

# Attitudes towards commercial recreation on public conservation lands

SCIENCE FOR CONSERVATION 301



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*Te Papa Atawhai*



# Attitudes towards commercial recreation on public conservation lands

Kerry Wray and Kay Booth

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# Attitudes towards commercial recreation on public conservation lands

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## ABSTRACT

The demand for, and importance of, commercial recreation on public conservation lands in New Zealand has increased rapidly in the past 30 years and commercial recreation is now (generally) an accepted use in these areas. Some aspects of the provision of commercial activities and services are controversial, yet little research attention has been given to exploring people's attitudes towards them. This report reviews the 'state of knowledge' about the attitudes of visitors toward the provision of commercial recreation services on public conservation lands. Study methods comprised a literature review, the synthesis of preliminary findings from a doctoral research project, and a focus group workshop which provided a 'sounding board' for findings and conclusions. Thirteen topics were identified as relevant to consideration of commercial recreation: definition; growth and impacts; objections to commercial recreation (philosophical, threats to independent recreation, fear of 'commercialisation', differences between commercial and independent recreationists); conflict/compatibility between commercial and independent recreation; effects which relate to a multiplicity of factors; the need to manage recreationists' expectations; providing opportunities—for whom?; cost-benefit analysis; equity of management for commercial and independent visitors; legislative issues; research quality; quality of tourism operations and concessions management; and the relationship with national identity. Overall, the study found that the topic is multi-dimensional, attracts differing and sometimes opposing views, and is potentially controversial. Recommendations for further research are provided.

Keywords: commercial recreation, tourism, concessions, attitudes toward recreation, public conservation lands, Department of Conservation, New Zealand

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# 1. Introduction

This report presents a ‘state of knowledge’ review on the attitudes of visitors toward the provision of commercial recreation services on public conservation lands. The report is derived from a literature review, the preliminary findings from a doctoral research project, and a workshop with a focus group of key informants who provided a ‘sounding board’ for the study’s findings and conclusions.

## 1.1 DEFINITIONS AND SCOPE

The following definition of *commercial recreation* was used for this study:

*Any recreation activity or service on public conservation lands (or related areas, such as airspace, waterways, carparks and roadends) that is provided by the private sector, and that involves the client paying a fee. Some activities will require concessions and some will not. Examples of activities include scenic flights, guided walks, service kiosks, private lodges and huts, scenic boating, shuttle transport, and bus services.*

This definition was adapted from the project brief and checked with focus group participants (where it was found to be acceptable, although limitations were noted—see section 4.4.2). Various definitions of commercial recreation are provided in the literature, but no standard definition was uncovered (see section 2.2).

The focus of the study is commercial recreation on public lands, particularly public conservation lands. Where relevant, knowledge about commercial recreation outside these geographical boundaries is provided.

The literature review brings together published research from a variety of disciplines including tourism studies, economics, commerce, environmental management and science, physical geography, human geography, and recreation and leisure studies. Because of the wealth of material which may have relevant information within it, the focus was upon key studies. For this reason, the review should be viewed as a *summary of key resources* pertinent to the topic, rather than a *complete inventory* of research on attitudes towards commercial recreation.

## 1.2 STUDY APPROACH

As previously mentioned, the study comprised three phases: a literature review, a synthesis of preliminary findings of a doctoral research project and a focus group workshop that examined the findings arising from the first two stages.

### 1.2.1 Literature review

A literature search and review of the formal research literature, encompassing New Zealand and international work, was carried out. Literature was sourced via searches of academic databases, New Zealand university library catalogues,

online indexes, existing bibliographies and research summaries, and reference lists in recent tourism/recreation texts and seminal papers. Using keyword searches, prospective references were located in academic journals, serials, books, university and government research holdings, theses/dissertations and conference proceedings.

Key informants were contacted to help locate research findings. Individuals were selected based on their previous work or connections to this field and included tourism and recreation researchers and planners (see Appendix 1). When individuals replied to our requests for research referrals, they also offered their views on commercial recreation on conservation lands. Where appropriate, these have been incorporated into the report.

Very little published literature on commercial recreation on public lands was identified by the literature searches and informal discussions with key informants. This issue has received very little academic research attention.

### **1.2.2 Synthesis of interview transcripts**

Some of the preliminary findings of a doctoral research project which examines (amongst other things) recreationists' attitudes towards commercial tourism in remote and wilderness areas of national parks in New Zealand were summarised. These findings represent the only New Zealand research on the topic of attitudes towards commercial recreation on public conservation lands that we identified in our study.

### **1.2.3 Focus group workshop**

A focus group of individuals was selected to test conclusions and directions from the first two stages of the study in a workshop. The workshop participants confirmed the issues identified from the literature review and doctoral study, provided commentary on them and added topics they considered relevant to consideration of commercial recreation services on public conservation lands. Priority areas for further research were identified.

Following the workshop, three participants provided written comments to the researchers. Where appropriate, these have been incorporated into the literature review/synthesis of doctoral study findings, with the source noted.

The project brief identified that particular attention should be paid to:

- New Zealand and international research results
- Key messages from doctoral study interviews in relation to the topic
- How focus group workshop participants reacted to the topic and themes identified
- What research themes and questions can be derived for any survey research project(s) that subsequently set out to explore the issue further.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 KEY FINDINGS

Despite the increasing presence of commercial recreation activities on public lands, and concerns about its potential effects, very little research has focused upon the social effects of commercial recreation. Most literature has examined this topic as part of wider studies of recreation/tourism and attitudes toward tourism in general, or has focused on particular recreation activities that have a commercial component.

More specifically, this review has identified that:

- There are strong proponents both for and against commercial recreation on public lands, but most of the information used to support these arguments is anecdotal.
- Little research attention has been paid to recreationists' or the general public's attitudes towards commercial recreation on public lands and its increasing prevalence.
- Some people may oppose commercial recreation on philosophical grounds.
- Some studies have addressed how managers of public conservation lands and/or tourism operators perceive commercial recreation.
- Findings from these studies suggest that perceptions of commercial recreation will differ by type of commercial facility or service, location and activity, and the attitude of the individual being questioned.
- Sections 2.2-2.10 present a review of literature relevant to the topic 'attitudes of visitors toward the provision of commercial recreation on conservation lands'.

### 2.2 DEFINING COMMERCIAL RECREATION

There is no standard definition of commercial recreation in the literature. Commercial recreation is often termed 'commercial tourism' or simply subsumed under the label 'tourism'. A significant amount of tourism and recreation research has been devoted to defining and distinguishing between recreation and tourism (see, for example, Smith 1988, 1991; Leiper 1990), but little attempt has been made to do the same with commercial and non-commercial recreation.

The New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC) distinguishes between recreation and tourism in its Visitor Strategy by stating that: 'If, in the process, they [visitors to public conservation lands] use and pay for facilities and services provided by the private sector (a concessionaire) during their visit, then tourism can be said to be taking place' (DOC 1996: 38) even though it deliberately avoids making the distinction between independent and commercial recreationists elsewhere in the report, by calling them all 'visitors':

*Visitors to areas managed by the department are travelling primarily for recreational purposes. In this strategy, visitors are defined as people visiting department-managed areas. They include people using visitor centres, clients of concessionaires, both New Zealanders and international visitors.*

(DOC 1996: 17)

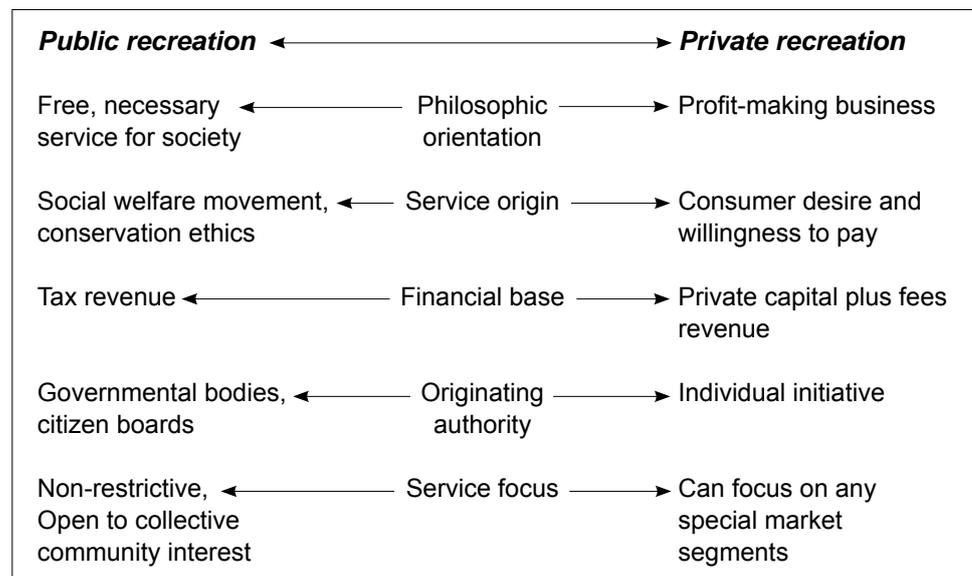
Commercial recreation is often defined in relation to public recreation, which many people believe to be different. Non-commercial recreation is often described in contrast to its commercial counterpart in the literature, by using dichotomous adjectives such as 'private' versus 'public'; 'dependent' versus 'free and independent'; 'controlled and predictable' versus 'adventurous and spontaneous'; 'guided' versus 'un-guided'; and 'tourist' versus 'recreationist'. In this report, we were guided by ideas in the literature. We use the term 'commercial recreation(ist)' to mean visitors to public conservation lands who use and pay for services and/or facilities provided by the private sector, and 'independent recreation(ist)' to mean visitors who do not use private operators or their facilities.

The key differences between public and commercial recreation that were identified in the literature can be illustrated on a continuum (Fig. 1). Very few public agencies are believed to exist in the pure form (at the far left of the continuum) (Crossley et al. 2001), and several commentators have suggested that it is becoming very difficult to distinguish between commercial and independent recreation.

### 2.2.1 Blurred distinction between independent and commercial recreation

Crossley et al. (2001) introduced the concept of 'commercialised public recreation' to highlight the complexity of trying to distinguish between commercial and independent recreation. They defined this as: 'the provision of recreation-related products or services by a governmental or non-profit organisation in a commercial manner, with much or all of the costs covered by fees, charges or other non-tax revenues' (Crossley et al. 2001: 14). An example of commercialised public recreation is a park agency that operates under traditional (tax) funding sources, but runs recreation programmes that are self-funding through user fees. Buckley (2006: 2) supported the notion that some forms of commercial recreation are difficult to distinguish from independent recreation: 'in terms of practical logistics, there is considerable overlap between private recreational groups and commercial tours'. Buckley (2006) also stated that independent recreationists may often make use of a commercial provider during part of their trip (for example, to hire equipment, or for transport to and from their trip location), thus further blurring the distinction between independent and commercial recreation.

Figure 1. Public-private recreation continuum. Based on a figure in Crossley et al. 2001: 11.



Andy Thompson (Tourism Resource Consultants, Christchurch, pers. comm. 2007) noted that the fact that a product or service is 'commercial' may go un-noticed by people in a situation where there is no independent alternative. An example of this is bungy jumping or jet-boating. He noted that 'most people have no problem with some level of commercial activities in most (but not all) places', and that 'the debate over commercial recreation centres on how much and what activities are appropriate and where'. Dr Rick Rollins (Researcher, Department of Recreation and Tourism Management, Malaspina University and College, British Columbia, Canada, pers. comm. May 2007) agreed that people are likely to accept certain forms of commercial recreation but not others, and stated that the label 'commercial recreation' is 'too generic'. Professor Grant Cushman (Professor of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand, pers. comm. May 2007) suggested that commercial recreation is now so integral to conservation lands in many countries that it is simply taken as 'a given'.

### 2.3 ROLE OF COMMERCIAL RECREATION ON PUBLIC LANDS

There is significant debate over the role of the commercial sector in providing recreation facilities and services on public lands (Quinn 2002). Concomitantly, the involvement of commercial recreation on public lands has increased in recent years (Buckley 2003); this is discussed further in section 2.4. Epperson (1986: 23) noted that: 'even in the 1980s, many public recreation managers continue to look at the private-enterprise operator<sup>1</sup> with less than respect' and that 'some of the more popular recreation and park text books in the United States suggested that 'private recreation enterprises were only profit-oriented businesses that preyed on the population'.

Many people appear to hold the view that public recreation provision should be free of charge and available to everyone. The role of the commercial sector on public lands is therefore an inherently political issue, with social, economic and environmental implications.

Issues of contention include:

- Which types of commercial recreation services should be provided?
- Should there be any limitations on the quantity of commercial recreation services?
- How many suppliers will be permitted to operate in these areas?
- How will rights to supply commercial recreation be allocated?
- What charges will be levied on suppliers of commercial recreation?

(Adapted from Kerr & Cullen 1995: 166)

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<sup>1</sup> 'Private enterprise operator' is used here to mean commercial operator, or commercial recreation provider.

## 2.4 TRENDS IN COMMERCIAL RECREATION

Contemporary attitudes toward commercial recreation have been shaped by the social and economic circumstances surrounding leisure and recreation. For this reason, it is important to briefly review the societal context for commercial recreation, and to outline recent trends.

Periods of economic reform, such as in the 1970s and 1990s, have resulted in an increasing presence of commercial recreation activities on public conservation lands. During these periods, government departments have often been restructured in attempts to improve efficiency and reduce budgetary requirements (Garrard 1989). This has commonly involved privatising sectors of the public service, or encouraging private investment on public lands. In the case of public conservation lands, the 'user pays' principle was applied to park use in several countries (the USA and Canada in particular), and to the use of certain public facilities (such as tramping huts) in New Zealand, where current policy prohibits charging park entry fees. Another popular method of generating revenue for park management has been to allow private operators to run commercial operations on conservation lands in return for concession fees.

The other significant factor which has contributed to a growing demand for commercial recreation on public conservation lands has been societal change. Increasing urbanisation in Western societies has meant that the majority of urban-dwellers have no outdoor component in their lives except during leisure activities (Buckley 2006). Many of these people have the desire, money and, perhaps, fitness for outdoor recreation, but lack the time, skills and equipment to plan, organise and safely undertake wilderness trips. Commercial recreation providers have filled this gap by offering the equipment, skills and organisational services that these people are lacking. In addition, there has been rapid growth in the *types* of outdoor activities available, and this has meant that people are often interested in taking part in more than one type of activity, and equipment for these activities (such as kayaks, bikes, skis, paragliders and climbing equipment) is becoming increasingly expensive. Again, commercial operators have responded to this need by providing equipment and training (and a guide, if desired) for individuals who do not have their own gear, and maybe lack experience or confidence.

The dramatic increase in the demand for commercial recreation activities on public lands (and conservation lands in particular) has been well-documented in the literature (see, for example, Dustin et al. 1987; Buckley 1998, 2006; Kirkpatrick 2001; Cessford & Thompson 2002; Curtis 2003). The Department of Conservation's Visitor Strategy notes that:

*In recent years there has been significant growth in the number of commercial tourism operators providing visitor facilities in department-managed areas. In particular, services that allow visitors to participate in adventure recreation and educational nature tours are increasing in number.*

(DOC 1996: 37)

## 2.5 ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE OF ISSUES RELATED TO COMMERCIAL RECREATION ON PUBLIC LANDS

Anecdotal accounts of strong attitudes both for and against commercial recreation on public lands have been reported from media reports, public submissions, reports from outdoor recreation conferences and informal conversations with recreationists or members of the tourism industry. Many of these accounts come from outdoor recreation groups (such as the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand, and Fish & Game New Zealand), or from industry lobby groups (such as the Tourism Industry Association New Zealand). These groups are able to voice their views through public submission processes on particular occasions (such as during the preparation of park management plans), and through publications or the websites of their respective organisations. Their comments are illustrative of the strength of feelings that exist about commercial recreation on public conservation lands, and raise questions about why this issue has not been studied as a subject in its own right within academia. This section highlights the sorts of issues that are evident in these informal (or anecdotal) channels, but it does not represent a comprehensive review of this 'informal' literature.

In the November 2006 edition of the FMC Bulletin, David Round put forward a strong argument that DOC currently prioritises commercial use of conservation lands at the expense of independent recreationists. Speaking as a member of the Federated Mountain Clubs Executive, he made a clear distinction between 'recreationists' (independent individuals seeking to recreate and refresh themselves) and 'tourists' (pleasure-seeking visitors using commercial products or services to have a predictable, packaged experience). He argues that commercial recreation and tourism are distinctly different from traditional, independent outdoor recreation, and that park managers are currently failing to make this distinction.

In a similar vein, Bruce Mason—a long-time campaigner for independent recreation on public lands, who has been involved in the debate since the mid 1970s—has argued that DOC is actively fostering commercial recreation and tourism because of pressure from commercial interests and an increasing dependence on funding from concessions fees (B. Mason, Researcher, Recreation Access New Zealand, Omakau, pers. comm. May 2007). He thinks this approach is contrary to DOC's legislative duties and believes that DOC is 'pandering' to the needs of the tourism industry by continuing to grant increasing numbers of commercial recreation concessions on public conservation lands. He suggests that a zoning approach to park management is essential to avoid increasing conflict between commercial recreation and independent use. Many of Mason's and Round's views (and others like them) are available on websites such as Recreation Access New Zealand ([www.recreationaccess.org.nz](http://www.recreationaccess.org.nz)) and the Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand ([www.fmc.org.nz](http://www.fmc.org.nz)) and in the FMC Bulletin.

There are also strong proponents *for* commercial recreation on public lands. In a submission to DOC on the draft Fiordland National Park Management Plan in December 2006, the Tourism Industry Association New Zealand (TIANZ) argued that concessionaires play a crucial role in 'enabling DOC to meet its statutory obligations to provide access to and education about the conservation lands'. The Tourism Industry Association believes that commercial recreation is extremely beneficial to park management because operators often contribute 'significant

amounts of their own resources to conserving aspects of [national] parks', and also 'invest and develop public amenities and infrastructure that improve the quality of the visitor experience' (TIANZ 2006 2: 24).

Also in support of commercial recreation on public lands, the New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2015 stated that 'the tourism sector has played a crucial role in protecting and managing many of New Zealand's threatened ecosystems and flora and fauna', and that 'the increasing commercial use of public conservation areas, particularly in the past 10 to 15 years, has led DOC to more actively manage these areas so that their environmental value is not compromised' (Ministry of Tourism, Tourism NZ & TIANZ 2007: 46). There are many more examples of opinion pieces and press releases from within the tourism industry that have argued for the benefits of commercial recreation on conservation lands. In addition, individual tourism operators carry out regular visitor surveys which highlight the high levels of satisfaction amongst people using commercial recreation services and products on public conservation lands.

This brief review illustrates that interest groups and individuals may hold strong opinions on the role of commercial recreation on public conservation lands, and these are periodically expressed in public forums, but that the views of the general public on this issue have, as yet, received very little research attention.

## 2.6 PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS COMMERCIAL RECREATION

There is evidence that some people have philosophical objections to commercial recreation (Cessford & Thompson 2002). In the case of public conservation lands, these feelings may be even more pronounced because conservation (or nature) is seen as good, and commercialisation is seen as its antithesis. This point is made in a study by Wynn (2003), which reported that visitors to the Zambezi Valley found that particular commercial activities (such as scenic flights, river cruises, motor-boating, golf courses and commercial sales outlets) were detracting significantly from the wilderness experience. The main reason given for this by visitors was that the activities were 'inappropriate' and 'incompatible' with their wilderness experiences.

Several authors have drawn attention to the fact that commercial recreation may conflict with the values and philosophies that underpin outdoor recreation or 'wilderness', including those of freedom, challenge and escapism (see Dustin et al. 1987; Watson 2000; Cessford & Thompson 2002). Dustin et al. (1987) argued that the values underlying commercial recreation are completely different to those which underpin free and independent recreation. They believe that the goal of outdoor recreation on public conservation lands is to promote human growth and development, whereas the goal of commercial recreation is simply to make a profit. Even if some commercial operators do have additional objectives, such as improving their clients' health and well-being, the bottom line is that they cannot operate unless they make a profit—so this has to be their primary objective. The authors also point out that in some cases—such as rafting on the Colorado River—commercial 'outfitters' have priority over independent rafters (75% of permits versus 25% for independent visitors), and that this has caused increasing animosity towards the companies and the rafting clients themselves.

Dustin et al. (1987) argued that giving priority to commercial clients runs counter to the logic of promoting free and independent recreation in national parks, and concluded that conservation lands are public goods which may be diminished by a 'merchant mentality' that limits access only to those who have the ability and willingness to pay for them.

Another philosophical objection to commercial recreation that is identified in the literature is the perception that commercial operators are taking advantage of public lands and facilities. Buckley (2003) noted that:

*In countries such as Australia, tourism interests are currently pursuing political approaches that would allow them to reap most of the potential profits available from public demand to visit protected areas, whilst only paying a small fraction of the management costs and none of the capital costs.* (Buckley 2003: 4)

Buckley (2003) further noted that people who believe that conservation lands should be for protection and not production may have strong feelings against their use for tourism, and that park managers should not subsidise the tourism sector by providing free access to protected areas.

Parker & Avant (2000) sought to assess the validity of negative perceptions, such as those expressed above, with commercial operators in the Sierra Nevada region of the USA. The issues addressed included a lack of compatibility with the 'wilderness' ideal, damage to natural resources and increased crowding through excessive marketing of particular areas of conservation land. To carry out their study, they interviewed guides from two different commercial 'outfitters'. Their findings illustrated that, although many guides did have strong conservation values, 'self-interest or commercial interest' sometimes took precedence over these values. This was seen as antithetical to, and incompatible with, wilderness or independent outdoor recreation. Parker & Avant (2000) concluded that outfitters and guides should not be treated as a homogeneous group, as their attitudes towards conservation and impacts on the environment varied significantly according to the type of activity they were involved in.

In summary, the studies we were able to obtain suggest that people may reject commercial recreation on purely philosophical grounds. However, most make no attempt to explore whether these philosophical beliefs are grounded in reality. A further criticism of this body of research is that it does not account for differences in the *type* of commercial recreation. As noted earlier, commercial recreation is a very generic term, which encompasses a wide range of services and products, some of which may be acceptable to recreationists, some of which may not. The issue, then, may not be whether people are for or against commercial recreation, but which forms of commercial recreation they have an issue with, and why.

## 2.7 ATTITUDES OF MANAGERS AND TOURISM OPERATORS TO COMMERCIAL RECREATION ON PUBLIC LANDS

Some studies have examined conservation managers' and tourism operators' perspectives of commercial recreation on conservation lands. These are discussed because:

- These groups provide informed perspectives on commercial recreation
- Managers' perceptions of the costs and benefits of commercial recreation have guided policy making

It is important to note here that these findings only represent the views of managers and *not* those of the visitors to conservation lands or the general public.

Commercial recreation is highly valued by park managers for a variety of reasons. As noted by Cessford & Thompson (2002):

- They [commercial operators] provide services and facilities for a wider range of visitors than would otherwise be possible
- The operators can communicate appropriate information, behaviour, protocol and conservation messages to their clients
- Revenue generated from concession fees can contribute towards conservation projects and park management

Benefits of commercial recreation are often included in general studies of the impacts of tourism in protected natural areas (see, for example, Baker 1990; Lindenberg 1991; McNeely et al. 1992; Pigram & Jenkins 2006).

The Department of Conservation's Visitor Strategy states that: 'the department recognises the significant potential for providing satisfying visitor experiences through facilities and services provided by the tourism industry under concessions' (DOC 1996: 40), but that 'the risk of detrimental visitor impacts occurring is increasing with increases in visitor numbers, commercial activity and an expanding range of visitor activities' (DOC 1996: 59). This illustrates that DOC managers are aware of the potential for commercial tourism to negatively impact on people's recreation experiences, but there is no attempt to explain what these impacts are.

Jebson (1983) examined the administrative framework for managing commercial recreation in New Zealand's South Island mountain lands. This study involved interviewing a range of commercial operators and representatives from organisations involved in managing these areas about their views on commercial recreation<sup>2</sup>. The findings of these interviews indicated that commercial recreation generates both beneficial and negative impacts on public lands. The key benefits were identified as: generation of foreign exchange earnings; increased employment opportunities; increased recognition of the area amongst potential visitors; and enabling a wider range of people (for example, those less-experienced or less physically able) to safely enjoy mountain lands. Some operators also believed that they provided more specific benefits such as the availability of aircraft

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<sup>2</sup> The managers interviewed came from a range of different administrative levels within various statutory bodies, including: the Department of Lands and Survey, the New Zealand Forest Service, the Ministry of Works and Development, the Waitaki Catchment Commission and the MacKenzie County Council.

for search and rescue operations or non-recreation sectors, a pool of trained guides for search and rescue attempts, the education of guided clients, and assistance for independent recreationists in the area, should the need arise. The negative effects of commercial recreation identified included increased administration costs, increased facility maintenance costs for the public sector, environmental impacts relating to access requirements and social impacts on independent visitors.

A crucial finding from this study was that respondents believed that *conflicts between some commercial and private recreationists were of considerable significance* (Jebson 1983: 64). The noise factor associated with many types of commercial recreation activities (such as helicopters, aeroplanes and jet boats) was believed to have a detrimental impact upon independent recreationists wishing to enjoy a 'wilderness experience'. Commercial use of public facilities (such as tracks and huts) was also identified as a source of conflict between commercial and independent visitors. Some managers argued that the private sector use of these facilities may, at times, be to the detriment of the general public; for example, if overcrowding becomes a problem. The study concluded that 'in recreative activities requiring facilities such as huts, tracks and wharves, increasing visitor use is resulting in growing conflict between the private and commercial recreational sectors' (Jebson 1983: 114). It is important to re-emphasise that these findings only reflect the views of managers and tourism operators, not the views of recreationists or the general public.

A similar study was carried out by Quinn (2002) in the USA, looking at park managers' views of commercial recreation on public conservation lands. But again, this study did not seek the views of recreationists or the general public. Quinn has suggested that not enough attention has been paid to how recreationists or the general public feel about the increasing levels of commercial recreation on public lands, and that this represents a major gap in the literature (T. Quinn, Forest Supervisor, Stanislaus National Forest, United States Forest Service, pers. comm. May 2007).

Several studies have looked at management responses to (or evaluations of) commercial recreation on public lands. Curtis (2003) evaluated the effectiveness of British Columbia's 1998 policy for 'Commercial Recreation on Crown Land'. He noted that commercial recreation on Crown land generates 'significant economic and recreational benefits', helps to attract tourists to the province, and can contribute to local and regional economies. In addition, he found that the potential for commercial recreation activities to generate revenue can help to preserve and/or protect natural settings from use by resource extraction industries such as commercial logging or mining. The key negative impacts of commercial recreation identified in this study were the potential to degrade the natural environment; overcrowding; a loss of the wilderness experience for independent visitors; and the potential for conflict between different commercial operators using the same resource base.

Other research has focused on the role of tour guides and operators in facilitating recreational experiences. For example, Arnould & Price (1993) undertook a detailed study of the commercially-provided wilderness rafting experience in the Colorado River Basin. They found that the commercial operators and tour guides played a significant role in facilitating 'extraordinary' and highly satisfying wilderness experiences for clients. Parker & Avant (2000) explored the values

that different commercial operators placed on wilderness in the Sierra Nevada area. Although some guides were found to be very commercially oriented, others clearly valued wilderness for its unique qualities, and were able to impart wilderness values to their clients, and to encourage them to become involved in wilderness protection.

## 2.8 RECREATIONISTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS COMMERCIAL RECREATION

Very little research was uncovered that dealt specifically with independent recreationists' attitudes toward commercial recreation on public lands. Several studies reported on surveys that contained some questions relevant to this topic. These are summarised in this section.

Many general recreation surveys have included questions about the social impacts of various elements of the recreation experience and, occasionally, they have included categories such as 'guided groups' or 'commercial developments'. The reports of these studies have been able to identify whether the visitors (predominantly independent, but occasionally some commercial visitors) questioned perceived commercial facilities and services to be desired developments or threats. An example of this type of research is the series of studies carried out by Gordon Cessford on the Great Walks in New Zealand (Cessford 1997a, b, 1998a, b, c, 1998d, e).<sup>3</sup> These studies sought to provide information about visitors' satisfactions with their experiences, and aspects of their visits that may have detracted from the quality of their experience. In section five of the surveys, visitors were asked to rate how 'bothered' they were with various types of impact. The impacts that related to commercial recreation were 'guided groups' and 'noise from aircraft'. The findings of the surveys varied considerably depending on the location of trips but, in most cases, guided groups were not seen as a major problem. This may have been because there were few guided groups on most of the tracks examined. On the Milford Track, however, 67% of individual visitors encountered guided groups, and 23% indicated that they were bothered by them. Aircraft noise was an issue in some areas, particularly on the Milford Track. Although these studies provide a useful indicator of what some of the issues related to commercial recreation might be, they do not attempt to explore reasons why, and do not focus specifically on commercial recreation.

Commercial recreation was also referred to in several wilderness studies and was seen in a negative light in all of them. However, it is important to note that some of these studies were carried out over 25 years ago and it is likely that social values and attitudes towards commercial recreation have changed since then. Higham et al. (2000) compared three wilderness perception studies in New Zealand, and concluded that commercial recreation was viewed as unacceptable in such settings because it is seen to be contrary to the image of wilderness. Wilson (1979) questioned tramping club members and the

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<sup>3</sup> Almost 5000 visitors were sampled in 11 surveys from several of the most popular multi-day walking tracks in New Zealand. The large majority of these were independent visitors. A multi-day river-canoeing trip and a multi-day sea-kayaking trip were included in the sample (Cessford 2000).

New Zealand general public about their perceptions of wilderness. Both groups felt that any evidence of 'overt commercialisation' was definitely *not* acceptable in a wilderness setting, but no attempt was made to define 'overt commercialisation'.

Kearsley (1982) carried out a survey of visitors to Fiordland National Park, New Zealand, and found that the majority of respondents did not view commercial tourism as being a function of the national park, and many were against any form of development that would 'commercialise' the park. Wynn (2003) found that commercial tourism and recreation was one of the key factors that detracted from visitors' wilderness experiences in the Zambezi River Area, Africa. Commercial activities that were identified as being most inappropriate included advertising signs, commercial sales outlets and 'tame' wildlife. This research is useful for the current study because it involved asking recreationists directly about their views of commercial activities, and it identified which activities detracted most from the visitor experience.

Some studies have provided clear evidence of antagonism/conflict between private and commercial visitors. Curtis (2003) found that many public recreation groups believed that commercial recreation was 'destroying' public recreation opportunities on Crown land in British Columbia, Canada. However, this research did not attempt to explore *why* or *how* the public recreation groups held these views.

Buckley (2006: 15) noted that: 'in some cases, especially where sites are crowded, there is antagonism between those present for private recreation and those there for commercial tours or instruction'. Buckley (2006) cited a study by Jakus & Shaw (1997) which found that 13% of climbers at a particular site wanted commercial climbing lessons prohibited, and stated that there have also been conflicts between recreational surfers and commercial surf schools, and recreational boaties and commercial charter boats. No further details of the nature of these conflicts were provided.

## 2.9 RECREATIONAL CONFLICT AND COMMERCIAL RECREATION

Many studies have addressed the issue of recreational conflict where one of the activities involves a commercial component (see, for example, McAvoy et al. 1986; Moore & McClaren 1991; Gibbons & Ruddell 1995). These are reviewed here in brief, as such studies offer only a limited insight into people's perceptions of commercial recreation because of their narrow focus on one or two recreational user groups, and their failure to examine the broader issue of conflict between commercial and non-commercial recreationists.

Recreational conflict can be defined as 'a negative experience, occurring when competition for shared resources prevents expected benefits of participation from accruing to an individual or a group' (Crawford et al. 1991: 309). It is a specific type of user dissatisfaction which occurs when people feel that their recreational experience is compromised by other visitors. The most commonly applied model, and the most substantial theoretical basis for understanding recreational conflict, is the theory of goal interference provided by Jacob &

Schreyer (1980). The theory defines conflict as 'goal interference attributed to another's behaviour'. According to the theory, conflict is a negative experience which occurs when participants with incompatible goals come into contact. The theory suggests that conflict in outdoor recreation can be caused by four major factors:

1. Activity style
2. Resource specificity
3. Mode of experience
4. Lifestyle tolerance

Research has shown that conflict is increasing between participants in outdoor recreation activities, and that conflict is likely to occur in areas where there are high levels of use and/or a variety of different activities competing for the same resource (Manning 1999). There is also research to suggest that conflicts have developed between commercial and non-commercial recreationists (ibid.). This notion is supported by the Department of Conservation's Visitor Strategy, which states that:

*Conflict is most likely to occur between dissimilar groups, particularly if one group's behaviour is considered to be inappropriate by the other ... Some visitor groups resent the intrusion of increasing numbers of visitors and an expanding range of commercial activities.* (DOC 1996: 21)

The theory of social psychological attraction, used by Adelman et al. (1982) to explain conflict between canoeists and motorboat users in the USA, may provide some explanation for the discord between commercial and non-commercial (independent) visitors. Findings from this study suggest that conflict occurs when some recreationists perceive themselves as being different from other recreationists. This can include differences in appearance, behaviour, motivations for visiting and values towards the (conservation) resource or the activity. If independent visitors to conservation lands see themselves as different from others using commercial recreation products or services, then this may foster negative attitudes towards commercial visitors. This effect accords with the 'goal interference' theory of recreational conflict.

McAvoy et al. (1986) used the theory of goal interference to try and understand the causes of conflict between commercial and recreational users of the Mississippi River. However, the 'commercial' users were not commercial *recreationists*; and therefore the relevance of this study is limited. The key finding was that certain propositions in conflict theory helped to explain the causes of commercial versus recreational user conflict. Recreationists saw the commercial users as a threat to, or an intrusion on, their use of the area, and these perceptions largely stemmed from the fact that they saw themselves as dissimilar to the other group. Again, these findings can be extrapolated to suggest that if commercial and non-commercial users perceive themselves to be 'different' from one another, then conflict is likely to occur.

Although most of these studies reviewed in this section were quantitative and focused on testing theoretical models of conflict, a few contained open-ended questions about *why* people were bothered by other visitors, and therefore provide more insight into the issue. Examples of this include: Barker (1989) who found that independent visitors in the Greenstone Valley, New Zealand had often formed stereotyped images of guided walkers as older and less able;

Tomkins (1996) who reported differences in nationality, group size, behaviour and appearance of guided and non-guided walkers on the Routeburn Track, New Zealand; Cessford (1987) who suggested that guided walkers required the commercial provision of equipment, expertise and guides to facilitate a similar experience to that of independent walkers; and Wray et al. (2005) who reported that commercially-guided visitors exhibited different characteristics and behaviours from independent visitors on Stewart Island/Rakiura, New Zealand.

A key finding from this area of research was that *people who undertake guided commercial recreation activities are often perceived to be different from those who visit independently* (see also Beamish 1977; Fisher 1982; Harris 1983; Cessford 1987). In addition, although caution must be exercised when generalising about any visitor group, the commercially-guided visitors in these studies tended to share certain characteristics which may have reinforced these perceptions of difference. They were generally older, less experienced, financially well-off, and from other countries. They also typically travelled in larger groups and carried similar equipment. As a result, commercially-guided groups were often easily distinguished visually from other visitors and, on occasions, this had led to animosity between independent and commercial visitors. An additional factor that was reported as contributing to discord between the two groups was the fact that commercially-guided visitors often had access to higher quality services (such as carrying smaller packs or having meals prepared for them) and facilities (such as hot showers and private rooms). For this reason, independent visitors often did not perceive commercially guided walkers as similar to themselves, and thus their presence detracted from the independent visitors' overall experience.

Commercial recreation activities are often designed to be accessible to unskilled clients (by reducing risk, remoteness and skill requirements) in order to maximise the potential market size (Buckley 2006). Many commercial activities (such as guided walks and boat cruises) are also often associated with more dependent visitors who require additional services and facilities (Cessford & Thompson 2002). Independent recreationists could be averse to these kinds of activities, either because they feel that these visitors are not similar to themselves and therefore should not be recreating in the same area, or because they fear that the presence of commercial visitors could affect their independent experience.

A weakness of many of the conflict studies is that they are *activity- or place-specific*, and so it is not possible to make generalisations from them about the broader phenomenon of commercial recreation. As noted earlier, 'commercial recreation' covers a broad spectrum of activities and services, and people are likely to accept some forms of commercial recreation but not others (Dr Rick Rollins, pers. comm. May 2007). In addition, most of the research in this area has *described* conflict issues, rather than *exploring the causes or reasons* behind them. Although the findings from these studies provide useful insights into potential reasons why recreationists object to *some forms* of commercial recreation on conservation lands, they do not examine the issue of attitudes towards commercial recreation in general.

## 2.10 KEY STUDIES

Two studies pertaining to attitudes towards commercial recreation were found to be particularly relevant because they deal specifically with the attitudes of the general public towards commercial recreation and commercialisation. These two studies are summarised in this section.

The first study is Vail (2001): 'Tourists are invading our district: social and ecological conflicts in a Norwegian national park'. This is the only study that we identified that dealt specifically with the issue of people's attitudes towards commercial recreation. The study sought to explore residents' perceptions of increasing commercial tourism in Femundsmarka National Park, Norway, through interviews and analysis of local media reports. Findings demonstrated that the locals objected strongly to commercial activities in the national park for several reasons.

First, many local residents had a philosophical objection to the idea of people treating nature as a commodity. This use of nature was found to be in complete contrast to the Norwegian view of how visitors should relate to the natural environment. Norwegian values of nature emphasise that conservation land should be appreciated as a place to find solitude and refreshment and to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life—that it should not be just another disposable commodity. This attitude reflects a particular view of how nature should be used, what are appropriate activities in natural areas, and what attitudes people should have towards nature. The author noted that 'organised commercial activity, particularly in large groups, offends the common Norwegian notion that nature should be open for all in a not-for profit atmosphere' (Vail 2001: 562). The following quotes from local residents participating in the study illustrate this point:

*How do we feel that nature, clean air, clean water are becoming commodities? Nature as something to be consumed? A commodity that lies there for free sale and use? What do we think about foreigners selling our nature? ... Will we see the area develop into a modern amusement park?*

*I am against such commercial activity, that we have charter tours in our forest, and that this traffic is guided by foreign tour operators. They sell our wilderness for money ...* (Vail 2001: 556, 558)

A second objection to commercial activities was the notion that foreign companies were making a profit out of Norwegian public lands and facilities. Respondents believed that commercial companies did not contribute fairly to park maintenance, and that the goal of making money from a public resource runs counter to the philosophy of free access to outdoor recreation ('friluftsliv') in Norway:

*The cabins are now filled with foreigners ... it looks like they are guided by tourism organisations down in Europe with profit as their goal. This is not compatible with the intentions behind having open cabins for the public.*

(Vail 2001: 555).

Finally, some residents expressed a fear that they would 'lose' certain public resources if they were opened up to commercial use:

*The local people are on their way to losing the forest ... Statskog [the village] must intervene and stop the commercial use of the open cabins.*

(Vail 2001: 554).

In this study 'commercialisation' was often used to disguise respondents' dislike of foreign tourists. Some locals appeared to have a fear of 'foreigners' taking over their land. They felt a sense of ownership of the national park and resented the idea that foreign companies were effectively 'selling' it to international tourists. This suggests that comments against commercialisation in this study may be masking deeper social and cultural issues such as xenophobia and cultural clashes.

The second report was Robertson & Burdge (1993): 'The interface between commercial and industrial development and recreational use in an urban river corridor'. This study focussed on an urban river corridor in Upper Illinois, USA. Although the focus was entirely on commercial *developments* (e.g. manufacturing facilities, power plants and recreational facilities) as opposed to commercial *recreation activities*, the findings shed light on the public's attitudes towards the notion of commercialisation, and the research methods may also be of use. The objectives of the research were:

1. To develop and test a behavioural approach to identifying and classifying the direct and indirect impacts of commercial and industrial activities on recreational use of an urban river corridor.
2. To examine the nature of the relationship between different recreational uses within the corridor

The study used interviews with park visitors to identify impacts associated with commercial use of the area that might affect visitor enjoyment, and then designed a quantitative survey to measure the strength and direction of the impacts.

The key findings that are relevant to the current study were that:

1. Commercial development adversely affects the quality of the recreation experience
2. The extent of the effects depends on both the type of recreation activity being undertaken and the type of commercial development

The study highlights that commercial development has potential to detrimentally affect the visitor experience, and also that impacts are likely to vary with the type of commercial recreation service or facility.

## 2.1.1 SUMMARY

A review of the formal research literature provides limited insight into visitors' attitudes toward commercial recreation services on public lands. Indeed, it highlights that this is a research area that requires more attention. Studies *about* commercial recreation on public lands were reviewed and findings summarised in section 2.1.

# 3. Recreationists' attitudes towards commercial tourism in remote and wilderness areas of New Zealand national parks

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section summarises some of the preliminary findings of a doctoral research project (by Kerry Wray) which examines (as part of a wider study) recreationists' attitudes towards commercial recreation and tourism in *remote and wilderness areas*<sup>4</sup> of New Zealand national parks. Visitors to remote and wilderness areas of Fiordland National Park were interviewed and 18 interviews had been completed at the time of this study. For this reason, results presented in this section are preliminary and Kerry Wray's forthcoming PhD thesis (Lincoln University) will yield more information. The section of the interview schedule which related to commercial recreation in remote and wilderness areas can be seen in Appendix 2.

Interviews were conducted with a sub-group of the outdoor recreation population (wilderness visitors). The findings, therefore, only represent the views of *independent wilderness visitors* (on commercial recreation in remote and wilderness areas); *not* the full spectrum of outdoor recreationists. Interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Each interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were searched for comments relating to commercial recreation, which were analysed to produce the results presented in this section.

Interviewees discussed a variety of commercial recreation activities and facilities during the interviews. These ranged from major proposed developments (gondola, monorail, sky walk, new roads) to guided activities (walking, hunting, fishing), motorised access (aircraft, boat, bus) and facilities (coke machines, coffee shops, etc.).

The key themes and issues uncovered during this analysis are outlined in the following sections. First, key findings are presented (section 3.2), followed by a summary of the benefits of commercial recreation (as identified by wilderness visitors) in section 3.3. Second, key objections to commercial recreation are discussed (section 3.4). Third, some of the characteristics that would make commercial recreation more acceptable to independent visitors to remote and wilderness areas are outlined (section 3.5), followed by perceived unacceptable characteristics of commercial recreation (section 3.6). It is important to note here that very few interviewees had any *direct* experience or examples of encounters or experiences with commercial tourism/commercial tourists in wilderness

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<sup>4</sup> Remote and wilderness areas are particular classifications of conservation lands in New Zealand which are managed to protect values such as remoteness and natural quiet, and the relatively unmodified natural environment (DOC 2006).

areas. Any incidents they discussed had generally occurred in high-use areas of conservation land, and not in wilderness areas. More frequently, they discussed the situation hypothetically—for example, their opinions about the *concept* or *prospect* of commercial tourism activities in wilderness areas.

### 3.2 KEY FINDINGS

1. Most interviewees were able to identify various forms of commercial recreation that currently take place on public conservation lands in New Zealand.
2. Most interviewees were able to identify benefits from commercial recreation activities on public conservation lands.
3. Many respondents viewed users of commercial recreation services and facilities as ‘different’ from independent visitors to public conservation lands.
4. Several interviewees stated that they deliberately avoided certain areas of conservation land (such as Milford Sound/Piopiotahi and Abel Tasman National Park) because of the perceived high levels of commercial use.
5. There was a feeling of mistrust towards commercial operators amongst some interviewees because of the perception that profit (rather than conservation) is their main goal.
6. Specific aspects of commercial recreation/tourism that bothered interviewees included: a fear that traditional recreational experiences are being threatened by an increase in commercial recreation, a fear that national parks may become ‘commercialised’, the belief that commercial recreation devalues independent recreation, a dislike of the impacts associated with some forms of commercial recreation (such as noise, increased visitors, vegetation damage, and increased facilities and services), and an aversion to private operators making money from a public resource.
7. Some interviewees were able to describe characteristics of commercial recreation that would make it more acceptable to them on public conservation lands. These included small group sizes, low-frequency trips, low-impact activities, conservation-minded operators and guides, and no new structures or facilities.
8. Although some interviewees were completely averse to any forms of commercial recreation on public conservation lands, most felt that *some* types of commercial recreation are appropriate in *some* areas, as long as the activities are well managed and meet the recreation objectives for the area.

### 3.3 BENEFITS OF COMMERCIAL RECREATION ON CONSERVATION LANDS

Most interviewees acknowledged that there are various benefits associated with commercial recreation on conservation lands. Identified benefits are summarised below:

#### **Improved/facilitated access**

- Allowing people to visit areas that they otherwise might not be able to access; for example, the elderly, families, people with disabilities, or people who do not have the time, skills or the necessary equipment for independent activities
- Providing different ways of accessing and experiencing areas and the ability to see different views; by use of kayaks, motor vessels and planes, for example
- Allowing more varieties of trips and experiences in short time frames

#### **Economic**

- Providing income and other economic benefits, both locally and nationally
- Providing employment opportunities
- Contributing to raising New Zealand's living standards
- Assisting conservation—concession fees are 'ploughed back' into conservation activities

#### **Controlling visitor impacts**

- Providing ways for large numbers of people to appreciate the natural environment while minimising their impact
- Providing a means of controlling the behaviour and safety of visitors
- Allowing impacts at sites to be managed, especially where the only visitation or use allowed is provided by commercial operators; for example, in subantarctic islands

#### **Imparting conservation messages and raising the profile of activities**

- Ensuring that visitors receive the conservation message (through guides, etc.)
- Enabling the profile of certain activities (e.g. hunting) to be raised

#### **Safety and companionship**

- Providing companionship/safety/security to visitors who do not know the area, or do not have a group of friends with whom to travel

Additional benefits of commercial recreation were suggested by one of the focus group participants, as part of the third phase of this study (see section 4). These benefits were:

- Commercial operators are often the 'eyes and ears' for DOC, preventing inappropriate behaviour by independent visitors, warning of illegal operations and providing early notice of changes to the environment.
- Many operators carry out research and monitoring, either as part of their concession conditions or voluntarily.
- Operators actively encourage New Zealanders to participate in outdoor recreation through their marketing campaigns. This has associated health and social benefits.

### 3.4 REASONS WHY INDEPENDENT WILDERNESS VISITORS OBJECTED TO COMMERCIAL RECREATION IN REMOTE AND WILDERNESS AREAS

After prompting, almost all interviewees who objected to commercial recreation in remote and wilderness areas<sup>5</sup> were able to articulate why they felt this way. The reasons were varied, but it was possible to group responses into nine key themes, which are discussed in this section.

#### 3.4.1 **Fear that traditional recreation experiences will be damaged, threatened or changed**

Many interviewees feared that the introduction of commercial recreation or tourism into a remote or wilderness area would threaten traditional, independent outdoor recreation experiences in that area. There was a perception that commercial recreation is different from independent recreation (and, in particular, wilderness recreation), and requires a much higher standard of services and facilities. Interviewees felt that independent wilderness visitors may be displaced by commercial activities, and that the introduction of new services and facilities to support commercial recreationists would eventually change the nature of the area and the existing recreation experience.

There was also a feeling that the introduction of any 'new' activities, structures or facilities in remote or wilderness areas would be to the detriment of existing visitors, and may favour international visitors over New Zealanders. Some interviewees felt very strongly about this issue. They argued that the introduction of commercial activities would 'destroy the integrity' of New Zealand's remote and wilderness areas, and cause them to 'lose what was special' about them. Underlying these sentiments was a fear that New Zealanders may be pushed out of particular areas of conservation land, or forced to pay to use what they believe is rightfully theirs. Interviewees had a strong desire to protect the wilderness resource and the backcountry experiences that they valued.

#### 3.4.2 **Fear that commercial recreation will 'open the floodgates' to commercialisation**

Another major concern was that allowing one or two commercial activities was simply a 'foot in the door' for commercial operators, and that this would eventually lead to the commercialisation of wilderness. Interviewees spoke of 'opening the floodgates' to tourism, 'sliding down the slippery slope' to commercialisation, and 'selling' the wilderness to commercial interests. Many people shared the view that once one form of commercial recreation was allowed to occur in an area, then that would be the 'beginning of the end' for independent recreation. They argued that commercial recreation requires a higher standard of facilities and services, and therefore necessitates improvements to existing facilities; that commercial clients require higher safety standards, and further improvements or developments; that this will encourage further demand for the existing services which will, in turn, attract new operators to the area, which will lead to further developments, and so on.

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<sup>5</sup> Interviewees often used the terms 'wilderness' and 'remote' in a generic sense rather than pertaining to land status.

A number of interviewees were able to give examples of (non-wilderness) areas where they had seen this process of commercialisation occur, and were upset or disappointed by what they saw. They used these examples to describe what they did not want to see occur elsewhere on conservation lands. Areas that were mentioned as being over-commercialised included Milford Sound/Piopiotahi, Abel Tasman National Park, the Hump Ridge Track and Queenstown. Interviewees were also concerned that political and economic interests may overshadow the views of the general public, and that individual recreationists would have little power to act against any major increases in commercial activity.

### **3.4.3 Dislike of impacts associated with commercial recreation**

Many of the objections to commercial recreation were more related to the impacts associated with the activities than the activities themselves. For most interviewees, commercial recreation means more people using an area, more advertising, more facilities, more infrastructure, more noise, more environmental impact, more crowding and more conflict between visitor groups. There was a perception that these associated impacts had the potential to destroy the independent wilderness experience through a loss of remoteness, solitude and isolation.

### **3.4.4 Commercial clients are ‘different’ from independent visitors**

As noted earlier, many interviewees held the view that people who use commercial recreation services and facilities are different from independent visitors to the wilderness resource. Because of these perceived differences, interviewees said that they may feel annoyed if they had to share certain areas with commercial clients. Interviewees identified several ways in which they believe commercial recreation clients are different from independent wilderness recreationists:

- They have different motivations from independent visitors. For example, they may be there simply to sight-see, to take photographs, or to participate in a particular ‘adventure’ activity such as rafting or jet-boating, rather than to have a ‘traditional’ outdoor recreation experience.
- They do not have the same level of adventure and commitment as independent visitors because they have a guide or an operator taking care of them.
- They put in less effort to achieve their recreation experiences. This is frustrating to independent visitors for two main reasons:
  - Because it does not seem fair. It goes against the Kiwi ethic of ‘putting in the hard yards’ to get somewhere, and detracts from the enjoyment of independent visitors who have put in the effort (for example, aircraft access compared with foot access).
  - Because commercial visitors are unlikely to be having a similar experience if they have not had to work to get there.
- They often do not interact with the environment during their visit—they ‘*observe*’ rather than *partake*’ in it (‘they don’t get their feet dirty’), and this is seen as a very different experience to that of independent visitors.
- Their trips are often of a much shorter duration, meaning that may not ‘have the same appreciation of’ the experience as independent visitors.

### **3.4.5 Commercial recreation is a reminder of civilisation that independent wilderness visitors want to escape**

Several interviewees felt that commercial recreation served as an unwelcome reminder of many of the elements of modern society from which they seek to 'escape' during their wilderness experiences. These elements included other people, non-natural noise (e.g. from aircraft or other people), permanent structures, tracks and facilities, motorised transport and large groups. Interviewees argued that encountering any reminders of civilisation was likely to have a negative impact on their experience because it would 'destroy feelings of remoteness', 'reduce opportunities for solitude', and 'diminish the challenge'. Some felt that any sign of commercialism in a national park would be a huge disappointment because it would mean that the area had been 'tainted' by the hand of man.

### **3.4.6 Philosophical objections to commercial recreation on conservation lands**

One of the key objections to commercial recreation was that it involves commercial operators extracting private gain from a public resource. A number of interviewees were philosophically opposed to this because they felt that all public conservation lands has been set aside for non-extractive use, i.e. for its intrinsic value, and not to provide economic returns for a select few. These people were also opposed to the idea of having profit as the main goal in outdoor recreation. They felt that this went against the philosophy of outdoor recreation in New Zealand—which is to provide equal opportunities for everyone to appreciate nature on nature's terms, to challenge themselves, and to reap the intrinsic rewards that they deserve. These people were of the firm belief that profit should not be the main driver of outdoor recreation. They were against the notion that individuals should be able to buy a certain experience just because they have the money. They also felt that conservation would suffer at the expense of big business if profit became the main driver.

It also became clear that one of the things the interviewees value most about conservation lands (and, in particular, remote and wilderness areas) is the fact that (unlike almost every other area of life) there is nothing commercial about them—no-one is 'out trying to make a buck' or trying to convince you to buy something you do not want. Interviewees found this a welcome and refreshing alternative to capitalist society, and were fearful that this may change if commercial recreation and tourism were allowed to increase.

### **3.4.7 Commercial recreation is antithetical to traditional outdoor recreation**

Commercial recreation was seen by interviewees as devaluing or belittling the experience of independent wilderness visitors by removing some of the essential elements/key values of the wilderness experience such as risk, adventure, self-sufficiency, opportunities to make decisions, and pushing oneself to one's mental and physical limits. The values of commercial recreation (for example: working to set schedules, making a profit, making people feel safe, looking after the group and making sure that no-one feels afraid) were seen as very different to those of independent wilderness recreation. Commercial activities frequently involve 'having your hand held', and having someone else control your decisions, and

for most independent wilderness visitors, this is not what outdoor recreation is about. Wilderness visitors often felt that commercial activities and the people who take part in them were incongruous with the natural environment—they do not ‘fit in’—their activities are a distraction and an irritation to independent visitors.

#### **3.4.8 Commercial recreation is elitist and only for the rich**

Another common perception of commercial recreation was that it is something that only the rich can afford. A number of participants described it as ‘elitist’ and felt that it was unfair that people were able to ‘buy’ their recreation experiences rather than have to earn them themselves. Some felt a sense of unjustness or unfairness at the fact that commercial clients have their experiences made easier simply because they have the money to do so. They argued that money should not be used as a substitute for effort, and that everyone should be ‘starting off on the same foot’ when it came to visiting remote and wilderness areas.

#### **3.4.9 Inappropriate behaviour of commercial groups**

A few interviewees were also unhappy with the behaviour of commercial groups that they had encountered on previous outdoor recreation trips<sup>6</sup>. They cited examples of when they had encountered inappropriate behaviour, and felt that this had tainted their view of commercial recreation. Examples of inappropriate behaviour included guided groups taking over public hut facilities and marginalising independent hut users, guided groups not displaying hut etiquette (e.g. being noisy and not cleaning up after themselves), commercial groups being too big, and not respecting the natural environment. Several interviewees also felt that some commercial recreation operators were ‘taking more than their fair share’ from public areas without making adequate financial contributions or mitigating their impacts.

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<sup>6</sup> All of the incidents cited by interviewees had occurred in non-wilderness areas of New Zealand public conservation lands.

### 3.5 CHARACTERISTICS OF ACCEPTABLE COMMERCIAL RECREATION ACTIVITIES

When asked what they *disliked* about commercial recreation, many interviewees identified certain characteristics that would make commercial activities more acceptable in remote and wilderness areas (and, in some cases, on conservation lands in general). These are discussed as seven categories: location, activity characteristics, behaviour, group size / trip frequency, operator characteristics, and facility use.

#### **Location**

Commercial recreation activities should be located:

- In frontcountry areas where the impacts would be less noticeable because there are already structures, facilities and high use levels.
- On the fringes of public conservation lands, where impacts on independent visitors seeking a wilderness-type experience would be minimal.

#### **Activity characteristics**

Appropriate commercial recreation activities in remote and wilderness areas include:

- Self-sufficient activities that mimic independent recreation activities.
- Activities which require clients to be 'on the same footing' as the independent recreationists—e.g. with similar motivations, aims, equipment and attitudes. Commercial visitors need to be perceived by independent visitors to be sharing a similar recreational experience—'not just looking at things through the lens of a camera'. They also need to have a similar level of adventure and commitment, which will enable both user groups to have mutual respect for one another.
- Activities which are compatible with the existing independent use of the area (e.g. consistent with the recreation objectives/experiences the area is set up to provide).
- Activities that have low impact.
- Activities that give something back to conservation, or benefit conservation (e.g. through weed or pest control).

#### **Behaviour**

Appropriate behaviour of commercial recreation groups on all of New Zealand conservation lands includes:

- Commercial groups being prepared to give up hut facilities for independent visitors, and not taking over public facilities.
- Commercial groups respecting the natural environment and the behavioural norms expected in the New Zealand backcountry.

#### **Group size/trip frequency**

For commercial recreation to be acceptable in remote and wilderness areas:

- Group size should be small.
- Trips should be of long duration (5 days or longer)—this would encourage the types of visitors who would be less likely to bother independent visitors.

### **Operator characteristics**

Commercial operators wishing to work on public conservation lands in New Zealand should have:

- Minimal impact on the social and biophysical environment.
- A real commitment to low-impact activities.
- A respect for the environment in which they are operating and for the experience of independent visitors.
- A keen awareness of conservation goals, and a dedication to protecting/preserving the social and biophysical environment in which they work.
- A commitment to imparting the conservation message to clients.

### **Facility use**

Commercial groups' use of public conservation lands and facilities should involve:

- No more tracks, services or facilities than existing use requires.
- A willingness to give up facilities to independent visitors if necessary.
- No use of motorised access (this was specifically in wilderness).

### **Examples of acceptable commercial activities in remote and wilderness**

Commercial recreation activities that are acceptable include:

- Guiding activities that meet all of the above criteria.
- Providing transport/access for independent recreationists.
- Providing access for hunters to control deer.
- Providing access for conservation purposes or search and rescue.

## **3.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF UNACCEPTABLE COMMERCIAL RECREATION ACTIVITIES IN REMOTE AND WILDERNESS AREAS**

Commercial recreation was automatically perceived as negative if it introduced something into an area that was inconsistent with the reasons why independent recreationists went to or used the area. The worst forms of commercial recreation (in remote and wilderness areas) that were identified by interviewees were:

- Anything that required (additional) permanent structures, facilities or tracks
- Activities that required motorised/mechanised transport
- Large groups
- High-frequency activities
- Large numbers of 'foreigners'
- Noisy activities
- Activities that did not fit in with the traditional use of the area

# 4. Focus group workshop analysis

## 4.1 KEY FINDINGS

The focus group participants identified 13 topics that they felt were relevant to a discussion of commercial recreation on public conservation lands. These topics are presented in section 4.2 and discussed in section 4.3.

Overarching themes derived from the workshop discussion are:

### **Concepts and philosophical tenets**

- Definition of ‘commercial recreation’ is difficult and requires careful attention.
- Public conservation lands belong to New Zealanders and the public should ‘benefit’ from their use. The purpose of public conservation lands and the public’s right to recreate on public lands underlie this construct.
- The relative priority of independent recreation compared with commercial recreation (when a conflict occurs) is fundamental to this topic.
- A growth imperative is associated with commercial recreation in the minds of some participants—but not others.
- The cultures and traditions of both outdoor recreation and tourism are important to New Zealanders.

### **Benefits of commercial recreation**

- Commercial recreation contributes to the provision of a range of public recreation opportunities (it provides choice).
- Benefits accrue from the commercial recreational use of public lands (economic and other types of benefit).

### **Effects of commercial recreation**

- The provision of commercial recreation services has changed the nature of the recreation experience in some places.
- The key management issue is the effects of commercial recreation and how to manage these.

### **Management of commercial recreation effects**

- Commercial recreation activity (and its effects) should be consistent with the management objectives for an area.
- Management decision-making should be supported by sound science.
- Management of commercial recreation is complex—it includes managing expectations and understanding motivations.
- The question of *how* to set limits is contentious.
- The degree to which commercial recreation should be ‘limited’ compared with independent recreation is contentious.
- There is concern that research is weighted too heavily towards the views of international visitors (rather than New Zealanders).

## 4.2 PURPOSE

The focus group workshop involved a diagnosis of the issues surrounding each topic, as defined by participants. It provided a forum in which ideas apparent from the literature review could be 'tested', other ideas identified, issues debated and key conclusions reached. More specifically, focus group participants:

1. Identified issues and benefits related to the provision of commercial recreation services on public conservation lands.
2. Discussed factors associated with, and influences upon, these issues and benefits.
3. Highlighted future research needs.

## 4.3 METHOD

A focus group is a selected group of people who possess certain characteristics (often an interest in the topic being discussed) and come together to discuss a particular issue or series of issues (Kreuger & Casey 1994). The recommended size of a focus group is 6-10 people. Anything smaller may limit the potential for gathering information, and anything larger may impede participation and interaction (Hancock et al. 2009).

For the purpose of the study, participants were individuals who fitted one or more of the following criteria:

- Has involvement in public debate about recreation on public conservation lands
- Has involvement in the provision of commercial recreation on public conservation lands
- Can provide an informed perspective on the public's attitudes towards the provision of commercial recreation on public conservation lands

Potential participants were selected via examination of the 'informal' literature (as part of the literature review for this study) which had highlighted people who had voiced opinions on commercial recreation. The 'snowballing' method of selecting participants was then used to gain further contacts. Care was taken to select for a *range* of perspectives (i.e. commercial recreation operators and various types of users).

Although DOC was considered to be a major stakeholder in this study, a DOC representative was not invited because a DOC presence may have influenced the responses from the group and limited the potential for open discussion.

In total, seven people participated in the focus group (see Appendix 3). They included people with a background or affiliation with the tourism industry, as well as those with a non-commercial 'backcountry' use focus. It proved difficult to engage with predominantly 'frontcountry' visitors; however, an outdoor recreation academic was selected to provide a broad overview of the topic. Individuals were not invited as 'representatives' of organisations, although people affiliated with the Tourism Industry Association New Zealand and Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand were invited. It was recognised that the group was not a collective of all visitors to conservation lands. The nature of the focus group method precluded this (i.e. the group had to be limited to 6-10 people) and ensuring all groups had a voice was not the purpose of the workshop.

Members of the focus group were advised that no names would be attributed to comments in the study report (to encourage full and frank discussion). All members agreed to have their names listed in the study report as a focus group participant.

Because these workshop participants were deliberately chosen for their range of views, it was anticipated that individuals would not always agree with each other. It was stressed to participants that the intention of the workshop was to elicit a broad range of opinions and that agreement on issues was not required, or sought. During the workshop, participants were respectful of others' views and were comfortable in voicing alternative perspectives. Participants appeared to enjoy the workshop and some individuals asked to have contact details for all participants, which were provided with everyone's agreement.

The workshop was held in Christchurch on 23 August 2007, from 11 am to 3 pm. A secretary typed notes during the session, and the meeting was recorded on audiotape (with the consent of participants). Both the notes and the sound recording were used by the researchers when writing the study report.

The approach taken by the focus group was to identify the issues/benefits associated with commercial recreation on public conservation lands, and then to discuss each issue/benefit in turn, in order to elicit the full spectrum of views on each matter. In this way, participants set the agenda for the workshop, by identifying the topics that they felt were important and wished to address. Issues and/or benefits were identified in two ways. First, a list of topics derived from the literature review was presented and 'checked' with participants. Second, a free-ranging brainstorming session was undertaken. Discussion of each topic was limited by time (to approximately 20 minutes per topic) and the order of discussion of topics followed the flow of the conversation, as some topics were closely related.

At the beginning of the workshop, all participants introduced themselves and their connection with public conservation lands. At the close of the workshop, participants were given the opportunity to raise any issue that they thought had been missed, or key points that they wished to emphasise. Three participants provided written comments after the workshop. This information has been incorporated into sections 2 and 3 of this report, rather than the focus group discussion (section 4), since other participants did not have the opportunity to discuss these notes.

The term 'workshop' is used in section 4.4, rather than 'focus group', as this was the terminology used by the project team with participants, in order to avoid research jargon.

## 4.4 RESULTS

This section presents a list (and brief explanation) of the primary issues and benefits associated with commercial recreation on public conservation lands (section 4.4.1). Each issue or benefit is then discussed in section 4.4.2.

#### 4.4.1 Identification of key themes

The key findings of the literature review (including the preliminary results from Kerry Wray's doctoral study) were presented to the workshop participants as five key issues and were briefly described. These issues represented the main themes that the project team wished to 'test' with the focus group. Focus group participants acknowledged the five themes as valid and appropriate for discussion.

Next, participants were given the opportunity to suggest other topics (related to attitudes towards commercial recreation) that they believed were important and wished to have discussed at the workshop. A further eight topics were identified. For each new point raised, the group decided whether it represented a fresh topic or was related to (and could be noted as part of) an existing topic.

The 13 topics are outlined below, along with a brief explanation. Statements for the five topics identified from the literature encompass both the pre-prepared description (written for the workshop) and points raised by participants during the workshop.

Topics are inter-related and the workshop discussion indicated this—participants often 'strayed' onto other themes during discussions and some points were raised more than once, under different themes. While the workshop was a structured discussion of the identified topics, the facilitator (Kay Booth) attempted to follow the flow of discussion as much as possible. The written version of the proceedings (section 4.4.2) suggests a greater distinction between themes than was the case—overlap was common. This is indicated, where relevant, in section 4.4.2 and is the reason why some points are repeated under different themes.

#### ***Key themes identified from the literature review (augmented by workshop discussion):***

##### **1. Defining commercial recreation**

There is no clear definition of commercial recreation in the literature. A distinction between commercial and independent recreation is acknowledged; however, the relationship is complex and the separation is becoming increasingly blurred. The difference between commercial recreation and tourism is similarly vague.

##### **2. The amount of commercial recreation on public conservation lands is increasing**

Evidence shows that the amount of commercial recreation on public conservation lands is increasing. The consequences of this growth include more visitors on conservation lands, a greater diversity of visitors and activity types, more recreational opportunities and more visitor impacts. The issue that this creates concerns the successful management of associated impacts. To ensure that successful management occurs, workshop participants believed that sound science was required. A related philosophical point (identified in the literature and supported by workshop participants and wilderness visitors interviewed) is the 'growth imperative' (inevitability of growth) perceived, by some, to be associated with commercial recreation.

### **3. Key objections to commercial recreation**

Existing research and data from interviewees and workshop participants indicated that independent visitors sometimes object to commercial recreation on public conservation lands. These objections can be categorised into four themes:

#### *Philosophical objections to commercial recreation*

Some people object philosophically to the notion of commercial recreation on public conservation lands. They believe that it goes against the traditional values that underpin outdoor recreation (such as freedom and equal opportunity for everyone to challenge themselves). The basis of this philosophical objection is the public ownership of conservation lands—that they should be for public good rather than private gain (protection not production). However, it has been argued that private use of public conservation lands does provide public good (e.g. through tourism companies' contributions to conservation and independent recreation).

#### *Commercial recreation has the potential to change existing recreation experiences*

Many of the wilderness visitors involved in this research felt that commercial recreation threatens existing recreation experiences. A number of interviewees and workshop participants were of the view that commercial recreation encourages higher levels of use, different types of visitors, and eventually requires a much higher level of facility development. Some workshop participants and interviewees were concerned with the loss of the New Zealand backcountry culture.

#### *Fear of 'commercialisation'*

Another fear associated with commercial recreation is that allowing any commercial activities in an area will 'open the floodgates' to commercialisation. Some interviewees and workshop participants believed that once a commercial activity is in place, this would set in motion a process of development and improvement of facilities, thereby encouraging more commercial activities to locate in the area.

#### *Commercial recreation clients are different*

The literature indicates that commercial recreationists are sometimes seen as different from independent recreationists. Wilderness interviewees characterised commercial recreationists as less-able, less-skilled, less-adventurous, older, more likely to be from other countries ('foreign'), and less likely to interact with the environment. Workshop participants agreed, but noted that independent recreationists use commercial services too, so there is no 'hard' separation between types of visitors.

### **4. Conflict and compatibility between independent and commercial recreationists**

Research suggests that conflict is increasing between participants in outdoor recreation activities, and that conflict is likely to occur in areas where there are high levels of use and/or a variety of different activities competing for the same resource. Findings from recreation studies also suggest that conflicts have developed between commercial and non-commercial recreationists. This point relates to the differences between commercial and independent recreationists—conflict may be occurring because commercial visitors are perceived as 'different'.

## **5. Effects of commercial recreation depend on many factors**

Managing the effects of commercial recreation is the key management issue associated with commercial recreation. Data from interviewees and workshop participants indicated that these effects are influenced by a variety of factors, such as the location, type and frequency of the activity or service, client and operator characteristics, and facility use. In addition, commercial recreation activities are diverse, and it is very difficult to generalise impacts across them.

### ***Key themes identified by workshop participants:***

## **6. Managing recreationists' expectations**

Visitors' expectations of their recreational experience at a place influence their satisfaction with the experience they receive, and unrealistic expectations can be set (influenced by things such as marketing materials). Careful management is required to ensure that expectations are realistic.

## **7. Providing recreation opportunities**

The right of the public to have recreation opportunities on public conservation lands and the definition of the recreation experience both relate to this theme. The recreation experiences for which public conservation lands are being managed need to be defined. An underlying question is: can public conservation lands be all things to all people? Commercial recreation services provide choice for the public in terms of recreational opportunities on public conservation lands.

## **8. Cost-benefit analysis of commercial recreation**

What are the costs and what are the benefits of commercial recreation on public conservation lands, and who bears the costs and who reaps the benefits? Of particular interest is the relative contribution of New Zealanders versus international visitors, and tour operators versus independent visitors. This relates to the concept of ownership of the resource. What return do New Zealanders expect from public conservation lands?

## **9. Fair management of commercial recreation and independent use**

When an area becomes busy, use limits are often directed at commercial recreation and not independent recreation. Should the managers of public conservation lands target all recreational use rather than just commercial recreation? It is important to know which areas are becoming too busy and whether these increases in use are being generated from commercial recreation. How does DOC prioritise if there is conflict between commercial recreation and independent recreation?

## **10. Legislative issues**

Is DOC meeting its legislative requirements? In particular:

- Does the term 'preservation' in the National Parks Act 1980 and the Reserves Act 1977 include the recreation experience obtained within these parks and reserves?
- What do the terms 'foster' and 'allow' in the Conservation Act 1987 mean, and are these definitions being adequately implemented through DOC management actions?

These questions revolved around whether DOC was giving priority to 'fostering' recreation over 'allowing' tourism; whether the statutory term 'preservation' encompasses preservation of recreation experiences.

### **11. Research quality**

High-quality research about recreation is important and must be scientifically robust. To what extent should the views of international visitors be taken into account (compared with those of New Zealanders) in research programmes?

### **12. Quality of tourism operations and concessions management**

Retaining high-quality tourism operations and operators is an issue of concern, and the management of concessions (especially concessions allocation systems) has an influence upon the quality of operators. This issue affects people's perceptions of the commercial recreation industry. Many *management* issues surround DOC's concessions system.

### **13. Tourism and recreation traditions and national identity**

New Zealand has proud traditions associated with both backcountry recreation and tourism. Should DOC recognise 'customary backcountry recreation' and protect it? Tourism also has a tradition of use (e.g. at Milford Sound/Piopiotahi). How important is this backcountry culture and the tourism tradition to New Zealand's national identity?

## **4.4.2 Discussion of key themes**

The remainder of the workshop was devoted to discussing each of the 13 issues listed above. Discussions were wide-ranging and topics were, on occasion, controversial. Around 15–20 minutes were spent on each issue, although the amount of time varied by topic. This section outlines the key points from the discussion for each topic and, where appropriate, lists research needs that were identified by workshop participants. These needs also were wide-ranging. A summary is provided for each topic which overviews the nature of the discussion, the key dimensions of the topic and the research implications.

### **1. Defining commercial recreation**

There was a general consensus that the definition of commercial recreation used for this project (see section 1.3) is acceptable in concept. However, numerous 'grey areas' in the definition were highlighted and became the focus of discussion.

Several participants felt that the study definition was too manager-oriented and that it needed a stronger user perspective. The example offered in explanation was a definition which suggested that purchasing a commercial recreation product gives people a certain 'expectation' (that an experience will be delivered), whereas independent recreationists 'hope' that certain experiences will occur, rather than expecting them.

A distinction between commercial and independent recreation was acknowledged by the group. The relationship between commercial and independent recreation is complex, with areas of 'cross-over', which makes defining commercial recreation difficult. Mountain climbers, for example, may use a commercial operator for access (e.g. they may fly in), but then pursue their activity independent of commercial services. Questions asked by workshop participants included: where do private groups paying fees to independent clubs and societies fit? Is customary take/harvest (by tangata whenua) part of commercial recreation?

Some participants suggested that ‘fee paying’ may be a good way to distinguish between the two types of recreation (commercial and independent). However, use of fee payments is not clear-cut; for example, most tramping or climbing club trips require a fee (to cover costs), and this was not considered to be commercial recreation. A ‘hire and reward’ dimension may be helpful for defining commercial recreation, because it helps to separate commercial recreationists from people simply sharing the costs of a trip. Use of the term ‘private sector provision’ does not differentiate adequately between commercial recreation and independent recreation (for example, a club may hire an instructor).

A key distinction between commercial recreation and independent recreation was seen to be the issue of ‘duty of care’ (i.e. who is responsible for the care of individuals). In commercial recreation, there is an uneven relationship between, for example, guides and clients. The guide is responsible for the client, and the client has an expectation that they will be looked after. This is very different from independent recreationists, where ‘duty of care’ is shared—each person is simultaneously responsible for themselves and the others in their group. However, expectation of ‘duty of care’ cannot be used to express the reasons or motivations for recreationists choosing a commercial service, because the desire to be ‘looked after’ is not always the primary motivation for using a service, such as hiring a guide. Some commercial recreationists may be very experienced, but choose to use a commercial service for reasons such as time constraints, companionship and so on.

There was a feeling that the term ‘tourism’ can have negative connotations and that it is sometimes interpreted differently from ‘commercial recreation’. For this reason, some workshop participants preferred the term ‘commercial recreation’ (rather than ‘tourism’). Researchers need to be careful when defining commercial recreation, to ensure that it is not simply interpreted as ‘tourism’.

Several workshop participants questioned the need to define commercial recreation in any future surveys, and suggested that doing so may create more problems than it solves. Surveys could allow questions to be worded in a certain way without having to provide definitions of all the terms used. But it is still imperative that the definition is made clear in any written research reports or presentations.

#### *Summary*

- Workshop participants agreed in principle with the study definition of commercial recreation, but noted that there are ‘grey areas’ and that it is difficult to define commercial recreation succinctly and clearly, because of its complexity.
- It may be wise to avoid defining commercial recreation in future survey work, or else be aware of the nuances of the term and its various dimensions.

## **2. Increasing commercial recreation on public conservation lands**

This issue is important for commercial operators as well as independent visitors. The key is to successfully manage impacts. Various questions were raised. Is it possible to increase commercial recreation without increasing its impact, what are the major implications of this growth, and how do we monitor change over time? An issue of institutional memory was raised—there was concern that people may forget what areas used to be like, if no baseline data are recorded.

A fear was expressed by some workshop participants from the outdoor recreation community that the tourism industry is unwilling to accept limits to growth. But the tourism industry participants stated that the industry supported limits, where they are needed. How these limits are determined is the contentious issue.

There was a strong agreement that any research on 'limits' needs to be robust and scientific. The need for scientific monitoring systems was acknowledged—to identify levels of use and evidence of impacts—in order to ensure evidence-based decision-making. The provision of this information will also give operators certainty and allow them to plan for the future.

During this discussion, it was noted that care needs to be taken not to generalise about 'the tourism industry'. This is an all-encompassing term, yet a range of views are represented within this group.

It was noted that commercial recreation may become a victim of its own success in some places—leading to bigger operations or attracting more operators. It was suggested that growth was an inevitable consequence of commercial recreation provision on public conservation lands. Some workshop participants felt that commercial operators do not have the same values as independent visitors, because of the drive for growth and/or profit. Others argued that growth in a business does not necessarily involve expanding existing products—it can be about developing new opportunities in other areas where the impact could be zero or very low. Commercial recreation can 'evolve' rather than 'grow'—it does not necessarily have to expand. For example, the focus of a product can be changed to meet clients' demands. But new opportunities are limited by the landscape; the example used was that there is only one Milford Sound/Piopiotahi. This raised the issue of whether 'concentration' or 'dispersal' was the most appropriate management technique for commercial recreation.

#### *Summary*

- This topic was contentious and elicited a wide range of opinions.
- Assessment of limits on growth was particularly contentious—the issue being *how* limits are defined, rather than the *principle* of limiting growth.
- The notion of a growth imperative was voiced strongly by some participants—that the presence of commercial recreation services will inevitably lead to more and/or bigger services. This idea was hotly disputed by others.
- There was agreement that the key issue is the effects of commercial recreation rather than its growth per se.

### **3. Key objections to commercial recreation**

There was agreement by workshop participants that objections to commercial recreation exist, some grounded in reality ('on the ground' examples exist), others perceptual. There was disagreement over specific elements of these objections.

#### *Philosophical objections to commercial recreation*

Several workshop participants felt strongly that public conservation lands should be used only for the public good, and that DOC managers need to recognise independent use as their first priority, with commercial recreation as their second priority. The pressure to 'grow a business' was seen by some as incompatible with the goal of managing national parks (the point that 'growth is inevitable'

was raised several times during the workshop under various topics). This view was opposed by other participants, who argued that there has been a shift in the Tourism Strategy (Ministry of Tourism, Tourism NZ & TIANZ 2006) in recent years, and that tourism development is about yield—quality not quantity.

Some commercial recreation companies make a positive contribution to conserving the environment, and commercial recreation has benefits for independent clubs and societies through the provision of instructors for skills development courses and so on. Linked to this idea was the comment (from an independent recreationist) that the ‘world has moved on’ and that independent recreationists need to accept commercial recreation.

*Commercial recreation has the potential to change existing recreation experiences*

There was a strong feeling that New Zealand’s backcountry culture is part of the nation’s heritage and needs to be preserved. Many people fear that it is being eroded, although the cause of this is not solely commercial use of the backcountry. Increasing numbers of visitors (especially international visitors) are contributing to this culture change. This point relates to topic 13 (an outdoor recreation tradition or culture exists and is part of our national identity).

Commercial guides may help to preserve this backcountry culture, as they often teach it to their clients (e.g. leaving cut firewood and clean huts). One workshop participant commented that dependencies may develop (e.g. some people only go climbing with guides) and that guides are not taking people to certain areas because of concern about ‘duty of care’ responsibilities.

*Fear of ‘commercialisation’*

Several examples were given of places where commercial recreation has changed the nature of the area and the recreation experience (e.g. the Routeburn Track, where the track was improved to a higher standard and larger huts were constructed to relieve use pressure). These examples illustrated that fears about commercialisation are grounded in reality. However, there are also places where commercial recreation has been a success (e.g. the Milford Track, where traditional commercial opportunities have been allowed to continue and the recreation experience has been retained). Alternative tracks have been created or developed (e.g. the Kepler Track) to take pressure off popular tracks, but this may have the effect of increasing use within a particular region.

The ‘growth imperative’ of commercial recreation—that commercialisation is predicated on growth, and such growth was inevitable—was raised again at this point in the discussion.

*Commercial recreation clients are different*

There was general agreement amongst workshop participants that commercial recreation clients often differ (commonly older, from other countries, and less experienced) from independent visitors, but that it is not possible to generalise about all commercial recreationists. The average New Zealand outdoor recreationist may use some types of commercial activity on certain occasions. Care needs to be taken to avoid placing people into the categories of commercial and non-commercial visitors, as the distinction is not clear-cut. Some people may use a commercial service one day, but be an independent visitor the next.

### *Research needs identified by workshop participants*

- How does the New Zealand public feel about the current levels and types of commercial recreation on public conservation lands?
- What return do New Zealanders want or expect from concessionaires?

### *Summary*

- This multi-dimensional topic was wide ranging and views were disparate.
- This topic overlapped with many of the other topics.
- The public ownership of conservation lands influenced opinions—some workshop participants felt that public conservation lands are for independent recreationists first, and commercial recreationists second.
- Some commercial recreation operators make positive contributions to conservation and outdoor recreation in New Zealand. The focus of the New Zealand Tourism Strategy is quality not quantity.
- Concern was expressed about the erosion of New Zealand's backcountry culture; commercial recreation may help 'keep it alive'.
- Commercial recreation has changed the nature of the recreation experience in some places.
- Commercial recreationists are considered different from independent recreationists (as 'types' of people); however, this is not a clear distinction (for the reasons discussed as part of topic 1).

## **4. Conflict and compatibility between independent and commercial recreationists**

A key issue was DOC's prioritisation between commercial and independent recreationists when there is conflict. Conflict may be occurring because commercial visitors are perceived as 'different'. Commercial recreation is often associated with 'foreigners'—this was confirmed as both a perception and the reality. Most of the workshop participants agreed that international visitors make up the majority of commercial recreationists. Several operators voiced their desire to have more New Zealand clients. Indeed, during this discussion, there was a tendency to discuss differences between international visitors and New Zealanders, illustrating the strength of the perception that commercial recreationists are synonymous with international visitors, as well as the point that recreational conflict covers more than commercial/non-commercial visitor conflict.

Some examples of conflict situations were provided by workshop participants:

- New Zealand visitors' resentment of guided parties at the Westland glaciers resulting from the belief that guided parties have preferential access to the glaciers
- An objection towards visitors who have their hands held by guides, and a sense of sadness that these people do not have the time and/or inclination to learn skills themselves
- Independent visitors becoming angry at guides for putting in extra facilities (e.g. bolts for climbing) to make the experience safer and quicker for clients

Some workshop participants felt that operators may be provoking conflict situations by ignoring the needs of independent visitors.

Most of the workshop participants opposed the segregation of commercial and independent visitors, because this was seen as the antithesis of the New Zealand backcountry culture of ‘all mucking in’, and because this approach is likely to require more structures and facilities (e.g. dual sets of huts). But there was acknowledgement that separation may help to reduce conflict in certain places—e.g. dedicated camping areas for (large) guided parties to minimise interactions with independent recreationists.

It was felt that conflict can be mediated by managing expectations (see key theme 6). Conflict is also less likely to occur if commercial activities are compatible with existing independent activities. Several workshop participants emphasised that conflict is not always just between commercial and non-commercial visitors; indeed, it may be difficult to distinguish between them. Research may need to look at the issues underlying conflict situations.

Taking ‘a step back’, the question was asked: who are New Zealand public conservation lands for? Some workshop participants expressed the belief that they should be managed primarily for New Zealanders, but be welcoming to international visitors. Several participants feared that the New Zealand tourism industry may be trying to meet the needs of international visitors, whilst forgetting what New Zealand backcountry culture is all about (‘the New Zealand way of doing things’). A problem occurs when too many people from other countries ‘flood’ the backcountry. It was suggested that there is no problem if the values or recreational experience for which a place is being managed are set by New Zealanders, and international and commercial recreationists fit into this regime and are not able to be differentiated from local visitors.

#### *Research needs identified by participants*

- It was suggested that busy ‘hot spots’ are the highest priority areas for conflict and crowding studies.
- Research should explore the similarities and differences between commercial and non-commercial visitors; for example, their demographics, types of activities, motivations and values. If research demonstrates that conflict is due to differences between the two groups, then this could be the basis for differential management.
- Research into these issues was seen as being a high priority by some workshop participants.

#### *Summary*

- Workshop participants confirmed that commercial recreationists in New Zealand are primarily international visitors (i.e. this is both the perception and the reality)
- Discussion centred upon the ability to distinguish between commercial and independent recreationists—where this was not possible, then it was anticipated that problems would be unlikely (do commercial recreationists ‘stick out’ from New Zealanders?)
- More research is needed to ascertain whether differences exist between independent and commercial recreationists
- There was philosophical discussion about for whom public conservation lands should be managed
- Segregation was not widely supported as a tool for managing conflict between commercial and independent recreationists

## **5. Effects of commercial recreation depend on many factors**

This topic received coverage under several of the other topics—only key points are summarised here. There was general agreement amongst workshop participants that the effects of commercial recreation are dependent on many factors, including the characteristics of the operator, the type of activity, the location of the activity and the behaviour of the clients. It was considered important that any commercial activity be consistent with management objectives for the area.

Desirable characteristics of commercial operators that were identified included a sense of responsibility, a desire to protect the area in which they work, a passion for conservation, and an understanding of the values of the area in which they work.

The question of who uses public conservation lands was raised. The question was linked to the notion that it was important to provide opportunities for ‘the New Zealand family’ to experience parks. Commercial recreation opportunities could form part of a suite of responses to encourage New Zealand families to visit public conservation lands.

### *Research needs identified by workshop participants*

- How much of the demand for commercial recreation is due to pressure from people living in urban areas who uphold urban values? Are these visitors putting pressure on operators to provide certain services (i.e. quick and easy trips to suit their urban lifestyles)?
- Are there opportunities for people with time and/or ability constraints to utilise the New Zealand backcountry?
- Who is not using public conservation lands and why not?

### *Summary*

- The effects of commercial recreation were raised under various topics throughout the workshop. This illustrates the inter-connectedness of the set of 13 topics identified
- While it had been previously identified that the effects of commercial recreation are of paramount importance (see topic 2), it was agreed that the nature of effects is not uniform
- Effects vary depending on a range of factors
- Commercial recreation activity (and its effects) should be consistent with the management objectives for an area

## **6. Managing recreationists’ expectations**

Workshop participants felt it was important to be aware of the expectations of both independent and commercial recreationists. Expectations were seen to vary by type of visitor, and conservation land managers and tourism operators need to be realistic about anticipating these expectations. Marketing can set these expectations and it was felt that visitors often have very high expectations. The problem is that they are not always met—Milford Sound/Piopiota, the Westland glaciers and Abel Tasman National Park were cited as places where people’s expectations sometimes do not match the reality of their experiences. All participants stressed the importance of ensuring that visitors have accurate expectations.

Some workshop participants emphasised the importance of ensuring that New Zealand remains unique, and that tour operators do not merely provide the same experiences as people can find in other countries. It was questioned whether DOC was managing for opportunities different from those expected by international visitors.

#### *Research needs identified by participants*

- The expectations of New Zealanders and international visitors need to be differentiated in any future research.
- The expectations and motivations of commercial recreationists and independent recreationists should be studied.
- Research needs to address the similarities and differences between different types of visitors (e.g. hunters versus trampers, commercial versus non-commercial visitors). This could be done via assessment of the ‘informal’ literature written by recreationists, including books, club material, blogs.

#### *Summary*

- The workshop participants agreed that it was important to understand the expectations of recreationists
- While discussion focused upon the expectations of commercial recreationists, many of the points raised are generic to recreation management (for both commercial and independent visitors)
- Various research needs were outlined, indicating that participants were interpreting this topic broadly (i.e. with reference to a wide range of types of visitors)

### **7. Providing recreation opportunities**

The workshop participants raised many questions about this topic, including: does everyone have the right to a recreation experience on public conservation lands; how widely are such rights recognised—and how many different methods (activities, modes of access, etc.) are needed to fulfill them; should we be attempting to define the *way* people experience recreation on conservation lands and can public conservation lands be all things to all people? It was noted that commercial recreation services provide opportunities for many types of people, including older people and those with disabilities.

One workshop participant believed that commercial recreation is all about providing choice—it is good to have the opportunity to use a commercial recreation service or visit independently (e.g. take a guided trip for a cultural or learning experience, but an independent trip for obtaining a wilderness experience). Discussion then centred around limits being set about this choice. In particular, there was a general agreement that commercial recreation should not be available everywhere. The nature of the activity and the location were seen as important in deciding whether it is appropriate. Zoning is a good strategy for ensuring that this happens. One view expressed was that once you allow one commercial activity in an area, then visitors may expect to be able to undertake that activity anywhere. Once these expectations arise, demand is created, and the commercial sector may wish to meet this demand—leading to further growth of commercial recreation.

### *Research needs identified by workshop participants*

- What types of activities (and intensity of provision) does the public feel is appropriate for national parks and on conservation lands in general?

### *Summary*

- Primarily, this topic was a philosophical discussion about the purpose of public conservation lands and the public's rights to recreate on public lands.
- The concept of choice was raised and accepted by all workshop participants—i.e. that commercial recreation contributes to the provision of a range of opportunities for the public.
- The issue that received greatest 'air time' was setting limits on this 'choice'. Many participants agreed with the principle of specified activities in specified places (compared with universal coverage, i.e. all activities possible in all places).

## **8. Cost-benefit analysis of commercial recreation**

The central question for this topic was: who bears the costs and who reaps the benefits from commercial recreation? Several workshop participants felt that tourism operators and international visitors were benefiting at the cost of New Zealanders. The latter pay taxes and may do volunteer work to contribute to the management of conservation lands. International visitors contribute very little but receive many benefits.

There were objections to this notion (that commercial recreationists unfairly reap benefits). It was noted that profitable businesses make significant contributions to conservation, and when operators receive a good return, then there is a net benefit for everyone. Often operators only have very narrow profit margins, yet continue to operate because they are so passionate about the area, conservation or their activity.

The question was asked: is the New Zealand tourism business model wrong, given so many operators have such narrow profit margins? Are people willing to pay more for commercial recreation services? Conceptually, you could have half as many operators but charge 'through the roof'—i.e. alter demand rather than increasing supply. However, New Zealand as a destination needs to remain competitive globally. Workshop participants voiced concern about New Zealanders being able to afford commercial recreation services if the price was too high.

Another big issue for workshop participants was who should pay for the infrastructure to support tourism. Problems arise because local authorities and central government have to 'foot the bill' for providing basic amenities (toilets and so on). These costs fall 'unfairly' on ratepayers and taxpayers, who are not necessarily the users of the facilities. There was a general feeling that international visitors and the tourism industry are not contributing enough. The average New Zealander gets charged twice—through taxes and then when they pay the same price as international visitors to use public facilities and services. This was seen as inequitable by some participants.

However, some participants expressed the view that many of the benefits of commercial recreation have not been fully acknowledged. There are many economic spin-offs from commercial recreation for local communities and to New Zealand generally—as demonstrated by recent research (for example,

DOC 2004, 2005, 2006). In contrast, other participants suggested that the full costs of tourism are not known. One idea that was floated was to remove all costs for New Zealanders—i.e. making their use of public conservation lands completely free—and promote this as a benefit of tourism.

Another issue that arose was who owns (or who should be able to own) tourism concessions. There was a feeling amongst some participants that these should only be owned by New Zealand companies.

#### *Research needs identified by workshop participants*

- Does the New Zealand public feel that concessionaires and international visitors are contributing sufficiently to the management of public conservation lands? Are New Zealanders benefiting from the provision of commercial recreation?
- What are the opportunity costs and/or benefits of commercial activities on public conservation lands? (E.g. environmental, social, economic, etc.)
- A key question that New Zealanders need to be asked is who do they believe owns public conservation lands, and for whom should it be managed?

#### *Summary*

- As for some of the previous topics, this discussion was underpinned by the notion of public ownership of conservation lands
- The contribution of the commercial recreation industry was a key issue—and research questions derived from this notion concerned asking New Zealanders what they wanted from this industry (given the lands are publicly owned)
- Benefits from commercial recreational use of public lands were highlighted
- Apparent in workshop participants' views was a clear schism between international visitors and New Zealanders

### **9. Fair management of commercial recreation and independent use**

There was a lengthy discussion about the role of commercial recreation on public conservation lands. Some workshop participants felt that visiting conservation land is part of New Zealanders' birthright, and that if certain areas were becoming too busy, then commercial recreation should be restricted. They suggested that if 'enough' people were accessing areas independently, then there may be no need for concessionaires.

There were objections to this from several workshop participants, who argued that if you remove commercial recreation opportunities, you remove the opportunity for certain types of people to visit public conservation lands. Commercial recreation is about offering choices to the public and providing a high-quality experience (e.g. through the provision of interpretation).

Other workshop participants questioned whether the increase in visitor numbers to conservation lands (and associated impacts such as crowding and conflict) is a result of commercial recreation. They felt that DOC should look at controlling overall use, rather than always curbing commercial use—the ability of DOC to control commercial, but not independent, use was seen as unfair by some participants.

There was an acknowledgement that it would be difficult to control overall use or to restrict the numbers of independent visitors. Some workshop participants felt that this was entirely out of the question. There was agreement to disagree

on what approach DOC should take with respect to targetting commercial visitors compared with independent visitors at busy sites. However, participants did agree that it is necessary to manage an area for future use, irrespective of whether visitors are commercial or independent, New Zealand or international visitors. This should be the key issue.

#### *Research needs identified by workshop participants*

- What areas are becoming too busy and how should these sites be managed?
- How important is freedom of access to New Zealanders (the ‘birthright to go into the hills’)?
- How would New Zealanders feel if this right was diminished and/or affected by increased commercial recreation?

#### *Summary*

- No consensus was reached; indeed, this topic generated many opposing viewpoints
- There was disagreement about whether commercial recreationists (but not independent recreationists) should be limited when sites become too busy
- Better information is needed about the cause(s) of increases in use (to better target management responses)
- There was agreement that management is needed when increasing use levels lead to adverse effects

### **10. Legislative issues**

Workshop participants questioned whether DOC is meeting its legislative requirements with respect to commercial and independent recreation provision. Participants discussed the interpretation of the terms ‘foster’ and ‘allow’ (from the Conservation Act 1987), ‘preservation’ of experiences (National Parks Act 1980, Reserves Act 1977), and allowing room for growth whilst also setting limits.

Several workshop participants felt that DOC was failing to meet its requirements to foster independent recreation. They argued that DOC relies too heavily on the commercial sector to provide visitor services and, in doing so, neglects some of the key elements of outdoor recreation (such as education, self-discovery and challenge). Encouraging the public to participate in the outdoors should not fall entirely on private operators—this is a DOC legislative function.

Some workshop participants argued that independent recreation should be given a clear priority by managers of public conservation lands—that public land has been set aside for free and independent public use—not commercial gain. They felt that many individuals, clubs and societies had fought hard for this, and that the land is owned by, and managed for, the New Zealand public. Tourism interests should be secondary to independent recreation (as stated in the legislation), but this is not always evident in DOC’s management.

Some participants felt that the meaning of the statutory term ‘preservation’ has not been widely debated, and that DOC needs to be clearer on what this means—are we trying to preserve the experience of a place for future generations?

The workshop participants questioned whether DOC is wielding its legislative power sufficiently to control concessionaire activities. It was agreed that DOC has this power but appears reluctant to use it, perhaps because of a potential backlash from commercial operators.

A discussion about the 'limits of acceptable change' framework focused on whether it was an appropriate way to develop some limits to commercial growth on public conservation lands. Some participants felt that the goal of preservation for future generations was incompatible with tourism growth. There was an objection from others, who felt that the provision of access must be balanced with what we are trying to preserve.

Some workshop participants felt that it was unfair that large commercial operators can afford to employ researchers and legal experts to help them with concession applications when many smaller independent operators have to run on a 'shoe-string'. They felt that this causes a democratic imbalance in the legislative planning process.

#### *Research needs identified by workshop participants*

- How can DOC control commercial recreation more successfully?
- Why is DOC not using its powers to impose certain concession conditions?
- Does the public think that DOC should foster recreation by running non-commercial recreation programmes (such as summer programmes)?
- How important are things like self-discovery, challenge and education as motivations for people engaging in commercial recreation and independent recreation? Are there differences between the motivations of commercial recreation and independent recreation visitors on these factors?
- Are commercial recreation activities providing these opportunities, if they are so desired?

#### *Summary*

- There was a wide-ranging discussion of legislative concepts and whether DOC is implementing these
- Underlying the discussion was the relationship between independent use and commercial recreation, and the statutory direction provided in the Conservation Act 1987 (to foster recreation and allow tourism)
- Overlap was apparent with other topics addressed in the workshop

### **11. Research quality**

There was unanimous agreement amongst workshop participants that any future research on the topic of commercial recreation must be scientifically robust and transparent. Who should be surveyed and, linked to this, where surveys were carried out, were identified as important factors which must be considered in any future research.

With respect to any future studies and/or surveys, the question was asked: how much weight should be given to the views of 'one-time visitors' from other countries compared with the views of New Zealanders? In some sites, most visitors will be international visitors and the 'voice' of New Zealanders may be overwhelmed within the data. New Zealanders have a longer-term perspective on the issues, and a New Zealand frame of reference. It will be important to separate the perceptions of international visitors from those of New Zealanders. This discussion was linked to resource 'ownership'—the views of New Zealanders were considered more important by some workshop participants, because the New Zealand public is the 'owner' of public conservation lands.

The discussion turned to administration of any future surveys; in particular, on-site versus off-site surveys. Some workshop participants felt that New Zealanders may be better reached via off-site surveys. But, if research is carried out in an urban setting, there is the potential for data to be affected by issues in urban areas (e.g. sampling may contact very few backcountry visitors). With respect to any proposed future research on commercial recreation, it was suggested that there may be a need for two types of survey—a survey of the general population, and a survey of visitors.

#### *Summary*

- Workshop participants had various concerns about survey data
- A key area of concern was that some survey data primarily represents the views of international visitors rather than New Zealanders
- Off-site studies may better elicit information from New Zealanders
- With respect to any proposed future research, some workshop participants suggested both off-site and on-site surveys were needed

## **12. Quality of tourism operations and concession management**

The workshop participants discussed how the variations in the quality of tourism operations might affect people's perceptions of the tourism industry—'shonky' operators can give the industry a bad name. How DOC manages concessions will contribute to this situation—successful, fair and open concessions processes can stimulate reliable and high-quality businesses (and vice versa). For example, by giving operators security of tenure, this will ensure that they continue investing in their businesses. Good service from DOC leads to good products from concessionaires. Relationships between DOC and commercial operators are very important.

The discussion then moved onto concession allocation issues. Some workshop participants believed that tendering was the best way to allocate concessions when there are limited opportunities, because it ensures that the 'best' operator will be able to provide the service—a win-win situation for DOC and visitors. Others felt that tendering was not a fair process. They argued that it is disruptive to operators and does not encourage them to invest in their businesses, or provide quality services. They queried whether DOC has evidence to support the view that tendering will provide better concessionaires.

Some workshop participants (tourism operators) thought that DOC's concessions process is too time consuming, and not consistent with 'allowing' tourism. Issues with the concessions process include the lack of clarity in management plans about management objectives and what is 'allowed', with the result that operators may interpret plans differently from DOC staff, thus creating difficulties for operators. Decision-makers may find it easier to say no instead of letting things run and 'see what happens'. Operators fear that if decision-makers did choose to adopt a more precautionary approach, this may lead to the curbing of new opportunities for operators.

More commercial operators may mean more concession applications, which would inevitably place strain on DOC resources. There was agreement amongst workshop participants that the current changes to Department of Conservation management plans (which are moving towards managing by values and objectives at particular places) are good, and will enable more proactive management of

concessions. But the issue of institutional memory was raised—will the planning documents being devised today be sufficient to protect what people are likely to value about these places in 20 years time (when present-day staff are no longer around)?

It was suggested that some commercial operators feel that DOC should respond more rapidly—at the same sort of rate as they operate their businesses—but that this is not realistic. Time issues can lead to problems and misunderstandings between DOC and operators.

Several workshop participants believed that commercial operators view themselves as more important than (or having priority over) independent recreational visitors. Others argued that this was not true, and stated that there is a feeling amongst some operators that DOC neglects the experiences of commercial clients in favour of those of independent visitors. This was seen as being unfair.

#### *Research needs identified by participants*

- Is there a problem with the quality of concessionaires at present?
- Will tendering produce better (higher quality) concessionaires?

#### *Summary*

- This topic was important to workshop participants (especially those from the tourism industry)
- Discussion was curtailed since it was moving beyond the mandate of the workshop

### **13. Tourism and recreation traditions and national identity**

This issue was confirmed as important, but was not discussed, as workshop participants felt it had been covered under other topics. The issue relates to the 'proud' traditions of tourism and outdoor recreation in New Zealand—and their relative priority on public conservation lands. Key points relating to this issue that were mentioned during the workshop were:

- Workshop participants felt strongly that New Zealand's backcountry culture is part of the country's heritage and needs to be preserved.
- References to the New Zealand backcountry culture indicated that it included challenging yourself, learning new skills and 'all mucking in'. This culture had significant meaning for some people.
- Commercial recreation may help to preserve and maintain this culture through appropriate interpretation.
- New Zealand also has a strong tradition of tourism, and this may contribute to national identity.
- It was important to most workshop participants that the New Zealand tourism industry did not forget 'the New Zealand way of doing things' when attempting to cater for the needs of international visitors.

#### **4.4.3 Final comments**

At the close of the workshop, participants were given the opportunity to make a final comment. Individuals' responses are summarised below. Some points have been edited or combined with other points to make them more specific.

- It is important not to over-exaggerate any fears about commercial recreation. Commercial recreation is currently only having an impact at small number of frontcountry destinations. There is a vast amount of country available in New Zealand for outdoor recreation, and there are still many areas where there is no commercial recreation. People still have lots of opportunity to have a true 'wilderness' experience.
- The un-developed places left that are suitable for family-based independent recreation activities may become fewer through competition with commercial operators, because these places are also the most suitable for the kinds of people who partake in commercial recreation. It is therefore important that the views of families are included in any future research.
- Although it is crucial to preserve the New Zealand recreation experience, it is also important to ensure that the public are able to have this experience—commercial recreation does this very well. Some level of change is inevitable, and people have to accept this.
- It is imperative that any further research addresses the voice of the New Zealand public to prevent the views of New Zealanders from being 'lost' within the waves of responses from international visitors who complete DOC surveys—such as the Great Walks surveys discussed earlier in this report (Cessford 1997a, b; 1998a b, c, d, e).
- Another key issue to address is whether differences do exist between commercial and non-commercial visitors to public conservation lands and, if so, how to incorporate these differences in management approaches.
- Priority should be given to non-commercial recreationists on public conservation lands. Commercial recreation *is* tourism. There is a place for it, but it is third *after* conservation (first priority) and independent recreation (second priority). This may mean having to 'weight' the views of New Zealand residents compared with those of international visitors in any future research.
- The current management of concessions is of concern—DOC is failing to use its powers to control commercial activities. The growth of commercial recreation has implications for New Zealand outdoor recreation in future decades.
- Research on the New Zealand backcountry culture is needed, as there is a dearth of information about this.
- We need to recognise the benefits of commercial recreation, as well as its potential negative impacts. Maintaining a spectrum of recreation opportunities is important, and this means providing opportunities for both independent *and* commercial recreation.
- A qualitative approach to any future research is preferable. The tourism industry is not adverse to setting limits to growth—it is how the limits are 'arrived at' that is important. DOC needs to manage the *overall* use of places, not just commercial recreationists.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The demand for, and importance of, commercial recreation on public conservation lands has increased rapidly in the past 30 years, and commercial recreation provision is now (generally) an accepted use of public conservation lands. Some aspects of the provision of these services are controversial. Despite anecdotal reports of strong attitudes—both for and against—commercial recreation on public lands, little research currently exists. Commercial recreation research to date has either been place- or activity-specific, or has simply looked at the impacts of ‘tourism’, and has failed to distinguish between commercial and non-commercial visitors. Similarly, ‘recreation’ studies have examined various issues but not focused upon visitors’ attitudes towards commercial recreation *per se*.

Findings from interviews with New Zealand wilderness visitors revealed that users of commercial recreation services and facilities are often characterised as ‘different’ from independent wilderness visitors. These perceptions of difference (whether grounded in reality or not) have the potential to increase conflict between independent and commercial visitors to the conservation estate, and to reduce visitors’ satisfaction. In addition, study participants also identified some more specific aspects of commercial recreation/tourism that bothered them, such as: a belief that commercial recreation devalues independent recreation and has the potential to change the nature of the independent experience; a fear that national parks may become ‘commercialised’; a dislike of the impacts associated with some forms of commercial recreation; and an aversion to private operators making money from a public resource.

Focus group workshop participants confirmed these issues and added more. Workshop participants also were aware of the significant benefits associated with commercial recreation activities on conservation lands, and discussed ways in which public conservation land managers could make such activities more amenable to independent visitors. From the views of the workshop participants and wilderness users, management suggestions may be identified.

Central to these strategies will be ensuring that commercial recreation activities are compatible with existing independent experiences and with the management objectives for the areas in question. More specific strategies include educating commercial visitors on how to behave in an ‘appropriate’ way on New Zealand conservation lands (particularly in backcountry areas), ensuring that commercial groups do not ‘dominate’ the use of any particular area, and encouraging/giving support to commercial operators who have a keen awareness of conservation goals, and a dedication to protecting and preserving the social and biophysical environment in which they work.

Given the growing importance of commercial recreation (and the potential for conflict between independent and commercial visitors), it would seem imperative to assess visitors’ (and non-visitors’) perceptions and attitudes towards commercial recreation activities and services. This topic requires the close attention of public conservation land managers and outdoor recreation researchers. Study results suggest that some independent visitors to New Zealand conservation lands perceive a threat to the quality of their experiences from the tourism sector.

The wide-ranging and divergent views expressed at the workshop suggest that New Zealand conservation managers have a challenging task to achieve successful co-existence of commercial and non-commercial recreation activities.

## 5.1 THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

### **Study approaches**

- Both the views of the general public (via off-site research) and visitors to conservation lands (via on-site research) should be addressed, and the findings compared
- Studies should include both New Zealanders and international visitors (and the views of both must be clearly differentiated in study results)
- Studies could explore anecdotal sources of information, such as recreation publications and internet sites
- It may be best to let respondents self-define commercial recreation (or at least be aware of the complexity of the term if it is defined)
- Studies may require a variety of different study sites, as people's perceptions of commercial recreation are likely to differ by type of commercial facility or service, location and activity.

### **Areas of enquiry relating to use and users that must be addressed**

- Who is not using public conservation lands and why not?
- Are there opportunities for people with time and/or ability constraints to utilise the New Zealand backcountry?
- Who are the commercial recreation clients?
- What are the activities, demographics, expectations, motivations and values of commercial recreationists and independent recreationists? These should be compared.
- What is the extent and nature of visitor displacement resulting from commercial use?

### **Areas of enquiry relating to public perceptions that should be addressed**

#### *Costs and benefits*

- What return do people want or expect from commercial use of conservation lands and from concessionaires?
- What are the perceptions of the benefits and costs of commercial recreation?
- Are the benefits of commercial recreation fully recognised?
- Are concessionaires and international visitors making adequate financial contributions to the management of public conservation lands in New Zealand?

#### *Acceptability*

- What amount of commercial recreation on public conservation lands is acceptable?

- What concerns (if any) do visitors to public conservation lands hold for the effects of commercial recreation?
- What types of commercial recreation are appropriate and where? How and why attitudes vary, by location and activity, needs to be explored.
- Are the current levels and types of commercial recreation on public conservation lands acceptable?
- What are the characteristics of commercial recreation that would make it more acceptable (factors which have already been highlighted include small group sizes, low-frequency trips, low-impact activities, conservation-minded operators and guides, and no new structures or facilities)?
- What types of activities (and intensity of provision) are appropriate for national parks?
- Is there support for setting limits to commercial recreation?

#### *Personal philosophies*

- What are the personal philosophies of visitors to New Zealand's public conservation lands about commercial recreation in these areas?
- What are the underlying reasons for people's attitudes (positive or negative) towards commercial recreation?
- Who owns the conservation resource, and for whom should it be managed?
- How important is freedom of access to public conservation lands (the 'birthright to go into the hills')?
- What do New Zealanders value about outdoor recreation and public conservation lands, and how does this relate to commercial recreation?
- How important are the cultures/traditions of outdoor recreation and tourism?
- What is the relative priority of independent recreation compared with commercial recreation?
- Do the general public's and visitors' perceptions of commercial recreation differ from those of DOC managers?

#### **Areas of enquiry relating to management actions that should be addressed**

- How can DOC improve the management of commercial recreation?
- Should independent recreation be controlled in the same way as commercial use?
- Is there a problem with the quality of concessionaires at present?
- Will tendering produce better (higher quality) concessionaires?
- What areas are becoming too busy and how should these sites be managed?

#### **Points to take note of when considering future research in this area**

- Very little prior research exists upon which to ground future research.
- The topic of commercial recreation on public conservation lands is contentious, so the results of any study may be contested.

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# Appendix 1

## KEY INFORMANTS FOR LITERATURE REVIEW, AND DATE THEIR CONTRIBUTION WAS RECEIVED

Professor Ralf Buckley. Professor of Recreation and Leisure Studies, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia. 24 May 2007.

Gordon Cessford. Social Scientist, Department of Conservation, Wellington, New Zealand. 18 May 2007.

Professor Grant Cushman. Professor of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand. 24 May 2007.

Geoff Ensor. Sector Manager, Tourism Industry Association New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand. 26 August 2007. [Written contribution after focus group.]

Dr Stephen Espiner. Senior Lecturer in Parks, Recreation and Tourism, Lincoln University, Canterbury, New Zealand. 24 May 2007.

Rob Greenway. Consultant, Rob Greenway & Associates, Nelson, New Zealand. 28 May 2007.

Professor James Higham. Professor of Tourism, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand. 29 May 2007.

Bruce Mason. Researcher, Recreation Access New Zealand, Omakau, New Zealand. 29 May 2007.

Robin McNeill. Executive board member, Federated Mountain Clubs of New Zealand, Invercargill, New Zealand. 29 August 2007. [Written contribution after focus group.]

Dr Les Molloy. Heritage consultant, Heritage Works, Wellington, New Zealand. 29 May 2007.

Tom Quinn. Forest supervisor, Stanislaus National Forest, United States Forest Service, USA. 30 May 2007.

Dr Rick Rollins. Researcher, Department of Recreation and Tourism Management, Malaspina University and College, British Columbia, Canada. 30 May 2007.

David Round. Lecturer, University of Canterbury School of Law, Christchurch, New Zealand. 31 May 2007.

Geoff Spearpoint. Guidebook author, Birdlings Flat, Canterbury, New Zealand. 23 August 2007. [Written contribution after focus group.]

Andy Thompson. Consultant, Tourism Resource Consultants, Christchurch, New Zealand. 23 May 2007.

Dr Alan Watson. Scientist, United States Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, USA. 25 May 2007.

# Appendix 2

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE RELATING TO COMMERCIAL TOURISM IN REMOTE AND WILDERNESS AREAS

- Define/describe what commercial tourism means to you.
- What are the benefits and costs of commercial tourism in national parks?
- Are you aware of any commercial tourism activities that take place in remote/wilderness areas?
- Have you engaged in any forms of commercial tourism in remote and wilderness areas?
- Do you think that any forms of commercial tourism are compatible with a wilderness experience? Explore.
- What would be the main effects of commercial tourism on the wilderness experience?
- Are some forms of commercial tourism more acceptable than others in remote/wilderness areas?
- What would be the worst forms of commercial tourism in such areas?
- What makes some activities more appropriate/worse than others? Explore.
- What types and levels of use may be appropriate in such areas?

# Appendix 3

## KEY INFORMANTS FOR FOCUS GROUP WORKSHOP

Individuals were invited to participate in the workshop based on their personal expertise and knowledge of the topic. They did not necessarily represent organisational views. A representative range of recreation participants was not sought. To provide an impression of the range of 'voices' attending the focus group workshop, an affiliation or job description is provided for each participant.

Rob Brown—Nature photographer, Conservation Board member

Geoff Ensor—Tourism Industry Association New Zealand

Dr Stephen Espiner—Outdoor recreation researcher

Robin McNeill—Federated Mountain Clubs, Conservation Board member

Daniel Murphy—Tourism operator (DOC concessionaire)

Richard Raeward—Tourism operator (not a DOC concessionaire)

Geoff Spearpoint—Backcountry recreation guidebook author



***What do people think about the provision of commercial recreation services on public conservation lands?***

*The demand for, and importance of, commercial recreation on public conservation lands has increased rapidly in the past 30 years and it is now (generally) an accepted use of these areas.*

*Some aspects of the provision of commercial activities and services are controversial, yet there has been very little study of what the people who visit and use conservation lands think about them.*

*This report reviews the 'state of knowledge' about attitudes towards commercial recreation activities on public conservation lands in New Zealand.*

Wray, K.; Booth, K. 2010: Attitudes towards commercial recreation on public conservation lands. *Science for Conservation* 301. 62p.