



Whare Kaupapa Atawhai
Conservation House
18 Manners Street
Wellington 6011
doc.govt.nz

14 May 2026

Ref: OIAD-6266

Tēnā koe 

Thank you for your request to the Department of Conservation, received on 20 April 2026, in which you asked for:

1. *"Details on how the sustainable visitor management for Tongariro project is going."*
2. *"Visitor numbers since the project came into place, and also what DOC's targets are for this."*

We have considered your request under the Official Information Act 1982.

The Tongariro Alpine Crossing (TAC) Sustainability Project was set up in 2022 by the Department and Ngāti Hikairo ki Tongariro to make management of New Zealand's most popular day hike more sustainable. Project objectives centre on the values of manaakitanga and kaitiakitanga, implemented through phased and adaptive interventions.

Your questions and our responses are listed below:

1. *Details on how the sustainable visitor management for Tongariro project is going.*

Over the four years since 2022 the project has delivered:

- Trained Manaaki Rangers, supplied by an iwi contractor, who have welcomed visitors with key messages at the track ends daily from Labour Weekend to 30 April.
- Behaviour-change campaigns on social media targeting visitors with key messages about booking, preparedness, and cultural significance.
- A free and voluntary booking system, which supports visitor monitoring and provides visitors with a briefing on preparedness and cultural significance.
- New concession conditions and fee, which support the other interventions, for example by requiring concessionaires to only transport visitors who have a DOC booking and funding an annual cultural wānanga for concessionaires.
- Installation of a new weather station near the track to provide improved forecasting, and new track counters to improve activity data.
- Improvements at both track ends, including the installation of pou whenua, picnic furniture, signage, and interpretation.
- Road safety improvements, including seasonal temporary traffic management and a safe crossing area at the State Highway 46 junction with Ketetahi Road, and improvements to the surface of both access roads.

Work to refresh the Mangatepopo Car Park and interpretation in the Tongariro National Park Visitor Centre are currently in procurement and the project deliverables are expected to be complete by December 2026.

2. *Visitor numbers since the project came into place, and also what DOC's targets are for this.*

We estimate around 100,000 people currently visit the TAC annually. It isn't possible to be exact because people walk the full track in both directions and make return trips at both ends, and our monitoring equipment cannot distinguish between activities or individuals. Activity is strongly influenced by weather, tourism trends and other factors each year. We compare total activity (counts in both directions) with activity in a single direction (northerly, representing most whole-track walkers) to better understand patterns.

TAC Annual Counter Activity (1 October – 30 April) since project started		
Year	Total activity	Single direction
2022/2023	85,000	60,000
2023/2024	126,000	108,000
2024/2025	133,000	94,000
2025/2026	106,000	71,000

Note: these estimates have a margin of error of +/- 10% and activity counting devices on the track are not an exact count of visits or visitors.

Historically the peak season occurred in 2018/19, when we estimate 155,000 visits to the TAC. The data above show there was recovery from the effects of the pandemic in 2023/2024. By 2024/2025 there was an apparent shift to a larger percentage of walkers making short return trips from Mangatepopo, possibly due to weather patterns. In the most recent season, the impact of two fires and unusually poor summer weather is evident.

The Department has set no targets for visitor numbers at the TAC; however the project commissioned reports on capacity that are available on our website: [Carrying capacity of the Tongariro Alpine Crossing: Our work](#). This work suggested a range of thresholds that indicate when sustainable limits are being reached and further management interventions may be needed.

- **Annual numbers above 155,000 (single direction)** – This has not happened to date.
- **Daily count above 2,000 (single direction)** – this has happened only once, on 30 March 2024. When the TAC booking form is added to DOC's online booking system, it will include features to 'nudge' people towards quieter days.
- **Rolling five-day average above 1,500 (single direction)** – This has not happened to date. Our contract with the Manaaki Rangers allows for additional resource on public holidays when peaks usually occur.

Please note that this letter (with your personal details removed) may be published on the Department's website.

[REDACTED]

Nāku noa, nā

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Wilson'.

Catherine Wilson
Director Heritage and Visitors
Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai