

2 Management Issues and Objectives

2.1 MANAGEMENT ISSUES

Past management experience within the Park and public comments received prior to the preparation of this Plan, indicate that there are a number of issues that this Plan has to address in order to provide some management direction. The current major issues facing the management of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park are outlined below. There are many other issues for the Park that also need to be addressed. These are included in the *Explanation* to the relevant policies in Part Four of this Plan.

2.1.1 Preservation and Use

The National Park is subject to two potentially conflicting sets of values. One arises from the status of national parks (and the larger nature and national reserves) as the icons of New Zealand's protected areas. Aoraki/Mount Cook is part of a world heritage area. The National Park is under the mantle of Aoraki with its Tōpuni. This combination justifiably deserves respect. Indeed it is implicit that the nation expects a greater degree of care in the interactions of people and their activities with this Park's natural, historic and cultural values than in most other areas managed by the Department. Conversely, the other set of values arises from the increased pressure for use and development. This is mostly commercial in nature and at times unrelated to visitor appreciation or preservation of the Park - for example the use of the Park and State Highway 80 adjoining the Park as a setting for some advertising, filming and sports events.

This issue of how preservation and use should inter-relate is in part inherent within the National Parks Act 1980. The Act requires that parks be managed primarily for the purpose of preserving their natural state and also for public entry and access to enable inspiration, enjoyment, recreation and other benefits. Situations do arise where these aims are at odds. The purpose of this Plan is to facilitate the resolution of this tension.

Much of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park is physically self-preserving, in the sense that the harsh and unstable environment places its own limits on the degree and type of public use which can be undertaken - for example there are physical limits on aircraft landing and hut sites. Preserving the Park's spiritual values, for both Ngāi Tahu and all New Zealanders who treasure the Park, is a harder management task. Some areas of the Park, especially in the Hooker and Tasman Valleys, are more accessible and are already experiencing visitor pressures. The *New Zealand Tourism Strategy 2010* predicts a national average growth rate for tourist numbers of 4.5% per annum for the period 2000-2010. Growth at Aoraki/Mount Cook is known to be higher than this in recent years (in excess of 30% for some Village visitor groups during 2002/2003). Within the ten-year life of this management plan the current 20,000 visits per annum to Hooker Lake could increase to between 30,000 to 50,000 visits per annum.

Recent studies in New Zealand (see Kearsley et al, 1998, 1999 & 2001) have looked at front-country and backcountry recreational use. The effect of large increases in numbers of overseas visitors, in addition to generating front-country physical and social impacts, is leading to displacement of existing recreational use into and within backcountry areas, with resultant crowding and other perceived impacts.

The *Mount Cook National Park Management Plan* (1989) recommended an amenities area under section 15 National Parks Act for the Aoraki/Mount Cook Village. This amenities area status (gazetted in July 1999) acknowledges that for the Village there will be an amenities and services emphasis, unlike the preservation emphasis for the balance of the Park, although the World Heritage Area status still applies. The 1989 Plan also emphasised retaining the Godley Valley as a more isolated and less developed part of the Park. The 1990 advent of the Hooker-Landsborough Wilderness Area just outside the Park south-west of the Mueller Valley requires consideration of compatible management within the Park adjoining the wilderness area.

2.1.2 Aircraft Use

Contentious issues surrounding aircraft use include how much aircraft use is desirable, what types of aircraft should be involved, the choice of landing sites and over-flying of the Park by aircraft based outside the Park.

Many of the arguments for and against aircraft use are similar to those between preservation and use of the Park (see 2.1.1). The biggest complaint raised against aircraft is the noise they generate in an otherwise largely undisturbed mountain environment.

Aircraft operations within the Park are a long-standing service for park users but they do need control to minimise the adverse effects of their operations.

The issue of aircraft type (fixed-wing verses rotary-wing) has drawn public comment. Both types have operational and park management advantages and disadvantages and consideration of their relative use needs to be based on their effects, not just aircraft type.

2.1.3 Aoraki/Mount Cook Village

The retention and further development of Aoraki/Mount Cook Village within the National Park is an old issue. It harks back to the pre-National Park establishment of The Hermitage and the subsequent development of services and other accommodation facilities that have led to today's multi-million dollar investment in the Village.

Aoraki/Mount Cook Village is acknowledged as being at risk from flooding. Protection works have recently (1999) been upgraded to reduce risk levels to those compatible with the requirements of the Building Act 1991 and allowable building areas defined.

The Village has seen much modification from its natural state and currently does need some refurbishment.

As noted in 2.1.1, an amenities area has recently been gazetted over the Village. There is now significant investment in the Village; flood protection works are in place and long-term concessions exist for many of the facilities. The primary Village

management issue is how the Village should develop within the limits of the amenities area site and geotechnic constraints, while maintaining National Park and World Heritage Area values, under the gaze of Aoraki/Mount Cook.

This management plan needs to consolidate former Village planning processes and provide a future direction.

2.1.4 Huts

The number and size of the huts within the National Park and the facilities within them, are issues increasingly dependent on operating costs, hut siting, and hut-user safety. The Department however, is mindful of its responsibility to foster recreational use. Huts are publicly-owned and operated by the Department, climbing clubs and a concessionaire, with concessionaire-group use of huts being an issue. A national review of huts and other visitor facilities managed by the Department is currently underway and the future of Park huts needs to be considered in this wider context. More specifically, Hooker Hut is under debate regarding its future location and function.

2.1.5 Introduced Plants

A number of plants introduced to the Park in the past are now considered undesirable (e.g. Russell lupins and cherry trees), although a few (e.g. old homestead site trees) may now have historical significance. National park legislation requires that, as far as possible, all introduced plants shall be exterminated, except where the New Zealand Conservation Authority otherwise determines.

For some plants, extermination is probably impossible and it is therefore necessary to determine what is feasible in the context of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. For many plants it may only be possible to put in sufficient resources and effort to control and prevent the spread of their population.

2.1.6 Park Boundary Changes

While a management plan cannot action changes to national park boundaries (see the process under section 8 of the National Parks Act) it can foreshadow such changes for consideration.

Tenure review of crown pastoral leases adjoining the National Park are under action or anticipated and will result in additional, adjoining conservation lands. The review process can also consider unoccupied Crown land such as the Tasman riverbed. Proposals for Park extensions and/or boundary rationalisation could follow.

Part of the Birch Hill Flats lying within the Park has been grazed and an additional Birch Hill Flats area was removed from the Park in the 1970s for staff accommodation development, but is no longer required. Both these areas need their future reconsidered.

2.1.7 Concessions Management

Since the 1989 plan, changes in concessions management resulting from Part IIIB Conservation Act have been extensive in aspects such as concession application and

processing requirements. A better understanding of the Commerce Act 1986 rules out some 1989 plan provisions that potentially restrict trade competition.

The growth and variety of concessionaire activity in recent years has been considerable and some of the issues that have arisen and need to be addressed in this plan include:

- managing the cumulative effects of multiple concessionaire activities;
- identifying and protecting visitor management settings within the Park;
- addressing Ngāi Tahu cultural concerns;
- the effects between user groups (e.g. aircraft noise on ground-based visitors);
- recognising the 'icon' status of the National Park;
- determining appropriate and inappropriate activities within the Park and avoiding the adverse effects of activities that do not clearly relate to the purposes for national parks;
- recognising and making use of the opportunities presented by concessionaire activities to increase visitor understanding of the preservation ethic of national parks.

2.2 MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The management philosophy for all national parks in New Zealand is set out in Section 4 of the National Parks Act 1980 (refer to section 1.2.1).

These objectives apply to the whole of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park, except for the amenities area at Aoraki/Mount Cook Village.

2.2.1 Primary Objectives

Having regard to the National Parks Act 1980, the primary objectives of this management plan are:

Objective 1

To preserve in perpetuity in their natural state, as far as possible, the landscapes, indigenous ecosystems and natural features of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park.

Objective 2

To preserve for the benefit, use and enjoyment of the public, the character of Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park as a natural area of exceptional beauty, geological and ecological significance and biological diversity, to the extent that this is consistent with Objective 1.

Objective 3

To give effect to the principles of the Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi, to the extent that the provisions of the National Parks Act 1980 are clearly not inconsistent with them.

Explanation

1. National parks are to be administered and maintained so as to preserve them in perpetuity in their natural state, as far as possible. The achievement of the primary objective will see the Park managed to protect its distinctive scenery, ecological systems, natural features and native plants and animals, the preservation of which is in the national interest.

2. Subject to the provisions of the Act and any conditions or restrictions as may be necessary for the preservation of the native plants and animals or for the general welfare of the Park or park visitors, the public shall have freedom of access to Aoraki/Mount Cook National Park. This enables the public to enjoy the splendour of the Park while ensuring that the Park's natural, historic and cultural values are protected.

3. Section 4 of the Conservation Act requires the Department to interpret and administer that Act to give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, to the extent that the provisions of the Conservation Act 1987 are not clearly inconsistent with those principles. Case law has established that section 4 applies to the Acts

listed in the First Schedule to the Conservation Act 1987. The National Parks Act 1980 is one such Act. The Department is also implementing the provisions of the Ngāi Tahu *Deed of Settlement* as they relate to the Park and its management. This helps to ensure that the values of significance to Ngāi Tahu are protected in the day-to-day management of the Park.

2.2.2 Additional Objectives

The following additional objectives flow from the primary objectives. The Department seeks to achieve these objectives in so far as they are compatible with the primary objectives above:

1. To preserve the Park's heritage of places, artefacts and archaeological sites;
2. To exterminate all introduced plant and animal pests in the Park, as far as possible;
3. To manage the Park in such a way that its World Heritage Area status is preserved;
4. To ensure any commercial use within the Park is compatible with the primary objectives in 2.2.1.

Explanation

Change is inevitable during the ten-year time frame of this Plan. It is not possible to foresee all potential changes and pressures that the Park may experience during this time. The purpose of these additional objectives is therefore more general than the primary objectives and is to steer the future management of the Park where policies may lack sufficient or up-to-date information. These objectives should therefore be used as a management guide together with policies, where relevant.