
Journey to the Heritage and Visitor Strategy

He Haerenga ki te Rautaki Taonga Tuku Iho, Manuhiri Tūārangi hoki



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

New Zealand Government

Cover: Trampers on the ridge boardwalk on the Tuatapere Hump Ridge Track. *Photo: Tareen Ellis*

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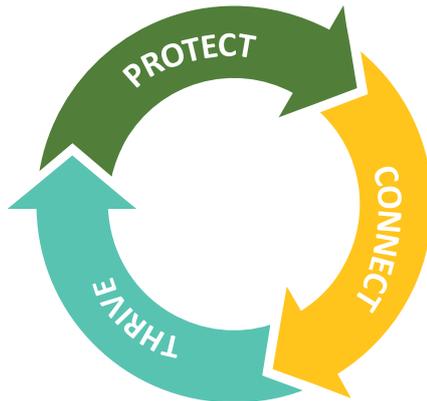
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1 Introduction

1.1 The Heritage and Visitor Strategy

DOC has developed a new Heritage and Visitor Strategy to provide a framework to navigate a changing context for visitor management on public conservation lands and waters. The strategy outlines how DOC's heritage and visitor decision-making can support DOC's vision that New Zealand is the greatest living space on Earth.

The three goals of the strategy are:



- **Protect** – New Zealand's natural, cultural and historic resources are protected and restored to maintain biodiversity, cultural and historic values, ecosystem health, landscapes and natural quiet.
- **Connect** – Visitors are enriched and better connected to New Zealand's natural, cultural and historic heritage.
- **Thrive** – Tangata whenua, regions and communities benefit from protecting and connecting visitors with their natural, cultural and historic heritage.

For each of these goals, the strategy outlines the outcomes DOC is seeking, DOC's approach to achieve them, and focus areas for prioritisation over the medium-term.

The Heritage and Visitor Strategy is designed for everyday use by DOC staff. It will help inform visitor and heritage management decisions across the country and DOC's work with Treaty Partners, stakeholders and across government. It sets out the goals DOC wishes to achieve, and the steps DOC will take to get there.

1.2 What is this document?

This document, Journey to the Heritage and Visitor Strategy, accompanies the strategy. It is a reference work that sets out the thinking behind the final strategy framework and actions and provides additional background information for in-depth understanding of the strategy. It expands on the rapidly changing context DOC is operating in, the legislation underpinning its work and the long and short-term trends it must respond to. The strategy and Journey to the Heritage and Visitor Strategy are both publicly available on the DOC website, providing guidance and transparency to others on how DOC manages its responsibilities for managing heritage and visitors. These documents can be found at: www.doc.govt.nz/heritage-and-visitor-strategy.

1.3 What is the Heritage and Visitor Strategy for?

DOC last developed the *Visitor Strategy* in 1996. It identified what was important to visitors from the natural, cultural and historic areas managed by DOC and pointed to a future where growing demand for recreation and tourism could increase the tension between visitor expectations and conservation efforts.

As the domestic and international tourism sectors have grown, increasing and fluctuating visitor numbers have created pressure – particularly congestion at popular places during peak periods – on DOC visitor services and infrastructure. New Zealanders are also growing concerned about the cumulative effects of visitor numbers on their communities and the environment.

It is timely to consider how to respond to pressures on DOC's Heritage and Visitor system and the opportunities visitors create to support productive, sustainable and inclusive economies and community wellbeing. The new Heritage and Visitor Strategy has been developed to provide a framework for DOC to navigate the changing context for visitors on public conservation lands and waters and how to realise the benefits visitors can bring to New Zealand.

DOC needs to think differently about these challenges and opportunities, not just on a local scale but at regional and national levels. Rapid changes will require new and innovative solutions to allow DOC to effectively respond to growing pressures. DOC needs to be able to prioritise its investments and develop a truly integrated approach to conservation and visitor management. In managing visitor pressures DOC will seek to be evidence-informed and future-focused. DOC also plans to provide value for money and co-design experiences.

Sustainable management of visitors is not a job for DOC alone. The strategy recognises that there are diverse groups that have interests in the management of visitors to public conservation lands and waters, and influence and contribute to DOC's activities and objectives.

The strategy recognises the Treaty partnership and DOC's commitment to achieving healthy partnerships with Māori and meeting the Crown's obligations to Māori under section 4 of the Conservation Act 1987, by applying Treaty principles practically in our work. The strategy provides an opportunity to strengthen the way DOC gives effect to this relationship by supporting more opportunities for tangata whenua to benefit from visitor to public conservation lands and waters.

DOC is committed to partnering with Treaty partners and working across government and with stakeholders to achieve the outcomes of the strategy.

Adult kakī /black stilt with Aoraki/Mt Cook in the background. *Photo: Liz Brown*



The importance of Aotearoa's natural, cultural and historic heritage to tangata whenua

For Ngāi Tahu, Aotearoa New Zealand's highest peak, Aoraki/Mt Cook, represents the most sacred of ancestors from whom they descend and provides the iwi with its sense of communal identity, solidarity and purpose.

Aoraki/Mount Cook has Tōpuni status, a public symbol of Ngāi Tahu manawhena and rangatiratanga. This comes from the custom of rangatira extending their mana over areas or people by placing their cloak over them. Aoraki/ Mount Cook has been covered with this symbolic cloak of protection. It does not override or alter the underlying land status but ensures that Ngāi Tahu values in relation to Tōpuni are recognised, acknowledged and provided for.

Ngātoroirangi, the ancestor of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, ascended the great mountains of the Central Plateau over 30 generations ago. He named Tongariro and the many features of the surrounding landscape, declaring this area as home for his descendants. Today, the area forms the Tongariro National Park and Ngāti Tūwharetoa maintains the inherent responsibility to protect the mountainous area to which their descendants belong.

These are two examples of places that are precious to their tangata whenua and are also iconic destinations that have attracted visitors for generations. Tongariro became New Zealand's first national park in 1894 and has been popular for walking and skiing since the 1930s. These places showcase some of New Zealand's stunning landscapes, are the backdrop for many of Aotearoa's stories and attract millions of visitors each year.

For DOC, it is critical to work in partnership with tangata whenua at place to enable their kaitiakitanga of the natural, cultural and historic heritage. Visitors to public conservation lands and waters provide opportunities for tangata whenua to express the value they place on their roles in kaitiakitanga and manaakitanga, and to further realise their aspirations for future generations rooted in their cultural inheritance.

Conservation management strategies give effect to the enduring Treaty relationship between tangata whenua and the Crown and set out its application for conservation management in each rohe.

1.4 A changing context for managing visitors

From 1996...

- New Zealand's population was 3.7 million
 - 1.5 million international visitors came to New Zealand
- New Zealanders were the primary visitors to protected natural areas and historic places, but with increasing use by international visitors
 - Multi-day walks were more popular
- A few iconic sites were regularly busy, but there was excess visitor capacity in most places



... to now

By 2019 this context had changed considerably:

- New Zealand's population is 4.9 million, with a higher proportion of Māori, Asian and Pacific Island ethnic groups, and more aged over 65
 - Population growth is greatest in the upper North Island
- 3.9 million international visitors come to New Zealand annually from a broader range of countries
- New Zealanders are still the main visitors to protected natural areas and historic places, but about 1.7 million international visitors every year visit at least one national park
 - Short walks of less than three hours are the most popular activities
- Many places have excess visitor capacity, but some are at full capacity or under pressure at peak season
- Digital technology has changed the way people find out about places and their expectations about available information
 - There is growing awareness of negative behaviour associated with visitors
- There is growing expectation that tourism should contribute positively to local communities and conservation



Looking to the future

The context is still changing. Given the speed of the change underway and the scale of the response required over the next 10 years there could be:

- more co-management of places and co-design of experiences with Treaty Partners
 - more places under pressure from external events such as climate change
 - New Zealanders will be more diverse and generally older
 - New Zealanders will seek experiences closer to main population centres
 - more international visitors, potentially from different visitor markets
 - more complex and diverse visitor motivations and expectations
- the emergence of disruptive technologies that reduce the barriers to, and change the ways people participate in, different visitor experiences
 - a wider range of visitor experiences on or connected to public conservation lands and waters
 - more demand for opportunities to participate in conservation and cultural visitor experiences
 - different approaches to the way DOC manages New Zealand's iconic and popular places
 - a more integrated approach to achieving conservation and visitor outcomes

2 A strategic framework for heritage and visitors

2.1 Purpose

The purpose of DOC's Heritage and Visitor Strategy is to:

Sustainably manage visitors to protect and enhance the values of New Zealand's natural, cultural and historic heritage.

This purpose reflects DOC's responsibility to protect and restore natural, cultural and historic heritage, biodiversity and the ecological health of natural areas, and to manage visitors so they can connect to this heritage. Sustainable visitor management means managing the protection, recreational use and development of natural, cultural and historic heritage to enable visitors to engage now, while safeguarding options for future generations.

The strategy has been designed to reflect the wider objectives of the government and support DOC in achieving its long-term strategic objectives.

2.2 Relationship to the Government's objectives

DOC's Heritage and Visitor Strategy reflects the government's long-term objectives for biodiversity, the economy and tourism by focusing on protecting and enhancing New Zealand's natural and historic heritage, and enriching peoples' connections to this heritage.

Biodiversity

New Zealand became a party to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 1992 and ratified the main convention in 1993. All parties to the CBD must have a national biodiversity strategy and action plan in place. New Zealand developed its original biodiversity strategy in 2000 and the action plan in 2016, to meet with this obligation. These will expire in 2020.

DOC is leading the development of the new Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy that reflects New Zealand's commitment to protecting our unique biodiversity and the central importance of biodiversity to wellbeing and the position of nature at the heart of our success.

The Heritage and Visitor Strategy outlines DOC's commitment that visitor management prioritises the protection of New Zealand's unique biodiversity. The strategy has been designed to ensure that our work to connect visitors to natural, cultural and historic heritage grows their understanding and appreciation for this heritage, and builds support for protection.

Economy – Wellbeing and the Living Standards Framework

The government's long-term economic strategy focuses on a planned and just transition to a more productive, sustainable and inclusive economy, improving the living standards and wellbeing of all New Zealanders.

A more productive, sustainable and inclusive economy means putting both peoples' wellbeing and the health and quality of the environment at the centre.

The Heritage and Visitor Strategy's goals align with this aim. By protecting our natural, historic and cultural heritage first, we are prioritising the protection of the natural and cultural capital needed for supporting intergenerational wellbeing.

Where we can foster recreation and allow for tourism, we can actively contribute to building natural, social, human and financial capital, raising the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

Tourism

In May 2019, the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment and DOC jointly released the *New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy*¹, setting out how the government will move towards a more active, deliberate and coordinated approach to tourism. Its overarching aim is to enrich New Zealand through sustainable tourism growth. 'Enrich' describes improvements in New Zealanders' social, cultural and environmental wellbeing, as well as the economic opportunities created by tourism. The *New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy* recognises the importance of the future tourism system being environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

The Heritage and Visitor Strategy has been designed to support the five integrated outcomes of the *New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy*:

1. *New Zealanders and our communities*: New Zealanders' lives are improved by tourism
2. *The environment*: Tourism protects, restores and champions the natural environment, culture and historic heritage
3. *The economy*: Tourism Sector productivity improves
4. *International and domestic visitors*: Aotearoa New Zealand delivers exceptional visitor experiences
5. *Regions*: Tourism supports thriving and sustainable regions

2.3 Relationship to DOC's Organisational Strategy

DOC believes New Zealand can be the greatest living space on Earth. Underpinning this is the knowledge that New Zealand's future depends on the natural environment and the resources and services it provides. Conservation, through the protection and enhancement of New Zealand's natural, cultural and historic heritage, is central to a sustainable and prosperous future for New Zealand.

The Heritage and Visitor Strategy has been developed to help achieve DOC's organisational strategy.

It reflects DOC's three strategic roles to:

1. provide conservation services and leadership to protect and enhance New Zealand's natural and historic heritage;
2. contribute to New Zealand's economic, social and cultural success; and
3. enhance the wellbeing of New Zealanders and international visitors by encouraging and enabling people to connect and contribute to New Zealand's nature and heritage.

The strategy aims to support DOC in achieving its relevant immediate outcomes:

- New Zealanders and international visitors are enriched by their connection to New Zealand's nature and heritage.
- New Zealand's unique environment and heritage is a foundation for our economic, cultural and social success.

¹ www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/5482-2019-new-zealand-aotearoa-government-tourism-strategy-pdf

- New Zealand's history is brought to life and protected.
- Both New Zealanders and international visitors contribute to conservation.
- Whānau, hapū and iwi are enabled to carry out their responsibilities as kaitiaki of natural and cultural resources on public conservation lands and waters

DOC uses stretch goals to set challenging targets to strive for over the long term and measure progress to achieving the intermediate outcomes. The four stretch goals which closely relate to DOC's heritage and visitor system are:

- *90 per cent of visitors rate their experience on public conservation lands and waters as exceptional.* This stretch goal helps to measure progress towards the outcomes of visitors connecting with nature, culture and history and DOC's focus on responding to what visitors want from their experience on public conservation lands and waters. It recognises visitor experiences matter for the quality of connections they develop with nature and history.
- *90 per cent of New Zealanders think the impacts of visitors to public conservation lands and waters are very well managed.* This stretch goal helps measure progress towards the protection of conservation values through the management of visitors. It acknowledges that New Zealanders' support for welcoming visitors is connected to the effective management of visitor impacts on public conservation lands and waters.
- *The stories of 50 Historic Icon sites are told and protected.* This stretch goal helps to measure progress towards enhancing the connection of people to New Zealand's cultural heritage. It focuses DOC, together with iwi, hapū and whānau, on providing inspirational and memorable stories to enhance the meaning of these heritage places. Once people care about and understand their significance, support for their protection will increase.
- *90 per cent of New Zealanders' lives are enriched through connection with our nature and heritage.* This stretch goal helps to measure progress towards increasing New Zealanders' awareness and understanding of the benefits of connecting with nature and heritage and how these benefits enrich their lives.

Activities captured within the strategy will support and contribute to achieving other DOC stretch goals, in particular:

- *Whānau, hapū and iwi are able to practise their responsibilities as kaitiaki of natural and cultural resources on public conservation lands and waters.*

Punakaiki Pancake Rocks. Photo: Benhi Dixon



Case study: Good design ensures biodiversity is protected and enjoyed

It is vital that tracks, huts and facilities are designed for both quality experiences and minimising impacts of visitors on the natural environment. DOC has good systems in place for constructing and maintaining facilities to achieve this, seen in two projects near Punakaiki on the West Coast.

The majority of the new Paparoa Track Great Walk and Pike 29 Memorial Track will be in the Paparoa National Park, which to date accommodated only a limited number of day walks and marked routes. As part of their construction, DOC has worked to understand and mitigate any environmental impacts associated with developing new tracks and associated facilities.

All work was completed inside a very narrow construction corridor to specifications that respect the various habitats, landforms and features the track passes through. There will be heavy emphasis on rehabilitation post-construction, as well as signage that encourages users to respect and care for the environment they are enjoying and sharing with other species.

On Punakaiki's popular Truman Track, facilities have been redesigned to protect a rare plant that was suffering from increased foot traffic. On the way to the bay, the old track curved through an area of rare coastal sea cress. As visitor numbers increased, trampling of the sea cress became evident.

In 2017 DOC built a staircase with viewing platforms which prevents visitors from stepping on the sea cress. The new structures immerse people in the coastal environment, provide them with safe access, and have proven popular. Associated interpretation tells the stories of this spectacular section of coastline, from the towering cliffs and dramatic blow holes, to the tiny, fragile, often overlooked sea cress.

3 A legal framework for managing heritage and visitors

3.1 Legal framework

The Conservation Act 1987 provides a general framework for how DOC carries out its role. DOC's main functions as set out in the Conservation Act are to:

- manage land and other natural and historic resources for conservation purposes;
- preserve, as far as practicable, all indigenous freshwater fisheries, and protect recreational fisheries and freshwater habitats;
- advocate for the conservation of natural and historic resources generally;
- promote the benefits to present and future generations of conservation;
- provide conservation educational and promotional information; and
- foster recreation and allow tourism, where these are not inconsistent with conservation.

Conservation involves preserving and protecting natural and historic resources to maintain their intrinsic values, to provide for their appreciation and recreational enjoyment by the public, and to safeguard the options of future generations. DOC administers 25 Acts of Parliament and has functions in many others.

The Conservation Act 1987, National Parks Act 1980, Reserves Act 1977 and Marine Reserves Act 1971 have additional requirements in relation to specified protected land, freshwater and marine areas managed by DOC.

The Wildlife Act 1953 and Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978 and their regulations provide the framework for protecting wildlife and marine mammals and managing people's interactions with them.

DOC and the Department of Internal Affairs also jointly administer the Freedom Camping Act 2011.

3.2 Visitors to public conservation land and waters

The Conservation, National Parks, Reserves, and Marine Reserves acts all provide for the public to benefit from and enjoy New Zealand's natural and historic heritage, where it is consistent with conservation at place. For example, the Conservation Act requires DOC to foster the use of natural and historic resources for recreation, and to allow their use for tourism, to the extent that the use of any natural or historic resource for recreation or tourism is not inconsistent with its conservation. The National Parks Act requires DOC to administer and manage all national parks in such a manner as to secure to the public the fullest proper use and enjoyment of the parks, where it is consistent with the preservation of their natural and historic features and the protection and well-being of their native plants and animals.

The legislation protects the public's right to enter (free of charge) national parks, marine reserves, other conservation areas, recreation reserves, historic reserves and scenic reserves. Normal personal recreational activities (e.g. walking or swimming) do not require permission. However, the public's right to enter is not absolute. For instance, entry to nature reserves such as Kāpiti Island and Hauturu/Little Barrier Island require a permit, so plants and animals can be preserved as far as possible in a natural state.

The legislation allows DOC to set a reasonable charge for visitors to use facilities provided, such as huts and campgrounds. However, the legislation does not allow DOC to charge visitors to use paths and tracks, nor, in the Marine Reserves Act to charge for the use of structures or facilities within marine reserves such as mooring buoys, jetties and boat ramps.

More generally there needs to be a balance between enabling people to enjoy places and protecting both the places they have come to see. People's safety is also an important consideration. The Conservation Act requires any use of natural and historic resources for recreation or tourism must not be inconsistent with its conservation, which includes the purpose for which it is protected. DOC may also set conditions and restrictions if they are necessary to protect the general welfare of the place or people's safety.

Providing commercial services to visitors in national parks, reserves and conservation areas requires a concession to help ensure the services are compatible with the area's values and protection. The legal framework is set out in part 3B of the Conservation Act 1989. For example, a concession may not be granted if the activity would have adverse effects that could not reasonably be avoided, remedied or mitigated, or if a structure could reasonably be established elsewhere. The concessions system does not apply in marine reserves—in these areas businesses such as boat hire or tours are managed through the relevant local authority.

3.3 Wildlife and marine mammals

DOC also has visitor-related functions extending beyond public conservation lands and waters.

The Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978 protects marine mammals (including all whales, dolphins, porpoises and seals) out to the 200-nautical-mile limit of New Zealand's exclusive economic zone. Offences include causing injury or death, harassment and/or disturbance to marine mammals.

The Wildlife Act likewise starts by protecting all wildlife everywhere in New Zealand and out to the 200 nautical mile limit. Certain species, including game, listed in schedules to the Act, have reduced protection or may be unprotected. New Zealand's native species that are protected include all native reptiles and frogs, almost all native birds, and some invertebrate and marine species listed in schedules 7 and 7A to the Wildlife Act 1953.

Commercial operations involving interactions with protected wildlife or marine mammals require a permit to ensure the species are appropriately protected and not disturbed or injured. For example, commercial operators require a permit to take people to view or come into contact with marine mammals at sea or at seal colonies on land.

3.4 Hunting and fishing

Most fishing is managed by the Ministry of Primary Industries. Fish and Game Councils manage most freshwater sport fishing and game bird hunting and represent the regional and national interests of anglers and game bird hunters. DOC generally manages all hunting on public conservation land apart from sport fish and game.

DOC manages the Lake Taupō fishery for trout, and issues licences for Lake Taupō and its tributaries under the Taupō Fishery Regulations. Elsewhere trout fishing is managed by Fish and Game councils.

The Conservation Act requires DOC to preserve, as far as is practicable, native freshwater fisheries, and to protect recreational freshwater fisheries and freshwater fish habitats. As part of this, DOC manages whitebait fishing under the Whitebait Fishing Regulations 1994 and the Whitebait Fishing (West Coast) Regulations 1994.

Under the Wild Animal Control Act 1977 DOC manages the commercial and recreational hunting of deer, tahr, chamois, feral pigs and feral goats on public conservation land. DOC has established 8 recreational hunting areas. In these areas commercial hunting is not allowed, and recreational hunting is used (although not exclusively) to control the numbers of these species. Recreational hunting is encouraged in places where it is consistent with the place's objectives. DOC manages some huts specifically for hunters. Recreational hunting requires a permit (which may be subject to administration/processing fee) which can include conditions to manage safety and impacts on other visitors and wildlife. In some areas DOC controls the use of hunting dogs to protect ground-nesting birds such as kiwi.

DOC uses a similar permit system to manage the hunting of rabbits, hares, possums and wallabies on public conservation land and manages recreational bird hunting on the Chatham Islands.

3.5 Statutory policies

Beneath the legal framework are detailed statutory policies and plans. These include:

- Conservation General Policy
- General Policy for National Parks
- conservation management strategies
- national park management plans
- conservation management plans

These documents form a hierarchy. The general policies ensure DOC manages the range of places, resources and species across New Zealand in a consistent way. The Conservation General Policy provides high-level guidance for DOC's Treaty responsibilities, how DOC manages natural and historic heritage, how DOC provides recreational opportunities, manages the impact of visitors, and provides accommodation and related facilities.

Conservation management strategies are ten-year regional strategies that provide an overview of conservation issues, implements the general policies, and identifies the values and objectives for the places and species DOC manages in that region. They provide a tool for integrating DOC's various management functions under different acts and is a guide for both managers and the public for what DOC intends to do, how it will set priorities, and how it will respond to requests to use the resources DOC manages.

National park management plans are required for each of New Zealand's 13 parks. These ten-year plans provide for the integrated management of each park by identifying the park's values and the outcomes sought for places within the park, to preserve the unique qualities of the park and its indigenous species, habitats and ecosystems, and provide for public enjoyment.

The purpose of conservation management plans is to implement conservation management strategies and to establish detailed objectives for the integrated management of natural and historic resources within an area, including for recreation and tourism. They are developed for areas where there is a greater role for tangata whenua in the management of a conservation park or area resulting from a Treaty settlement, or where there is a high level of activity or a complexity of issues that cannot be satisfactorily dealt with in the conservation management strategy.

3.6 Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki ruling response

The 2018 Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki case concerned DOC's consideration of the Treaty of Waitangi principles in the granting of two commercial tour concessions on Rangitoto and Motutapu Islands to Fullers Group Limited and the Motutapu Island Restoration Trust.

The Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki Tribal Trust opposed the granting of concessions to parties other than tangata whenua on the basis that economic opportunities should be preserved for iwi and hapū as an incident of their mana whenua over the islands.

Section 4 of the Conservation Act 1987 requires DOC to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi in its work to promote the conservation of New Zealand's natural and historic resources.

The Supreme Court found that section 4 was not properly applied in the challenged decisions. It said that in some circumstances, giving effect to the Treaty principle of 'active protection' will require decision-makers to consider extending a degree of preference to iwi, as well as the potential associated economic benefit of doing so. However, all applications must still be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The judgment also set out that section 4 does not create a power of veto for iwi or hapū over the granting of concessions, or any exclusive right to concessions.

DOC fully accepts the Supreme Court's decision, which issues a strong directive about DOC's role as a Treaty partner and sees this as an opportunity to improve how it delivers section 4 responsibilities.

As a first step in this work, the Minister of Conservation and the New Zealand Conservation Authority have initiated partial reviews of the Conservation General Policy and General Policy for National Parks.

The partial reviews will focus exclusively on improving the way the general policies reflect section 4 of the Conservation Act 1987 and is anticipated to take approximately two years to complete.

DOC will ensure the results of the review and any further responses to the Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki decision are reflected in more detail in updates to the Heritage and Visitor Strategy. Until then, the strategy recognises the Treaty partnership and our commitment to achieving healthy partnerships with Māori. DOC is focused on meeting the Crown's obligations to Māori under section 4 Conservation Act 1987 by applying Treaty principles practically in our work, and will consider the impact of the Supreme Court decision on its policies and processes.

Māngungu Mission. Photo: Ministry for Culture and Heritage (Manatū Taonga)



TOHU WHENUA

Landmarks that tell our stories



Case Study: Tohu Whenua – connecting with history

The Tohu Whenua programme is a joint initiative between DOC, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and the Ministry for Culture and Heritage. By identifying and promoting New Zealand's most significant heritage sites, Tohu Whenua seeks to make it easier for visitors to enjoy, share and care for cultural and historic heritage.

Storytelling is used to bring history to life at these sites so visitors can connect more deeply with the identity and culture of New Zealand. Following the success of a 2016 Northland pilot, the Tohu Whenua programme was extended to the Otago region in 2017 and to sites on the West Coast in December 2018. So far ten of DOC's significant heritage places have been recognised as Tohu Whenua sites.

Using design-led visitor research, DOC studies how visitors engage with the stories told at iconic heritage sites, using GPS tracking of visitor movements through a site, social media research, passive observation and experience audits. DOC has discovered that visitors value interactive, immersive, sensory experiences and stories about people. These visitor insights are helping DOC attract visitors to a more diverse range of sites and use evidence-based decision-making to provide more memorable visitor experiences at future Tohu Whenua sites.

DOC is also using these research insights to improve its online platforms and make it easier for visitors to find out about new places, plan and prepare their trip, learn more, and share their experience with others afterwards.

4 Visitor management

4.1 DOC's role

DOC was formed in 1987 when the Conservation Act was passed to integrate conservation management functions. This act sets out the majority of DOC's responsibilities and roles.

DOC is entrusted with managing:

- public conservation land, which covers 80,000 km² – more than one-third of New Zealand's land area. This includes 13 national parks covering 29,000 km².
- visitor facilities, including walking, biking and 4WD tracks, huts, campsites and visitor centres. The track network stretches for 14,800 kilometres and DOC manages around 970 huts and over 13,000 supporting structures.
- public conservation waters, including 44 marine reserves covering 17,000 km², and eight marine mammal sanctuaries.
- 13,000 archaeological and historic heritage sites, of which DOC actively manages about 600.
- advocating for the conservation of natural and historic resources (beyond the areas DOC is directly responsible for), providing conservation information, and promoting the economic, environmental and social benefits of conservation.

Tangata whenua, as the people of the land, have longstanding and diverse connections to New Zealand's land and water. They engage with natural, cultural and historic heritage in a multitude of ways, for example as kaitiaki, for recreation, for traditional sources of food, and for connection with their whakapapa. Their relationship with public conservation lands and waters is guided by DOC's responsibilities under section 4 of the Conservation Act 1987, to interpret and administer the act to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

4.2 Our nature, our heritage, our wellbeing

Our nature is part of who we are as New Zealanders. Throughout Aotearoa New Zealand's human history - from Māori then early settlers through to today's diverse society - nature has been at the core of our culture, identity and wellbeing. The public conservation lands and waters administered by DOC and the experiences people enjoy connecting to the natural, cultural and historic heritage within them are a central part of that identity for many of us.

The reasons people visit public conservation lands and waters are wide ranging and often intensely personal. Some of us seek a true wilderness experience; the remoteness, discovery, challenge, solitude, freedom and romance available in the backcountry. Some of us choose to live close to conservation lands and consider them an extension of their own home.

Others among us may seek opportunities to appreciate New Zealand's natural heritage by visiting small reserves and front-country sites in convenient reach. The benefits we get from spending time in public conservation lands and waters are just as varied.

Every year, 80 per cent of New Zealanders go to their conservation lands and waters at least once and many of us make repeated visits. This percentage is increasing steadily. As many as 4.4 million New Zealanders a year could be spending time in conservation lands by 2025.

While New Zealanders may have different ways to connect with conservation areas, different types of experiences we seek and different reasons for seeking them, what is universal is the value derived from the enjoyment of our natural and historic heritage. Public conservation lands and waters are a vital, relevant and enormously beneficial part of our lives as New Zealanders. When thinking about visitor management DOC must be mindful of the wide range of different experiences sought by New Zealanders and the values that are integral to those experiences.

Taking photos on Kapiti Island. Photo: DOC



Case study: Healthy Nature Healthy People

Across the globe there is increasing recognition of the benefits of time spent in nature for people's health and wellbeing. DOC is leading New Zealand's Healthy Nature Healthy People (HNHP) initiative, which is based on the *Healthy Parks Healthy People* campaign created by Parks Victoria in Australia in 2000. The HNHP initiative seeks to reinforce and encourage the connections between a healthy environment and a healthy society. The principles are:

- > Community wellbeing depends on healthy ecosystems
 - > Protected areas nurture healthy ecosystems
- > Contact with nature is essential for emotional, physical and spiritual health and wellbeing

HNHP is an important strand of DOC's work that contributes to the stretch goal that *90% of New Zealanders' lives are enriched through connection to our nature*. Initiatives include:

- > Working with the Mental Health Foundation to promote the importance of nature to mental health and wellbeing
 - > Taranaki Mounga collaborative partnership to restore the ecological vitality of Mount Taranaki and the surrounding areas and reconnect people with the mounga
 - > Supporting Halberg Disability Sport Foundation to develop an application which will inform those with all levels of physical abilities about accessible activities in nature

DOC is working to incorporate HNHP principles across its work and ensure everyone can access the benefits of getting out into New Zealand's nature.

4.3 Who is a visitor?

In the Heritage and Visitor Strategy, visitors are defined as New Zealanders or international visitors who visit or use natural areas, cultural sites and historic places managed or regulated by DOC for recreation or tourism purposes, either by themselves or using commercial operators. The term does not include people using natural, cultural and historic heritage in other ways, such as customary harvest by tangata whenua.

Many people have strong associations with New Zealand's public conservation lands and waters. In this strategy, the different groups below are considered to fit within the definition of a visitor:

- **Local users** – New Zealanders who regularly visit places near where they live for diverse reasons; including physical exercise, a sense of spiritual fulfilment or to experience the challenge, solitude and freedom of being out in nature.
- **Domestic visitors** – New Zealanders who are travelling outside their local area and have often taken time to plan their trip and book activities in advance.
- **International visitors** – people who are travelling from overseas and will have often invested considerable time in planning their trip. Some will have limited knowledge of the places, their values or local expectations.

4.4 Welcoming visitors

As the guardian of some of New Zealand's most beautiful and special natural, cultural and historic heritage, DOC seeks to encourage more people to participate in recreation, engage with conservation and value its benefits.

New Zealanders, as both local users and domestic visitors, have a strong relationship with this heritage. In 2016, an estimated 80 per cent of New Zealanders visited a broad range of parks and places administered by DOC at least (Survey of New Zealanders, 2016). These spaces provide diverse outdoor opportunities for recreation and connection with nature, culture, and history. In 2019 a revised Survey of New Zealanders (not comparable with the 2016 version) found more specifically that 55 per cent of New Zealanders had visited protected natural areas (predominantly this included Conservation, Forest and National Parks) at least once a year.

The opportunity to engage and connect with nature has many benefits for wellbeing. There are mental and physical health benefits for people of all ages. Participating in outdoor activities in nature can reduce stress, improve concentration, and lift physical health. Time in nature and the outdoors during childhood can provide benefits for children's development, health and wellbeing, and influence participation in recreation in adulthood.

For some New Zealanders, time in nature can help define a sense of belonging and identity. Being part of New Zealand's culture and history through the stories of New Zealand's places can help build a deeper understanding and appreciation of the foundations of New Zealand's society. It can help people to identify with others and can support a sense of unity and belonging.

In certain circumstances, building a deeper understanding and appreciation of New Zealand's natural, cultural and historic heritage can encourage people to support conservation and become more aware of and involved in conservation activities.

4.5 The importance of visitors

The quality of New Zealand's natural landscapes, ecosystems and unique cultural and historic heritage on public conservation lands and waters is a drawcard and backdrop for the recreation and tourism sectors.

DOC and the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment are jointly leading the *New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy* in order to take a stronger role as steward of the tourism system. The government want to make sure that the benefits of tourism are realised, while managing the impacts in order to enrich New Zealand-Aotearoa through sustainable tourism growth.

The tourism sector makes a significant contribution to New Zealand's success. In 2018 provisional estimates show that New Zealand's tourism industry was valued at \$39.1 billion, with domestic tourism providing more than half of the sector's economic activity. In 2018, tourism provided jobs for over 216,000 people. Tourism is likely to continue to be a large employer in the future. Additionally, in 2016 the outdoor recreation industry contributed \$727 million to the New Zealand economy, or 0.3 per cent of GDP, employing nearly 11,000 people.

International tourism is New Zealand's biggest export sector, contributing more than 20 per cent of New Zealand's export earnings. In 2016 half of all international visitors to New Zealand travelled to a national park or participated in outdoor recreation of some kind. 73 per cent said they spent time walking or tramping.

Generally, public conservation lands and waters are outside of the main metropolitan centres. Recreation and tourism in these areas generates jobs and opportunities for inclusive growth by distributing these benefits across regions and communities.

Protecting, restoring and providing sustainable access to public conservation lands and waters can increase regional wellbeing as well as conservation outcomes. Visitors - whether international, domestic or locals - contribute through the use of recreation-based operators and by spending on fuel, food, accommodation, hospitality and other businesses in nearby communities. In 2017 approximately 1,100 businesses operated recreation and/or tourism-based activities on public conservation lands and waters.

Visitors also brings wider economic, social and cultural benefits. Visitor experiences provides an opportunity for Māori to showcase their cultural heritage and realise their aspirations as a key part of the tourism sector. New Zealand Māori Tourism estimates there are now over 2,000 Māori tourism businesses employing more than 14,000 people and annually providing more than six million activities to international visitors.

DOC has estimated international tourism associated with national parks alone contributed \$1.15 billion to New Zealand's economy and employed nearly 12,000 people. These international visitors also tend to stay longer in New Zealand and spend more than those who do not visit national parks, even if they had a similar length of stay. Access to public conservation lands and waters for domestic visitors and local users may also contribute more to regional and community wellbeing as they are more likely to visit a broader range of places than international visitors.

Carkeek Hut, Tararua Forest Park. Photo: DOC



Case study: Backcountry Trust – enabling people to care for their treasured places

New Zealand has a world-famous and treasured network of remote huts and tracks where adventurous and experienced trampers can explore the backcountry and enjoy opportunities for activities like tramping, hunting, mountaineering and more recently mountain biking. Many of the remote facilities are world renowned for their isolation, spectacular landscapes and the solace that can be gained there. They are extremely valued by the people who visit them.

Increasingly, DOC is also ensuring that there are opportunities for those who cannot easily access the backcountry to spend time in nature, regardless of their skill or physical capability. Access to outdoor opportunities closer to home or on popular tourist routes is particularly important for New Zealand's increasingly urban and aging population.

With changing visitor demographics and numbers putting pressure on popular, accessible sites, continuing to service remote and expensive-to-maintain backcountry facilities is a challenge. An extremely successful approach to this challenge has been to enable groups and individuals to help look after the backcountry places that are special to them.

The Backcountry Trust is an umbrella organisation that supports groups keen to assist with hut and track maintenance through funding and mentoring. The Trust is collaborating with DOC and has received \$1.6 million through the DOC Community Fund in the last four years.

The Trust has supported and distributed funding to 234 projects, of which 181 have been completed to date. Maintenance has been carried out by volunteers on 121 public huts and 842 km of tramping and mountain bike tracks, along with smaller projects to establish trailhead facilities and support a range of activities.

In 2018/19, 41 significant projects were completed including re-establishment of the Amuri Pack Track, maintenance of Kapakapanui, Carkeek, Barker, Top, Broderick, Army, Stoney Creek Huts and Sefton Biv, a full rebuild of Mingha and Nina Bivs, and restoration of Canaan Downs Loop Track.

Through the initiative, the places special to New Zealanders are restored and maintained, and groups continue to respond to the challenges and appreciate the rewards of the backcountry.

4.6 Managing adverse effects

In conjunction with welcoming visitors, DOC is responsible for protecting natural and historic resources on public conservation lands and waters. Activities at places should be managed to avoid or minimise any adverse effects on natural resources, cultural and historic heritage, the qualities of peace and natural quiet, solitude, remoteness and wilderness, and the experience of other people.

The acceptability of any adverse effects will be determined by the purpose, values, and resilience of a place. In some areas the level of acceptable change may be minimal or nil, whereas in others, there may be more tolerance for impacts.

When effects are not well-managed or addressed, they can lower the quality and resilience of the environment, lower visitor satisfaction with their experience, increase management costs and create conflict between existing users and public expectations about the management of place. As these impacts accumulate at local, regional, and national levels, they can eventually lead to a loss of public support for the way places are protected and managed. The assessment of effects on an area or place will be used to determine the Conservation Management Strategy actions for managing visitors within these areas and inform other management responses.

DOC is able to set conditions or restrictions necessary to protect plants and animals, cultural and historic heritage, the general welfare of a place or people's safety and experiences. A reasonable charge for the use of facilities (other than paths or tracks) may be imposed. Commercial visitor operations in national parks, reserves (other than marine reserves) and conservation areas require permission from DOC, through granting concessions. The concession process helps DOC ensure activities are compatible with an area's values and ensures those values are safeguarded.

Potential adverse effects include impacts on...

...the environment

- soil erosion or compaction
- water pollution
- introduction of animals, weeds, or diseases
- fire
- noise reducing natural quiet
- wildlife disturbance
- removing or damaging vegetation

...historic and cultural heritage

- disturbing archaeological sites
- damage to historic structures
- inappropriate behaviour in places of cultural significance
- removal of artefacts
- disturbing wāhi tapu

...the recreational experience

- incompatibility of different activities
- congestion
- inappropriate behaviour offending other visitors
- noise reducing natural quiet and tranquillity
- sense of crowding
- introduction of manmade structures

Case Study: Developing a collaborative regional approach – Mackenzie Basin

Big skies, big landscapes and jaw-dropping scenery have resulted in the Mackenzie and Waitaki basins experiencing significant growth as a visitor destination over the past five years. This increase has created significant pressures on local communities and organisations tasked with managing land in the area.

Piloting a new regional and spatial planning approach, DOC is working alongside iwi, the Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment, Land Information New Zealand, Mackenzie and Waitaki district councils, the New Zealand Transport Agency and a range of other stakeholders to develop a collaborative spatial plan to address visitor pressure and achieve a long-term vision for best management approaches. Where the challenges and opportunities span across territorial and jurisdictional borders such as local authority boundaries, the plan will set out a 20 to 30-year plan for the region and community.

DOC facilitated a working group of land management agencies to co-design a short-term camping plan for the peak 2018/2019 summer season. The group looked at solutions across the Mackenzie Basin focused on leveraging this joined-up approach to more efficiently utilise funding and help manage visitor pressures, rather than each agency concentrating on its individual organisational boundaries. Building on this first step, agencies will continue working together to initiate long-term spatial planning work to manage visitor demand and flow, identify infrastructure requirements and placement, and ensure fit-for-purpose regulations.

This work aims to place the enhancement of natural, cultural and historic heritage at the heart of a community's success. It will seek improved conservation outcomes to achieve high-quality visitor experiences and support regions and communities to lift their wellbeing through well-planned visitor-related activities.

DOC also has regional and spatial planning projects underway in Queenstown and Milford Sound, Ruapehu and Taranaki.

5 Visitor trends

5.1 The context has changed

Since DOC last developed a *Visitor Strategy*² in 1996, there has been a significant shift in the context for managing visitors. The system set up under the 1996 Visitor Strategy was not designed for the current context. A change in approach, designed to manage heritage and visitors is needed to ensure that visitor management is sustainable.

In 1996, the strategy pointed to a future where tourism, whether domestic or international, could increase the tension between visitor impacts and the conservation of places. Many of the popular and iconic places DOC manages are reaching this point, particularly during the peak season. This situation has developed quickly and continues to evolve. DOC's resources are under increasing pressure from growing visitor numbers. Inadequate infrastructure and services that are not set up to deal with these numbers can lead to impacts on natural, cultural and historic heritage and degrade the quality of the visitor experiences. Every year 810,000 people visit Milford Sound, 750,000 people visit Franz Josef glacier, 130,000 people visit the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, and over 100,000 people visit the Hooker Valley Track. Annual growth in these places is around 10 per cent, with visitors to Hooker Valley Track increasing by 35 per cent between 2016 and 2018. This growth is not likely to slow any time soon. At the same time, visitor patterns have the potential to shift, with some places rapidly fluctuating in popularity due to factors such as promotion on social media. As more resources are required for managing popular places, the challenges and costs of managing other places also continues to grow.

DOC and stakeholders need to be thinking differently about these challenges, not just on a local scale but at regional and national levels. The rapid pace of change in the sector will require new and innovative solutions to allow DOC to respond to pressures. DOC needs to be able to prioritise its investments and develop a truly integrated and adaptable approach.

5.2 Macro-trends and drivers

5.2.1 More New Zealanders will visit nature and heritage

In 2016, an estimated 80 per cent of New Zealanders visited a broad range of places administered by DOC at least once and many make repeated visits (Survey of New Zealanders, 2016). Between 2013 and 2016 visitation increased steadily from 71 per cent. Such increases, coupled with population growth, means more and more New Zealanders are using public conservation land and waters and are

	2016 (m)	2025 (m)
Domestic	3.7	4.4
International	1.4	2.7

Table 1: Estimated visitors connecting with our natural places.

likely to visit in the future. Based on the same level of broad visitation and current projections, as many as 4.4 million New Zealanders per year could visit public conservation lands by 2025.

In 2019 a revised Survey of New Zealanders (not comparable with the 2016 version) found more specifically that 55 per cent of New Zealanders had visited 'protected natural areas' (predominantly this included Conservation, Forest and National Parks) at least once a year.

² www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/about-doc/role/policies-and-plans/visitor-strategy.pdf

5.2.2 The make-up of New Zealand’s population and where they live is changing

New Zealand’s population is ageing and its ethnic mix is evolving because of immigration patterns and demographic trends. New Zealand’s population is projected to grow from 4.9 million in 2019 to 5.5 million in 2025. In that time the ‘European or other’ ethnic group is projected to be the only group to decrease its share of New Zealand’s population.

Age structures are also changing. By 2032 it is expected 20–22 per cent of New Zealanders will be aged 65 or over, compared with 15 per cent in 2016. Currently, 56 per cent of New Zealand’s population is based north of Hamilton. By 2033, this is projected to have risen to 60 per cent.

These demographic trends may change the profile of visitors to public conservation lands and their outdoor recreation needs. More evidence is needed regarding the nature of these potential changes and their significance for demand for visitor services, facilities and experiences.

5.2.3 International visitor numbers will also continue to increase

International visitor arrivals to New Zealand are expected to reach 5.1 million in 2025, up from 3.9 million in 2018. There is expected to be continued strong growth in arrivals from China. Australia is expected to remain New Zealand’s largest visitor market.

	2019	2023
Australia	1,530,000	1,820,000
China	413,000	800,000
USA	369,000	516,000
UK	234,000	298,000
Germany	101,000	148,000
Japan	98,000	139,557

Table 2: International visitors to New Zealand from key markets – 2019 (year-end September) vs projected.

5.2.4 Where international visitors come from is likely to remain the same

The top five source countries for international visitors are the same as they were in 2012, and are ranked in the same order: Australia, China, USA, UK and Germany. The five next most prevalent source countries are also largely the same as five years ago, with only one minor change in ranking: Japan, Korea, Canada, India and Singapore.

Australia is New Zealand’s largest visitor source, providing more than 1.5 million visitors in 2018. Forecasts show that visitor numbers from Australia will continue to grow by 19 per cent by 2025.

Another key source of visitors for New Zealand is China. China visitor numbers are expected to grow 55 per cent by 2025, increasing from 449,000 in 2018 to reach 696,000 by 2025.

Australia will remain the largest market by spend, though Chinese spend will reduce the gap by 2025.

5.2.5 Visitors’ recreational desires and needs will continue to evolve

The ways in which people prefer to engage with nature have been changing. In the past, more people ventured out into nature for longer walks (day walks or multi-day walks), often into the backcountry.

Today, walking is still visitors’ preferred activity in the outdoors, though in general they prefer shorter walks and expect a higher level of facilities and services. They also enjoy a much wider range of activities while in the outdoors. There is increasing demand for activities such as mountain biking, four-wheel drive adventures and jetboating. Some of these activities are not appropriate on public conservation lands and waters where they damage or have other negative impacts on conservation values.

Time, instead of cost, is now a major deciding factor for people venturing into the remote outdoors. Visitors are increasingly seeking easy access to the backcountry, such as helicopter access for hunting, skiing, and fishing and convenient to remote tourist attractions such as the South Island glaciers.

5.2.6 Visitor activity is concentrated

Most international visitors arrive in Auckland or Christchurch, with smaller numbers arriving in Wellington and Queenstown. Travel takes place along a few major travel routes around New Zealand. Domestic travel patterns within New Zealand are similar.

Enduring seasonal and regional travel patterns can exacerbate the pressures caused by visitor numbers and can lead to congestion, adverse impacts at specific places and reduced community support for visitors.

If the increasing number of visitors continues to be concentrated along these travel routes, it will place even more pressure on popular sites. High visitor numbers in some iconic sites can also create pressures on the infrastructure and services in local communities such as roads, carparks, waste disposal, public toilets and community support services, such as police and ambulance.

Case study: Using digital technologies to provide smarter and more integrated experiences

DOC is investing in digital technologies to improve and enhance the services it provides to meet the expectations of visitors.

To enable more integrated digital services, DOC upgraded its website as well as hut and campsite booking platforms. Bookings on the Great Walks opened in the new system in June 2018 and have outperformed other years in terms of total bookings and stability of the site. There has been a significant reduction in queries to the DOC helpdesk and positive feedback from visitors about ease of use. DOC will continue to add new services to improve the online visitor experience in the future.

The new website platform will enable DOC to provide a personalised experience for visitors, offering content based on demographics or previous behaviour on the site. This platform enables DOC to target safety content to audiences based on experience or location. Using integrated analytics, DOC can monitor the website more effectively and improve its understanding of visitors and to support future improvements.

Digital technology is also helping DOC design and support visitor experiences for the future. DOC, along with Sport New Zealand and Sport Bay of Plenty are collaborating in Virtually On Track. It is a website that acts as a virtual hub for online tools promoting eight sites around the Bay of Plenty to encourage outdoor experience in parks, reserves and beaches. The platform uses Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and a blog to encourage communities of users to download challenges, interact online, and encourage participation in clubs and group activities on site.

5.3 Emerging challenges

5.3.1 Climate change and sustainable management

Human induced greenhouse gas emissions are causing significant changes to the earth's oceans, atmosphere, and climate. In New Zealand, climate change is predicted to include more severe flooding, drought, coastal erosion and storms. New Zealanders are facing unprecedented risks and challenges from the effects of these changes, threatening our unique biodiversity, ecosystems and way of life.

DOC has a responsibility to manage visitors to public conservation lands and waters in a way that encompasses a long-term view of the costs, benefits and impacts of management decisions. Sustainable visitor management is about managing the recreational use, development and protection of natural, cultural and historic heritage to enable people and communities to engage with it now, while safeguarding the options for future generations.

New Zealand has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the effects of climate change. DOC wants to be at the forefront of national efforts to achieve this. DOC needs to adapt our approach and practices to ensure our work to protect nature is truly sustainable in a carbon-constrained world.

Achieving the strategy's purpose of sustainable management means making decisions that move DOC towards a low-emissions heritage and visitor system that is resilient to the risks of a changing climate. DOC needs to work towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions across the organisation. Beyond direct emissions from conservation management, DOC facilitates activities on public conservation lands and waters which result in greenhouse gas emissions. DOC cannot always directly control these factors but will to work to influence opportunities for emissions reductions.

DOC is already working to finalise a *Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan*, including measures for the heritage and visitor system, to guide DOC's planning and operations and integrate climate change adaptation into the way we do things.

Ensuring work is sustainable may be challenging. It also presents huge opportunities to explore new ways of working that could achieve even better results for the strategy's goals to protect, connect and thrive.

5.3.2 Growing pressure on places and facilities

DOC's focus is on protecting and enhancing New Zealand's natural and historic resources, while fostering recreation and allowing for tourism where it is not inconsistent with the purpose and values of the place. Many places managed by DOC have the capacity to accommodate more visitors. However, the capacity of some popular places to handle visitor demand during the peak season has been placed under pressure where visitor numbers have grown quickly. Common issues have been the inability to adequately service front country toilets, inadequate carparking, and congestion on selected tracks and huts. Inadequate infrastructure and services lead to impacts on natural, cultural and historic heritage and degrade the quality of the visitor experiences.

Visitor pressure will continue to grow, though it may slow or fluctuate depending on global economic conditions. It may also rapidly impact places previously unaffected, depending on factors like social media promotion, as has been seen at Roy's Peak near Wanaka. More visitors mean the existing capacity of some places will be reached and exceeded. There is often a time lag between the construction of new visitor services and infrastructure or significant maintenance and management decisions, which hampers DOC's ability to respond to rapid changes. Being able to understand future demand, as well as external

factors such as the need to adapt to climate change and its impact on the capacity and resilience of places, will be important for adaptably managing future visitor pressure and potential adverse effects across the heritage and visitor system.

Where people travel is driven by a range of factors including transport access, availability of experiences, reason for travel, proposed length of stay and place of origin. Most of DOC's visitor network can accommodate growing visitor numbers. The challenge is to shift visitor patterns to influence when, where, and how they visit. The dispersal of visitors to less-visited areas can reduce pressure on popular places.

DOC could identify existing places and facilities along the visitor 'pipelines' from Auckland to Rotorua/Taupō and Christchurch to Queenstown to attract visitors away from places at capacity. This would help make better use of the infrastructure in place and realise benefits from past investments in services and infrastructure.

Case study: New ways of managing traffic congestion at popular places – Tongariro Alpine Crossing

With rapidly increasing numbers of visitors seeking out the same iconic natural attractions, it has been essential for DOC to take new approaches to managing traffic and congestion in these popular places. Simply building more infrastructure for private vehicles is detrimental to the natural environment and will not work in the long term.

To support the ongoing popularity of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing, arguably New Zealand's best-known day hike, in 2017 DOC introduced new traffic management measures and encouraged visitors to park in nearby towns and use shuttles.

Additional toilets were installed, maintenance was increased and kaitiaki rangers supported visitors on the track. In summer 2017/2018 the crossing's 10 per cent annual growth trend continued, but there was an increased spread of visitors throughout the day and reduced traffic congestion. Visitors better understood the natural and cultural context, gave positive feedback about the presence of rangers and no search and rescues were needed on Ngauruhoe. DOC is also working with Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro, councils and key community groups to develop a 20-year vision for the crossing.

5.3.3 Increasing cost of providing services and facilities

DOC currently spends around \$150 million a year to enable visitors to access public conservation lands. Visitors could contribute more towards the cost of DOC visitor facilities and services that meet expectations across the outdoor recreation network. The International Visitor Conservation and Tourism Levy will help ensure international visitors benefiting from DOC's investments contribute more to meeting the costs.

DOC has some ability to charge users of specific facilities and revenue is currently generated through fees for concessionaires and users of some huts and campsites. An increase in the range of revenue options could cover the costs of maintaining the heritage and visitor system and help manage pressures from increasing visitor growth. Trial programmes have tested some ideas, including differential pricing for international visitors on the Routeburn, Milford, Abel Tasman and Kepler Great Walks over the 2018/19 peak season.

A significant amount of information-gathering and analysis is needed to inform advice and decisions on how revenue collected from visitors can support the government's objectives for conservation and a sustainable tourism sector. Improving data and insights is a priority for the strategy, as well as for the *New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy*.

5.3.4 Managing conflict between visitors and their expectations about recreational use

As visitor numbers increase and the demand for different types of experiences grows or fluctuates, there is likely to be an increase in conflict between different types of users. For example, a visitor might seek an experience where they can 'get away' and appreciate natural quiet and solitude within the remote outdoors. Conflict can arise if they encounter a large, guided group of visitors, impacting their experience. Another example of possible conflict is where day visitors park at road ends, encroaching on or limiting access to overnight camping spaces.

Conflict is more likely to occur between dissimilar activities such as cycling versus tramping or guided versus non-guided activity and when traditional or local users are impacted by new users or different activities. Conflict between different activities is usually managed through zoning and policies at place within the statutory conservation management strategies for each region.

As visitor numbers grow or fluctuate and patterns shift, DOC will need to think about how it can maintain some places for traditional domestic visitors and local users. This may require more active management and investment at iconic and popular places to deliberately concentrate travelling visitors, to allow places of importance to local users to be maintained for their enjoyment and appreciation.

5.3.5 Growing risks to visitor safety

The natural forces that shaped New Zealand and gave New Zealand its unique scenery are also sources of risks to visitor safety. Glacial changes, landslide risks, volcanic hazards, weather events, flooding, avalanches and earthquakes are potential risks. Increasing visitor numbers may increase the number of incidents or casualty events.

Growing numbers of people are visiting places that have historically been the domain of experienced backcountry users. Social media is increasing awareness of experiences that appeal because of the exceptional scenery but require higher levels of fitness and appropriate experience to visit safely. While lower-skilled visitors may have a great experience, the increased interest in these places is contributing to a larger number of accidents and an increasing number of injury and deaths.

There is a need to gain a greater understanding of natural hazard risks at high-use sites and the implications of increasing visitor use and/or different types of visitors. This knowledge will inform the type of information provided to visitors and how it is communicated as part of the visitor experience.

5.3.6 Building support within communities

The ongoing success of the recreation and tourism sectors will in part rely on maintaining support and approval within the local and wider communities. DOC is one part of this story. Ensuring that New Zealanders' lives are improved by tourism is also a key outcome sought by the *New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy*.

DOC often has strong regional presence and a highly visible role through its management of popular places and the large visitor network it manages across New Zealand. DOC has a role to play in helping communities understand the value of these places, and can work to make sure that connecting visitors to conservation is sustainable by ensuring visitor helps to build thriving communities.

5.3.7 Developing an integrated heritage and visitor system

DOC's visitor management system was set up to provide good access and simple infrastructure in a relatively static setting. Under current and predicted demand, the existing system needs to change to be able to meet contemporary visitor expectations for quality and type of experiences. Under its current approach, DOC is often active only at the end of the management process, after visitor pressure has become an issue. DOC currently has limited ability to anticipate environmental or activity changes or to influence outcomes before visitor numbers at specific places increase. Further investment is needed to better understand visitor trends and behaviour and their impact at a local, regional and national scale to inform planning and future investment.

Better coordination of the tourism system is a priority of the *New Zealand-Aotearoa Government Tourism Strategy*. DOC is committed to improving tourism outcomes by taking an all-of-government approach to the tourism system and look for opportunities to engage and coordinate with tangata whenua, local government, the tourism and recreation sectors, businesses, regions and communities. DOC should be engaged in collaborative local, regional and national recreational and tourism planning to develop a fully integrated approach to conservation and visitor management. This approach would allow DOC to take pre-emptive, coordinated and strategic action to influence visitor activity consistent with conservation outcomes and government and community objectives.

5.4 The opportunities

Case study: Waipoua/Rakau Rangatira Sharing kaitiakitanga

DOC shares guardianship of some special places with tangata whenua. By working together with Treaty partners there is potential to achieve significant benefits. Their history and culture is brought to life in an authentic and memorable way. Nature is protected and the visitor experience is enhanced.

These benefits are demonstrated in the management of Waipoua Forest, where Te Roroa are kaitiaki. Te Roroa form part of the governance working group for Rakau Rangatira, which is enhancing the visitor experience at Waipoua Forest, starting with improved infrastructure to manage impacts and lengthen visits. Through a contract with DOC, iwi ambassadors are employed to provide education and advocacy for reducing the spread of Kauri Dieback at Tāne Mahuta during peak visitor season.

As well as changing visitor behaviour, Te Roroa's leadership is producing significant conservation benefits. Through Kaitiaki Kiwi, the rūnanga are collaborating with the community to increase the population of kiwi in Waipoua Forest by establishing a core protected area. They have established Te Toa Whenua to transform around 900 hectares of Treaty settlement cultural redress lands in the lower Waipoua Valley from exotic forestry to a mosaic of sustainable land uses.

5.4.1 New ways to work in partnership with tangata whenua

Connection to nature is integral to Māori identity, culture, health and spirituality. As a Treaty partner, DOC is committed to working with tangata whenua to enable them to practise their responsibilities as kaitiaki of natural, cultural and historic heritage and foster Māori prosperity and wellbeing.

Tangata whenua are a Treaty partner in managing natural, cultural, and historic heritage at place. DOC will continue to work with tangata whenua to identify and facilitate opportunities created by visitors to enhance their contribution to conservation through visitor-related activities, including through conservation management strategies.

DOC recognises there is significant potential for greater involvement by tangata whenua to add authenticity, depth and richness to visitor experiences, particularly in expressing the relationship between tangata whenua and the land and connecting visitors to Aotearoa's cultural stories. DOC will seek more opportunities for co-management and to co-design visitor experiences with tangata whenua.

The Māori economy is valued at \$50 billion. In some regions, tangata whenua run significant tourist operations and are concessionaires on public conservation lands and waters. These existing operations present an opportunity to explore how to best enable and work with tangata whenua to support them to benefit from visitors and grow community wellbeing through connecting people with New Zealand's nature, culture and heritage.

5.4.2 Growing awareness and support for conservation

Nature and heritage conservation are a vital part of New Zealand's identity. Visitors to public conservation lands and waters provide more opportunities to tell New Zealand's conservation story. DOC has expanded opportunities to showcase conservation stewardship and management of New Zealand's natural, cultural and historic heritage. DOC's work should encourage New Zealanders to 'own' the conservation effort and enhance New Zealand's reputation with international visitors.

Sharing stories about New Zealand's places with visitors is an opportunity to advocate for conservation, generate respect for nature and the places managed by DOC to help reduce the impact on the environment, and increase positive contributions to conservation.

Visitors share kaitiakitanga of our great outdoors

With increasing numbers of people visiting New Zealand's great outdoors, behaviours once acceptable at low levels are now becoming problematic. Advocating effectively for responsible visitor behaviour has never been more necessary.

This goes beyond just doing the right thing – visitors need to assume a shared responsibility for guardianship of the sites they visit. Separate to DOC's wider work to guide and influence visitor behaviour (from flyers for campervan hire companies to face-to-face visitor centre and ranger advice), DOC is looking at several ways to achieve enhanced and shared responsibility for respecting places.

The Tiaki Promise - DOC is part of a public-private sector initiative, that includes Tourism New Zealand, Air New Zealand and Tourism Holdings Ltd, to develop a visitor pledge to foster responsible travel within New Zealand. Tiaki Promise was launched in November 2018

DOC has also collaborated with Leave No Trace New Zealand. This involves:

- engaging with concessionaires to increase their involvement in promoting responsible behaviour
- developing promotional materials such as flyers, posters and a video for use on Facebook and Instagram

DOC is working with Tourism New Zealand to better understand visitors' behaviour in nature and identify how best to communicate messages about minimising visitor effects.

5.4.3 Supporting conservation efforts

DOC's visitor network sits at the heart of New Zealand's recreation and tourism sectors and underpins the ability for people to connect with nature, culture and history.

In 2017 about 1,100 businesses operated recreation and tourism-based activities on public conservation lands and waters, including 465 guiding, 72 boating, and 15 ski field businesses. DOC also issued 93 permits to businesses around New Zealand offering watching or swimming experiences with whales, dolphins and seals. These concessionaires help facilitate participation in outdoor recreation. Many other businesses, such as commercial transport, rental vehicles and accommodation providers, support and benefit from visitors to public conservation lands and waters.

DOC and the tourism sector have a good relationship. DOC and Tourism Industry Aotearoa (TIA) have an agreement to progress shared outcomes. One initiative under the agreement is Project Groundswell. It is aimed at driving consistent DOC decision-making and supporting practices that exemplify kaitiakitanga and grow conservation activity by the tourism sector. DOC has been exploring the development of a pathway to make conservation opportunities 'easy to see' and 'easy to do' for tourism businesses. This builds on work with tourism operators to help determine actions DOC can take at a local and national level to make it easier for others to contribute to conservation.

DOC has also been part of the development of the Tourism Sustainability Commitment which is being led by TIA. There are opportunities for DOC and the tourism sector to continue working together to find ways to enhance the contribution of the tourism sector and concessionaires to conservation.

Case study: Supporting conservation through the visitor experience

Experiences on public conservation lands and waters can support conservation in ways that make a real and measurable difference to conservation.

There are a number of tourism operators who build conservation action into the visitor experiences they offer and their everyday activities. Eco Wanaka Adventures take visitors to Mou Waho Island on Lake Wanaka for a nature walk, and each group they host plants a native tree in an area cleared of pine trees. The company also run planting days. So far, their groups have planted approximately 8,000 trees, a significant contribution to the restoration of a pest-free island that is home to weka, geckos and two species of wētā.

Businesses that operate in some of New Zealand's unique natural heritage have an interest in helping to protect and enhance the values of these places that support their activities. In some cases, these businesses and staff carry out conservation work convenient to their usual operating areas.

Real Journeys is a leading example. In Milford Sound their boat crews check the stoat traps weekly to reduce pests within these areas to help provide protection to nesting penguins and other wildlife.

For smaller and less remote companies, the opportunity exists to do conservation work in their own 'backyard', providing leadership and a focal point for conservation in the community. Examples include:

- ZipTrek remove wilding pines, trap stoats and possums, and plant native shrubs at Bob's Peak in Queenstown.
- Rotorua Canopy Tours trap animal pests in a 220-hectare forest reserve near Rotorua leading to dramatic canopy regeneration.

DOC is working to help make more conservation opportunities 'easy to see' and 'easy to do' for tourism and recreation businesses so they can play their part in protecting and restoring natural, cultural and historic heritage.

5.4.4 Supporting regional and community wellbeing

New Zealand's public conservation lands and waters are distributed across the country's regions. Visitors, through their social and economic contribution, can make a difference to regional development and sustainable, inclusive growth within these communities. These contributions present an opportunity for regions and communities to lift their overall wellbeing – natural, economic, social, and cultural – through protection of their natural, cultural and historic heritage and increased visitation.

Hosting visitors can support local recreation and tourism operators and the transport, accommodation and hospitality sectors. The visitor economy generates jobs, contributing to sustainable and thriving communities. DOC has estimated international tourism associated with national parks alone contributed \$1.15 billion to New Zealand's economy and employed 11,943 people.

These economic and social benefits often accrue from the natural, cultural, and historic heritage and the experiences that draw visitors into these communities. Protecting and enhancing the natural, cultural and historic heritage underpinning these experiences will sustain thriving regions and communities. DOC, in partnership with tangata whenua, and working with government, councils, the recreation and tourism sectors, and communities, can help protect conservation areas and support quality experiences for visitors. By becoming more closely engaged in national, regional and local destination management planning, DOC will be able to advocate for conservation and, as part of the heritage and visitor system, achieve outcomes at local, regional and national levels.

DOC has an extensive network of visitor services and facilities across New Zealand. This network means regional and seasonal dispersal could also spread the benefits from visitors more widely and support regional development. However, DOC will need to consider the potential flow-on effects of increasing visitor numbers at other places, including the impact on local users and their experiences, and the local community's views on more visitors. Places identified as alternative destinations will need to be able to provide experiences without lowering conservation values.

Successive governments have sought to improve outcomes for regions outside of the main metropolitan areas. DOC has an opportunity to support regional and community wellbeing in ways that align with the protection of conservation values.

6 Conclusion

Developing a new Heritage and Visitor Strategy has allowed DOC to consider how to respond to the many challenges and opportunities identified in this document. The new Heritage and Visitor Strategy sets out three goals – PROTECT, CONNECT, THRIVE – which seek to ensure we:



- Protect New Zealand’s natural, cultural and historic heritage
- Enrich and better connect visitors to this heritage, and
- Support tangata whenua, regions and communities to benefit from protecting and connecting visitors with this heritage.

The new strategy proposes actions to achieve these goals. It is focused on effective and adaptable responses to challenges and opportunities, and delivering a proactive strategic framework for the heritage and visitor system that is aligned with and responsive to the government’s priorities.

Developing the strategy

To develop this strategy, DOC consulted with Treaty partners and with other government agencies with interests the tourism sector, as well as the New Zealand Conservation Authority and conservation boards. We have sought the views of a wide range of sector stakeholders including the Tourism Industry Aotearoa, Federated Mountain Clubs, Forest and Bird and Recreation Aotearoa.