

Jobs for Nature

Sustaining the gains

Continuing to increase long-term investment in nature beyond the programme

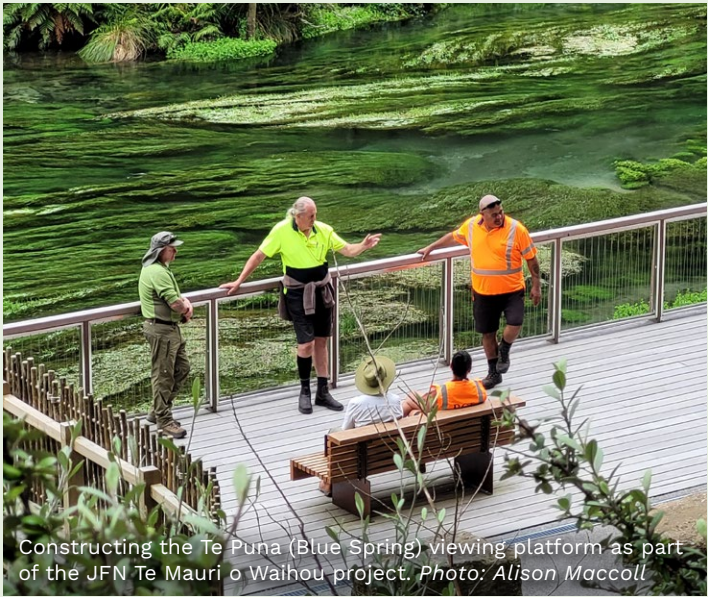
Jobs for Nature (JFN) was a \$1.2 billion programme set up in response to COVID-19 to create both nature-based employment opportunities and enduring environmental benefits. It ran from July 2020 to June 2025 and was administered by five government agencies.¹

The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) allocated \$485.3 million over 225 projects across Aotearoa New Zealand. It is estimated that these projects will collectively return more than \$1.97 billion in environmental, social and economic benefits over 30 years.²

The opportunity

The JFN programme originally focused on short-term employment and then shifted into something much bigger. The programme demonstrated that investing in conservation has major benefits for people, the economy and the land.² It delivered a positive economic return on investment, contributed to many conservation goals, and built conservation skills and capability into the workforce. Wider benefits included the development of new commercial businesses, connecting communities, and providing opportunities for iwi, hapū and whānau to exercise kaitiakitanga.

Projects indicated that sustainable long-term funding is the main barrier to sustaining the gains. To overcome this challenge, DOC and other stakeholders will need to continue to explore ways to increase long-term investment into nature.



Constructing the Te Puna (Blue Spring) viewing platform as part of the JFN Te Mauri o Waihou project. Photo: Alison Maccoll



Funding allocation

What we did to ensure sustainability

DOC targeted projects to ensure that:

- funded work contributed to long-term regional or national conservation strategies and outcomes
- projects were developing the capability of their kaimahi (workers) and setting them up for continued employment
- a diverse range of projects were funded
- projects were creating enduring benefits – for example, through building knowledge, systems, commercial businesses, community connections and partnerships.

Applications were also assessed against sustainability criteria, including their ability to sustain outcomes once the JFN funding ran out.

What happened

There was high pressure at the beginning of the programme for potential partners to submit proposals and deliver employment outcomes quickly.

Having a diverse range of projects allowed for a focus on localised employment needs and leveraged existing infrastructure and priorities. It also resulted in different sustainability needs throughout the programme depending on project size, resources, capacity and capability.

There was wide variation in the ability of projects to deliver on sustainability outcomes. Many of the projects were able to realise their sustainability plans, but some needed to shift their approaches.

‘Looking ahead, there is potential ... to diversify and expand [our] focus. This may involve placing greater emphasis on biodiversity conservation, in addition to pest control ... As we transition beyond the Jobs for Nature programme, we will explore opportunities to develop new initiatives and projects that build on the successes of the current [project]. This may include integrating additional conservation activities and expanding the scope of our work to address other environmental challenges.’³





Delivery

What we did to ensure sustainability

DOC provided projects with flexibility by enabling variations to funding terms, payment schedules or agreed deliverables – for example, preparation of a business plan.

DOC's regional teams provided tailored support for delivery and enduring outcomes in specific locations.

Partners were encouraged to participate in community collaboration, attend regional hui, share knowledge and build capability.

What happened

Flexibility allowed partners and projects to react to pressures such as severe weather events and rising costs. In other instances, it allowed them to focus on transition – for example, by developing a business plan for ongoing needs.

This investment has built capability and connections that continue beyond the life of the JFN funding. Over 957 people completed formal training through the programme, and most of the 7,103 people employed completed informal training to support them in their roles.

Many project partners are now connecting and sharing knowledge. Collaborations are bringing together expertise and resources to enable ongoing conservation work.



See also the Jobs for Nature 'Investment profile', 'Benefits' and 'Lessons learned' summaries. Data as at June 2025.

Notes:

- 1 The JFN agencies are DOC, the Ministry for the Environment Manatū Mō Te Taiao, the Ministry for Primary Industries Manatū Ahu Matua, Toitū Te Whenua Land Information New Zealand and the Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment Hikina Whakatutuki.
- 2 Webber J, Steen-Jones C. 2024. Jobs for Nature impact assessment. Prepared for the Jobs for Nature Secretariat. Wellington: MartinJenkins. www.jobsfornature.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Final-report-2024-Q4-J4N-impact-results-2024.pdf
- 3 Information obtained from unpublished End of Project reports delivered to DOC in 2024.
- 4 DOC. 2022. Regional Investment Review – Survey undertaken by DOC of 193 projects to identify delivery risks and opportunities, transition requirements, and regional alignment (unpublished). [156/193 projects indicated that they would want to continue.]
- 5 Tūhono Taiao. [date unknown]. About Tūhono Taiao. [accessed 13 March 2025]. tuhonotaiao.org.nz/about
- 6 Jobs for Nature Secretariat. Selection of project profiles. www.doc.govt.nz/jfn-project-profiles
- 7 Sustainable Business Network. 2024. Case study interview for JFN0055: Partnering to Plant (unpublished).
- 8 Ngā Tāngata Tiaki Custodian Trustee Limited. 2024. Case study interview for JFN0050: Nga Awa Whanganui: Te Awa Tupua o Whanganui – Mouri Tūroa (unpublished).



Transition beyond closure

What we did to ensure sustainability

The JFN Secretariat provided a central approach for the cross-agency programme to sustain outcomes beyond JFN funding, seeking to make opportunities and resources accessible to projects. This included creating the national digital platform Tūhono Taiao to enable stronger ongoing collaboration.⁵

DOC committed to providing baseline transition support, which included:

- access to employment support from the Ministry of Social Development
- a showcase of the project benefits⁶
- access to the Tūhono Taiao platform⁵
- a tailored transition plan for each region.

What happened

In a survey of the project partners, 81% stated that they intend to continue past the closure of their JFN project.⁴ Some of the funded work, such as animal pest control and landscape-scale restoration, requires sustained efforts to achieve outcomes. By contrast, planting generally requires limited maintenance for a few years to maturity.

Due to these factors, some projects require little or no ongoing support through transition, while others require significant long-term support to sustain and grow conservation gains. Just over half of the funded projects have indicated the need for transition support.⁴

The majority of project partners surveyed indicated they would require further investment, signalling that the end of JFN creates a significant funding cliff.⁴ Non-financial government support can help projects through this period and, in some cases, lead to the creation of sustainable funding or business models.

For example, Tūhono Taiao provides an ongoing mechanism for project partners to connect and collaborate with other organisations. This could lead to new partnership opportunities.

‘Tūhono Taiao was born out of a shared vision to create a platform to facilitate collaboration and enhance the collective impact of nature-based projects across New Zealand.’⁵

‘Some of the organisations through gaining capability and capacity brought themselves up to a point where they were viable to apply for local contracts and council contracts in those areas. Or were getting noticed for other bits of work, it kind of got them over a threshold.’⁷

‘We’ve got a lot of potential to move forward, and ... we’ve created a lot of tools, and we’ve got a really good system in place. A vehicle to drive this long-term, should we choose [to] keep it. I personally would like to see [the project] move on, but it comes down to that funding again.’⁸