



Jobs for Nature Benefits

Benefits observed by the Department of Conservation from the \$485.3 million Jobs for Nature programme



Jobs for Nature: Benefit Report

This document is available at www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/jobs-for-nature--mahi-mo-te-taiao/jobs-for-nature-benefits-and-outcomes

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Cover image: *Kauri Tracks*. Credit: *Auckland Council*

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Foreword

Comment from the Deputy Director-General Public Affairs

Jobs for Nature provided the largest single investment into conservation nationwide. The Department of Conservation (DOC) has been privileged to be able to invest in priority initiatives led by our project partners. This has allowed DOC to focus its own efforts tactically, alongside the great work by other entities.

The funding was of course a response to the impacts of COVID-19 with a dual focus on jobs and nature, but this report shows the benefits were even broader than that.

Jobs for Nature projects enabled communities, iwi, hapū, businesses and government to work together to restore and protect our natural heritage. Mobilising communities and businesses to accelerate conservation efforts, built a sense of stewardship that endures beyond the life of this programme. We have seen new and innovative approaches to conservation emerge and we have seen projects commercialise their operations and become self-sustaining.

The programme has delivered environmental resilience through investing in freshwater improvements like riparian planting and landscape scale predator control across the country. Wider benefits include an emergent workforce that is both trained and experienced in conservation capability, which is an ongoing benefit to New Zealand's precious nature.



Now as we transition out of the programme, DOC remains committed to building on the lessons and benefits of this investment. We will continue to work alongside Treaty Partners, communities, and businesses to protect and enhance our biodiversity for future generations.

The relationships, skills, and structures established through Jobs for Nature will have lasting impacts, informing future conservation programmes and strengthening DOC's ability to deliver on its strategic goals. Fundamentally, nature needs all of us now, more than ever.

Sia Aston

Deputy Director-General Public Affairs
Department of Conservation

Executive summary

‘Healthy nature is central to human health, wellbeing and our economy. Here in Aotearoa New Zealand our natural environments, and the plants and wildlife they support, are part of our Kiwi identity. Nature provides us with green spaces and recreation for wellbeing, supports our primary and tourism industries, and allows us to gather kai. When nature is thriving, people are thriving. This has long been recognised in Māori culture, where nature and people are interwoven through whakapapa. People are kaitiaki (guardians) of nature, and nature is kaitiaki of people.’¹

The Jobs for Nature programme was a \$1.2 billion investment in conservation and employment, launched in 2020 in Aotearoa New Zealand in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Conservation Te Papa Atawhai (DOC) allocated \$485.3 million to 225 projects across the country, employing 7,103 people and delivering over 8.6 million hours of conservation work.

The programme achieved far more than its initial employment goals. It strengthened biodiversity outcomes, empowered iwi and communities through local

decision-making and delivery, and built a skilled conservation workforce. New business opportunities and entrepreneurial skills were developed.

These outcomes align with Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020 (Biodiversity Strategy)² and the Treasury’s Living Standards Framework,³ demonstrating how nature-based investment can deliver social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits. The Biodiversity Strategy’s vision is that everyone has a part in helping restore the mauri (life force) of nature for future generations.

As the programme concludes, the focus shifts to sustaining these gains and supporting long-term conservation and employment pathways. In addition, it is about identifying new opportunities to leverage these learnings for future nature-based investment opportunities.

DOC identified four benefits from the Jobs for Nature programme, that are explored further in this report.



Seed collection. Credit: Arowhenua Nursery

1 Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation. Page 4.

2 See note above.

3 A framework established by the Treasury to monitor the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

Figure 1: Four Jobs for Nature benefits

1

Increased employment in conservation in response to COVID-19

The Jobs for Nature programme has been successful in its delivery against the core objective of ‘Providing jobs to communities and businesses in regions affected by the COVID-19 pandemic’.

The programme provided employment and boosted economic resilience, with 7,103 people employed in nature-based roles. Flexible time was available, so staff could still be employed by a business for existing work and fill in their hours with conservation work. The programme supported local economies by keeping people local and enabling new businesses to emerge. Smaller entities were able to build their governance, business cases, and entrepreneurial skills and systems for future prosperity.

The programme was well positioned to achieve even higher rates of employment. In the absence of need, however, it was able to adjust and focus on training and capability development, which will ultimately deliver more long-term benefits for people and nature.

2

Deliver additional conservation, recreation and heritage gains

Local, regional and national ecosystems received a huge boost of energy and mahi (work) from programme participants. Areas important to people, communities and Aotearoa New Zealand’s unique species have been restored and will be looked after for generations to come. This work has supported local climate resilience and the natural environment, which supports people’s wellbeing and the natural health of Aotearoa.

Environmental gains include 2.2 million hectares of pest control, 4.9 million plants planted, and 861 cultural and recreational sites maintained. Priority waterways and wetlands have been restored, improving wildlife habitat, water quality and flood and erosion control, while 7,060 hectares of land have been protected in perpetuity through Queen Elizabeth II covenants across 265 sites.⁴

3

Increased opportunities for iwi, hapū and whānau to exercise rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga

A significant emerging benefit from the programme has been the embedding of te ao Māori (the Māori worldview) into conservation management. This included supporting Māori partnerships and leadership, with 90 Māori entities receiving funding, enabling rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga. Knowledge was also shared, with mātauranga Māori embedded in 60% of projects and training of current and future kaitiaki. The programme also built delivery partnerships between Māori, government, science and community organisations.

The Māori Land Fund supported Māori landowners to protect and restore their whenua by building and delivering on iwi, hapū and whānau management plans. Individuals have reconnected with the land, enabling mana whenua to realise visions for their rohe and exercise kaitiakitanga.

4

More effective conservation effort through learning and collaboration

Projects focused on training and upskilling staff, which led to a knowledgeable conservation workforce more able to respond to future challenges. The programme helped 957 people obtain formal qualifications, with most of the 7,103 participants receiving informal training.

The programme empowered local decision-making. This resulted in groups reaching out across their communities, creating lasting linkages and building knowledge and alignment across their visions and goals. These connections will endure and help contribute to thriving communities and local conservation actions into the future. Over 28,000 community members participated in education initiatives.

The increase in training and connections will undoubtedly help these communities respond to future weather-related events. This was observed after Cyclone Gabrielle, in February 2023, with many of the project workforce across Jobs for Nature projects using their skills, such as chainsaw and bulldozer use, to support civil defence efforts.

With increased knowledge, shared understanding and visions and inspirations, it is likely many Jobs for Nature participants will continue to contribute and advocate for conservation and pass on their skills. The programme has empowered iwi, whānau and hapū, landowners, community groups and businesses to actively engage in restoring biodiversity in Aotearoa, and this supports the Biodiversity Strategy's vision for all New Zealanders to be involved.

4 Further details on the full conservation achievements can be found in other Jobs for Nature reports (see links in the Appendix).

Background

The \$1.2 billion Jobs for Nature programme was established in June 2020, initially as a COVID-19 pandemic response programme, to promote short-term employment. Its purpose was to support business sectors, communities and individuals affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and provide meaningful employment with conservation outcomes. The programme represented a new approach to economic recovery.⁵

The five-year multi-agency programme had three core objectives:

- create 11,000 jobs in regions that needed work the most
- establish enduring benefits for healthy waterways, biodiversity, climate change and cultural values
- support sustainable land use and the implementation of regulatory requirements, including for freshwater, biodiversity and climate change.

This report looks at the allocation of funding administered by DOC.

Jobs for Nature funding was administered through five government agencies, with coordination undertaken by a central secretariat. The breakdown across agencies was as follows:

\$485.3M

Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai (DOC)

\$430.6M

Ministry for the Environment

\$188M

Ministry for Primary Industries

\$40.9M

Kānoa – Regional Economic
Development and Investment Unit

\$40M

Land Information New Zealand

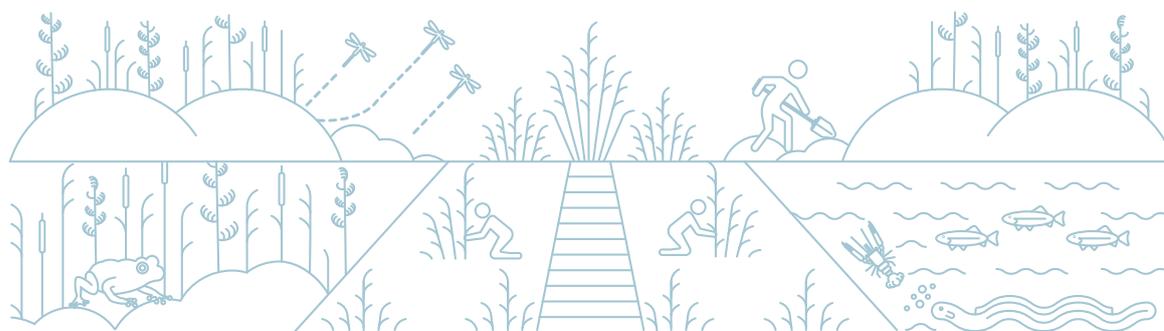
⁵ Further details on the full conservation achievements can be found in other Jobs for Nature reports (see links in the Appendix).

Investment profile

DOC received \$485.3 million of this funding to allocate according to the investment framework principles.⁶ This resulted in 225 projects across Aotearoa, with a range of objectives supporting conservation work and DOC’s responsibilities for te taiao (the natural world) (Table 1).

Table 1: DOC Jobs for Nature funding streams

Kaimahi for Nature	Restoring Nature	Protecting Nature
<p>\$198.6 million funding 143 projects</p>	<p>\$134.1 million funding 76 projects</p>	<p>\$152.6 million funding 6 projects</p>
<p>Kaimahi for Nature was based on the fast redeployment of potentially affected people, businesses and regions. Initial delivery-ready projects targeted urgent needs in tourism and forestry. The remainder of the fund was allocated through a contestable and regional approach.</p>	<p>Focused on biodiversity restoration projects. Included three targeted contestable funds for Māori and private landowners and community groups. Provided targeted funding to accelerate restoration of six priority waterways and threatened species work. Included long-term protection of gains through QEII covenanting.</p>	<p>This non-contestable funding was directed at projects delivering landscape-scale predator control.</p>

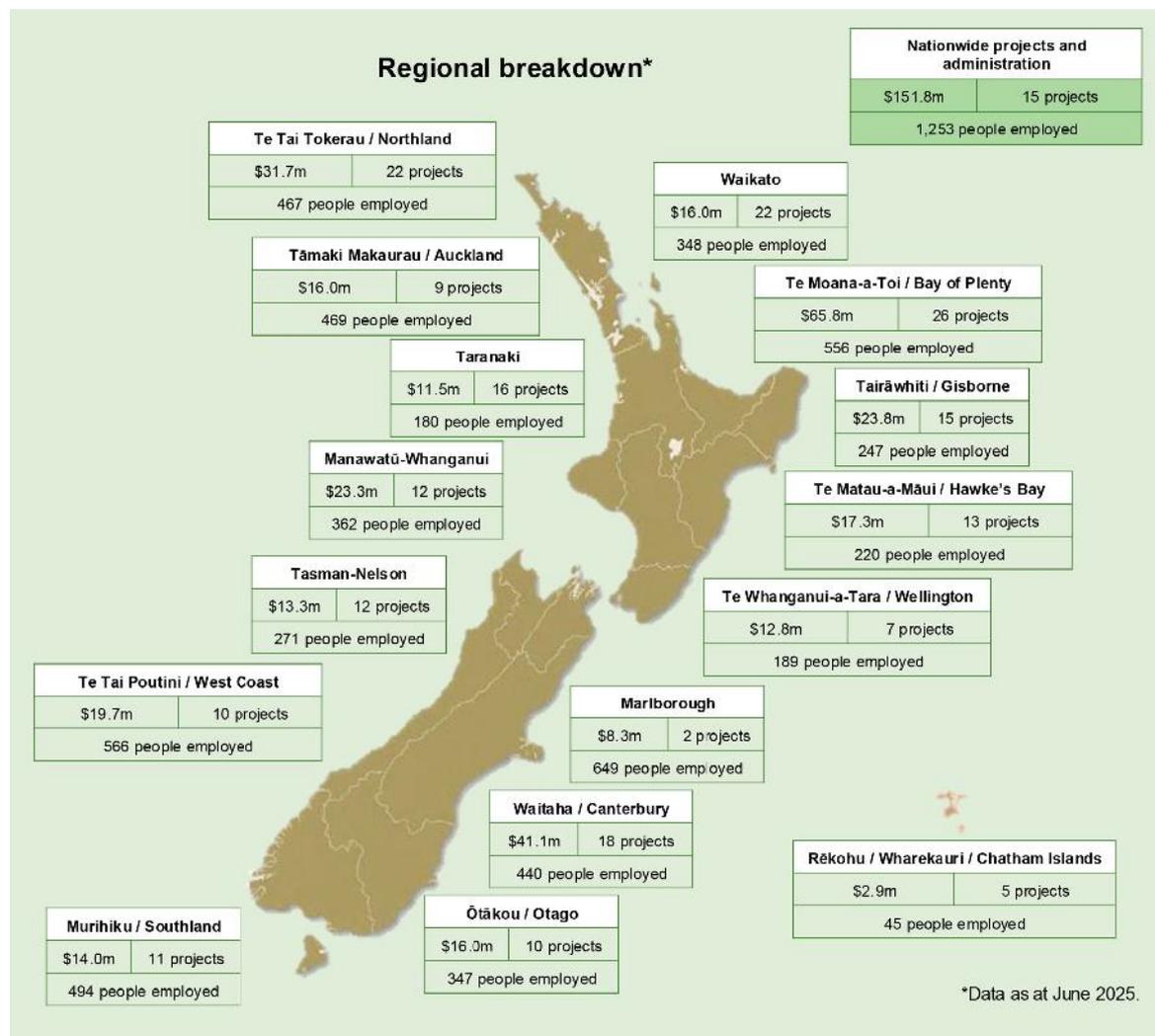


⁶ Jobs for Nature Reference Group. 2020. Jobs for Nature Investment Framework. [accessed 17 December 2025]. environment.govt.nz/assets/publications/Funds/appendix-jobs-for-nature-reference-group-investment-framework-1.pdf

Project distribution

Projects varied in scale, from small community-based restoration activities, partnerships with distressed businesses, to more strategic large-scale investments. Regional distribution and prioritisation were significant factors in the funding allocation decisions (Figure 2).

Figure 2: DOC Jobs for Nature project regional distribution



Changing context

With high unemployment predicted, as a result of the country's closed borders and pandemic lockdowns, the initial focus was on 'delivery-ready' projects that were able to employ people quickly, particularly in affected sectors, such as forestry and tourism.

When the predicted unemployment did not eventuate, sustainable land use Ministers⁷ directed agencies to place greater emphasis on environmental and capability objectives alongside employment. Over time, projects were able to adjust from short-term, quick employment to longer term visions and outcomes.

In addition to direct COVID-19 pressures, other external influences substantially changed the environment in which projects had been planned. These included:

- supply chain disruptions (e.g., difficulty in obtaining plants and fencing materials and hiring vehicles)
- over 20% increase in the living wage throughout the programme duration⁸
- high inflation,⁹ resulting in substantial increases to material purchase prices
- adverse weather events, including Nelson flooding (August 2022), Auckland Anniversary Weekend floods (January 2023) and Cyclone Gabrielle (February 2023).

As a result of these pressures and a change in programme focus, several projects had to revise their original estimated deliverables.

⁷ Ministers responsible for the Jobs for Nature programme at the time included: environment, local government, agriculture/biosecurity/land information, forestry/economic and regional development, conservation and climate change.

⁸ Living Wage New Zealand. September 2021 (\$22.75), September 22 (\$23.65), September 23 (\$26.00) and September 24 (\$27.80). [accessed 17 December 2025]. livingwage.org.nz

⁹ Reserve Bank of New Zealand. June 2021 (3.3%), June 22 (7.3%), June 23 (6%), December 24 (2.2%). [accessed 17 December 2025]. rbnz.govt.nz/monetary-policy/about-monetary-policy/inflation

Wilding Pine – Forestry Redeployment Project (\$2 million)

Starting in July 2020, forestry workers displaced by the COVID-19 pandemic were redeployed into short-term conservation roles nationwide.

The work completed by 189 contractors employed under this early project included the removal of 2,633 ha of wilding pine and 235 km of track maintenance.

Queenstown and Fiordland Workforce Hub (\$250,000)

A pilot collaboration between Otago Regional Council, Queenstown Lakes District Council, DOC and tourism operators to redeploy local tourism workers in Queenstown and Fiordland.

Thirty-six tourism workers were paid the wage subsidy and matched to conservation projects, including building two urban cycleways and making over 250 traps for the Gibbston Valley.

Kaitiaki Taiao (\$1.6 million)

This ecological restoration project, based in Hawke's Bay, responded to a survey in June 2023, noting that the 5,000 trees planted the previous year had been lost due to Cyclone Gabrielle. Access to the sites was restricted for over 3 months, slowing the ability to complete planned project outputs.

Seven staff were tasked to regional clean-up work, totalling 3,000 hours of work.

With no further funding available, the project's original goals and timeframes needed to be revisited.

Benefits

Benefits are defined by Treasury and others as ‘the measurable improvement from an outcome perceived as an advantage by one or more stakeholders’¹⁰

A programme will result in outputs (e.g., new plantings next to a stream) that lead to outcomes (better water quality, less erosion), which, in turn, are measured by the value to those receiving the benefit. A benefit needs to be attributable to the work of the programme.

DOC mapped potential outcomes from the core strategic documents to design the Jobs for Nature programme and identified **four main benefits**:

1

Increased employment in conservation in response to COVID-19

2

Deliver additional conservation, recreation and heritage gains

3

Increased opportunities for iwi, hapū and whānau to exercise rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga

4

More effective conservation effort through learning and collaboration.

A profile of each benefit, its measures and the strategic outcomes it delivered against are provided below. The benefit profile includes the relevant Living Standards Framework¹¹ indicators and He Ara Waiora¹² objectives. Contributions towards the Jobs for Nature Strategy¹³ and Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy (Biodiversity Strategy)¹⁴ are also noted.

Benefits can also ‘emerge’ through the programme that were not initially predicted. In many cases, Jobs for Nature funding also contributed to a much larger existing programme of work, which made measuring its contribution complex. This report provides examples and highlights the potential longer term, collective benefit to conservation management in Aotearoa.

¹⁰ The Treasury. 2015. Managing Benefits from Projects and Programmes – Better Business Cases. Wellington: The Treasury.

¹¹ A framework established by the Treasury to monitor the wellbeing of New Zealanders.

¹² The Treasury framework for evaluating Māori perspectives on wellbeing and living standards.

¹³ The DOC Jobs for Nature Strategy was developed to guide DOC’s allocation of Jobs for Nature funding. [Unpublished]

¹⁴ Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation.

Economic benefits

DOC-administered projects were estimated to deliver a cost–benefit ratio of \$4.08 for every \$1 spent (with a payback over 6 years), resulting in an estimated total of

\$1.97 billion
in benefits over 30 years.

The economic assessment, along with an earlier report,¹⁶ found the highest returns came from pest control on agricultural land and water-quality improvements, particularly those reducing irrigation losses. Projects that avoided infrastructure costs (e.g., stormwater drains) or improved resilience to extreme weather events, such as wetland restoration, also proved to be highly effective investments.

These findings reinforce the value of nature-based solutions as cost-effective strategies for climate resilience and biodiversity protection.

¹⁵ Martin Jenkins. 2024. Jobs for Nature impact assessment: Final report. Wellington: Martin Jenkins.

¹⁶ Martin Jenkins. 2023. Jobs for Nature – Mahi mō te Taiao: Understanding economic impacts of the programme – final report. Wellington: Martin Jenkins.



Te Mauri o Waihou. Protecting and enhancing Te Puna (the Blue Spring). Credit: Alison Maccoll

Benefit 1: Increased employment in conservation in response to COVID-19

Benefit profile

1 This benefit focuses on the core employment objective of the programme. It looks at financial wellbeing including individual employment and business support outcomes.

Sub-benefits:	1.1 Individuals are employed in conservation-based jobs	1.2 Businesses and communities in potentially affected regions survive or thrive
Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people employed in work as part of the DOC Jobs for Nature programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number and types of groups that received funding • Total funding allocated to each region • Case Study: Creating positive outcomes for businesses

Strategic objectives and outcomes supported:

<p>Living Standards Framework Natural Environment</p>	<p>Jobs for Nature Programme outcome Providing jobs to communities and businesses that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	<p>Biodiversity Strategy outcome Prosperity is intrinsically linked with a thriving biodiversity</p>
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BENEFIT 1

Why it matters

As noted in the DOC Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Conservation, in January 2023: ‘Our economy depends on nature, from tourism to agriculture, forestry and fisheries, infrastructure, property, energy, resources, sports and recreation.’¹⁷

In 2024, international visitors contributed \$12.2 billion to Aotearoa New Zealand’s economy.¹⁸ For 40% of visitors, the country’s landscapes and scenery were a deciding factor in visiting,¹⁹ highlighting the economic importance of investment in the environment.

A report commissioned by the Treasury²⁰ in 2020 found tourism-related industries were most likely to be affected by the pandemic. The report forecast that, by March 2022, gross domestic product could be 25% below its March 2020 level in the Queenstown-Lakes District, the worst-affected area. Other tourism-dependent districts, such as Mackenzie, Kaikōura and Westland, were expected to record double-digit declines. Factors relevant to Aotearoa New Zealand’s economic recovery would include the ability for unemployed workers to retrain and find new employment, and the expansion or development of businesses.

1.1 Individuals are employed in conservation-based jobs

As at June 2025, DOC’s Jobs for Nature projects have employed 7,103 individuals in nature-based jobs. Participants were paid to be in meaningful work, ensuring they were able to support their families and communities.



As noted in Aotearoa New Zealand’s Employment Strategy:

‘Work is an important part of our lives generating lifetime and intergenerational benefits. It contributes to the physical, mental, cultural and financial wellbeing of workers and their families. Work provides people with opportunities to use, develop and pass on their skills and knowledge. It creates a sense of purpose, helps build social connections and networks and has a positive impact on people’s physical and mental health.’²¹

Figure 3 shows the total people employed by region.

17 Department of Conservation. 2023. Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Conservation. Wellington: Department of Conservation. Page 5.

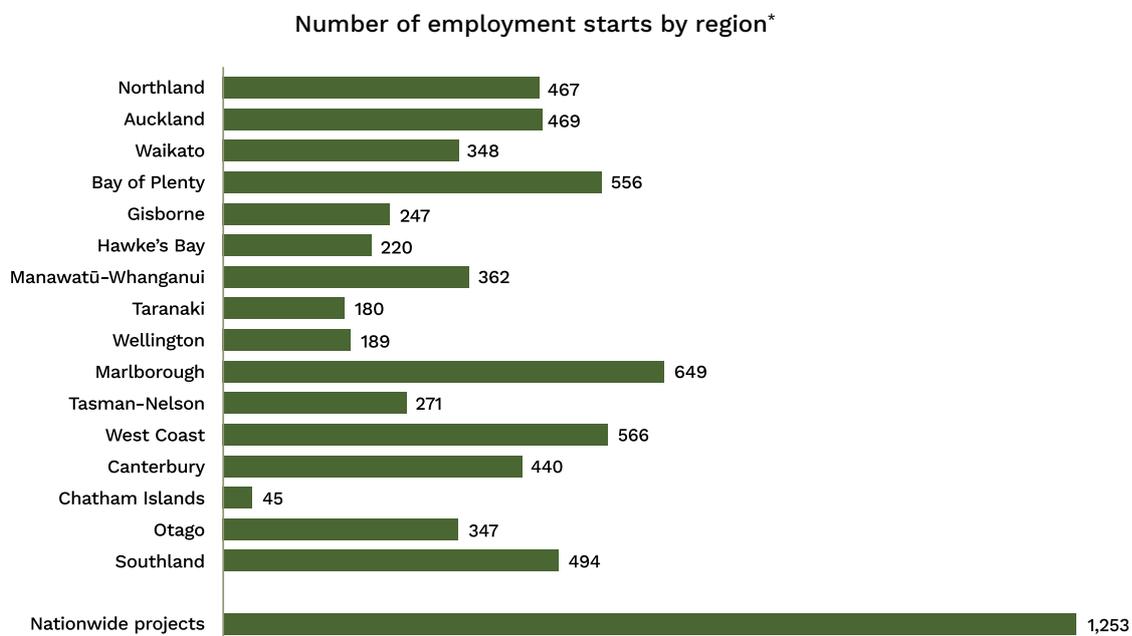
18 Tourism Evidence and Insights Centre. International Visitor Survey – Year end December 2024 and December Q4 2024 Data Release. teic.mbie.govt.nz

19 Tourism Evidence and Insights Centre. International Visitor Survey (Quarterly) – Tourism Evidence and Insights Centre. teic.mbie.govt.nz/teiccategories/datareleases/ivs

20 Infometrics. 2020. The effects of COVID-19 on the regional economies of New Zealand. Wellington: Infometrics. Page 4.

21 Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. 2019. Aotearoa New Zealand’s Employment Strategy. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Page 1.

Figure 3: Regional employment



*Data as at June 2025

Projects have reported on employees’ personal growth and their positive outlook for the future. The skills and confidence gained allowed staff to move to more senior roles.

‘Personal development gained, as a key component of training, was the ability for kaimahi to rise to being better whānau members as a result of full-time employment with guided professional development. The supportive and nurturing program enabled our whanau to engage in professional and personal development that was staged to encourage progress.’²²

Some projects focused on recruiting the long-term unemployed and provided wrap-around support services, for example, pastoral care, basic life skills, mental health support and career coaching. The social return on this investment is better outlined in the social impact assessment of the Jobs for Nature programme.²³

The programme delivered many benefits for individuals, including the ability to remain local, close to family and therefore supporting their local economy and community.

22 Ngāi Tāmanuhiri Taiao End of Project Report. [unpublished]

23 Impact Lab. 2024. Jobs for Nature Programme: GoodMeasure Portfolio Overview. This reports on four projects, of which one was funded by DOC.

BENEFIT 1

'During the delivery stage, we were resourced effectively to trial our training and support programme to cater for those job seekers who were long term unemployed and at risk of generational dependent rangatahi...

The success of our delivery also resulted in staff being actively headhunted by other organisations... 90% of the people enrolled under Mana in Kaimahi programme transitioned into employment or education. Nine of the participants are currently working for Te Whangai Trust.²⁴

1.2 Businesses and communities in affected regions survive or thrive

A core focus of the programme was to support those businesses and communities most likely to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This included the forestry and tourism sectors and the communities relying on those sectors, such as in the West Coast and Waitomo areas.

'Many people, particularly Māori, have strong economic, cultural and social ties to their regions. Supporting our regions and industries to thrive and create jobs is a key part of realising the potential of all people in all parts of the country. Productive and resilient regions, industries and firms deliver high quality products and services that contribute to the economy and higher living standards.²⁵

South Westland Tourism Worker Redeployment (\$3.78 million)

The Glacier Country, on the West Coast of the South Island, is highly dependent on international visitors.

This project allowed up to 40 businesses to keep essential staff. For example, a historic track in Franz Josef Glacier Valley was upgraded by skydiving staff who split their time between track building and hosting domestic skydiving customers.

It enabled the businesses to employ their staff around tourism work, so they could continue in full-time employment. As a result, businesses stayed open, and staff received a full-time wage, staying in town and supporting the local economy. Tourism staff also got a wider appreciation of the conservation work that many of their businesses depended upon.



Credit: DOC

24 Mana in Kaimahi Te Whangai Trust Hub Expansion. [unpublished]

25 Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. 2019. Aotearoa New Zealand's Employment Strategy. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Page 2.

Entity types contracted included:

97

charitable trusts

45

companies

29

incorporated societies

29

Crown entity or government

24

Māori organisations and landowners

Waitomo Region Restoration Project
 (\$2 million Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment and \$1.2 million DOC)

This project supported up to 18 roles in the community in a job-share concept. Led by Tourism Holdings Ltd (Discover Waitomo), staff were retained and provided with full-time, meaningful employment.

Work included reserve maintenance, planting and weed control. Staff were trained in the skills needed.

A major focus was a bespoke work programme that was adaptable around the demands at Waitomo Caves.

A range of entity types was funded across Aotearoa, including 45 companies directly. Many other projects also recruited staff from local businesses to support their employment, such as the South Westland Tourism Worker Redeployment project.

In developing its Tourism Industry Transformation Plan, the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment commissioned a review of the South Westland Jobs for Nature project. This found the flexible workforce sharing model, between tourism and conservation sectors, to be successful.²⁶

Early in the programme, funding enabled existing businesses to retain important staff through periods of low tourism numbers. As time progressed, projects could start to think about maintaining and improving, and potentially becoming a commercial organisation.

²⁶ Allen + Clarke. 2023. South Westland Jobs for Nature Outcomes Assessment: Evaluation report. Wellington: Allen + Clarke.

²⁷ Ministry for the Environment on behalf of the Jobs for Nature Secretariat. 2025. Backcountry Trust Project Profile. jobsfornature.govt.nz/assets/Publications/Project-Profile-Backcountry-Trust.pdf. Pages 3 and 4.

²⁸ Department of Conservation. 2022. Regional Investment Review Survey (193 responses across 185 projects) (unpublished).

BENEFIT 1

'The project work extended to smaller communities like Murchison, Wanaka, and Reefton, where the communities were affected by a loss of tourism revenue due to COVID-19 lockdowns. By aligning the work on Public Conservation Land and distributing funding into these smaller communities, the Trust was able to support them during difficult times.

The project created jobs for skilled workers in tourism and construction, supporting them through tough economic times. It offered flexible, short-term work for construction sole traders, which was especially valuable during COVID-19 lockdowns when many projects were stalled due to supply chain issues.²⁷

In a mid-term review of the projects,²⁸ 93 projects noted an intention to either commercialise or explore commercialisation in the future. Of these, 14 projects advised a high level of confidence in progressing towards commercialisation. Further information can be found in the Case study: **Creating positive outcomes for businesses** (see link in the Appendix).

The Jobs for Nature programme also aimed to support likely affected communities. The regional distribution of funding can be seen in Figure 2, and ranges from \$2.9 million to the Chatham Islands through to \$65.8 million in the Bay of Plenty. A further \$151.8 million went to projects distributed across more than one region. By allocating funding across Aotearoa, it ensured support was provided where needed, with projects undertaking local recruitment based on local needs and priorities.

Arowhenua Nursery (\$2.7 million – June 2021 to June 2024)

Founded with support from Jobs for Nature and One Billion Trees funding, this Māori-led nursery grew alongside other local Jobs for Nature restoration projects needing eco-sourced plants.

The project quickly exceeded its target of 180,000 plants, producing more than 600,000 plants over 3 years. Following the conclusion of Jobs for Nature funding, the nursery is now working to become an ongoing commercial business.

The nursery is focusing on its people and building a collaborative partnership to support the rūnanga to practise kaitiakitanga and become empowered partners in conservation and biodiversity.



Credit: Arowhenua Nursery

Benefit 2: Deliver additional conservation, recreation and heritage gains

Benefit profile

2 This benefit is the second core objective of the programme and looks at the work delivered by the programme including the biodiversity, recreational and heritage achievements.

- Sub-benefits:**
- 2.1** Increased conservation gains including for fresh water, pest management, threatened species and climate change resilience
 - 2.2** Recreation, cultural and heritage sites developed and / or maintained. Businesses and communities in potentially affected regions survive or thrive
 - 2.3** Increased long-term conservation protection by legal mechanisms

- Measures:**
- Conservation output data is in the annual reports
 - Case study: Investing in the protection and recovery of New Zealand’s Threatened and At-Risk species
 - Recreation and historic output data is in the annual reports
 - Area of private land protected
 - Number of sites protected

Strategic objectives and outcomes supported:

Living Standards Framework
Natural Environment

Jobs for Nature Programme outcome
Create a sustainable conservation legacy through delivery of a 4-year programme

Biodiversity Strategy outcome
Contributing to the wealth of the natural environment in Aotearoa

BENEFIT 2

Why it matters

As noted in the Biodiversity Strategy:

*'Papatūānuku (Earth mother), Ranginui (Sky father) and their offspring are in serious trouble, and we urgently need to do a better job at looking after them. The state of nature is a legacy that we leave for future generations.'*²⁹

The natural environment and outdoors are important to New Zealanders. They benefit our lives and society in many ways, from the need for clean air and water, the food we farm, catch or hunt, and our tourism- and primary industry-based economy, through to recreational and cultural connections.

In 2021/22, around 80% of New Zealanders visited protected natural areas (such as parks, reserves and beaches) and 75% visited heritage sites. Two-thirds of New Zealanders (65%) agreed that the preservation and conservation of the outdoors is one of the most important issues in New Zealand.³⁰

2.1 Increased conservation gains for fresh water, pest management, threatened species and climate change resilience

By focusing the Jobs for Nature programme on work in nature, Aotearoa New Zealand's biodiversity has had a significant boost.

Jobs for Nature investment accelerated existing important priority workstreams, such as contributing an additional \$76 million towards the Predator Free 2050 strategy and \$42.9 million supporting restoration of six Ngā Awa priority waterways.



2.2M ha

of pest control
(animal and plant)



4.9M

plants planted



6,025 ha

of wetland restored

²⁹ Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy. Wellington: Department of Conservation. Page 12.

³⁰ Department of Conservation. 2023. Briefing to the Incoming Minister of Conservation. Wellington: Department of Conservation.

Penguin Place (\$633,000) and Jobs Increasing Hoiho Conservation (\$422,000)

Unique to Aotearoa New Zealand, the hoiho (yellow-eyed penguin) is thought to be one of the world's rarest penguin species.

These two projects focused on predator control, fencing and weeding to protect hoiho habitat, and provided support to the operations of the Penguin Place Rehabilitation Centre.

The presence of additional rangers meant more monitoring of the nests, which, in turn, meant sick and vulnerable penguins were found, helping combat the new threat of respiratory distress syndrome.

Waimatā Catchment Predator Management and Species Restoration Project (\$308,000)

Predator management in 3,000 ha of mixed farmland, bush and riparian areas to support the long-term goal to reintroduce pāteke (brown teal), kākābeak (ngutu kākā) and eventually kākārīki.

Kākābeak is classified as nationally critical, with only 150 known wild plants, found mostly in the east of the North Island.

At least 60% to 70% of Jobs for Nature projects included ecosystem restoration and / or pest control, helping to build safe places for threatened and taonga species.

Some projects also worked directly with threatened and taonga species, such as the kākārīki karaka (orange-fronted parakeet) (nationally critical), kākābeak (ngutu kākā) (nationally critical), hoiho (yellow-eyed penguin) (nationally endangered), kauri (at risk) and whio (blue duck) (naturally vulnerable).



BENEFIT 2

Further information can be found in the Case Study: **Investing in the protection and recovery of Aotearoa New Zealand's Threatened and At-Risk species** (see link in the Appendix).

Projects have helped support Aotearoa New Zealand's nature-based response to climate resilience. Restoring ecosystems, replanting forests and wetlands to provide natural barriers against climate hazards, and riparian planting to prevent erosion are examples.

Waingake Ngāhere Ora (\$2 million)

Gisborne District Council and Maraetaha Incorporated, supported by Ngai Tāmanuhiri, have embarked on a transformation project to return 1,100 ha of clear-felled pine plantation to indigenous forest in Waingake, restoring the significant cultural and ecological values of the area and adjacent native bush, while also protecting Gisborne's drinking-water source and infrastructure assets.

The project has contributed significantly to long-term outcomes for resilience and security of Tairāwhiti's water supply, helping to improve land stability over time, reduce erosion and sedimentation, and ensure a high-quality water supply.³¹

2.2 Recreation, cultural and heritage sites developed and/or maintained

Many New Zealanders immensely value the ability to get out into nature and experience the country's unique heritage. Natural, cultural and historic areas are well used here by commercial tourism businesses and international visitors.

The DOC Heritage and Visitor Strategy³² creates a framework for decisions relevant to public conservation land. The natural, cultural and historic heritage of places need to be protected first. Visitors can then experience and connect with these places. This protection and enhanced visitor connection support improved wellbeing, enabling communities to thrive.

3,171 km
of tracks created and maintained*,

861
cultural, heritage and recreational assets maintained

* Note, tracks built or maintained were for both recreational use and / or pest control purposes.

³¹ Waingake Ngāhere Ora End of Project Report. [unpublished]

³² Department of Conservation. 2021. Heritage and Visitor Strategy. Wellington: Department of Conservation.



Credit: Auckland Council

Kauri Protection and Restoration (\$1.9 million)

Many of Auckland's recreational tracks have been closed to protect kauri forests.

The project supported 12 construction and maintenance crews per year to upgrade tracks to kauri dieback standards. Staff came from a small local tourism business affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 30 km of tracks have been maintained to kauri dieback standards, exceeding the goal of 16 km.

Re-opened tracks now provide further recreational opportunities for both Auckland locals and visitors to see and experience this special taonga species.

Preservation of natural, historic and cultural places is important to New Zealanders' identity. Some Jobs for Nature projects directly supported this crucial work by facilitating experiences that strengthened the connection New Zealanders felt to their heritage, which helped to build enthusiasm and support for conservation.

'The riverbanks have been transformed from an unseemly dump area into a recreational park area for the benefit of many in the local community and visitors alike. An amazing transition that will continue to improve with time. A significant legacy for the community. This Jobs for Nature project has been the enabler.' [The trail network – over 60,000 users a year in 2024 – doubled in usage in the past 3 years.]³³

BENEFIT 2

Backcountry Trust Work Programme

(\$2 million)

The project complemented volunteers' work efforts by contracting specialist skills, such as removal of lead from huts, hut and bridge building and maintenance.

Thirty huts and 130 km of tracks were maintained. Huts were restored to help reduce ongoing maintenance needs.

Jobs for Nature (along with other funding sources) supported the rebuild of Aspiring Hut, a historic stone hut in Mount Aspiring National Park. Renovations involved earthquake strengthening and adapting it to the needs of future users.

Back Country Trust used builders affected by the COVID-19 downturn and focused on small communities where the loss of tourism was being felt.

Maungaruahine Heritage Pa Reserve

(\$355,000)

In the Bay of Plenty, funding was used to restore and protect the Maungaruahine Pā historical pā site, which was returned to the Waitaha iwi under a Treaty Settlement.

The project has provided cultural and outdoor skills training and 17 ha of pest and weed control. It is developing a Geographic Information System mapping and health analysis of the Maungaruahine Heritage Pā conservation area, to inform future protection and preservation strategy.

2.3 Increase in long-term conservation protection by legal mechanisms

The Jobs for Nature portfolio included funding to ensure the long-term protection of gains made.

DOC allocated \$8 million to the Queen Elizabeth II National Trust to protect areas of high biodiversity value or newly restored areas on private land.

The Trust offered two legal protection mechanisms to landowners, delivering 265 QEII covenants comprising 221 open space covenants and 44 restoration agreements, across Aotearoa. In total, 7,060 hectares of private land are now protected in perpetuity.

7,060 ha
of private land in protection under the QEII National Trust across 265 sites

Benefit 3: Increased opportunities for iwi, hapū and whānau to exercise rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga

Benefit profile

3 This benefit reflects funding allocation decisions that allowed for a significant number of iwi-led or co-led projects that were able to enhance rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga at place.

Sub-benefits:	3.1 Whānau, hapū and iwi exercise greater influence in environmental decision-making and are able to exercise kaitiakitanga	3.2 Mātauranga Māori is further embedded within conservation
Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of Māori collective entities funded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of projects reporting use of mātauranga Māori

Te ao Māori benefits case studies

Strategic objectives and outcomes supported:

Living Standards Framework Human capability	He Ara Waiora Tikanga <i>(making decisions with the right values)</i> Tiakitanga <i>(guardianship, stewardship)</i>	Jobs for Nature Programme outcome Supporting iwi, hapū and whānau to become rangatira and kaitiaki	Biodiversity Strategy outcome Treaty partners, whānau, hapū and iwi are exercising their full role as rangatira and kaitiaki
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BENEFIT 3

Why it matters

Under the provisions of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi), the Crown and Māori work in partnership to actively protect Māori interests. The intention is to build an ongoing relationship of mutual benefit, built on trust and good faith between tangata whenua and all who are to come. Kaitiakitanga (guardianship and protection), rangatiratanga (absolute sovereignty) and protection and continued use of taonga, such as Māori knowledge, are also a vital part of this agreement.

‘Connection to nature is integral to Māori identity, culture, health and spirituality. Representing the Crown 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.’³⁴

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment has developed the Māori Employment Action Plan. The vision is that Māori exercise rangatiratanga to create intergenerational wellbeing through work. The action plan includes objectives for successful and sustainable Māori entrepreneurship and for a diverse Māori workforce in future-focused sectors.³⁵



Credit: Nga Manu Taiao o Tamaki-Nui-a-Rua

³⁴ Department of Conservation. 2021. Journey to the Heritage and Visitor Strategy. Wellington: Department of Conservation. Page 31.

³⁵ Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. Māori Employment Action Plan. [accessed 16 December]. mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/employment-and-skills/employment-strategy/maori-employment-action-plan

3.1 Iwi, hapū and whānau exercise greater influence in environmental decision-making and are able to exercise kaitiakitanga

Jobs for Nature funding provided a significant opportunity to progress aspirations and visions held by whānau, hapū and iwi. It activated new opportunities for Māori to be the decision-makers, provide governance and deliver on those visions.

Ninety Māori collective entities – including post-settlement governance entities, trust boards and land trusts – were funded. A mid-term review found that 59% of projects were led or co-led by hapū or iwi, embedding te ao Māori practices and enabling active kaitiakitanga.³⁶

Many projects have referenced the value of connecting to the whenua and of building capability and knowledge for the next generation, while actively engaging in kaitiakitanga.

As one participant from Manawatū-Whanganui shared:

‘The mana of the taiao...it’s about active kaitiakitanga, and the cultural monitoring work undertaken in J4N [Jobs for Nature] creates connection back to whenua, employment and training, learning, and having our own conservation workforce. We would like to be doing more nature-based contracts and monitoring, and we would like conservation outcomes for our whānau. J4N makes sense of our Iwi values, and helps us to return home, to our whenua. – Kaimahi, Manawatū Whanganui.’³⁷

90

different Māori collective entities were funded across 100 projects

Oranga Whenua, Oranga Tāngata / Restore, Grow, Thrive – Phase 2 (\$2.3 million)

Building on earlier work, Te Rūnanga Nui o Te Aupōuri focused on the restoration of three significant sites within the Te Aupōuri rohe in the Far North.

The Nga Tai e Tua o Te Aupōuri Environmental Management Plan was implemented and practised throughout the project, raising awareness and fostering kaitiakitanga of historical sites of significance. Enhancing knowledge was a significant focus.

‘The JFN [Jobs for Nature] initiative has provided us with opportunities for co-governance on 100% Te Aupōuri iwi-owned land and enabled us to work on various projects and pursue financial sustainability.’³⁸

BENEFIT 3

The Jobs for Nature programme included a dedicated \$25.6 million Māori Land Fund, supporting 16 projects aimed at enhancing biodiversity on Māori-owned land. In partnership with Ngā Whenua Rāhui,³⁹ DOC allocated funding to initiatives for predator and weed control, wetland restoration, and broader conservation outcomes. Overall, more than 93 projects reported undertaking work on Māori land, contributing to the restoration and protection of whenua and supporting intergenerational biodiversity outcomes for Māori communities.⁴⁰

E Hoki Mai Ra Whenua Collective (Mahia Māori Land Collective) (\$1.3 million)

Funding was provided to continue and upscale an existing programme of pest control on Māori land on the Mahia Peninsula. The Rongomaiwahine Iwi Trust is delivering an animal pest control programme over 1,700 ha on Māori-owned land within four catchments with the Rongomaiwahine rohe.

Working in partnership with the Hawke's Bay Regional Council, the project supports continued progress towards predator free goals of the Mahia area.

These partnerships are stepping stones towards whānau, hapū and iwi exercising rangatiratanga.

Further information on te ao Māori benefits is available in the Secretariat Report - Jobs for Nature Te Ao Māori Evaluation⁴¹) and DOC's Te Ao Māori Benefits Case Studies (see link in the Appendix).

*'The hononga of this kaupapa was huge. Connections and affiliations to the whenua created a fundamental recognition of Tikanga, Kawa and Kaitiakitanga to provide a sense of identity and belonging that had been disconnected for generations. This project raised the awareness and engagement of whanau to significantly lift the intergenerational wellbeing of our connection as Maori.'*⁴²

36 Department of Conservation. 2022. Regional Investment Review Survey (193 responses across 185 projects) (unpublished).

37 Allen + Clarke. 2024. Te Ao Māori Evaluation Jobs for Nature. Wellington: Allen + Clarke. Page 36.

38 Oranga Whenua, Oranga Tāngata/Restore, Grow, Thrive – Phase 2. Close-out report.

39 The Ngā Whenua Rāhui funding programme offers two funds to protect the natural integrity of Māori land and preserve mātauranga Māori.

40 Department of Conservation. 2022. Regional Investment Review Survey (193 responses across 185 projects) (unpublished).

41 Allen + Clarke. 2024. Te Ao Māori Evaluation Jobs for Nature. Wellington: Allen + Clarke. jobsfornature.govt.nz/assets/Publications/J4N-Evaluation-Te-Ao-Maori-Report_Final.pdf

42 Ngāi Tāmanuhiri Taiao End of Project Report. [unpublished]

3.2 Mātauranga Māori is further embedded within conservation

‘Mātauranga Māori’ directly translates as ‘Māori knowledge or wisdom’. In New Zealand and internationally, awareness is growing among the scientific community of Indigenous or traditional knowledge, its value and how it relates to environmental science.

‘Incorporating mātauranga into scientific research and conservation projects can result in a better understanding of climate change, habitat loss and introduced species.’⁴³

Jobs for Nature was an opportunity to increase the use of mātauranga Māori in conservation. A DOC survey indicated that mātauranga Māori was integral to 110 projects, or 60% of those that responded to the survey. A further 24% indicated occasional use (Figure 4).⁴⁴

‘Benefits have included strengthening the connection of rangatahi and pakeke with their whakapapa and Iwi, learning about their history including sites of significance, reconnecting with old practices such as hunting and fishing, and developing an ability to combine mātauranga Māori with Western ecological science practices. – CEO, Manawatū Whanganui’⁴⁵

Figure 4: Use of mātauranga Māori



Te Haumihi ō Ngāti Kuri (\$2.64 million)

With a focus on capability building to grow jobs in nature and achieve long-term ecological gains, the project made extensive use of mātauranga Māori.

Mahi (work) contributed to the conservation of a significant complex of threatened dune and wetland ecosystems in the Te Pahi area of the Far North.

Led by Ngāti Kuri Trust Board, the ongoing project has a multi-dimensional approach to developing its labour force to maintain infrastructure, translation of research and mentoring.

43 Predator Free NZ. [date unknown] Mātauranga Māori. [accessed 16 December 2025]. predatorfreenz.org/toolkits/groups-toolkit/governance/matauranga-maori/

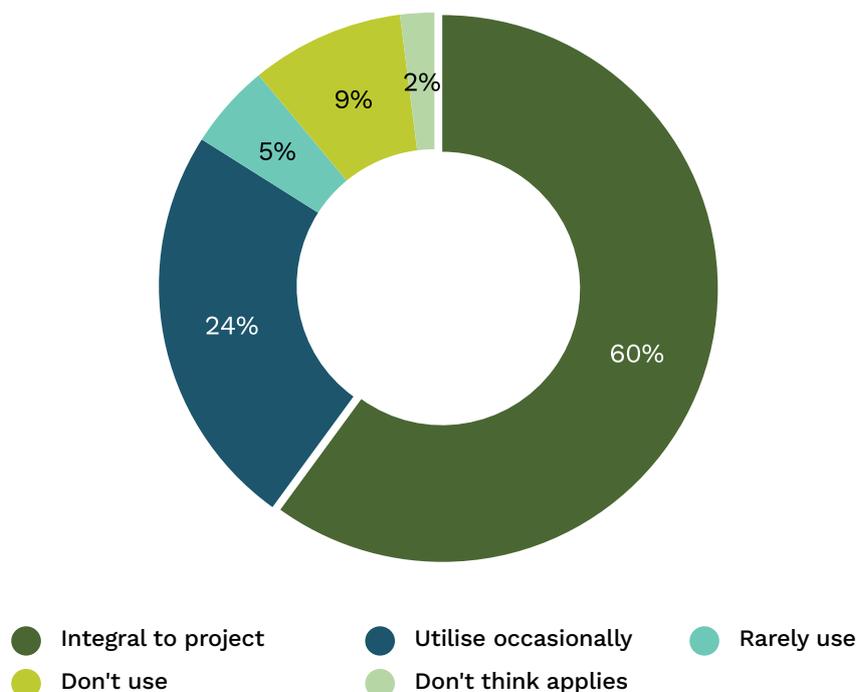
44 Department of Conservation. 2022. Regional Investment Review Survey (193 responses across 185 projects) (unpublished).

45 Allen + Clarke. 2024. Te Ao Māori Evaluation Jobs for Nature. Wellington: Allen + Clarke. Page 32.

BENEFIT 3

in Jobs for Nature projects

Use of Mātauranga Māori



The closure report for one project provided the following reflections:

'The project has recognized and provided opportunities for iwi, hapū, and whānau by incorporating mātauranga Māori into environmental restoration, offering co-governance roles to exercise rangatiratanga, and engaging local communities in kaitiakitanga. It aligns with Treaty Settlement commitments and iwi management plans, protecting taonga species and reconnecting mana whenua to significant sites. The project has also generated commercial opportunities and supported cultural impact assessments to ensure alignment with Māori values. [...]

*Working closely with iwi, hapū, and whanau strengthened partnerships and created a deep sense of ownership and pride within the community. The training provided empowered participants with new skills and qualifications, which will benefit them long into the future. Although the project faced challenges, such as the uncertainty caused by COVID-19 and the need to ensure long-term employment sustainability, the overall experience has been one of growth, resilience, and hope for the future.'*⁴⁶

Benefit 4: More effective conservation effort through learning and collaboration

Benefit profile

4 This benefit is about people being invested, becoming more knowledgeable, and aligning with other conservation work for more effective and efficient mahi.

Sub-benefits:	4.1 Participants learn new conservation skills	4.2 Increased wellbeing and sense of connection to nature	4.3 Increased community connections and knowledge-sharing lead to more effective conservation
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Measures:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of people completed formal training • Case Study: Building conservation knowledge and skills • Number of people employed funded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of community education experiences • Case Study: Accelerating conservation through community connections and collaboration
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Strategic objectives and outcomes supported:

<p>Living Standards Framework Social cohesion</p>	<p>He Ara Waiora Kotahitanga <i>(working in an aligned, coordinated way)</i></p>	<p>Jobs for Nature Programme outcome Building capability to expand the future environmental workforce Kaimahi are enriched by working in nature and contributing to thriving communities Growing investment and empowering local decision-making to increase collective impact</p>	<p>Biodiversity Strategy outcome People’s lives are enriched through their connection with nature</p>
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BENEFIT 4

Why it matters

The Aotearoa New Zealand Employment Strategy outlines the importance of capability building:

*'Lifelong learning enables people to maintain and build their skills helping them be productive and adaptable in the face of change. The better skilled our workforce, the more prosperous our communities will be. Investment in skills benefits workers, their families, employers and our wider society. It helps to reduce inequities by increasing workers' resilience and expanding the opportunities available to them.'*⁴⁷

'We're all part of the solution' is a consistent theme running through all of Aotearoa New Zealand's conservation strategies. Iwi, hapū, whānau, community groups and landowners are actively involved in leading and delivering conservation work. The more informed people are, the more effective they can be. Building connections to others in the community will increase the transfer of knowledge, align priorities and build a sense of community spirit in the work people do.

4.1 Participants learn new conservation skills

Jobs for Nature funding has contributed to the development of skilled workers in conservation across Aotearoa.

Nearly all of the 7,103 people employed under the Jobs for Nature programme learned new skills informally on the job. In total, 957 people have completed formal training, including Growsafe, conservation certificates, chainsaw, driving, and health and safety courses.



Tractor Training. Credit: Arowhenua Nursery

⁴⁷ Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. 2019. Aotearoa New Zealand's Employment Strategy. Wellington: Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment. mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/employment-and-skills/employment-strategy/aotearoa-new-zealands-employment-strategy Page 2.

Learning new skills not only provides for future opportunities but also increases confidence and motivation for those who take part. Further information can be found in the Case study: **Building conservation knowledge and skills** (see link in the Appendix).

The Mauri Oho Project in the northern Ruahine Range reflected on the following:

‘Team members had transformational and enabling experiences. We’ve enabled five team members to achieve full drivers licence, all achieved L4 Cert in Conservation. On-job practical evidence-based learning under UCOL, for some, the best job they’d ever had.

All the while working together, building confidence, giving them a sense of purpose and the ability to be strong in themselves. The feeling of belonging, creating consistency which some had not felt in a workplace. The team became a workforce. Working together, complimenting each other’s strengths.’⁴⁸

Many projects used the opportunity to focus on the development of training and education opportunities. Projects filled existing skill gaps in the sector, including marine kaitiaki training, developing conservation leaders and connecting people to te Taiao.

Training was not limited to Jobs for Nature participants, with many projects providing education or volunteer open days to the wider community.

Predator Free Apprenticeship Programme (\$5.2 million)

The Predator Free New Zealand Trust developed the apprenticeship programme after its experienced predator control staff saw a skills gap. Up to 51 apprentices undertook training in animal pest management, completing their New Zealand Certificate in Pest Operations, gaining work experience with qualified teams and providing support to local conservation community groups.

The apprenticeship programme has increased the number of experienced predator control specialists in Aotearoa. For some small companies, having an apprentice has helped support and build their business. Apprentices have worked with specialist pest control companies, eco-sanctuaries and large landscape-scale projects.

This is strengthening the sector with the expansion of access to technical expertise and shared knowledge.

BENEFIT 4

National Hunter Education and Training Scheme (\$212,000) and New Zealand Deerstalkers Association Incorporated (\$488,000)

With expertise from the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association instructors, the New Zealand Game Animal Council developed a comprehensive online hunter education programme, 'Hunting Essentials', hosted on their hunter learning platform 'Better Hunting'. The programme teaches hunting safety, success, responsibility, ethics and conservation. Better Hunting now has over 6,500 accounts, with content and resources developed in collaboration with nearly 30 other hunting or outdoor sector organisations. Designed to complement practical hunter training, Better Hunting has been positively adopted by the hunting sector.

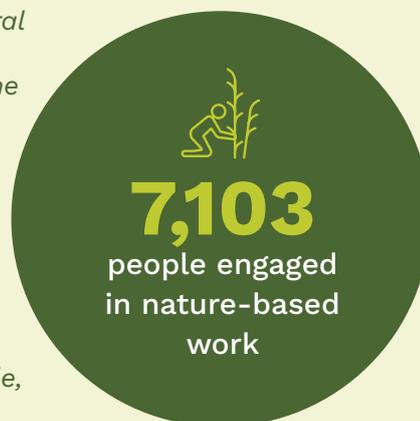
In conjunction, the New Zealand Deerstalkers Association engaged staff to expand its hunter national training scheme training. Over 3 years, the project trained 994 new hunters, and now operates from 30 locations around Aotearoa, being taught by 100 instructors. Many attendees and learners are continuing to engage in conservation work, such as game animal management, ongoing predator trapping initiatives, small game and pest control and backcountry hut maintenance, and the training resources developed both online and in the hunter national training scheme leave an enduring legacy.



Credit: NZ Deerstalkers Association

4.2 Increased wellbeing and sense of connection to nature

‘New Zealand’s indigenous biodiversity and natural landscapes provide a wide range of ecosystem services that contribute in a variety of ways to the wellbeing of New Zealanders... However, since New Zealand’s indigenous biodiversity is in decline and natural ecosystems are continuing to degrade, we cannot assume that these services will continue indefinitely – and there is a risk that New Zealanders may not come to realise the full consequences to their wellbeing of environmental degradation and biodiversity decline until the situation has become irreversible, or at least very costly and difficult to overturn.’⁴⁹



The Treasury’s Living Standards Framework provides a structure for measuring Aotearoa New Zealand’s wellbeing at three levels. At the first level are 12 wellbeing domains used to consider individual and collective wellbeing. This includes ‘environmental amenity’, or having access to and benefiting from a quality natural and built environment (e.g., clean air and water, green space, forests and parks), and ‘leisure and play’ (e.g., using free time to rest, recharge and engage in personal or shared pursuits). Connection to nature is integral to the way of life in New Zealand.

‘Many of our team have a whakapapa connection to the whenua they were working on. The whenua has been inaccessible to public and mana whenua for many years and this project has enabled the kaimahi to reconnect with a place of high cultural value to them. The reconnection to the whenua and the ability to exercise kaitiakitanga has been important to the wellbeing of our kaimahi. The team have developed a passion for working in Te Taiao alongside a suite of skills which has set them up well to pursue an ongoing career in conservation.’⁵⁰

A 2022 study by the Ministry for the Environment looked at improving our understanding of the contribution of nature to people’s wellbeing during times of crisis, using the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study.⁵¹ The survey found many participants experienced negative feelings associated with depression, anxiety or loneliness. For those who spent time in nature, it had a positive impact on their mental wellbeing, helping them to manage or avoid some of these negative feelings.

⁴⁹ Department of Conservation. 2017. A summary of The nature of wellbeing: how nature’s ecosystem services contribute to the wellbeing of New Zealand and New Zealanders. Wellington: Department of Conservation. Page 6. doc.govt.nz/Documents/conservation/human-values/nature-of-wellbeing-summary.pdf

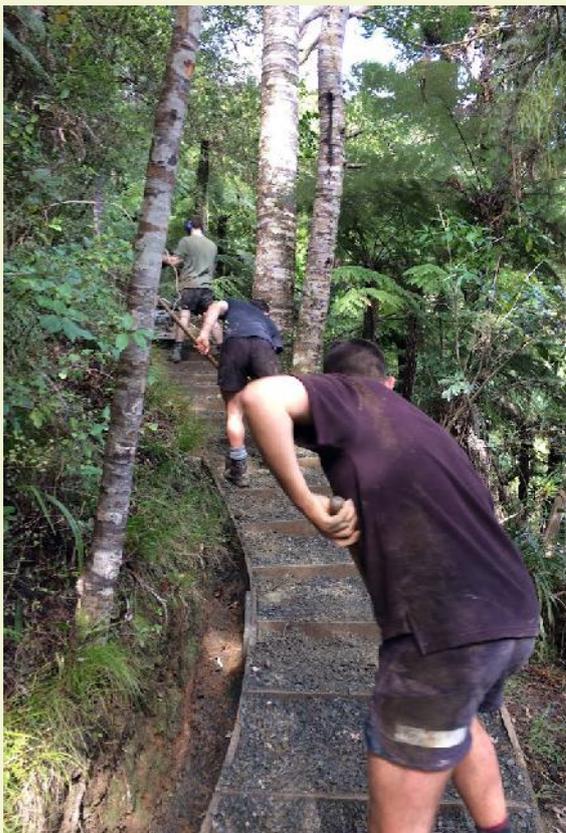
⁵⁰ Waingake Ngāhere Ora End of Project Report. [unpublished]

⁵¹ Ministry for the Environment. 2022. Value of nature for wellbeing during times of crisis: COVID-19 case study. Wellington: Ministry for the Environment.

BENEFIT 4

Individual and community wellbeing benefits from the Jobs for Nature programme include:

- provision of financial security to individuals at risk of unemployment
- increased opportunities for individuals to connect to and gain a wider appreciation of nature, improving mood and mental health while reducing stress
- supporting iwi, hapū and whānau, communities and landowners to improve the natural and historic places important to them
- developing nature-based solutions, such as restoration planting, that may prevent erosion and / or bring back wildlife that can be enjoyed
- opportunities to undertake meaningful kaitiakitanga and learn more about the diverse biodiversity in Aotearoa
- improved recreational assets, local reserves, and cultural and historical heritage sites for the wider public to enjoy.



Credit: Auckland Council

‘Our project significantly improved the wellbeing of the individuals involved, offering a unique opportunity for personal growth, healing, and reconnection to te taiao (nature). Our kaimahi came from diverse backgrounds, including those experiencing burnout, and others who had suffered due to addiction. The environment and activities of our project provided a nurturing space for healing and personal rediscovery. Participants were able to reconnect deeply with themselves, developing a renewed sense of identity and purpose. Furthermore, the skills and knowledge gained through the project have not only empowered them individually but also equipped them to pass valuable lessons and sustainable practices to their mokopuna, fostering lasting generational benefits.’⁵²

4.3 Increased community connections and knowledge-sharing lead to more effective conservation

The Biodiversity Strategy recognises that:

‘Our local conservation champions play a significant role in inspiring the actions of others in their communities. Resourcing to help community groups grow, connect with others, and gather and share knowledge will bolster the fantastic work already being done to protect and restore our taiao.’⁵³

Jobs for Nature resourcing enabled most of the 225 funded projects to connect and collaborate more effectively with their communities and advocate for conservation. This was essential when looking for people to employ, seeking landowner permissions to continue restoration work along waterways, gaining extra knowledge, or aligning with other work occurring in the region.



Southern Lakes Sanctuary (\$3 million from DOC and significant community donor input)

With a long-term goal to eradicate introduced mammalian predators across the Lake Whakatipu and Lake Wānaka catchments, the Trust that oversees this project is a consortium of six local groups that collectively represent nearly 100 community groups, landowners, and businesses that have been working for many years to protect and restore biodiversity.

In its December 2024 project update, Southern Lakes Sanctuary noted:

‘None of this would have been possible without the incredible generosity and support of our community. Your support has not only enabled us to deliver on our immediate goals but also to dream bigger and plan for a sustainable, thriving future for our precious ecosystems. Together, we are proving that collaborative conservation can turn bold visions into reality.’

⁵³ Department of Conservation. 2020. Te Mana o te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Wellington: Department of Conservation. Page 5.

BENEFIT 4



Credit: Groundtruth

In the areas that formed regional collaboration groups, these groups played decisive roles during funding allocation and prioritisation. An example is the top of the south Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance, which was formed before the Jobs for Nature programme. This alliance, between iwi, councils and DOC, was well positioned to direct and align the Jobs for Nature funding:

‘Our focus is on landscape-scale conservation projects that also have environmental, social, economic, and cultural benefits ... The Alliance is committed to working in partnership to align and integrate the efforts of Alliance members.’⁵⁴

In many places, collaborations led to well-defined priorities and aligned conservation efforts. A recent te ao Māori evaluation report found the collaborative model allowed for Māori to be equal or lead partners in regional funding decision-making.⁵⁵

The Te Tai Poutini West Coast Alliance was also formed with the goal of securing maximum benefits from the Jobs for Nature funding, with its members including local iwi, the West Coast Regional Council, DOC and Development West Coast. The Alliance worked in partnership to make sure funding proposals were coordinated and integrated across the West Coast.⁵⁶

Connection also occurred within and across projects, for example, through regional hui, where representatives from Jobs for Nature projects met and exchanged knowledge and experiences for a shared and unified vision.

⁵⁴ Kotahitanga mō te Taiao. 2019. Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Strategy. Page 4. nature.org/content/dam/tnc/nature/en/documents/KotahitangaMoTeTaiaoStrategy-June2019.pdf

⁵⁵ Allen + Clarke. 2024. Te Ao Māori Evaluation Jobs for Nature. Wellington: Allen + Clarke.

⁵⁶ Williams, L. 2020. Historic West Coast alliance to oversee Jobs for Nature cash. RNZ. [accessed 16 December 2025]. rnz.co.nz/news/national/421265/historic-west-coast-alliance-to-oversee-jobs-for-nature-cash

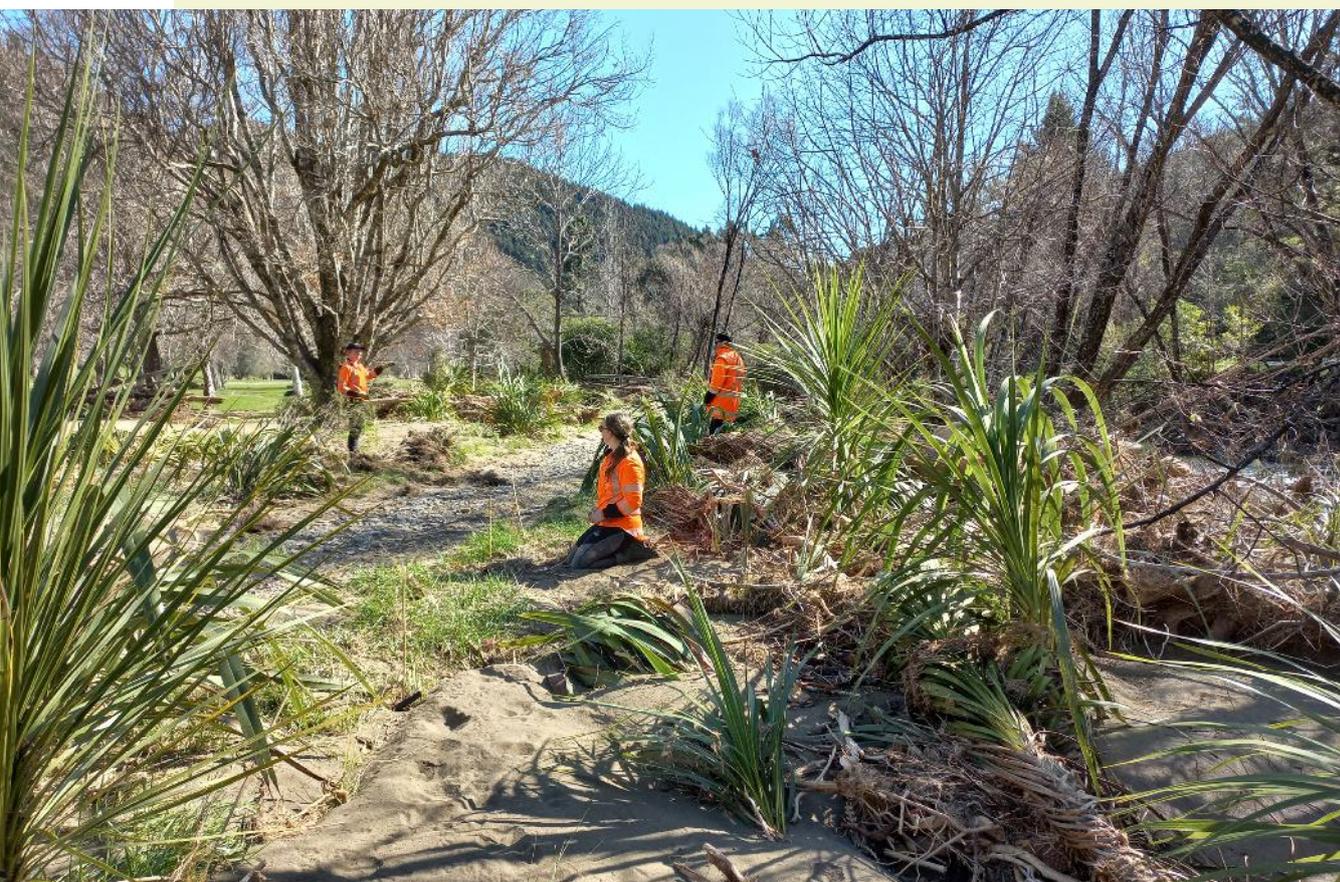
A Canterbury-based project team noted:

‘Relationships were built or strengthened with Environmental Canterbury, DOC, local nurseries, local experts, Christchurch City Council and other JFN [Jobs for Nature] projects in Canterbury. This was vital for our project as they provided on the job training, local knowledge, advice, inspiration, and were always available to answer questions. We promoted the progress of the project to our visitors, to encourage them to get involved in nature at home. We also partnered with local schools, doing different projects such as habitat gardens and tracking tunnels, both for here and for them to setup at home.’⁵⁷

Jobs for Nature teams also added direct benefits to their communities. This was shown when projects adapted to support their communities’ needs for disaster relief following flooding from Cyclone Gabrielle in February 2023.

‘The skills developed in the [Jobs for Nature] nature-based work lent itself to civil defence, from driving to clearing trees, outdoor first aid, chainsaw and scrub bar use, and construction.’⁵⁸

These collaborative efforts laid the groundwork for enduring conservation partnerships and community-led resilience across Aotearoa.



Rangers help with clean-up in Maitai after Aug2022 flood Credit: Nelson City Council

57 Restoration of wetland and grassland habitats at Orana Wildlife Park End of Project Report. [unpublished]

58 Allen + Clarke. 2024. Jobs for Nature Evaluation: Year Two Report. Wellington: Allen + Clarke. Page 60.

BENEFIT 4



More information can be found in the Case study: **Accelerating conservation through community connections and collaboration** (see link in the Appendix).



Maitai Ecological Restoration Project (\$2 million)

Project Mahitahi in Nelson aimed to provide local employment and plant 125,000 trees, restore 1.3 ha of wetlands, and carry out pest plant and predator control in the Maitai / Mahitahi river catchment.

An extreme weather event in August 2022 resulted in the Maitai River reaching record levels. The project saw firsthand the resilience of both plants and people. While erosion occurred throughout the catchment, many native trees planted on the riverside and flattened by the floods sprang back. Clearing the flood debris was a community effort, and Project Mahitahi stepped up to support the Civil Defence response in the huge clean-up task.

In a media article, Nelson City Council had this to say about the community:

‘The richness of the community engagement with the mahi of restoring the catchment has grown, and the strengthening of a wider community understanding of the ecological issues and participation in solutions will be of long-term benefit to the health of the catchment.’⁵⁹

59 Our Nelson. 2023. Project Mahitahi plantings survive flooding. Our Nelson. [accessed 16 December 2025]. our.nelson.govt.nz/stories/project-mahitahi-plantings-survive-flooding

Case study - Ko Waikanae te awa: An example of the benefits in action

Benefits

1

Employment in conservation work...

- Ninety-four people were employed.*
- Hours worked: 150,491 or 96 full-time equivalent employees.

*(*At the time, the area had 1,363 job seekers.)*



People's lives are enriched through their connection with nature

2

Has delivered additional conservation gains...

- Operational plans focused on the main conservation threats for the Waikanae River.
- There were 104,000 plants grown, and over 21,000 were planted in riparian areas.
- New fencing totalled 6.2 km, 231 ha were weeded, 834 ha of bird monitoring was conducted, and over 2,500 ha had possum and goat control.
- The project area grew to 5,143 ha through working with surrounding landowners.
- Nearly 20% Māori land, 50% private and 30% reserve or conservation land.



Ecosystems, from mountain tops to ocean depths, are thriving

3

Providing opportunities for iwi, hapū and whānau...

- Aligned to the Kaitiakitanga Plan*, to promote the inter-generational values of tupuna to express kaitiakitanga as mana whenua, and to support achieving appropriate engagement with the kāwanatanga.
- Dedicated iwi coordinator role connecting work and people.
- Target to employ at least 50% of staff from Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai.
- Dedicated training and community education running alongside the core delivery aims allowed iwi and others to enter the programme at different levels and build their involvement, skills and employment over time.
- Restoring the whenua.

Māori are exercising their full role as rangatira and kaitiaki

Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai, as mana whenua and kaitiaki of the awa, held the same aspirations for their people and land as the Jobs for Nature and Nga Awa Priority Waterways programmes. Building on the previous Waikanae ki uta ki tai 'mountains to sea' Nga Awa project, this Jobs for Nature project is a great example of the benefits that were realised.

4

Leading to increased effort, learning and collaboration...

- Sixty-seven people completed a 3-month formal training course, including restoration, pest control and sustainable land management.
- Opportunities for growth in leadership and specialised roles.
- People built development plans.
- Sustainable land management plans built with landowners.
- Integrated community education programme through school visits, school river clean-up day and nursery propagation visits.
- Sharing knowledge for the future.



Prosperity is intrinsically linked with a thriving biodiversity

Leading to long-term gains being sustained...

- In December 2024, the project celebrated the transition of the Waikanae Jobs for Nature project into an ongoing, iwi-run business.
- The skills and connections gained by those involved will have much wider effects, with many of the taura (trainees) continuing in the conservation sector. The project will continue to support their whānau, iwi and the wider community.
- The success of the partnership has laid the foundations for future collaborations.



“I thought I was here to save the taiao but found the taiao was saving me.”

Quote from one taura (student).

Strategic alignment

As highlighted in this report, benefits from the Jobs for Nature programme are well aligned with other Crown obligations and strategic objectives, including the following.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi)

Jobs for Nature funding provided important opportunities to honour the Crown's commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, providing opportunities for Māori to be the decision-makers, provide governance, incorporate mātauranga and undertake delivery.

Ninety different Māori collective entities received \$134 million in funding to create employment and build on the visions that whānau, hapū and iwi hold for their rohe.

Te Mana o Te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy 2020

As a national strategy, Te Mana o te Taiao sets a strategic direction for the protection, restoration and sustainable use of biodiversity in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Jobs for Nature funding supported several actions outlined in the 2022 Te Mana o Te Taiao – Aotearoa New Zealand Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plan. This helped to improve systems and empower New Zealanders, following the strategic pillars outlined in the implementation plan.

Living Standards Framework and He Ara Waiora

The Treasury's Living Standards Framework provides a structure for measuring Aotearoa New Zealand's wellbeing. The Jobs for Nature programme has delivered across all capitals in the framework, including social, human capability, natural and financial wealth.

The Treasury's He Ara Waiora framework emphasises the responsibilities to sustain and maintain the wellbeing of te Taiao. Main principles included kotahitanga (working in an aligned, coordinated way) and tiakitanga (guardianship, stewardship). The Jobs for Nature programme contained many projects that were guided by, and that achieved, these principles.

Predator Free 2050 Strategy

The strategy aims to mobilise, innovate and accelerate the delivery of a predator free Aotearoa New Zealand by 2050. The Predator Free programme has identified pathways to deliver the strategy that have many similarities to the work achieved by the Jobs for Nature programme.

Of the Jobs for Nature projects, 153, or 68%, included animal pest control work that can be built on. Funding also supported training and research to support the Predator Free 2050 goals.

Looking ahead

Sustaining the gains

The Jobs for Nature programme delivered substantial conservation and employment outcomes over 5 years. The focus now shifts to sustaining these gains for both people and places.

New job opportunities are needed for participants who gained skills and a passion for conservation from the programme, particularly those who reconnected with their whenua and aspire to continue as kaitiaki. The Ministry of Social Development regional leads have been engaged throughout the programme and will continue to support participants in accessing future employment.

In a DOC survey of the Jobs for Nature projects, 92% of project partners indicated their intention to continue beyond the funding period.⁶⁰ Many projects have secured ongoing funding or resources, while others are still exploring options. Some were part of larger initiatives, and others developed ambitious new goals during the programme.

Regional collaboration has emerged as an important strategy for sustaining gains. The Jobs for Nature Secretariat developed 'Tūhono Taiao'⁶¹, an online platform, to support knowledge-sharing and partnership development. One project lead shared:

'I just want to say how Jobs for Nature has completely changed our project from something very unknown and small to something that continues to grow. When we started Jobs for Nature we had zero connections and zero iwi engagement...

*Now we have the local iwi coming most weeks to help with mahi plus we are training one of their rangatahi, we have some of the AirNZ team coming next month and in the background we have been working on some tech that Predator Free 2050 came on board late last year to help us. A PhD student is coming on board in June for 3.5 years using our tech to develop novel statistical methods for the estimation and monitoring of forest bird population sizes via Auckland University funded by the George Mason Trust.'*⁶²

DOC has supported this transition through regional planning and guidance. Further details are available in the summary overview: Jobs for Nature – Sustaining the Gains (see link in Appendix).

Continued collaboration, innovation and support will be essential for continuing the gains made from the Jobs for Nature projects. The legacy of the Jobs for Nature programme is not just what was achieved but what comes next.

⁶⁰ Department of Conservation. 2022. Regional Investment Review Survey (193 responses across 185 projects) (unpublished).

⁶¹ Mō Mahi mō te Taiao. 2025. Tūhono Taiao. [accessed 18 December 2025]. jobsfornature.govt.nz/about-jobs-for-nature

⁶² The gateway to the Matemateāonga Range – Omoana Project – Rotokare to Omoana Biodiversity Corridor Correspondence.

Measuring the long-term impact

The Jobs for Nature programme injected \$1.2 billion into conservation, generating an estimated \$3.9 billion in economic, environmental and wellbeing benefits over time. While many of the programme's outputs are measurable, the long-term social and biodiversity outcomes will take years to fully realise.

In 2021, the Cawthron Institute developed a monitoring framework to assess the effectiveness of the Jobs for Nature investment in the Ngā Awa Strategic Waterways programme. The resulting report highlights the challenge of monitoring long-term biodiversity outcomes that often take years to become visible.

This challenge applies broadly across the Jobs for Nature programme. While outputs – such as restoration planting or employment – can be quantified, the enduring benefits are more difficult to articulate. For example, the lifetime impact on an individual who transitioned from unemployment to a conservation career, or the long-term improvements in water quality and flood resilience resulting from riparian restoration, may only be fully understood in the future.

This Jobs for Nature benefits report aims to highlight how the programme and its projects have collectively contributed to the goals of the Biodiversity Strategy, laying the foundation for lasting environmental and social gains.

Tū Mai Taonga – Aotea Great Barrier Island (\$2.175 million – May 2021 to March 2025)

This project supported the long-term goal of a pest-free Aotea Great Barrier Island, aiming for the eradication of cats and rats from the island through community-led collaborative governance.

Project goals included 18,000 ha of feral cat eradication and rat control of 5,113 ha. Further work after this project allowed for the preparation of sustainable rat control and expansion in the future.

Due to the success of the project, funded by the Ministry for the Environment and DOC, it has now received further funding to continue progress towards this important goal.

Reflections for the future

Aotearoa faces growing threats to biodiversity, including species loss, invasive pests and diseases, and climate change. Extreme weather events are causing increasing economic and social disruption.

As climate change introduces new challenges, including extreme weather events, nature-based solutions offer a way to build resilience while supporting biodiversity, cultural and economic goals. Nature-based solutions can help remove and store carbon, build climate resilience, and support biodiversity, kaitiakitanga and other outcomes.

The Jobs for Nature programme showed strong economic returns, with a cost-benefit ratio of 4.08 over 30 years and a 6-year payback period. This highlights the value of investing in riparian and freshwater management as a strategic climate adaptation response.

An important reflection from a 2023 economic assessment was:

'This analysis – and results – demonstrate that a strong case remains for investing in riparian and freshwater management activities to improve resilience and could form part of a future response to climate change adaptation activities.'

DOC's evaluation of the programme was that it exceeded expectations, achieving broader outcomes than initially planned. Future investment can build on these insights, aligning operational efficiencies with environmental, social, cultural and economic objectives. For more, see the Jobs for Nature Summary Overview – Lessons Learned (link in the Appendix.)

Appendix:

Supporting evaluation and benefits assessments

Date	Description	Author	Links
Jul 2025	Te ao Māori benefits case studies (Benefit 4)	Verian	Jobs for Nature publications: Jobs for Nature – Mahi mō te Taiao
Aug–Oct 2025	<p>Case studies for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating positive outcomes for businesses (Benefit 1) • Investing in the protection and recovery of Aotearoa New Zealand’s Threatened and At-Risk species (Benefit 2) • Building conservation knowledge and skills (Benefit 4) • Accelerating conservation through community connections and collaboration (Benefit 4). 	DOC	Jobs for Nature publications: Jobs for Nature – Mahi mō te Taiao
Sep 2025	<p>Summaries and overviews of DOC’s:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investment profile • benefits • sustaining the gains • lessons learned. 	DOC	Jobs for Nature publications: Jobs for Nature – Mahi mō te Taiao
Nov 2024	Jobs for Nature programme – GoodMeasure Portfolio Overview. Review of four projects to reflect on their social value measurement.	ImpactLab	Jobs-for-Nature-FINAL-Portfolio-Analysis-revised-report-31-Jan-2025.pdf
Nov 2024	Te Ao Māori Evaluation. Evaluation of the design, delivery and outcomes of the Jobs for Nature programme through a te ao Māori lens.	Allen + Clarke	J4N-Evaluation-Te-Ao-Maori-Report_Final.pdf
Oct 2024	Jobs for Nature impact assessment. Economic assessment of the programme.	Martin Jenkins	<p>Updated: Final-report-2024-Q4-J4N-impact-results-2024.pdf</p> <p>Previous version (Oct 2023): MJ_J4N_Understanding_economic_impacts-2023.10.17.pdf</p>

Date	Description	Author	Links
Sep 2024	Jobs for Nature Evaluation – Year Two Report.	Allen + Clarke	J4N-Evaluation-Year-Two-Report-Final-17-Sept-2024.pdf
Sep 2024	Thematic case studies for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • climate change resilience • social impact • freshwater restoration. 	Allen + Clarke	J4N-Climate-Change-Resilience-Case-Study.pdf J4N-Social-Impact-Case-Study.pdf Submitted-J4N-Freshwater-Restoration-Case-Study.pdf
Mar 2024 various	Regional profiles of the Jobs for Nature investment. Individual project profiles.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	Publications :: Jobs 4 Nature
Feb 2024	Annual Review – Year Three. Achievements and progress to date.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	F_8241-MFE_JFN_Annual-Review_2023_v12.pdf
Dec 2023	Snapshot of how the programme delivers social, cultural, environmental and economic benefits.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	Insights_Report_Dec_2023_A3.pdf
Nov–Dec 2023	Series of portraits of individuals leading Jobs for Nature projects.	Radio New Zealand	The Turning Point
Sep 2023	Interim evaluation to assess the success of the cross-agency Jobs for Nature programme.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	Jobs-for-Nature-programme-interim-evaluation-2023.pdf
Sep 2023	Place-based case studies for the Auckland, Manawatū-Whanganui and Nelson-Tasman regions.	Allen + Clarke	Jobs for Nature place-based case studies
Sep 2023	Jobs for Nature Evaluation – Year One Report.	Allen + Clarke	Jobs for Nature evaluation year one report

Date	Description	Author	Links
Jun 2023	Jobs for Nature Programme Transition Strategy.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	Jobs-for-Nature-Programme-Transition-Strategy.pdf
Apr 2023	Outcomes assessment of the impacts of the South Westland Jobs for Nature project. Focus on workforce sharing between the tourism and conservation workforces.	Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment / Allen + Clarke	South Westland Jobs for Nature Outcomes Assessment
Nov 2022	Annual Review – Year Two. Achievements and progress to date.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	Jobs-for-Nature-Annual-Review-Year-Two.pdf
Nov 2022	Interim benefits assessment.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	Jobs for Nature programme benefits report 2022
Feb 2022	Annual Review – Year One. Achievements and progress to date.	Jobs for Nature Secretariat	JFN_Annual-Review_2021_Final.pdf



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