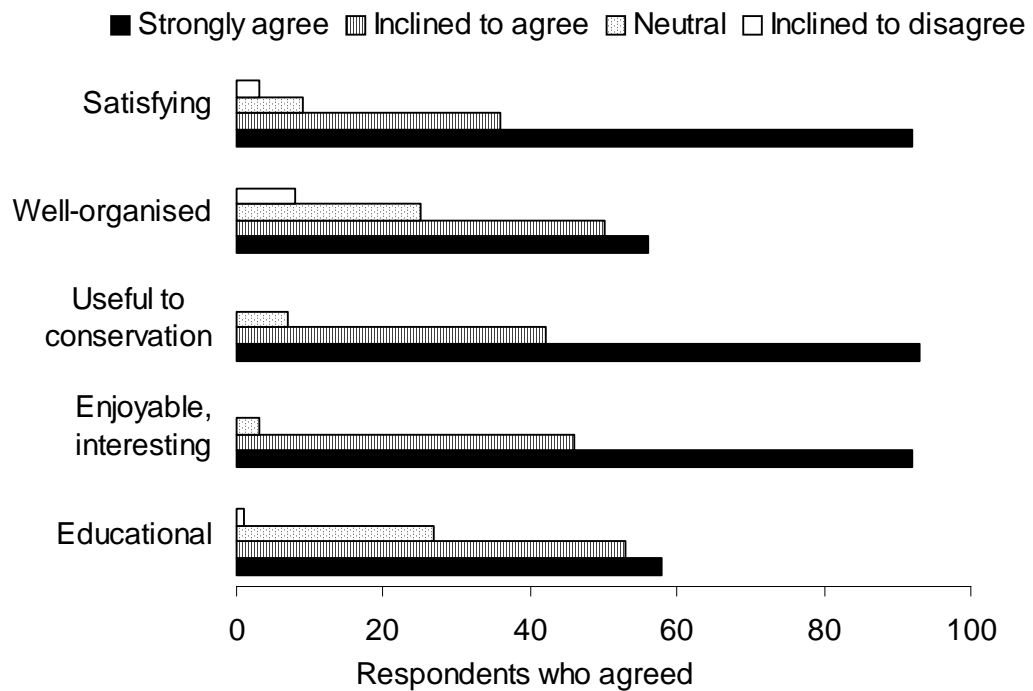


Figure 3. Respondents' opinions on the experience of being a volunteer.

It is challenging to determine exactly what these results mean in terms of whether volunteers experience the volunteer programme as educational or not, because it may be that volunteers are already well educated about conservation and therefore do not learn a lot more from the experience. It may also be that the goals of the volunteer programme relating to raising awareness and promoting conservation may not be emphasised as part of the volunteer programme.

### 3.4.5 The goals of the volunteer programme

In the focus groups the volunteers and DOC staff were asked if they were familiar with and knew what the goals of the Conservation Volunteer Programme were. The volunteers were unclear about the goals of the volunteer programme, especially as they related to conservation advocacy.

'I do not know what the goals are even though I've volunteered for years, as the goals are not spelt out to volunteers and discussed with volunteers: we're given a job and we do it.'

When volunteers provided an answer it tended to relate to the *getting-work-done* goals of the programme. Other common responses provided on their understanding of the goals were that they were: *to keep tracks open to the public*, and *ongoing protection of birds and dunes*.

Other volunteers thought the goals of the volunteer programme were to:

'Involve the public in the conservation effort.'

'Educate people about the environment and spread the word from there.'

In contrast DOC staff were clear that there were goals of the volunteer programme relating to *getting work done* and *conservation advocacy*. A comment was made that beyond that broad understanding, the goals and objectives of the volunteer programme were not clear or easy to communicate to volunteers. They were also difficult to measure in terms of their effectiveness.

'Is it about increasing the number of volunteers or, about having quality experiences with fewer people? It is hard to measure whether advocacy is successful, and we all seem to have a slightly different understanding of what it means.'

#### **3.4.6 Has volunteering increased understanding and commitment to conservation?**

Most respondents think that volunteering and the DOC volunteer programme raises awareness of conservation and has benefits for conservation and promotes conservation awareness, understanding and pro-conservation values. All volunteers reported that they had learnt something about conservation from their involvement in the volunteer programme. Many volunteers commented that they would like to learn more. Volunteers responded to a question on how the volunteer programme had raised awareness of conservation for them or how it could raise awareness. Comments included:

'Though word of mouth, that's the best way to promote conservation messages, through the Volunteer Co-ordinator and volunteers talking and discussing different issues and how to solve them. An awareness of conservation naturally rubs off from volunteering.'

'Being involved and seeing the results and what needs to be done makes people feel more responsible.'

'Need more marketing and publicity in order to promote conservation through volunteers and need to target a wider group of people and ages, like children and schools.'

'Acknowledge volunteers more and they will promote conservation for you through their enthusiasm.'

'Allocate more resources to the volunteer programme and have more variety of experiences available to volunteers so that they learn more about different aspects of conservation.'

Ninety percent of respondents thought that the volunteer programme improves the relationship between DOC and the community (9% do not agree, and 1% was unsure). This is because people in the community are given opportunities

to be involved in conservation activities (something that the majority of volunteers wanted more of).

The majority of respondents learn about conservation through their volunteering experiences. Figure 4 illustrates how volunteering has raised respondents' awareness of conservation, i.e. they have learnt about: the Department of Conservation, New Zealand's flora and fauna, restoration, pest control measures, and ecosystems management. The lowest level of self-reported learning was in relation to historical and archaeological management. This may reflect a lower priority given to this area by the DOC as a whole.

Discussions with volunteers in the focus groups and the results from the surveys indicate that it is important that volunteer participants feel they have accomplished something worthwhile and contributed to achieving conservation goals. Volunteers said they want to learn why they are doing the tasks they are allocated as part of their volunteer programme experiences and how it fits into a broader conservation effort. This would suggest that conservation/environmental education is an important component of a successful conservation volunteer programme, and that if education is present then conservation advocacy goals will be met. Being involved in volunteering can build an active constituency of community advocates for conservation. This research found that awareness of conservation issues is certainly raised with volunteers and that their involvement in the volunteer programme has definitely increased their support for the work of the Department. Whether this extends to the volunteers having more pro-conservation attitudes and behaviours and a greater commitment to conservation is harder to ascertain.

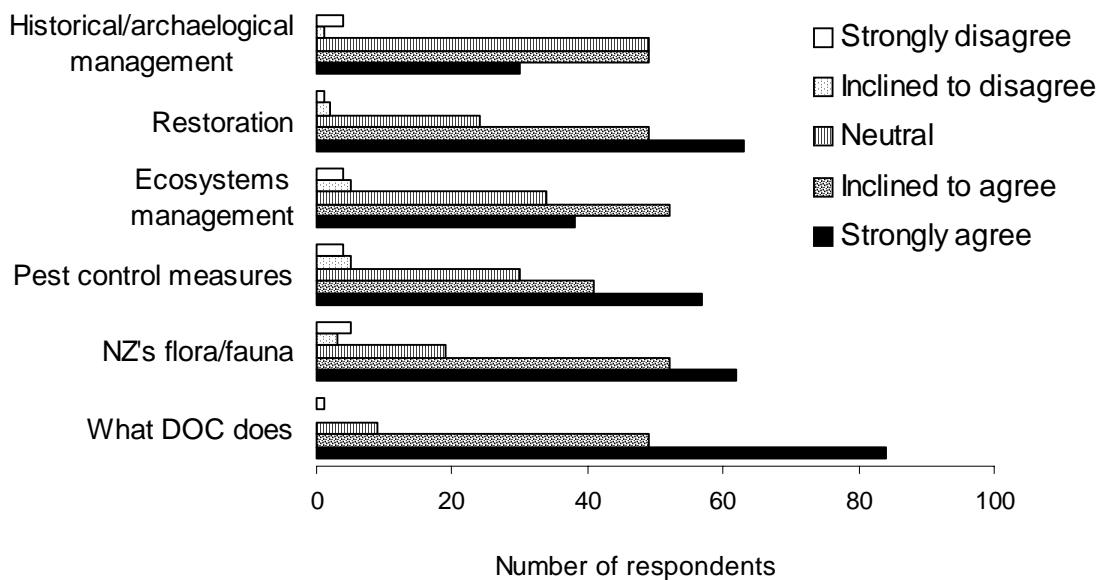


Figure 4. Has volunteering raised your awareness of conservation?

### **3.4.7 The volunteer programme and advocacy goals**

Survey respondents were asked how they thought DOC could raise awareness of conservation and achieve benefits for conservation through the volunteer programme. The points below were the most common suggestions:

- Promote conservation through word of mouth
- Encourage more volunteers to become involved in the conservation effort
- Do more marketing and publicity of the positive things that have been achieved for conservation from the volunteer programme
- Acknowledge volunteers more and they will be enthusiastic and spread the word from there
- Allocate more resources to the volunteer programme
- Have more variety in the volunteering experiences to keep the experience fun and a good learning environment
- Target younger people and schools, and have more volunteer events suitable for the whole family as this way it will be easier to get people involved

### **3.4.8 Improving the volunteer programme to meet goals for conservation**

Volunteers and DOC staff were asked how the volunteer programme could be improved to meet its goals. The points below were the most common suggestions:

- Need positive/enthusiastic communication with volunteers
- Acknowledge volunteers, thank them, have BBQs at the end of the year, and care for people
- Increase management support for the volunteer programme as it needs a higher priority and more resources to be truly beneficial to conservation
- Offer variety, plan and organise better, keep the database up to date
- Do more publicity and marketing of positive volunteer events and contributions
- Involve more people and groups, especially young people and schools
- Have more education and training for volunteers and staff involved in the programme
- Reduce paperwork and don't be so obsessed with OSH requirements
- Keep costs for volunteers as low as possible
- Start listening to the community as they have good ideas and skills to make things work

## **3.5 DOC STAFF VIEWS AND IDEAS**

In the early stages of this research DOC staff were concerned that some of the volunteers thought that the volunteer programme would be stopped because of lack of resources, and that this was an important perception to manage as this research progressed. Staff confirmed that the programme does take a lot of time and energy and that there is rarely enough time allocated to do a good job with the volunteers because the volunteer programme competes with a number of other work demands. Lack of support for Volunteer Co-ordinators was identified as an issue, as well as lack of training and support, especially in

relation to social understanding and skills, group management, advocacy, and education.

Another issue identified was that there were mixed attitudes and levels of management support for the volunteer programme: *Volunteer involvement in conservation activities is not always valued*. Lack of *genuine* management support was a concern: *The managers think it's a good idea to involve volunteers but when it comes to the details it is not really as supported*. One Volunteer Co-ordinator mentioned that she had to cancel a regular volunteer event at the last moment because another staff member needed a vehicle and took priority.

Some confusion was expressed at how the volunteer programme fits within the broader range of different community involvement projects currently being funded by the DOC. Co-ordination and integration is needed.

Staff believed reasonably good conservation awareness was being achieved through the volunteer programme, but the conservation advocacy and education aspect could be enhanced and better promoted. A comment was made that it is important for DOC staff to reflect on why the voluntary work is being done, as well as actually doing the work, and to communicate this to volunteers.

Staff were unsure how to measure the advocacy benefits of volunteering, but view this as a core part of the Department's work.

## 4. Discussion and analysis

Analysis of the focus group discussions, postal survey, and staff meetings, provides useful information and ideas for recommendations on how the Conservation Volunteer Programme could be better used to promote appropriate conservation messages, attitudes, and behaviours in the community. This section of the report provides a brief discussion and analysis of the research findings. The format corresponds to the three key research questions (Section 1.1).

### 4.1 BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME

The main benefits of the volunteer programme are to:

- Assist with getting DOC work done
- Gain community support for DOC
- Increase community awareness of conservation
- Enable communities to take action towards conservation goals

It is suggested that, to fully realise the benefits of the volunteer programme and achieve the goals, it is not helpful to make the distinction between *getting work done* and *conservation advocacy goals*. These are not necessarily two distinct things. Actually *getting work done* and having the volunteers informally talking about what they are doing could (in itself) be a form of conservation advocacy. Volunteers experience conservation in action through their volunteering, and learn from it.

Volunteers bring multiple benefits to conservation goals. Tasks which may not otherwise be achieved are completed with the assistance of volunteers. Volunteers may have skills and expertise that adds value to those of the Department staff involved in the volunteer programme. There is greater community and public ownership of conservation efforts. Having volunteers involved can raise awareness of conservation issues and promote pro-conservation behaviour. There can be increased community and public support for DOC, and an improved relationship between the community and the Department as a result. Increased commitment to and ownership of the conservation work occurs, and there is often a higher sensitivity by volunteers to conservation values. All of these benefits associated with the volunteer programme combine to create a community of advocates for conservation.

### 4.2 IS THE PROGRAMME ACHIEVING CONSERVATION ADVOCACY GOALS?

There are many opportunities to achieve conservation advocacy goals through greater involvement of volunteers in conservation activities. There are also barriers to achieving goals.

Ninety percent of volunteer respondents thought that the volunteer programme improves relationships between DOC and the community, and most volunteer respondents thought that the volunteer programme raises awareness of conservation and has benefits for conservation. In contrast, Bayliss (2000) found that 51% of DOC staff thought that involvement in the volunteer programme helped achieve conservation advocacy in some way, including strengthening links with the community and raising public awareness of conservation issues. This would suggest that staff have less confidence that the volunteer programme adds value to the conservation effort in New Zealand than the volunteers. In this research, there was a mixed response from DOC staff in terms of whether they value the contributions volunteers make, and whether they want to help volunteers to contribute to conservation outcomes. There is a perception that volunteers add limited value to conservation compared to some of the newer initiatives, recently funded, like community partnerships. One staff member not involved in the volunteer programme commented that *the volunteer programme adds 20% value and community partnerships add 90% value*. This sums up some staff attitudes towards the programme.

Achieving conservation goals relies on community support. Volunteers are community members who have an interest in conservation. They are committed to being involved in achieving conservation goals. If some Department staff question the value that volunteers add, then this may be reflected in their attitudes and behaviours towards volunteers. Volunteers involved in this research indicated that not all DOC staff value their contribution to conservation. This limits what they are able to achieve in terms of conservation goals. It would appear that this relates particularly to advocacy.

The goal to raise conservation awareness can definitely be achieved through the volunteer programme. However, with its current levels of resourcing, the volunteer programme appears less successful at promoting pro-conservation values and behaviours. This is because, to some extent, staff appear to be preaching to the converted (the volunteers, who tend to be Pakeha, over 50 years, and already interested and committed to conservation). Advocacy goals and outcomes are harder to measure than work output. One of the challenges of assessing whether advocacy goals have been achieved is that advocacy is difficult to measure.

Volunteers learn about conservation issues from their volunteering, but this does not always appear to translate into pro-conservation behaviour. James conducted research on the *conservation expectations of Aucklanders* (James 2001b) and found there was a need for more conservation education, increased consultation and communication, and more community involvement in conservation activities. James (2001b) concluded: *there is a potentially untapped interest in volunteer and hands-on conservation work*.

To run successful volunteer programmes and meet the goals relating to conservation, this researcher concludes there should be:

- Clear goals that are explicitly communicated to all DOC staff and volunteers
- Quality recruitment processes (for volunteers and Volunteer Coordinators)
- Good relationships between staff and volunteers
- Commitment by both parties

- Good leadership and organisation of volunteer events from the Department
- High quality experiences (i.e. manageable tasks with clear outcomes, the opportunity to work on useful and worthwhile projects, variety, fun)
- Appreciation and recognition of effort
- Opportunities for feedback and reflection on why the voluntary work is being conducted and how it contributes to conservation outcomes

Staff who lead or supervise volunteers should ensure: there is adequate funding, resources, and planning; be friendly to the volunteers; express appreciation for the volunteers' contributions; and demonstrate an organised and safe approach to the volunteer experience. They should expect a level of support for their work from management, and clarity of how the volunteer programme and its outcomes fit with the broader community-involvement initiatives. Lack of co-ordination and organisational efforts on the volunteer programme has led to frustration, duplication of effort, missed opportunities, and staff turnover.

### 4.3 HOW COULD THE VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME BE IMPROVED TO MEET GOALS?

There were many suggestions made by volunteers and DOC staff on how the volunteer programme could be improved to meet its conservation goals. These suggestions and those of the researcher are discussed here:

#### 4.3.1 Clarify the framework within which the programme fits

Since the Department's additional funding for greater community involvement in conservation activities in 2000 to 2001 there has been some confusion about how the volunteer programme fits within the community involvement initiatives. It is important for the future success of the volunteer programme that staff and volunteers are clear about how volunteers contribute to the broader conservation effort. It appears that the Conservation with Communities Strategy provides the overriding framework for this work. Key issues to consider include: how are 'volunteers' different from 'conservation with communities' and 'community participation' and how do they fit with 'conservation awareness' initiatives? Some clarity of the framework and consistency of language used would be useful.

#### 4.3.2 Commit to greater support and a higher profile

Greater Departmental support and increased resources (staff time and money for support services such as administrative assistance, newsletters, promotion and marketing of the programme, and staff and volunteer training) are needed for the volunteer programme to be truly successful. The Department may need to recommit to the vision of how volunteers may contribute to promoting conservation. To be successful in achieving its goals the volunteer programme requires a higher profile and greater support. This involves a philosophical shift in terms of how managers and staff value the contribution volunteers can make to conservation and how it is profiled.



#### **4.3.3 Improve the organisation of the volunteer programme**

Many volunteers disagreed with the statement that the volunteer programme is well organised. They commented that they would like more advanced warning of volunteer opportunities, better communication about upcoming events, and information on how they link with the Department's overall conservation efforts. Volunteers identified the organisation of the volunteer programme as a barrier to achieving conservation goals.

There is a lack of easily accessible and detailed information about the volunteers and how they contribute to the conservation effort at the national level (i.e. no database of volunteers or good practice examples of volunteer experiences and training). The programme currently appears to operate in a fairly low key and ad hoc way. The existing volunteer databases seem to be out of date so some volunteers are not receiving any information about local events and activities. The administration of the volunteer programme could possibly be contracted out or a conservation trust or volunteer leaders could fulfil this role. The time and energy it takes to make the programme happen is using valuable resources. See, for example the New Zealand Trust for Conservation Volunteers website at [www.conservationvolunteers.org.nz](http://www.conservationvolunteers.org.nz) for some examples of some of the trusts currently operating such as the Project Crimson initiative which is funded by Carter Holt Harvey.

#### **4.3.4 Share good practice ideas and tools**

To be affective, the Standard Operating Procedure (Department of Conservation 2001b) needs to be widely used and accepted by DOC staff as a starting point to sharing good practice tools, approaches, and ideas. This operating procedure is comprehensive, but practice on the ground does not necessarily reflect this document. A more co-ordinated approach and sharing of good practice would go a long way to improving the organisation of the volunteer programme and enable the advocacy goals to be achieved.

Some excellent initiatives have been undertaken within New Zealand, but it appears that this good practice has not been widely distributed for use throughout DOC. There are examples of highly successful conservation volunteering programmes (such as the Golden Gate San Francisco approach, see Moore 1999). These could be assessed and simple good practice guidelines prepared and shared with Volunteer Co-ordinators.

#### **4.3.5 Value effective communication and people skills**

The communication and people skills of DOC staff that have contact with volunteers (broader than just the Volunteer Co-ordinators) are vital to the volunteer programme's success. There was also a perception by some staff involved in this research that these skills may be undervalued.

#### **4.3.6 Clarify and communicate the conservation goals**

The literature on volunteering states that it is important to be clear about why volunteers are involved. Clear communication of the goals of the volunteer programme and explaining how it contributes to broader conservation efforts is important, and does not always occur. Many Department staff and volunteers

are unclear of the goals of the volunteer programme and are not aware of how it contributes to conservation. The term *advocacy* is not widely understood, so it may be helpful to use plainer language. Talk about the goals as the contribution volunteers can make to increasing understanding of and commitment to conservation.

A question was asked: Do volunteers need to know the goals, or is it sufficient to work towards their achievement in a more low key way? The researcher's view is that people are more likely to achieve stated goals if they are part of the process of establishing what the key issues are and how they can be met. For advocacy goals to be achieved, they need to be clear to those involved in the programme, and there would need to be a conservation education component to the programme. Volunteers reported that they learn through doing conservation work, that this raises their awareness of conservation, and in many cases has changed their attitudes to DOC and conservation generally.

#### **4.3.7 Promote and market to a broader range of people**

Most volunteers suggested promoting and marketing as a way of improving the volunteer programme so it meets its conservation goals. Many suggested ways in which the programme would be improved, such as involving a broader range of people (through schools, iwi structures, community groups, trusts, and societies) and having more of an emphasis on family involvement in volunteering as current opportunities are limited. The majority of volunteers are over 50 years old and expressed concern that some of their hard work over many years may be wasted and people will not learn unless the 'unconverted' and younger people are targeted as potential conservation advocates. Young people seem willing. One survey respondent (aged 20–29) said:

'My friend and I joined when we were both teenagers. Volunteering gave us direction and something to believe in. I would love other teenagers and young people to experience it.'

At present the programme focuses on existing volunteers, the majority of whom are already committed to conservation and over 50 years old, and on the practical work that is achieved. In the case study areas it only involves a limited number of the community, and people such as young people, families, Maori, schools, and service groups tend not to be involved. There could be intergenerational benefits of involving a broader range of people throughout New Zealand in conservation activities. The volunteer programme is one of the means of involving the community in conservation and achieving conservation awareness, understanding and commitment for conservation. If the programme was refocused on the 'unconverted' there would be huge opportunities to influence a broader range of people, provide them with opportunities for involvement in conservation, raise their awareness and understanding of conservation issues, and work towards a higher community commitment to conservation.

The principles of environmental education point to how advocacy goals may be achieved. Environmental education is described as education *in, about, and for* the environment. Translated into a conservation context this means people need to have opportunities to be involved in conservation activities (first hand experiences), they need to learn about conservation and ecosystem management, and be motivated towards a commitment to conservation (values as well as facts) and

showing pro-conservation behaviours. Education is more than information provision. For it to be effective it needs to integrate local knowledge, be action oriented, and build on local ways of learning. In this sense it is a partnership between the volunteers (as members of the community) and the Department.

DOC staff can influence pro-conservation behaviour by providing experiential learning opportunities for volunteers, and showing leadership as people committed to conservation. Active participation in practical conservation activities is an ideal opportunity to develop pro-conservation values and behaviours in the community because people can learn more about the environment and conservation in a non-threatening and pleasurable way. They can find out how to do things that will make a difference environmentally, and may connect spiritually with the environment in which the conservation activities take place. This can leave a lasting impression, and a commitment to conservation.

#### **4.3.8 Allow time to reflect, discuss benefits, and have feedback**

For DOC staff and some volunteers there appears to be little allowance for 'time out' or time to discuss and reflect on the experience of volunteering and how it contributes to the conservation advocacy effort and objectives. Environmental responsibility can be promoted by creating opportunities for involvement and learning (Rush & Trezis 2002). This may include assessing what the issues are, confirming the problems, and working together towards a solution. Learning does not always happen. The group may be too busy doing the voluntary work and not taking stock and reflecting on the experience. *It is important to discuss with volunteers the expectations for the volunteer event, why this particular work is being done, and how it contributes to the conservation effort and goals.*

#### **4.3.9 Build community support through education**

According to Ringer (1996)<sup>2</sup>, an important means of building community support for conservation is through education. Collaborative approaches that involve information sharing and training are important. Increasing people's awareness of conservation issues may increase their personal commitment to conservation. Many volunteers did not view their volunteering experiences as very educational. Ringer concluded that bringing about changes in participants' pro-conservation behaviours, values, and beliefs required a multi-focus approach. Components of this approach that may be useful for the volunteer programme include developing:

- In-depth knowledge of environmental issues and action strategies, with a consequent ability to make judgements about the severity of environmental problems
- A belief in the person's own ability to make a difference, sometimes achieved through taking part in a successful environmental protection or enhancement programme

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<sup>2</sup> In 1996 Martin Ringer and Margaret O'Brien spent time in the field observing staff working with volunteers and visitors to the conservation estate and ran a workshop for conservation volunteer coordinators. They provide information for staff who want to build on their relationships with volunteers and influence pro-conservation behaviours through experiential learning.

- Knowledge of practical means of enhancing the environment
- A belief that acting to enhance the environment will be beneficial to the individual
- Intrinsic motivation to enhance the environment
- Intuitive sensitivity to the environment, often through personal experience and appreciation of pristine environments or exposure to degraded environments
- A sense of ownership, of personal investment in, and affiliation with the land through geographic location or an intense spiritual experience with the land
- Language that enables participants and leaders to talk about the importance to themselves of conservation
- Emotional arousal about the state of the environment
- An intention to act

#### **4.3.10 Train Volunteer Co-ordinators and volunteers**

Many staff and volunteers commented that Volunteer Co-ordinators need more support and training, especially in leadership, people management, and communications and advocacy/conservation education. Volunteer Co-ordinators training could also include what motivates volunteers and why they volunteer, and therefore identify how the programme could be improved to satisfy volunteers' reasons for being involved.

#### **4.3.11 Monitor, evaluate, and review the programme**

Regularly monitor, evaluate, and review the volunteer programme to ensure it is achieving its conservation goals. James (2001a) highlights that there is no widely accepted set of indicators or measures specifically for monitoring effectiveness of conservation advocacy. How will the Department know if their advocacy is working? The evaluation literature suggests that it is important to evaluate three things: effectiveness of process, effectiveness of outcomes, and implementation of programme goals (for example, see the guidance note on monitoring of policy effectiveness on [www.qualityplanning.org.nz](http://www.qualityplanning.org.nz)). Initial ideas on aspects of the programme that could be measured include: is there a genuine need for the volunteers' involvement in conservation, quality recruitment processes, good relationships between staff and volunteers, commitment by both parties, good leadership, high quality experiences, appreciation and recognition for effort, and opportunities for feedback? These could be developed into a simple checklist and focus groups of selected volunteers and staff could be held every two years to assess progress towards these measures of success.

If the broad goal of advocacy is to change attitudes and behaviours then three things should be present: public awareness is increased; public involvement is increased; desired conservation behaviours are achieved. As part of this monitoring and evaluation any good practice developed around the country to help achieve these goals could be disseminated and implemented.

#### **4.3.12 Ensure a fun experience, and acknowledge contributions**

Volunteers are often unsung heroes, but the lifeblood of many communities in New Zealand. The experience of volunteering and leading volunteers should be fun for all involved, and it is important to acknowledge and value the

contribution of volunteers. Volunteers want to feel needed, useful, part of the team, and welcome.

In relation to consultation, Ritchie (2001) states that the Department of Conservation is *shifting from just educating and informing people to involving them increasingly in defining the issues, the problems and the solutions*. This sort of shift would be beneficial to the management of the volunteer programme. A staff member made the comment that *a mediocre idea will go a long way with enthusiasm, compared with a great idea with no enthusiasm*. Volunteers have enthusiasm, want to make a difference to New Zealand's conservation effort, and are seeking opportunities for a greater involvement in conservation activities.

These suggestions of how to improve the Conservation Volunteer Programme and achieve advocacy benefits suggest the need for organisational / cultural change in order for the programme to be truly successful. For the Conservation Volunteer Programme to meet its goals of raising awareness of conservation and creating opportunities for pro-conservation behaviour, the programme needs to be valued as one means of partnership with local communities. It would provide more opportunities for community involvement in conservation management, be better planned and managed and supported across the whole organisation and include a conservation education component.

Previous surveys show that almost three quarters of New Zealander's have either neutral or favourable attitudes towards the environment but that these do not always translate into positive environmental/conservation action (Enviro Solutions 2001a, b). Being involved as a conservation volunteer provides people with an opportunity for involvement in conservation activities and is a well established way of getting tasks done. The act of being involved in practical conservation work can have benefits for conservation beyond work output—such as raised awareness and more pro-conservation behaviours. There can be a snow-balling effect as volunteers talk enthusiastically of their experiences to their families and friends and encourage them to get involved and add value to the work of DOC. For the advocacy benefits to be achieved there need to be learning opportunities as part of the volunteer experience and support, resources and leadership from the Department.

Any project involving the community in conservation needs to address how it will raise awareness and move beyond passive acknowledgement that there are problems to implementing positive action with the community (Forgie et al. 2001) such as the volunteers who are representatives of that community.

# 5. Conclusions and recommendations

## 5.1 CONCLUSIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of this research was to identify the existing benefits for conservation of the Conservation Volunteer Programme, and make recommendations for enhancing these opportunities through the volunteer programme. The research addressed three key questions:

- What are the benefits for conservation advocacy and volunteers associated with the Conservation Volunteer Programme?
- Is the Conservation Volunteer Programme meeting its goals relating to conservation advocacy (increasing understanding of and commitment to conservation)?
- How could the Conservation Volunteer Programme be improved to meet these goals?

### 5.1.1 Benefits for conservation of the volunteer programme

The benefits of involving communities in conservation are now well recognised (see for example Ritchie 2002; James 2001b). There are now strong policy commitments to work with communities (Forgie et al. 2001). Some stress the need for an organisational shift and change in focus to occur in order to provide greater opportunities for community involvement in conservation. Ritchie (2002) reported that in order to be involved in conservation, local communities need encouragement/inspiration, contacts/networks, skills and knowledge, opportunities for involvement, sufficient resources for tasks, two way communication, successes, and acknowledgement.

This research found that the main benefits of the volunteer programme are to:

- Assist with getting Department of Conservation work done
- Gain community support for the Department of Conservation
- Increase community awareness of conservation
- Enable communities to take action towards conservation goals

The volunteer programme fosters increased understanding of and ownership of conservation through volunteers' involvement, and there is often sensitivity by volunteers to conservation values and a commitment to conservation. A number of volunteers mentioned that they wanted to contribute so their children and children's children could enjoy the environment in the future.

Volunteers think that the volunteer programme improves the relationship between the community and DOC. There is increased public awareness of the Department's work and support for this. The relationships developed between volunteers and Volunteer Co-ordinators and other staff involved in the volunteer experiences can be built on for other projects and initiatives.

### **5.1.2 Is the Conservation Volunteer Programme meeting its conservation goals?**

There are many opportunities to achieve conservation goals through greater involvement of the public and volunteers in conservation activities, but there are barriers to raising awareness and promoting conservation. The relatively ad hoc approach, low-key organisation, and limited resources for the volunteer programme have hindered achievement of some of its advocacy goals. Volunteer Co-ordinators are stretched, and some commented that the programme had a low priority within the Department and is perceived to take a lot of resources.

The question of whether the programme is meeting its advocacy goals is a challenging one to answer because these goals are not entirely clear to the participants in the programme (volunteers and staff). The programme certainly provides opportunities for the public to be involved in conservation activities and raises awareness and understanding of conservation. The conservation values people develop from being a volunteer have lasting effects and is spread by word of mouth to families and friends. So in this sense the volunteer programme is achieving advocacy goals well.

As a tool to gain greater commitment of the community to conservation, the programme is not necessarily as effective, because the people who volunteer already have an interest in and commitment to conservation when they start. So the programme does meet advocacy goals as defined by the DOCTory (to be a voice for conservation and raise awareness about conservation), but the programme would need to be expanded to gain a greater commitment to conservation (because it is to some extent focused on those already committed to conservation—the converted). Actually achieving pro-conservation values and behaviours (rather than just raising awareness) is possible through the volunteer programme, but the evidence does not point towards this being fully achieved at present because those involved are already pro-conservation.

### **5.1.3 How could the volunteer programme be improved to meet conservation goals?**

There is a groundswell of enthusiasm for involvement in conservation activities. Volunteers are part of this movement. As volunteers learn more about conservation from their experiences in the natural environment, their levels of competence and confidence can grow. They can also develop a sense of conservation values and greater commitment to conservation. Intrinsic values and motivations are important. Understanding the needs of volunteers, their motivations and barriers to greater involvement, goes some way towards thinking about how the advocacy goals can be achieved. There is good information available on the needs of current volunteers. Less is known about the needs and motivations of potential new volunteers, such as young people, groups, schools, Maori communities and others, who have been less involved in the past. Several of the volunteers involved in this research commented that the aging population of volunteers was a concern to them. They suggested there is a need to recruit new and younger people to the programme to ensure its continuity.

There were many suggestions made by volunteers and staff on how the volunteer programme could be improved to meet its goals. They included:

clarification of the framework within which the volunteer programme fits, greater support from the Department as a whole, a higher profile for the programme within DOC, improved organisation, sharing of good practice ideas and tools, more communication with volunteers, communicating the conservation goals to staff and volunteers, promotion and marketing of the volunteer programme, allowing time to reflect on the experience and discussing its benefits for conservation, building community support for conservation through education, training for volunteer co-ordinators and possibly volunteers, regular monitoring, evaluation and review of the programme, and an emphasis on fun, celebration and appreciation of efforts made by volunteers.

Volunteer involvement in conservation activities depends on a number of things, and leadership is important to success. It is important to create 'learning opportunities' for volunteers so that they can be conservation advocates. For community action to occur, previous studies have reported that there needs to be: pressure for change, shared vision, capacity for change, and actionable first steps (Ritchie 2001). CRESA (2001) concluded that successful projects which achieve conservation advocacy goals: respond to community initiatives (not just DOC priorities), are culturally responsive, use te reo Maori as appropriate, build from community knowledge of and interest in conservation, acknowledge community expertise, provide opportunities for hands-on conservation, and enable collaborative working relations (such as valuing and putting time into the relationships, facilitating community networks, and linking with other agencies).

'The success of many of the projects could be attributed to the extent to which their design and implementation reflected DOC's respect for and valuing of communities and community input, including Maori, Pacific Island and other communities.'

CRESA (2001)

It could be questioned whether there is this kind of respect and valuing of the volunteer programme. This has been mentioned as a barrier to achieving some of the conservation outcomes by staff and volunteers. There is tremendous scope to include volunteers, as members of communities, in conservation and volunteering is a well-established way of getting work done. It is starting to be recognised as a means of developing collaborative partnerships with communities.

'Community co-operation is essential if the Department is to realise effective conservation outcomes and fulfil its mandate.'

Ritchie (2001)

To improve the programme as a successful advocacy tool, the organisational shift which is occurring needs to be more inclusive of community involvement. The volunteer programme should be further considered as one way to engage the community. A more targeted approach, involving those that have traditionally not been involved in the programme, may be beneficial (for example, involving some schools in particular projects).

DOC's role in helping communities build capacity for action towards conservation goals (including the volunteer's role in this) is a long-term commitment. It requires good relationships with volunteers and responsiveness from the Department. Conservation education needs to be emphasised. There is an opportunity to learn from others while doing things in an action oriented



and experiential learning environment. To improve the volunteer programme and meet its advocacy goals it is suggested that conservation education training is developed and included as part of the training recommended in this report.

#### **5.1.4 What can we learn from other countries' experiences?**

Examining what is happening in other countries may provide some useful ideas for how the New Zealand Conservation Volunteer Programme can increase understanding and commitment for conservation. Three things stand out from hearing and reading about experiences overseas:

- There has been a resurgence of volunteer involvement in conservation and parks overseas since the early 1990s.
- Volunteers are viewed as an important tool for community partnerships, and are seen as adding value to conservation efforts in America, Australia, and the United Kingdom (rather than being viewed as a drain on resources).
- A number of volunteer programmes are run through trusts/societies and a number of these trusts (especially in the United Kingdom and Australia) are funded through corporate sponsorship.

Much of what is suggested in the recommendations that follow is common sense, and these things may already be happening in some areas. Previous studies have shown that many people have favourable attitudes towards the environment, but that this does not always translate into action (Enviro Solutions 2001a). A similar thing could be said about conservation. There are many people who want to volunteer for the Department of Conservation. Others may be interested if approached, but these people are unlikely to act without some encouragement, some opportunities, and without leadership from the Department.

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

There are some factors which are critical to the success of the Conservation Volunteer Programme and the achievement of its conservation goals. Recommendations from this research are listed below.

### **5.2.1 Clarify the framework**

- (a) Link the volunteer programme with the Consultation with Communities Strategy and ensure consistency with this vision (refer to that strategy and list the benefits of the volunteer programme for conservation in the appropriate section).
- (b) Incorporate the volunteer research findings into the Community Involvement Strategy (currently being progressed) to indicate the existing and potential value of the volunteer programme (i.e. 90% of volunteers think the volunteer programme improves the relationship between the community and DOC).
- (c) Put the volunteer programme in the context of other work and communicate this clearly to both staff and volunteers. Tell people in simple language why the programme is worthwhile, what it achieves, and why it is worth the bother. This could be achieved by updating the flyer on the volunteer programme and celebrating the achievements of volunteers through pictures or circulating the

document to celebrate International Year of the Volunteer (Department of Conservation 2001a).

- (d) Clarify the goals and objectives of the volunteer programme and distribute across the Department, and to organisations with related programmes for volunteers. Does the Department want to increase the use of the volunteer programme as an advocacy tool?
- (e) Get community ownership of the volunteer programme in local areas, and build on this (as with the community involvement initiative) by building on and linking with existing community conservation efforts in local areas. Involve the local media. Have a family focus.

### **5.2.2 Commit to greater support and a higher profile**

- (a) Revisit and recommit to the philosophy of volunteers contributing to the conservation effort. Ensure there is two-way communication between the Department and the volunteers.
- (b) There is a credibility threshold that needs to be passed for the volunteer programme to be successful. Some staff view the programme negatively and this is limiting how much it can add to conservation advocacy. Work on the philosophy of the volunteer programme to ensure that management and staff value its contribution to conservation achievements. Ensure that there are opportunities for volunteers to participate in conservation activities at a level that meets their needs and aspirations. The reputation of the programme, and to some extent its success, depends on the sense of fulfilment of the volunteers and staff, and word of mouth is a powerful way of promoting it. Be inclusive.
- (c) Send a half page summary of the indicative results of this research to all conservators now so they are aware of what the results are telling us about the role of volunteers in achieving conservation goals and ask for their support of the programme.
- (d) Keep DOC and the wider community informed about volunteer projects and their contribution to the conservation effort.
- (e) Ensure that the volunteer programme has a higher priority than at present. That is, address issues of lack of staff capacity to make the volunteer programme successful and ensure that it will be funded adequately so that a good job can be done.
- (f) Ensure there are adequate resources (staff time, budgets, and so on) and systems in place (provision of available transport for volunteers, good databases, training, evaluation tools) to run successful programmes.
- (g) Think further about how to provide greater support to the Volunteer Co-ordinators (such as Community Relations Officers in the Area Offices looking for opportunities for volunteer involvement in community initiatives and in DOC work).

### **5.2.3 Improve organisation of the volunteer programme**

- (a) Have a structured, well-managed approach.
- (b) Communicate more regularly with volunteers about the programme (via phone calls, newsletters, articles in local newspapers, and so on). Tell them well in advance of events (i.e. send out a letter of thanks for their involvement and a list of proposed dates for future events at a suitable time every year).
- (c) Update the databases locally (to include all volunteers and their skills) and aim for a national database of conservation volunteers. If necessary apply for funding to make this happen.

- (d) Have a ‘whole team’ approach, and involve as many staff and volunteers as possible in promoting the volunteer programme through their work (given the current time constraints).
- (e) Integrate with existing management systems (such as quality management, business management, and asset management) to ensure a consistent approach.
- (f) Integrate with existing corporate structures such as training structures, communication and reporting structures, budget allocation, and performance review structures. This could be achieved by ensuring that the volunteer programme is included in annual planning and reporting processes.
- (g) Integrate with other related volunteer programmes, such as those being run by regional and district councils. Consider running programmes together, where possible. For example, in Wellington make contact with the Landcare Division of the Wellington Regional Council to assess opportunities to share resources and ideas and learn from each other in relation to the planning and management of each agency’s volunteer programme.
- (h) Remove inflexible bureaucracy wherever possible.

#### **5.2.4 Share good-practice ideas and tools**

- (a) Aim for a more co-ordinated and collaborative approach to the programme. Involve people who are good at integration, and good at working collaboratively, on a range of projects.
- (b) Share good practice ideas and initiatives throughout New Zealand (could be via a newsletter, email group, or scheduled workshops every six months to a year).
- (c) Learn from successful programmes overseas where events are making a big difference to the achievement of conservation goals (such as the Golden Gate VIP: Volunteers in Parks scheme in San Francisco).
- (d) Update, circulate, and implement the standard operating procedure (Department of Conservation 2001b) and ensure that all staff are aware of it. It would be beneficial to include some of the recommendations from this research, such as how to recognise and acknowledge volunteers (see Section 5.2.12 below).
- (e) Prepare a four-page summary of this research in a simple and visually appealing manner and circulate this widely. Highlight what motivates volunteers, how they can make a difference and the value they add. Use this to share good practice.
- (f) Take photos and provide visual documentation of what volunteers achieve. Display this often as appropriate, (possibly ask one of the volunteers who is a good photographer to do participate). This could be used as one tool for monitoring and evaluating the success of the programme.
- (g) Have a copy of what is achieved by volunteers and information about the volunteer programme on DOC’s intranet. Include positive images/stories.

#### **5.2.5 Ensure effective communication and people skills**

- (a) Improve communications—ensure two-way communication between volunteers and staff.
- (b) Don’t use jargon—such as the word ‘advocacy’ and possibly even terms like ‘conservation’—unless these are clearly defined. Develop a glossary of terms for use in the Department to ensure consistency across the country OR: Do not use these terms, but instead use plain English.

- (c) Sell ideas to the managers using simple graphs and pictures that illustrate the benefits for conservation of the volunteer programme.
- (d) Maintain relationships and commitments and keep volunteers in the loop by having regular communication (i.e. there could be some simple email groups set up in local areas, more newsletters; refer to Section 5.2.3).
- (e) Have well-briefed staff that understand the benefits of the volunteer programme for conservation, and encourage open communication about what works and what does not work, so there can be a process of continual improvement.
- (f) Refer to the last three bullet points in Section 5.2.4.

### **5.2.6 Clarify and communicate the conservation goals**

- (a) Reiterate in any staff training and to *all* DOC staff that the volunteer programme has conservation advocacy benefits as well as getting work done. The two are not necessarily two distinct things. Getting work done and having volunteers informally talking about what they are doing could (in itself) be a form of advocacy.
- (b) Show staff real life examples of volunteer work that has helped promote conservation. It is important that this is shown rather than talked about in a generic sense.
- (c) Aim for organisation-wide understanding of the benefits for conservation of the volunteer programme. Remind staff of these as opportunities arise and in staff induction processes.
- (d) Reiterate to volunteers on all volunteer events that it is not just about getting work done. That the Department also aims to achieve conservation advocacy goals, OR at least enable volunteers to experience that volunteering can have advocacy benefits by implementing the recommendations provided in this report and ensuring there is a conservation education component to the volunteer programme.

### **5.2.7 Consider refocusing the programme to a broader range of people**

- (a) Target some community groups or schools and ask them to volunteer so that the benefits of having volunteers involved in conservation activities and information about the programme can be shared – and have a BBQ afterwards to celebrate. Link in with other volunteer databases (such as those held by some councils, and agencies) to assess if there are people interested / and with useful skills for conservation volunteering.
- (b) Hook people in, get them actively involved in conservation activities and then gain their trust, respect, and buy-in.
- (c) Have a ‘wine time’ after key volunteer activities to help hook people in and acknowledge what they have done, OR schedule some regular meeting times for volunteers and staff to share knowledge and ideas, and have some social aspect as well.
- (d) Update the flyers or have signs inviting people to become involved in the volunteer programme. Reflect it as one of the ways of having partnerships between the community and the Department.
- (e) Maintain closer links with volunteers and promote a positive image—have better administrative and communications systems, such as greater information sharing about what is being achieved through the volunteer programme. (An example is a

photographic documentation of what was achieved, as discussed in Section 5.2.4 above.)

- (f) Sell the benefits of the volunteer programme to managers and field staff and illustrate this with a simple 4 pager outlining what has been achieved (see Section 5.2.4 above).
- (g) Focus on a broader group of the unconverted, such as young people and urban dwellers.
- (h) For the volunteer programme to expand and be promoted in any way, there would need first to be increased resourcing (such as staff capacity) and a commitment across DOC to the philosophy that members of local communities, as volunteers, can be conservation advocates when given the opportunity to do so. Don't aim for goals that are too high—ensure they are achievable.
- (i) To get new recruits Volunteer Co-ordinators could attend meetings (such as tramping clubs, schools, local community boards) as guest speakers, and talk to neighbours about where volunteer work is occurring. They could also raise awareness of the issues and the programme by giving talks on local radio/TV and preparing articles for local newspapers. All of these approaches would need to include making local contact details available.
- (j) Volunteers who have been involved in the programme for a while could be asked to recruit new volunteers in the areas where new volunteers could add value to conservation efforts.
- (k) Develop and maintain a family atmosphere.
- (l) Provide for different levels of volunteer involvement.
- (m) Encourage targeted programmes for specific conservation projects such as Project Crimson.
- (n) Be more connected to and integrated with other community initiatives, such as links with local authorities volunteer programmes, trusts like the Karori Wildlife Sanctuary, community organisations, and iwi.

### **5.2.8 Allow time to reflect on volunteering, and discuss its benefits**

- (a) Take some time during all volunteer events to reflect on why the work is being done and how it contributes to conservation goals.
- (b) Tell volunteers about how other volunteers have contributed to conservation.
- (c) Ask volunteers for their ideas on how volunteers could better contribute to conservation outcomes and goals, given current levels of funding, or allow more resourcing so that ways of better using the volunteer programme as a conservation advocacy tool may be developed and implemented.

### **5.2.9 Build community support for conservation through education**

- (a) Train and educate staff and volunteers who indicate they would like to learn more about conservation, and enable experiential action-based learning.
- (b) Have a collaborative approach to information sharing and conservation education.
- (c) Always include an element of conservation education about the local environment in which the volunteering is occurring. Where possible and appropriate, involve more experienced volunteers in educating others.

- (d) Send volunteers some succinct information in advance about how their work will make a difference, and some background information on the project/area. Most importantly, follow up with information on how successful the project and the volunteers' efforts were. This may be through a simple report (such as those from Otago/Southland), by an email group, through regular newsletters, and so on.

#### **5.2.10 Train Volunteer Co-ordinators and volunteers**

- (a) Provide training in project planning, organisation, and project management.
- (b) Provide training in people management, communications, and groups skills (to include staff development on voluntary group processes and partnership, e.g. see work by Environment Waikato).
- (c) Enable education and conservation advocacy training (for staff and volunteers).
- (d) Explore what motivates people to volunteer, and how the programme could be improved to satisfy volunteers' reasons for being involved.
- (e) Introduce a volunteer mentoring scheme for new Volunteer Co-ordinators to learn from more established Volunteer Co-ordinators (even if this means linking people in different locations).
- (f) Offer training opportunities to long-term volunteers so that they increase their skills and knowledge and can add greater value to conservation advocacy.
- (g) Ecological knowledge is low in many projects, so it may help to involve educators and trainers more closely in the voluntary programme to introduce a more educative focus. This could be done in a number of ways and may, for example, include things like providing printed material, website information, and videos, so that the time and resources are not wasted on making similar mistakes across the country.

#### **5.2.11 Monitor, evaluate, and review the programme**

- (a) Develop a system to monitor and evaluate the success of the volunteer programme in terms of meeting its goals relating to conservation, and review this every few years.
- (b) There is a questionnaire in the Standard Operating Procedure for volunteers to complete after an activity, but it is not clear whether this is always completed. If these findings were collected and recorded they could be logged into a national record and used to review the programme.
- (c) Develop a volunteer programme monitoring system for the start and end of key projects.
- (d) Have staff training to ensure this is a simple and achievable process.

#### **5.2.12 Ensure the experience is fun and acknowledges contributions**

- (a) Always thank volunteers and look for ways to recognise their efforts.
- (b) Make the volunteer programme relevant, fun, and enjoyable (i.e. hook people in).
- (c) Highlight and celebrate achievements and successes, such as have a BBQ and display photos of what volunteers have achieved and a thank-you from managers at the end of each year. (Similar to the celebrations for International Year of the Volunteer.) A thank-you may be as simple as inviting volunteers to attend a Department seminar.
- (d) Ensure that volunteer efforts are recognised and acknowledged. Examples such as having badges/patches that acknowledge years of service and involvement in particular projects (like the T-Shirts for the 'Birdman' and so on) that not only thank volunteers for their time, but also promote what they are doing to a wider

community. Update the standard operating procedure (Department of Conservation 2001b) to include the suggestion list provided below. Suggestions for ways to recognise and acknowledge volunteers are built on ideas from the Hillary Commission (1986):

- Smile and call volunteers by name
- Praise volunteers while on the job
- Write letters / postcards of thanks
- Prepare simple certificates of appreciation
- Have identification badges (e.g. saying Conservation VIP)
- T-Shirts, caps and pins (as listed in the SOP)
- Acknowledge volunteers in newsletters (have these at least quarterly)
- Prepare media releases with photos to celebrate the great work of volunteers
- Present awards on an annual or biennial basis
- Provide complimentary tickets to longstanding volunteers to the DOC ball
- Investigate and provide a discount card
- Reimburse out of pocket expenses
- Hold social events for volunteers (such as 'wine time', BBQs, talks)
- Farewell people when they leave the community: welcome them to their new one
- Provide meal and petrol vouchers to acknowledge special efforts
- Listen to volunteers ideas
- Promote further voluntary action and partnerships

(e) Ask volunteers how they think the volunteer programme could be improved to achieve advocacy goals.

(f) When it is refocused, rename the programme the Conservation Volunteer Involvement Programme—and use Conservation VIP for short. If resources permit, make a series of badges for people with this title to wear when they are volunteering.

The Conservation Volunteer Programme appears to be at a crossroad. There are more volunteers wanting to be involved than opportunities for involvement, and at present the programme operates in a fairly low key and ad hoc manner. It tends to attract those people who are already committed to conservation (at least in terms of attitudes and values). To fully achieve advocacy goals, the volunteer programme needs to involve conservation education, and provide better opportunities for partnerships between a broader range of volunteers (as members of local communities) and the DOC.

Having volunteer participation in conservation could be a powerful conservation advocacy tool. It provides a way for the Department to engage the community more in conservation and achieve increased understanding of and commitment to conservation. For the volunteer programme to be successful in this manner *'volunteering must be viewed as a core activity with more substantive benefits than just 'free help'* (Moore 1999). Effective volunteer programmes expand public ownership of conservation, build a core of conservation advocates and share management responsibilities. They form effective partnerships between the community and the Department of Conservation. They need to be backed by a clear understanding of the goals of the programme in those involved, and adequate staff resources, training, management systems, and rewards.

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# Appendix 1

## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been involved in volunteering and tell me about your experiences?
2. Why do you volunteer for DOC?
3. What are the benefits **to you** from your involvement in the Conservation Volunteer Programme?
4. What are the benefits **to DOC** from your involvement in the Conservation Volunteer Programme?
5. What do you think the benefits are of volunteering?
6. Are you aware of the goals of the volunteer programme and if so what are they?
7. How has the volunteering you have been involved with promoted conservation and raised your awareness of conservation? If so, in what ways and what?
8. How could the Conservation Volunteer Programme promote conservation?
9. Who is responsible for promoting conservation in your view?
10. How could the Conservation Volunteer Programme better train volunteers so that they are aware of key conservation issues and better promote appropriate conservation messages, attitudes and behaviours amongst the community?

# Appendix 2

## POSTAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

### *Survey on the benefits of conservation volunteering*

*Thank you for being a volunteer for the Department of Conservation.*

*We are interested in what you view as the benefits of volunteering.*

*We invite you to please complete the following questions and return your response in the enclosed postage paid envelope no later than 22 February 2002.*

1. How long have you been registered/volunteering for the Department of Conservation?

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> less than 6 months | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 months to a year | <input type="checkbox"/> 1.1 - 2 years      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2.1 – 3 years      | <input type="checkbox"/> 3.1 – 5 years      | <input type="checkbox"/> 5.1 – 10 years     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10.1 – 15 years    | <input type="checkbox"/> 15.1 – 20 years    | <input type="checkbox"/> more than 20 years |

2. What types of volunteering have you been involved in?

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ongoing volunteer             | <input type="checkbox"/> short term volunteer                | <input type="checkbox"/> special events volunteer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> working holidays volunteering | <input type="checkbox"/> registered but not yet volunteering |   |

3. Which of the Department of Conservation's conservancies have you done most or all or your volunteer work for? (*tick up to three boxes*)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bay of Plenty | <input type="checkbox"/> Southland                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Otago         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please write in where) _____ |

4. Describe the nature of your volunteering work for the Department of Conservation. If you have undertaken more than one type of volunteering please tick the boxes that reflect the nature of the volunteering (*tick up to three boxes*)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a) restoration work (e.g. fences, planting)       | <input type="checkbox"/> b) office work                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c) coastal  | <input type="checkbox"/> d) protected species             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e) facility development/maintenance (e.g. tracks) | <input type="checkbox"/> f) promotion and education       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> g) wild animal control                            | <input type="checkbox"/> h) fire control                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> i) nursery work (e.g. seed collection)            | <input type="checkbox"/> j) historic and archaeological   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> k) hut warden                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> l) honorary ranger               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> m) weed control                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> n) survey monitoring (e.g. kiwi) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> o) other (please specify)                         |   |

5. Why do you volunteer for the Department of Conservation?

*Please indicate the three most important reasons for you by numbering three boxes.*

*Place 1 (the most important reason) to 3 (the third most important reason) in the boxes.*

- |   |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> a) enjoyment, recreation or personal interest in the environment                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> b) personal concern for the environment  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> c) to learn, to increase personal knowledge and awareness                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> d) to assist DOC to achieve conservation outcomes/objectives                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> e) work experience for career or study   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> f) to make other people aware of environmental issues                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> g) to socialise, or meet people with the same interests                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> h) to improve link between DOC and the community                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> i) so that future generations (e.g. grandchildren) can see and enjoy the environment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> j) because of involvement through a club (e.g. walking or tramping club)             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> k) other (please specify)  |
-

6. What do you perceive as the main benefits of the Conservation Volunteer Programme to the Department of Conservation?

Please indicate the three most important benefits by numbering three boxes.

Place 1 (the most important reason) to 3 (the third most important reason) in the boxes.

- a) getting the Department's work done
  - b) communities have increased awareness/understanding/commitment to conservation
  - c) communities take action and initiate their own conservation activities
  - d) increased community support for the Department of Conservation
  - e) other (please specify)
- 
- 

7. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following words/phrases that might be used to describe the work you do as a volunteer for the Department of Conservation?

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Inclined To Agree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Inclined to Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
Educational	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Enjoyable/interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Useful to conservation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Well-organised/supervised	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Satisfying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following words/phrases that might be used to describe whether your volunteering for the Department of Conservation has raised your awareness of / or attitudes and behaviours towards conservation?

	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Inclined To Agree</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Inclined to Disagree</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>
<i>It increased my knowledge of:</i>					
DOC and what they do	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
NZs flora and fauna	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Control measures for pests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ecosystems management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Restoration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Historical/archaeological mgt	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Are there other things volunteering has raised your awareness of (if so please write below)?

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9. Do you think that the Department of Conservation's Conservation Volunteer Programme generally raises awareness, attitudes and behaviours towards conservation?

yes                       no                       don't know

Please explain:

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10. How could the Conservation Volunteer Programme help to raise awareness, attitudes and behaviours of people in the community towards conservation?

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11. Do you belong to an environmental/conservation organisation (such as Forest and Bird, or New Zealand Association for Environmental Education) or a conservation trust/society?

yes                       no

If yes please write the name(s) of the organisation here

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Did you join before or after becoming a volunteer?

before                       after

12. In your view, does the Conservation Volunteer Programme improve relationships between the Department of Conservation and the community?

yes                       no

Please explain:

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13. What advice would you give the Department of Conservation to help them strengthen their Conservation Volunteer Programme for the future?

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14. Do you have any additional comments on volunteering for the Department of Conservation?

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**Please indicate your . . .**

15. Gender     male                                       female
16. Age         younger than 20                       20 – 29                       30 – 39  
                   40 – 49                                       50 – 59                       60 +
17. Ethnicity    NZ Pakeha/European     Maori                       Pacific peoples  
                     Other (please specify your ethnicity) \_\_\_\_\_
18. Highest level of education  
                     primary school                       secondary school  
                     vocational/trade qualification  
                     tertiary qualification                       postgraduate qualification
19. Work status  
                     student                                       working full-time  
                     working part-time                       retired  
                     unemployed                                       parent/homemaker  
                     other (*please specify*) \_\_\_\_\_
20. Volunteering in terms of whether you are a:  
                     New Zealand resident                       International volunteer  
                     Volunteer for other organisations as well as DOC (If so write in what you do)

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**Thank you for taking the time to complete the survey and returning it in the stamped/addressed envelope provided by 22 February 2002**

**We appreciate your response.**

If you have returned your survey by 22 February and wish to go into the draw for a \$30 book voucher, please write your full name and phone number on a piece of paper and include that in the envelope with your completed survey.