

Forest and Bird (Dunedin Branch)
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25 April 2002

Aspiring Review
Department of Conservation
PO Box 5244
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Mount Aspiring National Park - Management Plan Review- Discussion Document

The Dunedin Branch of Forest & Bird comprises some 600 members. We frequently visit and recreate in Mount Aspiring National Park and greatly value its natural features, including indigenous plants and animals, their habitats, and the spectacular mountain and valley systems that are present. We are pleased that the Department is beginning its review of the park management plan at this early stage, and that the public have been invited to comment on the direction of the review. Our comments below follow the structure of the discussion document.

6. Some Key Issues for the Review

6.1 Increasing Visitor Numbers

The Dunedin Branch is concerned about crowding in areas such as the Routeburn Track. High standards of track and large comfortable huts have been effective in attracting considerable numbers of tourists to these areas, but local people tend to be displaced to the off-season because they don't enjoy paying high hut fees and contending with large numbers of other people using tracks and huts. We do not favour the spread of Great Walk

tracks to other parts of the park. We feel that Mount Aspiring National Park retains a largely natural, undeveloped feel, in contrast to some of our other National Parks, and would like this distinctive character to be protected.

6.2 Zoning

The Branch agrees that the main divide areas around the Haast, Te Naihi and Arawhata Rivers should be rezoned to reflect the remote and relatively undisturbed nature of these areas. We do not see why these areas need to be left free for commercial opportunities. It is important that the park caters for people with different levels of experience, and some areas should remain free from commercial intrusion so that experienced people can enjoy the challenge of travelling unassisted through these areas. We would also like some of the more easily accessible areas of the park, such as the East Matukituki Valley to remain relatively undeveloped. Retaining only basic tracks and/or huts will allow walkers to experience peaceful contact with nature in the absence of crowds of people and intrusive commercial activity.

6.3 Air access

We are concerned about the intrusive impacts of mechanised access into the park. Aircraft access should be limited to very small areas of the park. This includes aircraft overflights.

6.4 Commercial operations/enterprises

We agree that commercial activities can help people to access the park, but those activities that are particularly intrusive should be limited to small areas, or not allowed at all. Our members tend not to be thrill-seekers and appreciate more the values of natural quiet and peaceful surroundings. We feel that while jet boats can be valuable for providing access, the thrill seeking activities that these boats indulge in are not very appropriate in a National Park. We have little objection to guided walks and canoeing, as these are compatible with the values of peaceful recreation and natural quiet. Providing huts that are exclusively available for commercial clients can promote antagonism between members of the public and commercial parties, and we do not support this. It is better to have commercial parties

and the public sharing the same facilities.

6.5

See comments under 6.1

6.6 Introduced species

The Dunedin Branch is very concerned about pest species in Mount Aspiring National Park. We support effective control strategies that have no significant negative impacts on natural values and indigenous wildlife. Deer must be recognised as a pest and deer control should not be hindered by efforts to promote hunting. Stoats are now well recognised as major predators of native birds. We would like to see every efforts made to try and understand and control these pests. Mount Aspiring National Park is notable for the presence of kakariki, yellowheads and kaka, all hole-nesting birds that are very susceptible to the effects of stoat predation. If stoats became abundant in the alpine zone it is almost certain that rock wren populations would suffer greatly. Sustained pest control in areas with high public use would allow the public to see the benefits that such control can have on native wildlife, and increase the chances of contact with species that have become uncommon elsewhere.

We are also concerned about plant pests such as tussock hawkweed and exotic grasses. The short tussock grasslands in the Rockburn and upper East Matukituki valleys are exceptionally important because of their relatively uninvaded state. Our members have noted a small concentration of exotic grasses and other weeds around the rock bivouac at Theatre Flat in the Rockburn. We suggest that this small area of weeds should be eradicated before wider invasion of the indigenous grassland occurs. It seems to us that these two valleys have retained relatively uninvaded valley floor grasslands solely because access is more difficult due to gorges in the lower valley reaches. This means that the upper areas have probably never been grazed by stock. Additionally, there are no huts in these valleys. The disturbance and raised fertility around huts inevitably promotes weed invasion. A similar process has happened at the Theatre Flat rock bivouac. For these reasons, it is important that the present level of facilities development is not

upgraded in these two valleys.

We also note that some bridges across the larger rivers (such as the Dart) are associated with the obvious trails of small animals such as possums and stoats. We suggest that concentrating pest control at such sites might prove valuable in restricting pest dispersal, with the river itself providing most of the barrier.

We suggest that ecological monitoring is necessary for many reasons. Monitoring should provide information on the rate of pest invasion, the effectiveness of pest control, and changes in the abundance of indigenous plant and animal populations. The discussion document identifies changes in the abundance of introduced species, but we wonder whether much is known about how indigenous wildlife is faring within the park. We suggest that a survey of indigenous fauna should be conducted at least once during the lifetime of each plan. It would be useful if the plan contained a “state of the national park” section that allowed assessment to be made from plan to plan of changes in the park’s natural environment.

6.7 Grazing

The Branch does not support the grazing of stock anywhere in Mount Aspiring National Park. We ask that the plan specifies that every effort will be made to negotiate cessation of grazing in the park.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Star,
Secretary, Forest and Bird (Dunedin Branch)
on behalf of the management committee.

