

Topic Paper: Potential additions to Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park and the World Heritage Area

1. Purpose

This paper provides the relevant background and matters for consideration regarding potential additions to Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park (AMCNP) and Te Wāhipounamu South-West New Zealand World Heritage Area (WHA).

2. Background

2.1 Potential park additions

The following types of lands and waters adjacent to, or surrounded by, AMCNP could potentially be added to the park for integrated management purposes (see sections 2.3 and 2.4 below):

- formed and unformed legal roads (responsibility of Mackenzie District Council);
- Crown-owned riverbeds (responsibility of Land Information New Zealand); and
- other public conservation lands and waters (pcl&w).

The formed and unformed legal roads and Crown-owned riverbeds are not part of the national park. Adjacent public conservation lands and waters can have various classifications.

2.2 Potential WHA additions

The WHA was first inscribed, based on natural values, in 1986 to encompass AMCNP, Westland Tai Poutini National Park and Fiordland National Park. In 1990 it was: given the name Te Wāhipounamu South-West New Zealand World Heritage Area; and expanded to include Mt Aspiring National Park, all other areas of pcl&w between the national parks, plus some other areas of pcl&w adjacent to the national parks (see Map 2 draft AMCNP management plan (AMCNPMP)).

The inscription for the WHA encompasses all the natural criteria (as identified in the World Heritage Operational Guidelines), being:

- (vii) to contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance;
- (viii) to be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features;
- (ix) to be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals;
- (x) to contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

A World Heritage Area can also be inscribed for its cultural values (six criteria), either separately, or in a dual manner. The cultural criteria most relevant to the WHA include:

- (iii) to bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilisation which is living or which has disappeared;

- (v) to be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;
- (vi) to be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance¹.

The Tongariro National Park WHA was inscribed for both its natural and cultural values (cultural criterion (vi)) and recognises “The mountains at the heart of the park have cultural and religious significance for the Māori people and symbolise the spiritual links between this community and its environment”.

2.3 Pre-draft consultation

Several relevant pre-draft comments were received from the public. Most supported some additions of adjacent lands (including braided riverbeds) to AMCNP to improve integrated management and protect important habitat for threatened species of plants and specialist river birds.

2.4 Potential additions

Those marked with * are identified in the draft AMCNPMP for addition to the Park and shown on Map 6. The other potential additions are included in this paper for information only. These other areas can be located by using the maps for the Canterbury (Waitaha) Conservation Management Strategy 2016 - <https://www.doc.govt.nz/about-us/our-policies-and-plans/statutory-plans/statutory-plan-publications/conservation-management-strategies/canterbury/>

Unformed legal roads

Description	Map Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an unformed legal road in the Godley River valley. The 4WD track managed by the Department crosses over this unformed legal road* 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an unformed legal road (possibly administered by NZ Transport Agency) within Birch Hill Conservation Area* 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • possible unformed legal road in Bush Stream catchment (adjoining Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park only) 	

Stream/river beds

Description	Map Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Birch Hill Stream (adjoining Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park only)* 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hooker River and Tasman River braided riverbed and valley floors to Lake Pukaki* 	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Godley River braided riverbed and valley floor to Lake Tekapo* 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jollie River riverbed between Mt Cook Station and Braemar Conservation Area and Mt Cook Station Conservation Area 	

¹ The World Heritage Committee considers that this criterion should preferably be used in conjunction with other criteria.

- Bush Stream (adjoining Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park only)
- Freds Stream (adjoining Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park only)

Other public conservation lands and waters

Description	Map Reference
• Aoraki/Mount Cook Village Road Conservation Area (has WHA status)*	6
• Aoraki Recreation Reserve (has WHA status)*	7
• Birch Hill Flat Conservation Area*	8
• Liebig Range/Upper Jollie/Cass Conservation Area*	9
• Mt Cook Station Conservation Area*	10
• Parts of Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park within the Birch Hill Stream catchment (and with WHA status)*	11
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• Parts of Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park within the Bush Stream and Freds Stream catchments	
• Marginal strip and unallocated Crown land in Bush Stream catchment (adjoining Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park only)	
• Marginal strip in Freds Stream catchment (adjoining Ruataniwha Conservation Area and Ruataniwha Conservation Park only)	
• Parts of Marginal Strip - Godley River catchment adjacent to the national park	
• Glentanner Scenic Reserve	
• Marginal strip adjacent to Glentanner Scenic Reserve	
• Sibbalds Island Conservation Area	
• Godley Riverbed Conservation Area	
• The Island Conservation Area	
• Godley Peaks Conservation Area	
• Braemar Conservation Area	
• Black Point Public Utility Local Purpose Reserve	

3. Matters for consideration

3.1 Iwi

In principle, Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (TRONT) does not support adding lands to national parks because it creates further impediment to accessing the land and using resources, additional to the existing restrictions for other areas of public conservation lands and waters. A similar opposition

applies to adding public conservation lands and waters to the WHA. Although, adding cultural criteria to the inscription and the statement of outstanding universal values for this site may alleviate some of these concerns.

Pre-consultation hui with TRONT and the kaitiaki rūnaka for the AMCNPMP review has covered some of the issues of adding land to the national parks and the WHA. At a hui on 1 November 2016 discussion points included Kāi Tahu desire to seek cultural heritage status for the WHA. Further comments received from the kaitiaki rūnaka at a hui on 29 May 2018 indicated they were willing to consider each proposed addition on a case by case basis, following an assessment of the cultural and ecological benefits to be gained from an addition to the national park.

3.2 Why close unformed legal roads and add them to the park?

- General Policy for National Parks 2005 (GPNP05) Policy 8.1(i) specifically states this should happen, except where they are essential as legal access to other lands;
- various activities such as aircraft landings, walking dogs (and other activities normally requiring authorisation within a national park) and vehicle use can occur. They are not within the Department's control, and could cause adverse effects and be incompatible with the values and management of the national park e.g. protection of natural quiet;
- the roads are usually 20 m wide but because many are not accurately surveyed the actual location is difficult to determine, making compliance with plan provisions or bylaws difficult; and
- it ensures integrated management of the national park.

3.3 Why add river beds to the park?

- GPNP05 contains several policies providing guidance and criteria for investigating additions to national parks, including a number relevant to the addition of riverbeds to AMCNP:
 - Policy 6(c)(ii) identifies areas that “*have no equivalent in a national park*”. Currently braided riverbed ecosystems are not well represented within New Zealand's national parks.
 - Policy 6(j) specifically seeks the addition of the beds of lakes and rivers “*as they are ecologically continuous with the national park and their inclusion would allow for better integrated management of the national park*”; and
- various activities such as aircraft landings, walking dogs, taking materials (and other activities requiring authorisation within a national park) and vehicle use can occur, which could cause adverse effects and be incompatible with the values and management of the park.

3.4 Why add other public conservation lands and waters to the park?

- in 2013 the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment released a report titled “Investigating the future of conservation: The case of stewardship land”. The report made two recommendations, one of which was: “*The Minister of Conservation instruct the Department of Conservation to identify areas of stewardship land that are clearly of significant conservation value, and reclassify them in accordance with that value.*”

A process is underway to implement this recommendation but only the Ruataniwha Conservation Area (adjacent to AMCNP) is identified on the Department's priority list, for possible conservation park re-classification. Any potential additions to AMCNP identified in the draft management plan would be complementary to the above process;

- various activities such as aircraft landings, walking dogs, taking materials (and other activities requiring authorisation within a national park) and vehicle use may be allowed, which could cause adverse effects and be incompatible with the values and management of the park;
- some of the areas identified do not possess national park values in the strictest sense (e.g. old road alignments of Aoraki Recreation Reserve and Aoraki/Mount Cook Village Road Conservation Area) but their addition would ensure integrated management of the national park; and
- some of the identified areas already have WHA status, which strongly suggests their values are compatible with being part of a national park.

3.5 Why add new areas and cultural criteria to the WHA?

- the current WHA encompasses areas of pcl&w with various land status, including stewardship areas and government purpose reserves. National park status is one of the highest levels of protection for pcl&w; it appears incongruous for the national parks to not have WHA status over their entirety;
- adding cultural criteria to the WHA would: acknowledge and recognise the relationship Ngāi Tahu and the kaitiaki rūnaka have with AMCNP on an international stage; and raise the profile of the WHA; and
- some of the proposed additions (e.g. braided riverbed ecosystems) provide additional values consistent with the criteria for natural values under the current WHA inscription, adding to the overall natural significance and value of the WHA area.

3.6 What are the perceived negatives?

- the Department's relationship with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu, given their principled views to date on additions to national parks and the WHA;
- the NZ Walking Access Commission advocates for the retention of unformed legal roads to enable public access. However, their main concern relates to these roads then becoming private land. In the case of a road becoming national park, the right of public access is retained (section 4(2)(e) National Parks Act 1980), subject to any necessary controls;
- the Department would have to manage more areas of pcl&w as national park, and with WHA status, in accordance with the management plans and other relevant statutory provisions; and
- lack of resourcing and support to pursue the additions.

3.8 What can the management plans achieve?

Additions to a national park are not made directly through a management plan itself; instead, policies in the plan support the processes required to achieve desired outcomes, as identified in the milestones. Interested parties and the public can make submissions on the draft plan provisions, and they may have an opportunity to comment on: investigations under section 8 of the National Parks Act 1980; and processes undertaken by LINZ (for riverbeds), or the district councils (for unformed legal roads).

Similarly, addition of land to the WHA and adding cultural criteria to the inscription cannot be made directly through the management plan. The provisions in the plan need to support these actions being taken, particularly through the milestones.